



(Travis Morisse/The Hutchinson News) Two and a half of the public bikes that were stolen have been recovered and are at Gallery 7 at 18 S. Main St.

Half of stolen public bikes recovered

Organizer: Talk fueled by thefts has drawn attention to downtown-use effort.

By Edie Ross - The Hutchinson News - eross@hutchnews.com

Research and development.

That's how organizers of Hutchinson's Public Bike Project are viewing the theft of the five bicycles they'd put in downtown Hutchinson for public use - and the return of 50 percent of those bikes a few days later.

Danny Brizendine, who has been helping with the project, said 2 1/2 half bikes were returned over the weekend after news of their theft got out.

"One of the bikes basically was surrendered," he said. "Someone called the city and wanted to drop it off in Carey Park and have the city come get it. The police recovered the other bike and also a half of a bike.

"It's cool because the police knew exactly who they belonged to."

The Public Bike Project debuted at May's Third Thursday event. The idea behind the project is to

make available to the community around 10 bicycles that can be ridden from business to business in the downtown area and left in bike racks for the next person to use.

The bikes were painted by local artists to make them clearly identifiable as bicycles in the project.

Soon after their unveiling, all five bikes were stolen on a weekday night.

Brizendine explained that one of the bikes recovered by police had been cut in half - lending evidence to his concern that the aluminum bikes were stolen to be cut down and resold. The other had been stripped down.

"They were definitely not looking so good," he said.

But Brizendine doesn't view the recent turn of events as a negative.

"It's an awareness thing," he said. "I know it sounds negative, but because of this project there has been more bicycle talk in the last two or three weeks than the whole time I've lived here."

Brizendine said the recovered bikes - at least the ones that are still whole - will be returned to the streets soon. Right now, he's looking into the cost of outfitting the bikes with GPS technology. Also, he's encouraging downtown business owners to help keep the bikes safe.

"We're sending out a memo asking that if they see one in front of the store when they are closing up for the night, to just pull it inside and put it back out in the morning," he said. "We truly think it is at night when they are being taken."

Brizendine said he's excited to see how the Public Bike Project continues.

"Everything takes some research and development," he said. "The wheel has been invented many times."