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Aspen cops' new electronic bikes benefit veterans



Aspen Police Officer Braulio Jerez, right, takes a spin Friday on one of the department's new electric-motor-assisted bicycles. The two bikes were sold as part of a new local effort to help military veterans own their own business and make a living on their own terms.



Aspen Police Officer Braulio Jerez, left, watches as former British Army Capt. David Mills makes an adjustment Friday on one of the Aspen Police Department new electric motor-assist electric bikes.

Keen observers of the downtown scene may have already noticed Aspen police officers out patrolling the core on burly new fat-tire bicycles.

But what they might not know about the sleek, black, electric-motor-assisted bikes is that they represent the beginning of a new local effort to help military veterans make a living.

"At the end of the day, that's what these guys need," said Larry Spatz, a part-time Aspen resident and entrepreneur who helped direct the new effort. "They don't need a 9-to-5 job.

"They need something that fits what they do and fits who they are."

Spatz, who also lives part of the year in the Chicago area, did not serve in the military. But about 12 years ago on a visit to Aspen during Christmas, Spatz said he was watching a television program about children who'd lost parents in the military and was inspired to start a foundation to help them.

Then, several years later, Spatz's son, who lives in Aspen, introduced him to a disabled veteran named Casey Owens who lived in town. Owens was in a wheelchair after having both legs amputated while serving in Iraq in 2004.

At the time, Spatz owned a medical technology company that had come up with a device that used tank tracks to allow people confined to wheelchairs to access sandy, muddy or rocky areas where standard wheelchairs couldn't go, he said. Spatz said he showed the device to Owens.

"He loved it," Spatz said. "He said, 'If I could drive that around, I could sell it.' And that was (my inspiration)." Spatz, Owens and another veteran, Adam McCabe, began meeting and laying the groundwork for a company that would train veterans how to own their own business, furnish products they could sell no matter what kind of disability, if any, they might have and act as a middleman to ship out those products, Spatz said. "That was my commitment to Casey and Adam," Spatz said. "We will show you how to be in your own business. We will find you products nobody else has."

Known as Enabled Enterprises, the company is just about ready to launch on a nationwide basis with a stable of products including the wheelchair tank tracks device, herbal supplements geared toward alleviating problems veterans face, solar electric vehicles and other unique products, Spatz said. "Our goal is to put 5,000 veterans in their own businesses in the next 18 months," he said. "We hope it will lead to more products and more veterans (as business owners) and more opportunities (for them)."

David Mills, an Aspen resident and a British Army veteran, recently sold the two electric-motor-assisted bikes to the Aspen Police Department. The bikes marked Enabled Enterprises' first-ever sales by a veteran, Spatz said. The rest of the products — available at www.enabled.vet — will launch in the next 60 days, he said. "It's huge," Spatz said of the bike sales. "The Aspen police said, 'If you can find studded tires (for winter), we'll buy them.'"

The bikes — which cost \$2,700 each — come with 750-watt motors that will allow them to travel as fast as 25 mph at full power, said Mills, who also is a local personal trainer. Officers also can pedal the seven-speed bikes with a motor assist or pedal them with no assist like a regular bike, he said. The bikes can travel up to 22 miles at full power or about 50 miles with the limited motor assist, Mills said. They take about five hours to charge and are approved for use by the U.S. government's General Services Administration, he said. Mills, who served in Afghanistan in 2013, said he hopes to work out any kinks and establish a sales system that can be emulated by other veterans who sign up with Enabled Enterprises. "It's pretty cool getting involved in the company," he said.

Aspen Police Chief Richard Pryor said the new bikes are practical and simply make sense. "I've always loved the patrol bike program," he said. "And this seems like the next possible evolution of that." Officer Braulio Jerez, an avid mountain and road biker who has already ridden the new bike on patrol shifts, said he'd rather be on a bicycle than in a car, even in the winter. "I was a mailman here and I wore shorts year-round," Jerez said. "My cut-off to wear pants was negative 33 (degrees)." Jerez is just getting used to the new bikes, but said he likes them already because they can go places cars can't and they're silent. In addition, he said that if he's on bike patrol and gets a call at Truscott or Burlingame, he can get out there quickly without expending all his energy before he arrives. The bikes also are environmentally friendly and always draw a crowd, said Aspen Assistant Police Chief Bill Linn.

"When you're on the bike, you're like a rolling information booth," he said. Owens, who suffered from a traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress syndrome, committed suicide in Aspen in October 2014 and never got to see the results of the company he helped found. His death was devastating, but also motivating, Spatz said. "I thought, 'I've got to find products,'" Spatz said. "I've got to make this happen. One Casey's too many. "I loved the guy. In a way, this is keeping his name alive. We do this to honor him."

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