

GET IN GEAR

A Newport non-profit shifts cycling availability into high speed

“PEDAL, PEDAL, PEDAL! YOU CAN DO IT,”

a parent shouts as a child wobbles forward, smiling while simultaneously white-knuckling the handlebars. Ah, the exhilarating elation of learning to ride a bike! For many in Newport County, owning and maintaining a bicycle isn't in their family budget, so the non-profit organization Bike Newport has bridged this gap with outreach initiatives geared towards giving people of all ages and abilities the skills, confidence and equipment to ride. “The earlier kids get involved with biking, the more it is integrated as a part of life rather than an add-on activity,” says Executive Director Bari Freeman. “We want to see kids biking to soccer practice and in their neighborhoods.”



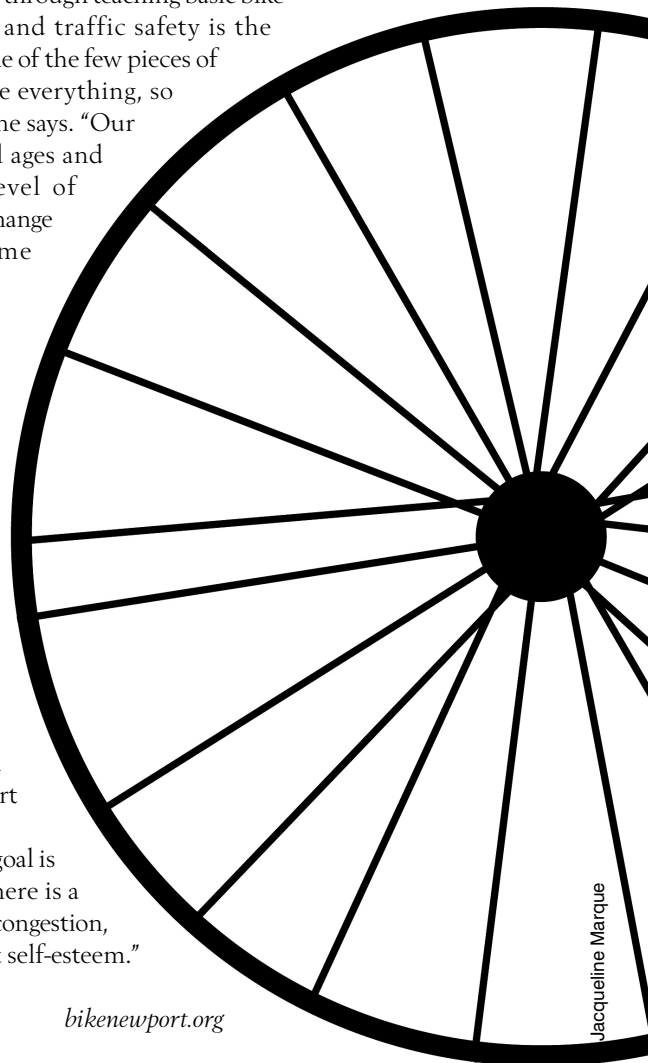
Bike Newport maintains two garages to help facilitate its programs; one at Rogers High School, located in the Newport Area Career and Technical Center and another at the Florence Gray Center. Encouraging biking through teaching basic bike handling skills, maintenance and traffic safety is the fundamental goal. “Bikes are one of the few pieces of equipment where you can see everything, so they're easy to take care of,” she says. “Our workshops, which are for all ages and abilities, give people a level of confidence to do things like change a tire so that they become independent riders.”

No worries if you don't own a bike.

According to Freeman, they collect bikes and equipment, such as new or gently used locks, tools and helmets, through donations and recycling days. While you can bring in worn out, rusty ones, which are stripped for parts, bikes that are in good condition are spruced up and used in various ways. Bike Newport maintains a collection to be used in its Tune Clinics as well as Bike Library, where you can check out bikes for the day. Youth and adults can earn bikes by putting in five “Learn & Earn” hours by working on the inventory or other Bike Garage projects. The Adopt-a-Bike program makes bicycles available for adoption for a reasonable suggested donation. And as if that isn't enough, Bike Newport also received funding to develop a school curriculum along with physical education faculty in Newport Public Schools.

“Newport is a small, inherently bikable town, so the goal is to get as many kids as we can riding,” Freeman says. “There is a happiness factor involved with bikes. They alleviate traffic congestion, give people a sense of freedom, improve health and boost self-esteem.” And who couldn't use a little bit of that?

bikeneport.org



Jacqueline Marque

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