

Biking their own path; 2024 youth bike summit blazes a trail of advocacy and adventure

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Joshua Furches, center with white sleeves, stands with workshop youth bike mentors after they brainstormed ideas on how to reward their efforts helping other kids learn the value of bicycles in life. Furches, from Philadelphia, is president of the National Youth Bike Council.

ALLENTOWN, Pa. — Tayshawn Edmonds rides his bicycle all through the streets of Manhattan. It's how he gets around.

"I don't drive," said Edmonds, one of five adult bicyclist-mentors who led three teenage students ages 15-18 years, from their El Puente Bike Club in Brooklyn, NY all the way to the National Youth Bike Summit Friday in Allentown.

On their bicycles.

The youth bike summit, in its 4th year, took place on the campus of Muhlenberg College.

Edmonds says the 100-mile bicycle ride to the event was “showing them [the teens] they *can* do it.”

Community Bike Works mentoring program, whose mission it is to teach life lessons through bicycles to the Lehigh Valley’s youngest and most vulnerable, hosted the 3-day summit.



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NYC youth bike mentor Tayshawn Edmonds, blue t-shirt, suggests ideas for improvements to Bethlehem's Broad Street corridor to Lehigh Valley Planning Commissioners Evan Gardi, striped shirt, and Brian Hite, right. Joining in with ideas is Ross Willard, of Recycle Bicycle Harrisburg.

Edmonds and others learned about the West Broad Street Corridor in Bethlehem, the focus project presented in the 'Making Your Neighborhood Pedestrian and Bike Friendly' workshop. Members of the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission (LVPC) led the discussion.

The corridor is the infamous, 1.5 mile stretch from 1st Avenue to Pennsylvania Avenue on the Allentown border, prone to bike and auto accidents. Last December, it was approved for nearly \$10 million in safety improvements.

Looking at large photographs of overhead street views of the corridor, attendees were invited to come up with solutions that could help slow down vehicle traffic. Enhanced crosswalks with improved signage, bump-outs, curb extensions and protected bike lanes are among the actual plans.

Advice from a Big Apple rider

Without knowing the approved plans, Edmonds suggested immediately repainting faded designated pedestrian and bike lane lines. Moving section by section, he led the exchange of ideas with LVPC transportation planners Evan Gardi and Brian Hite.

“Roundabout” was offered several times by Edmonds, whose vast city-biking experience helped him quickly absorb the corridor issues and LVPC lingo.

“A roundabout is a great traffic-calming device,” Hite said, as one solution to the problem of human behavior on the roads. “Except where tractor trailers and buses need a lot of right-of-way. Also, municipalities incur all the expense of making intersections safe, and a roundabout is less costly than a traffic signal.”

The workshop was one of 40 the expected 500 attendees from across the country could choose for

just the Saturday portion of the summit.

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Joshua Furches, National Youth Bike Council

Topics ran the gamut from empowering girls through biking, route planning, 'bikepacking' camping trips, and the importance of youth in local bike shops, to climate action as bicyclers, and celebrating youth bicycling.

"How do you want to be recognized for doing something good with your bike?" Joshua Furches, president of the National Youth Bike Council asked his young 'Celebrate Youth Bicycling' workshop teens.

The goal of the workshop, Furches said, was to amplify the young cycling leaders who have found an appreciation for bikes and in turn, bring on more young people to use and do good with their bikes.

"They deserve to be rewarded because they do amazing work getting kids involved. It's for them to come together, discover, learn. Exposing them to each

other and giving them the idea of opportunity bicycles are, and, as a platform, to not only use this as a tool for young people, but use it as a tool for young people to do great things.

“For some of these young people, riding a bicycle is the only way to get out there. It’s the only way a lot of these kids are going to see the world. For me, I lived in an area where it’s not that easy to get around, so the bike for me was a tool to get around.”



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Kyle Bradshaw, 16, from Brunswick, GA, led fellow youth bike mentors on ways to keep motivated in their quest to bring other youth to bicycling, Saturday at Muhlenberg College, where the 2024 Youth Bike Summit was held.

Kyle Bradshaw, 16, from Brunswick, Georgia last week rode 442 miles with the BRAG (Bike Ride Across Georgia) team, from Atlanta to Savannah. Why?

“We do this to get kids out, so they’re not stuck inside, gaming and things like that when school is over. They get a bike to ride, to keep riding,” Bradshaw said.

He read aloud what his group of youth biking mentors thought would make excellent rewards for kids doing amazing things on their bikes. Amazon gift cards, amusement park and college tour trips, snacks, free bike washes and tune-ups, cool socks and team merch.

Summit visitors also had some hands-on fun in a maker space, turning bike parts into jewelry and other accessories, playing Bike Jeopardy, taking two park and all-girls rides, rides through the local countryside, on the Trexler Nature Preserve mountain bike trails, and to the Velodrome, where they stayed for nighttime events.

They also got an Iron Pigs tour, practiced mindfulness and yoga, and they even went behind the scenes at Bicycling Magazine and saw the Nurture Nature Center in Easton.



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Noah Henderson, 15, of Arlington, VA gets creative with recycled bicycle parts with helper, Kathleen Dent, a volunteer with Community Bike Works of the Lehigh Valley.

After a planned breakfast Sunday, participants will take the BIG RIDE! From 10 a.m. to Noon, taking a finale

ride through center city Allentown to the SteelStacks in south Bethlehem. It's a 10-mile trip, after which they'll have lunch at the site and take a bus back to Muhlenberg.

Shaavel'le Olivier, from Boston's Mattapan Food and Fitness Coalition and on the steering committee for the youth summit, is excited her city will host next year's event.

"I'm here today because when I was 22, I went to the National Bike Summit and saw that a youth bike summit was starting, so I went to it and saw all of these youth, and more specifically, youth of color.

"I wanted them to experience what I experienced, that there are other youth of color working on getting the word out about cycling. So I started to bring some of our vigorous youth so they could see, they're not alone in this endeavor, and it's just been growing from there," Olivier said.

Anna Tang, with the League of American Bicyclists in Pittsburgh, one of the event sponsors, says there's a local non-profit in almost every single community in the United States that does bike advocacy or bike and walking advocacy.

"We're the oldest bike advocacy non-profit, around since 1880," she said.

"And so we just like to support other groups who are doing similar stuff. We help people who are ready to move on from the youth summit and transitioning to

what they want to do next. We're here to help them figure it out.

"From commuters who don't own a car, to recreational, people who create an entire life around it. Bike across the country, own a business. It's a multi-million dollar industry. It's super fun. There's a lot to do."