

Tour de Pittsfield

Presented by the United South
Neighbors Association

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OCTOBER 3rd RIDE AIMS TO MAKE PITTSFIELD A BIKEABLE CITY

Who would ever think that the prevalence of bike riding in a city would be a key to its future economic viability?

Remember banana bikes? Forget banana bikes. This isn't just for kids anymore. Bicycle riding is part of the new "cool." And Pittsfield is not too far behind.

For instance, Memphis, TN, where Elvis, 30,000 FedEx jobs and a new AAA minor league ballpark aren't doing it for them, is frantically building bike lanes and greenways to attract young entrepreneurial types with advanced degrees.

New York City's Deputy Mayor of Economic Development Dan Doctoroff, a multimillionaire in his own right, rides his bike to work. Since 1991, the city has been creating 900 miles of greenways and bike lanes. Every two years, it publishes a huge new bike map which, in 2002, listed 30 bike shops in Manhattan alone, 43 this year. A 150-mile greenway is being built up to Albany.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm has asked 250 Michigan mayors to convene local "cool cities" development groups to "encourage young people to live, work and shop in your city."

Biking for big bucks

These initiatives are supported by the research Prof. Richard Florida details in "The Rise of the Creative Class," a book on the Harvard Business Review's list of Breakthrough Ideas of 2004.

"Healthy cities will be those that can compete not for big companies but for educated, creative young people, says Florida. "You create an attractive place for young people to live. Then the corporations will come after them." (Not the other way around.)

"Tolerant, funky, hip, diverse cities are also the rich ones," he says. "The level of skills in a city has been the best indicator of economic growth since the 1800s."

And members of this new "creative class," Florida finds, are not interested in motorized recreation or sedentary spectator sports. They want individual, action, do-it-yourself sports, one of which is cycling. In hundreds of interviews and focus groups, no one ever said they moved to a city because of a professional sports team there.

Greenways get the green

Even before reading Florida's book, United South Neighbors Association participants had scheduled June and October neighborhood and city bike rides.

Partnering with USNA are the Berkshire Cycling Association and the Berkshire Bike Path Council. BCA president Mike Ward and BBPC's Marge Cohan are both Pittsfield residents.

Another 2 1/4-mile link in the Vermont-to-Connecticut greenway proposed for the Western Mass Electric right-of-way between East and William streets in Pittsfield has met with some abutter concern about noise, litter and property invasion.

How about the Marginal Way in Ogunquit, ME.? It runs along the foot of 1 1/4 miles of million-dollar homes. Two million people walk it every year without incident.

On May 2, I stood for 2:10 hours in Central Park watching 28,000 cyclists come by--in the rain--on the 27th anniversary of the 5-borough, 42-miles Bike New York event (adults \$33-\$50), I noticed three things--everyone looked happy, there was no noise and no litter.

Later on the East Side part, I saw that even the police were smiling. "The police love this event," a Bike New York rep told me. "Cyclists don't cause problems."

Then I called Central Park HQ to ask if 28,000 cyclists had dropped any litter anywhere.

"No."

"Not any?"

"None."

The bike greenway in prosperous Burlington, VT, goes right through neighborhoods. Some home owners put up fences or bushes on their property line. Many just plant a flower bed.

Cyclists who participate in the Sunday, Oct. 3 Tour de Pittsfield (a ride, not a race) will be riding in support of a bikeable, prosperous Pittsfield--with bike lanes and greenways--so even kids can safely ride anywhere.

The 20-mile, symbolically circular route through all seven wards has been laid out by Tom Martin and is being vetted by Officer Marc Maddalena of the Police Department. It starts at the Common (Check-in, 1 PM. Start, 2 PM.) and will go along the following streets, roads and avenues:

First, Park Square, West, Center, West Housatonic, Barker, Melbourne, Lebanon, Hungerford, Ft. Hill, West, Valentine, Highland, Hancock, North, Springside, Allengate, Dalton, Hubbard, Dalton Division, Williams, Elm, First and back to the Common. Helmets are mandatory.

Registration is at Ordinary Cycles, 247 North St., \$5 per rider, \$10 at the event. "We're keeping the registration fee low this year, so many more people will be willing to put themselves on the line for the possibilities of this event.," said USNA's Astrid Hagenguth.