

# Bike to Work Day: Good for health, wallets

Event started to give cyclists community advocacy

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By 6:30 a.m. on a cloudy Friday, Rick Fox had already made the 14-mile trip from his home in Cedarburg to West Bend, not by car but by bicycle.

"I bike to work a couple of times a week," he said.

He joined a number of others who commute to work by bicycle in front of the River Shores YMCA to celebrate "Bike to Work Day."

The annual event was sponsored Friday by The Healthy People Project of Washington County and featured healthy, on-the-go breakfast snacks, information on local trails, a "fix-a-flat" station and technical expertise from a couple of local bicycle shops.

"I started commuting on my bike about five years ago," Fox, 50, said. "It takes me about 45 minutes one way. I take the back roads for the most part and really enjoy it."

Fox said he forsakes his car for his bike when the weather warms up in spring and continues pedaling to work a couple of days a week through fall.

"I keep going until I run out of daylight for the ride back home when the days get shorter in October," he said.

Fox was one of about 20 bicyclists who commute to their jobs at West Bend Mutual Insurance Co. and who gathered for the Bike To Work event.

Fox suggests those considering commuting any distance start slow.

"Try going out on a weekend, and plan your route," he said.

Mike Van Brundt bikes from Hartford to his job at West Bend Mutual Insurance Co. in West Bend three times a week, a trip he said takes "between 55 minutes to an hour and five minutes depending on the wind."

Van Brundt, like almost



Rick Nelson, left, and Linda Smeaton make last-minute checks of their bicycles before continuing their commute to work Friday morning.

all the cyclists at the event, was clothed in layers, including a skin-clinging shirt, long pants, special shoes with cleats, gloves and a helmet.

"It's very important to have proper gear to wear because you want to be comfortable during the ride," he said. "Lots of bicyclists wear shoes with cleats on the bottom so they can be attached to the pedals. In that way you get power as your foot is pulling up, too."

Linda Smeaton used a colored marker to trace the route she bikes to work on a huge map tacked onto one of the booths at the Bike to Work event.

"Last year, I commuted the 11 1/2 miles one way to work more than 20 times," she said. "I started biking because I like to be healthy and I got tired of paying for gas."

Smeaton said bike commuters need to take into consideration dressing for work once they arrive on the job.

"I can leave a change of clothes at work and we have showers," she said.

Smeaton said the only downside to biking rather than driving to work tends to manifest itself Friday afternoons.

"Sometimes by Friday

I'm pretty tired by the end of the work day and then I dread having to get on my bike for the ride home," she said. "Once I get on my bike, though, that tiredness only lasts for about a half a mile or so, until the endorphins kick in and I get in my 'zone.'"

Sixty-five-year-old Rick Nelson rides to work, a mere 34-mile round trip, rain or shine, five days a week.

"I don't ride in hail or lightning," he said, noting that in the dual saddlebags draped over each side of his rear tire, he is prepared for any kind of weather or mechanical mishap he may encounter on his way to or from work.

"I carry a raincoat, extra shoes, water, plastic bags, tools, a bicycle pump and a spare inner tube," he said.

Nelson said there is a dual purpose for his bike commute.

"I feel it's so important, especially for older people to stay active, because as we age, we lose our balance and flexibility," he said. "I also use my commute as training because I do triathlons."

Many of the bicyclists at the event said the majority of the drivers they share the road with are polite.

Bicyclists, however, need to remember that the rules — and the laws — of the road apply to them, as well as to motorists.

"Bicyclists have to abide by the laws, too, so that means stopping at stoplights and always riding in the same direction as traffic," West Bend Police officer Todd Yerges said.

Ort-Anna Ramsey started the Bike to Work event six years ago to address a need she saw in the community.

"There was nothing like it and I felt bicyclists needed a community advocacy," said Ramsey, who stepped down as event organizer this year but was on hand for the event, now sponsored by Healthy People Project of Washington County. "It's also a way for bicycle commuters to get together and socialize, network, and learn about our community."

Money raised from Friday's raffle will be used to support bicycling and commuting in the county. One year, the event raised enough funds to purchase a pedestrian sign that is located on Decorah Road, where the Eisenbahn Trail crosses the road.

## Bike laws

A bicycle is defined as a vehicle and, as such, the operator is granted the same rights and has the same duties as the driver of any other vehicle. Here are important laws to know when bicycling:

■ Always ride on the right in the same direction as traffic and as far to the right as practical.

■ On one-way streets with two or more lanes of traffic, bicyclists may ride as near the left- or right-hand edge, or curb of the roadway, as practical.

■ Bicyclists may ride two abreast on any street as long as other traffic is not impeded.

■ Bicyclists are required to use the same hand signals as motorists. Hand signals are required within 50 feet of your turn. It is not required continuously, if you need both hands to control the bicycle.

■ A motorist passing a bicyclist in the same lane is required to give the bicyclist at least 3 feet of clearance and to maintain that clearance until safely past. A bicyclist passing a stopped, parked, or moving vehicle, is required to exercise care when passing.

■ Bicycling at night requires at least a white front headlight visible to others at least 500 feet away and a red rear reflector that is visible to others from a distance between 50 and 500 feet.

■ A bicyclist involved in an accident resulting in injury or death or total property damage of \$1,000 or more must report it immediately to the police. This does not apply to accidents if involving only human-powered vehicles.

■ State law allows for a bicyclist facing a red signal at an intersection, after stopping for not less than 45 seconds, to proceed cautiously through the intersection before the signal turns green if no other vehicles are present at the intersection to activate the signal and the operator believes the signal is vehicle actuated. The bicyclist shall yield the right-of-way to any vehicle proceeding through a green signal at the intersection.

Source: Wisconsin Department of Transportation Pedestrian/Bicycle Safety Program

## WEST BEND LIBRARY

### Use books to plant seeds of knowledge

Author Amy Stewart award-winning author six books on the perils of the world, has written a book "The Drunken Botanist." She explores the array of herbs, flowers, trees, fungi and fungi that humans have contrived to transform into alcohol. This fascinating concoction of biology, chemistry, history, etymology and mixology — with more than 50 drink recipes and growing tips for gardeners — will make you the most popular guest at any party.

Another book by Stewart, "Wicked Plants: The Weed That Killed Lincoln's Mother & Other Botanical Atrocities," goes through plants that have quite a scandalous history. A weed killed Lincoln's mother; a shrub nearly blinded Frederick Law Olmsted, American landscape architect; and a flower bulb sickened members Lewis and Clark's expedition. She lists "poison gardens" such as the Chelsea Physic Garden in the heart of London. A centuries-old "apothecaries' garden," includes a number of medicinal and poisonous plants. The Alnwick Poison Garden in Northumberland, England, surrounds Alnwick Castle. There are more than 100 plants of varying deadliness grown in the Poison Garden. Some of the plants are beautiful, and others look so harmless it is hard to imagine their dangerous, even fatal, qualities.

"From the Ground Up: The Story of a First Gardener" tells the story of Stewart's determination to create a garden in which the plan struggle to live up to the gardener's vision. She shares lessons she has learned the hard way.

In "The Earth Moved: On the Remarkable Achievements of Earthworms," Stewart takes readers on a journey through the underground world and introduces us to the earthworm and its profound impact on the ecosystem. The earthworm plows the soil, fights