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After 50 Years He Can't Retire

'Wag' Still Mending Bikes

By HELEN WATERHOUSE

A HALF CENTURY of mending bicycles is behind white-haired Phillip G. Wagner.

On Oct. 3—at 76—Wagner celebrated the 50th anniversary of the opening of his old South Main st. bike shop—mecca of hundreds of youngsters just after the turn of the century.

He celebrated by sitting in the crowded little back room of his present store at 404 Storer av. and mending another bike wheel for a tow haired boy who stood anxiously by.

The boy might have been the grandchild of one of Wagner's first customers.

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THROUGH THE years he served three generations of worried little riders who came in with their banged up bikes. He's watched as they go away happy, a few moments or a few hours later, with bikes that can run again, their bike bells tinkling a merry "thank-you" as they ride down the street.

Probably no other man in Akron has had so much fun bringing joy through the years to so many kids, as the man they sometimes used to call "Wag" Wagner.

Recently Wagner turned the reins of his hardware and cycle store over to his son, Paul—with an idea of retiring.

But along in mid-morning, you'll always find him there in the back of the store, tools in hand—a bike wheel propped in a rack in front of him.

And, he'd still be riding a bike, himself, he confides, if he hadn't banged his leg all up in a motorcycle accident.

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THE ACCIDENT left his limb stiff and put an end to the motorcycle part of his business. Now Wagner's no longer handle motorcycles.

"Once we used to be distributors for the best ones in town. We used to train Akron cops to ride them down near Long Lake where there was no pavement," he recalls.

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THEN THE man who was



PHILLIP G. WAGNER ...he makes youngsters happy

town store at 198 S. Main st. In 1903, most bikes were of the racer type, he recalls.

Coaster brakes were just coming in and were making a big hit. Tires were tubeless, one and a half inch affairs cemented onto the rims.

"The old wooden bike rims were awful hard to straighten and fix," Wagner says.

"A few people were still riding tandem bikes and worn-out wore bicorners as a regulation bike attire.

"I'd been a machinist and I was handy with tools so the work came easy to me. But those old bikes aren't much like these new lightweight beauties that even have three gear shifts," he added proudly, showing one of the newest acquisitions of

his South Main st. store to Storer av. because rents downtown were getting too high.

"When I first went into the downtown store, rent was \$35 a month for the 18 by 99 room. Later it went up \$3 and then \$5 and I decided it was time to get out," he explains.

"But today in this smaller store, I'm paying \$100 a month rent."

He admits that in the old days he often didn't charge the kids anything when they came in for service for a loose nut or bolt.

There were lean years for the store, of course, when the depression came in 1907 and 1929. They "pulled in their belts" and cut wages and ex-

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THEN THE man who was born in Germany, coming to this country as a child, reminisced a bit about his bike business. When he started his down-

his store.

"When balloon tires came in about 15 years ago they created a big revolution in the bike business," Wagner added.

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SOME OF the more famous customers he's had in the 50 years include the late C. L. Knight who rode a bike for exercise for many years, the late B. G. Work and Judge Doyle and his "boys," he recalls.

A great-grandfather, Wagner, still is spry and as fond of machines of all kinds as he always was.

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WAGNER laughs when he recalls how he moved from

denses.

"But we weather the gales — and I'm still mending bikes," Wagner adds proudly.

Wagner Cycle & Hardware Was sold to John Paul Wagner I (son) On June 30, 1953 for the sum of \$8,000

Akron Beacon Journal - February 9, 1972

Philip Wagner, 93, Bicycle Repairman

Philip G. Wagner, 93, made a practice of making youngsters happy — he fixed their broken bicycles for a half a century.

Mr. Wagner died Tuesday at St. Thomas Hospital.

Born in Germany, Mr. Wagner lived in Akron for 90 years. He started the Wagner Cycle & Hardware Co. in 1903 at 198 S. Main, moving to 404 Storer av. in 1928.

Over the years he repaired more than 40,000 bicycles. One of his customers was C. L. Knight, editor and publisher of the Beacon Journal until his death in 1933.

Mr. Wagner was a life member of the Knights of St. Johns and was a charter member of St. Sebastian's Catholic Church and the Holy Name Society. He resided for many years at 1020 Whittier av., before moving to St. Edward's Home.



Phillip Wagner

He leaves his wife, Anna K.; sons Philip F., Doylestown, and Paul J.; daughter Mrs. Coeline Delagrange; brother Henry, all of Akron; 18 grandchildren and 33 great-grandchildren.

Mass will be at 9:30 a. m. at St. Sebastian's Church. Burial will be in St. Bernard's cemetery. Friends may call from 2 to 4 and 7 to 9 p. m. Thursday at the Hummel funeral home.