

Vive la Revolución!

The wheels are turning on a campaign to help Christchurch reclaim the title of “Cycle City”.

When Catarina Gutierrez arrived in Christchurch in 2014 from the United States, her first stop was to look for a bike. It didn't have to be new, it didn't have to be fancy, but it did need to get her around the city. She found what she was after at RAD Bikes (short for Recycle-A-Dunger), and is now a volunteer mechanic and co-ordinator with the not-for-profit organisation, which helps get people rolling by rejuvenating and recycling old rides. “It's built up a really cool community around bikes,” she says.

Two-wheelers have always been part of the culture in Christchurch, which rivalled Copenhagen as a cycling city in the 50s and 60s but has been gradually losing traction ever since. A keen cyclist herself, Gutierrez wondered what had changed – and what it would take to get people back on their bikes. So she set up Cycle Christchurch to promote cycling for the fun of it and bring a little diversity to the scene.

One of the group's regular events is “Bikes, Beers and Banter”, where women, men and entire families turn up at a local pub. “It's a platform for people to be involved in cycling; a space to hang out and

Two wheels good: Catarina Gutierrez at RAD Bikes, in Christchurch.

talk about bikes,” says Gutierrez, who also organised the Slow Roll Bike Ride from the central city to the Nostalgia Festival at Ferrymead Heritage Park on March 4.

In 2015, Cycle Christchurch and RAD Bikes joined forces to take over the mobile Cycle-Powered Cinema. Initially set up by Gap Filler after the earthquakes, the cinema runs on pedal power, with riders bringing their own bikes to drive the battery-run projector and sound system. The kit has since travelled the country, powering stage lights at Beervana in Wellington, light-sculpture installations at Festa in Christchurch, and even charging mobile phones.

Gutierrez works as a start-up activator mentoring small businesses at the Ministry of Awesome, an initiative set up “to make things happen” in post-quake Christchurch. When it comes to getting around the city, she describes her approach as “multi-modal”, preferring a mix of cycling and busing. Each of her five bikes serves a different purpose, from off-road to cruising; she built one of them herself to ride the West Coast Wilderness Trail.

Late last year, Gutierrez facilitated a couple of workshops in Detroit at Bike!Bike!, an annual international gathering for those involved in local projects and collectives. She hopes to work with the Christchurch City Council to create more community-oriented bike events here – and with 13 new major cycle routes to be built over the next seven years, at an estimated cost of \$156 million, she believes the time is ripe for a strong cycling culture to re-emerge in the city.

“My big mission is to make Christchurch the cycling capital of New Zealand,” she says. “And New Zealand the cycling capital of the world.” **RACHEL SMITH**

