

PROPERTY

City-wide bicycle registry adopted

Aim is to reunite owners with bikes

GORD MCINTYRE

POSTMEDIA NEWS

It's a too-familiar, heart-sinking feeling. You come out of the coffee shop expecting to find your bike where you left it locked up, but it's gone.

The problem is, even if you report the theft, it is no sure thing that you will get your bike back in the cases where bikes are recovered by police.

It is difficult to put owner and bike back together. To one of the people who gave us the Xbox, that's just not right, so J Allard created Project 529, a bike registration and recovery program adopted by the Vancouver Police Department.

"I want to start by thanking the thief who stole my bike four years ago," Allard said on Monday as Bike to Work Week began.

Allard had left his job at Microsoft after 20 years and was between gigs, as he put it, unsure what he wanted to do next when his expensive customized bike was stolen in 2011.

"Now I knew exactly what I wanted to do next," he said. "I started looking for it."

From that experience as bike detective was born 529 Garage. Vancouver is the

first municipality in Canada or the U.S. to adopt the program city-wide.

It takes about five minutes to register a bike online, and increases the chances of it being returned if it is recovered.

It is also hoped the tamper-resistant decal that comes with the free registration will deter thieves.

To date this year, 2,705 bikes have been reported stolen in Vancouver, a 21-per-cent increase over the same time last year, according to police.

And the police think the number of bike thefts is vastly under-reported.

Most recovered bikes wind up in the police property department, because it is difficult to track down owners, deputy chief constable Warren Lemcke said. Only about 10 per cent are returned to owners.

The police department hopes to have 10,000 people signed up over three years.

"I feel that if my bike goes missing, I have an extra level of protection," said Shel Montgomery after registering her bike at one of the 529 Garage tents distributed around the city this week.

"I live in a condo downtown and we've had lots of bikes stolen from where I live, so I feel this is an important program."