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Eric Cornwell, left, and Leah Miracle, right, talk to Ron Linker about a new taxi service and bicycle-sharing program Saturday. Photo by Andrew Spear.

## Co-op takes bike-sharing plan out for a spin

By Mike Barajas  
Athens NEWS Campus Reporter  
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Saturday the Athens Bicycle Cooperative launched the Athens Yellow Bike Taxi Service, or AYBiTS, with its fleet of 25 refurbished one-speed bikes.

The bikes, all painted bright yellow and easy to spot, will be scattered around uptown Athens and the Ohio University campus, either on public bike racks or safe spots to lock up a bike, said Eric Cornwell, who helps run the bike co-op.

"The bike co-op has been dedicated to helping more people become cyclists in the area," Cornwell said. AYBiTS, he added, "is intended for students, residents, visitors, anybody who needs these bikes."

Cornwell began considering bringing a bike taxi service to Athens after visiting his brother in Vienna, Austria, and seeing the city's own public bike system, Citybike. "I was just really intrigued with the one I saw in Vienna, and thought we could try one here," he said.

To join the program, new members need to sign up with the Athens Bike Co-op, providing their name and contact information. Each member also must sign a liability waiver and make a donation to the co-op (Cornwell suggested around \$20). When the co-op set up a table on College Green Friday afternoon, Cornwell said, they had already signed up 16 people for the service.

To gain access to the new bikes, each member will pay a \$10 deposit for a key that will open up the bike locks on any of the new bikes around town.

The Bike Co-op also gives members who sign up a manual that introduces them to basic bike maintenance. "Basically," Cornwell said, "it's up to the members to make sure [the

bikes] are in good working order." The co-op also give members a map detailing some prime bike routes throughout the area, and information on bike safety and Ohio bike laws.

Cornwell explained that the Athens Bike Co-op has been working on refurbishing bikes that were donated to the shop for the AYBiTS program since last November, with the University Courtyard apartment complex donating around 40 bikes. Since then, he said, the shop has put around \$600 or so into the program, or between \$25 to \$30 per bike.

The co-op set up a launch party Saturday on the College Green to take all the new bikes on a "poker run" to the businesses around town that helped sponsor the program with ads that are placed on the sides of the bikes. On the run, the bikers collected a playing card at each location, with the biker with the best five-card hand winning a custom-painted bike frame from the bike co-op. Over a dozen businesses and organizations around town sponsored AYBiTS, Cornwell said.

"I think it's extremely innovative and timely, timely for the green awakening," said Holly Creelfox, an Athens resident who came by Saturday to watch the bike launch. Creelfox said she plans to take advantage of the public bike program in the future.

Riding around on one of the yellow bikes Saturday was Roger Sikes, a senior OU student. Though he already owns a couple bikes, Sikes said he plans to use the yellow bikes around town. "Yeah, for sure I'm gonna be on these; I think the whole concept is cool," he said.

Sikes said he thinks a public bike system benefits everybody in the Athens community. "We've got like 25 of these guys, and we just want to disperse them throughout Athens," he said. "The goal is to make all our members feel part of this community."

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