

Reflection on Bike-to-Work Day in Newark—a good start for the event and for me, personally

by Mark Deshon

On Biking to Work

Having had the privilege of biking to my job at the University of Delaware for the better part of three decades, I consider myself blessed. Every now and then, I remind myself that there are several reasons why I do this, even through the cold of winter. For me, each of these reasons is personal and stands quite well on its own as an improvement over driving a car.

Biking to work is...

Good for Your Bank Account – You save gas, parking costs, wear and tear on your car, and (in many cases) lower your vehicle insurance.

Good for the Earth – When you're biking, you're reducing your carbon footprint (i.e., you're not polluting the atmosphere).

Good for Your Body – Keeping your leg muscles, heart, and lungs working helps maintain your health.

Good for Your Senses – You not only see but hear and feel things that you don't experience from inside a vehicle.

Good for Your Soul – It makes you feel good and is a great wake-up substitute for coffee in the morning.

Bike-to-Work Day Celebration in Newark

Last year I decided I needed to become more of an advocate for bike commuting and bicycling in general. So after chatting with Frank Warnock at the 2010 Delaware Bike Summit, I decided I would talk with Jeff Riegner and see if I could become a member of the Newark Bicycle Committee (NBC).

Not only were NBC's members very open to a "newbie," but they risked allowing me to make an initial contribution by trusting me with the coordination of Newark's Bike-to-Work Day event in 2011. Yikes! Nothing like jumping in with both feet.

All in all, I would characterize the event as a "good start" for this bronze-level "Bicycle Friendly" city.

I had participated in Bike-to-Work Day in years past, back when TMA Delaware was very involved and the University of Delaware organized the Newark event. I knew that NBC wanted this event to be resuscitated in a grand way. Working through my connections at the University and the City of Newark (perhaps Newark's two largest employers), we were able to build some momentum, as we did whatever we could think of to publicize the event. We found out early on that we would need a group inside the University to arrange for the event site (Trabant Center patio) without cost; the **UD Cycling Club** came through for us in that regard.

Of course, I got a lot of help:

- **Heather Dunigan** (WILMAPCO) was instrumental in helping develop printed material and pushing things out on the NBC website.

- **Frank Warnock** (Bike Delaware) helped get the word out through his channels.
- **Mike Fortner** (City of Newark) was a great help with the business community and even went “door-to-door” with me to seek sponsorships as the event grew near.
- **Anthony Aglio** coordinated his efforts as DelDOT’s bike/ped advocate with NBC and those groups organizing similar events throughout the state.
- NBC president **Jeff Riegner** consulted with me on a basic site plan for the event and sent letters out to the event sponsors, thanking them for their support.
- **Dan LaCombe** came and set up DelDOT’s tent in the light rain on the morning of May 20 and brought lots of transportation-related goodies.
- **George Stanko** (Newark Police) and **Jim Grimes** (UD Public Safety) coordinated public safety coverage for the event.
- DelDOT Community Affairs Officer **James Westhoff** stayed in constant touch with me during the final couple weeks and brought a portable podium and sound equipment to the event.
- Newark’s Community Affairs Officer **Dana Johnston** helped publicize the event among City of Newark employees.
- **The local bike shops** and the **University of Delaware’s Wellness Program** posted advertising at their locations.
- **Several others** offered help and encouragement, which I greatly appreciated.

Event sponsors included **BikeLine**, **Wooden Wheels**, **Fusion Fitness**, **Newark Natural Foods**, **Bing’s Bakery**, and **The Ski Bum**. Breakfast items were either donated or paid for by these sponsors.

The **University of Delaware Office of Communications & Marketing** provided staff photographer **Ambre Alexander** to cover the event.

In addition to a brief welcome message from **UD Provost Tom Apple** (on behalf of the University) and closing words from **Newark Mayor Vance Funk**, we were lucky to have had **Cleon Cauley**, **Delaware’s Acting Secretary of Transportation** and a proven bicycling advocate, come and give a substantive address in support of the future of bicycle transportation in Delaware.

Though the early rain and the threat of more, in all probability, limited the number of bike commuters at this year’s event, the nearly 30 participants seemed genuinely happy to have stopped by on their way to work. Everyone had something to eat and drink and an opportunity to socialize a bit.

Some things might have been done differently, and we should look to get the word out earlier next spring and hope for better weather. However, things did come together nicely—the rain pretty much stopping on cue at 7:30—leaving NBC members with some “good vibes” about what we had accomplished together.

Thanks again to all who helped make Bike-to-Work Day a success.