

# Lance Armstrong unveils his new commuting bike shop

## Cyclist hopes to encourage bike use in downtown

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It's not about the bike sales.

That from Tour de France champion Lance Armstrong, who plans in May to open a bike shop, commuting center, training facility and cafe in a 1950s-era building at the northwest corner of Fourth and Nueces streets.

**"This city is exploding downtown. Are all these people in high rises going to drive everywhere? We have to promote (bike) commuting," Armstrong said Wednesday, gazing up at the towering 360 condos rising next to the site of his new shop. "This can be a hub for that."**

Mellow Johnny's, named for the nickname Armstrong earned while wearing the Tour de France leader's "maillot jaune," or yellow jersey, will be housed in a yellow- and red-brick building next to the music venue La Zona Rosa. It is a block north of the Lance Armstrong Bikeway, a path that will cut east-west through downtown Austin.

Armstrong said he'd like to see Austin evolve into a place like Portland, Ore., where biking is part of the culture and people pedal to work, to restaurants and to run errands. "Walk outside, and the streets are lined with bikes — because they have a safe place to ride," Armstrong said of the city long known for its bicycle-friendly amenities and policies.

So how does Austin get to that point?

"The (Lance Armstrong Bikeway) is a big start," he said. Armstrong and his general partner in the project, Bart Knaggs, said they'd like to see Austin create bike lanes separated from vehicle traffic and a system like a new one in Paris where people can use a credit card to rent a bicycle from a bike rack station and return it at any of the dozens of other stations around the city.

"There are times I ride in Austin, and I'm afraid of cars," Armstrong said. "Imagine what the beginner cyclist must feel like? I think (Mayor) Will Wynn's dream was this whole revitalization of downtown, which we're getting, but it's going to make it a lot easier if people can get around on bikes."

Mellow Johnny's will carry top-of-the-line Trek bikes, which Armstrong rode to his seven consecutive Tour de France victories, but the focus won't be on selling the newest, lightest racer. The shop will celebrate

the culture of biking, from the historic memorabilia hanging on the walls to a counter where customers can sip coffee and ask questions as they watch bike mechanics at work.

Besides road bikes, Mellow Johnny's will sell commuter bikes, mountain bikes, triathlon bikes, fixed-gear bikes, low-riders, cruiser-style bikes and even hand-made "art bikes" that look as good hanging on a wall as they do rolling down the street. Stock will also include gear by Giro, Nike and Oakley.

Showers and a locker room will allow commuters who don't have facilities at their offices to ride downtown, store their bikes at the shop, bathe and catch a ride on a pedicab or walk the rest of the way to work.

The building covers 18,000 square feet on a main floor and basement level and will have garage doors that roll open at one end. The site has served as a distribution center for Pearl beer, a paint company, a steel manufacturing facility and a resource center for the homeless. Demolition work began in June, and construction inside the shop started two weeks ago. Armstrong and his partners are leasing the property from an undisclosed owner.

Part of the basement level will include a Carmichael Training Systems facility, where cyclists can do power-based training.

"There's a bigger ambition we're going to go for here. It's not like there's not a good bike shop in town. We want to add something to the community that will catalyze interest around riding bikes, about being bike friendly and folding it into life in Austin," Knaggs said.

Armstrong predicted that Mellow Johnny's will be "the coolest bike shop in the world," but said he's not trying to put any other Austin bike shop out of business. "It's not us versus them," he said. "We're all about the cycling culture."

Architect Michael Hsu, who designed the Belmont and Bess restaurants downtown and the 04 development on South Congress Avenue, said he is uncovering the clean lines of the original building as he transforms it.

An old dumb waiter will be used to haul bikes between floors. Decor will include some of Armstrong's memorabilia, but the cyclist said he doesn't want to turn the shop into a Lance Armstrong museum. He said he'd rather feature items from other famous athletes. Craig Staley, co-owner of Bettysport women's fitness store, Rogue Equipment running store and other local ventures, will be general manager.

Armstrong, who still remembers being a trifle intimidated when he walked into a bike shop as a kid, wants to make sure that doesn't happen to customers here. He said he'd rather encourage rookies to start riding than sell a faster bike to a veteran cyclist.

"If you're a commuter, you're just as important to us as the state champion on a road bike," Knaggs said.

"Potentially, more important," Armstrong added.

**Courtesy of JB Goodwin**