

College bike-share programs rolling along

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BY DANA WILSON

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Bicycles abandoned by college students who've moved away are of no use to University Courtyard Apartments in Athens, but the collection grows every year.

So when property manager Kris Pyle heard that the local bicycle cooperative needed donations, she happily turned over about 40 unclaimed bikes that had cluttered the complex.

"The majority of them were new," Pyle said. "There were a few very expensive bikes as well, which I can't imagine anyone leaving behind."

The Athens Bicycle Cooperative refurbished some of the hand-me-downs for its new bike-sharing program, and Ohio University students might ride them again.

Eric Cornwell is putting the finishing touches on a fleet of 25 bikes that anyone can borrow by signing up for the Athens Yellow Bike Taxi Service. Membership costs \$10 for a key deposit, plus a suggested \$20 donation to the co-op. The bright yellow, single-speed bikes will be locked to public racks around town and on campus to be used by key holders on a first-come, first-served basis.

Cornwell, a 24-year-old Athens native and avid cyclist, hopes nonbikers will consider the benefits of pedaling.

"The streets are a little congested, and parking is hard to find," he said. "I find that riding a bike, I can get anywhere around town as fast or faster than people in vehicles."

The co-op is not affiliated with Ohio University, but Student Senate members are considering a bike-rental program just for students. They'll conduct a survey this quarter to test interest, said Bailey Miles, an OU senior and Student Senate academic affairs commissioner.

At least 70 colleges and universities nationwide offer free bike-share and bicycle-rental programs, including Ohio State University and Oberlin College, according to the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education.

"There's a variety of motivations, but certainly trying to reduce environmental impact is part of it," said Julian Dautremont-Smith, associate director of the nonprofit association.

There are fitness benefits, too, he said. "Biking is a way to get more exercise in on your way to and from class."

Buckeye Bikes have gained in popularity at Ohio State University since the student-initiated program started in spring 2008.

It's hard to keep all 10 Schwinn Heavy Duty Cruisers in stock at the sport shop at the Recreation and Physical Activity Center, said Rob Jech, director of member services.

"There's been a lot of demand, and we haven't done a whole lot of marketing for it," Jech said.

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Renters must sign a waiver form. Helmets are not required but are encouraged. Organizers decided to limit rentals to 48 hours at a time and impose a late fee because some users kept the bikes for two or three weeks before returning them.

A group of environmentally conscious students at Ohio Wesleyan University in Delaware, meanwhile, are raising money for a bike-rental program dubbed the Bike Movement, which is expected to make its debut in the fall. The group's proposal would require students to register, sign a waiver and take an online road and safety course.

Lara Kobelt, one of the student organizers, said the idea is to get some cars off the road. "Some people use it as an excuse to drive, because they don't have a bike."

dwilson@dispatch.com