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A New Player in Town

Submitted by Walk & Bike Mendocino

Editor's Note: It almost goes without saying that physical activity plays a vital part in community health. Walking and biking are wonderful options to increase physical activity, but safety concerns and lack of appropriate infrastructure can decrease access for many. In 2010 there were 26.2 bicycle-involved collisions per 100,000 population in Mendocino County. Even more concerning, there were 3.2 pedestrian deaths per 100,000 population according to HealthyMendocino.org. This is almost double the national Healthy People 2020 goal of 1.3 pedestrian deaths per 100,000 population. Increasing knowledge of bike safety and improving bike and pedestrian pathways will contribute to increased physical activity, safety, health and well-being in Mendocino County. This month, Healthy Mendocino invites you to learn more about one new program helping to influence active transportation in Mendocino County.

There is a new player in town working to make Mendocino a healthier place to live. The newly formed Walk & Bike Mendocino is working to find new opportunities for active transportation throughout the county. Through education, advocacy, and encouragement, the group hopes to have a positive influence on a wide variety of health indicators in the areas of exercise, weight, transportation and the built environment.

The group originally formed as a Facebook page in 2010. The page quickly grew garnering over three hundred likes in its first months and now boasts over nine hundred likes. Discussions on the page have focused on the need for improved infrastructure and show a strong grassroots interest in improved opportunities for walking, biking, and active, healthy living in Mendocino.

Neil Davis, a public health nurse, was one of the founding members and has now assumed the role of Program Director. "We tried working as a 'leader-full' group with no one person in charge," stated Davis. "We did some bike counts, a monthly community ride, held a bicycle fashion show and helped get the Ukiah Bike Kitchen formed. We really were accomplishing things as a group with no structure and no one in charge," said Davis. "But then we started having some struggles."

Davis went on to explain, "We realized we needed professional staff. The workload was too great for an all volunteer effort and with no one in charge, there was no way to deal with finances; someone has to have the authority to sign the checks."

So in the spring of 2013, Davis contacted North Coast Opportunities and requested they become a fiscal sponsor. Once they were signed on as sponsor, he began a fundraising drive with a goal of hiring part-time paid staff. The effort was successful and he is now

working in a paid position. The group is also contracting with a licensed bicycle safety trainer.

The group has signed contracts with the Public Health Department and Alta Planning + Design. The group is now providing bicycle safety classes, working with local law enforcement agencies to coordinate and unify educational materials and curriculum, and working with the City of Ukiah to update the Bike and Pedestrian Master Plan.

“We’re eager, and I think well positioned, to partner and consult with other agencies and programs to make Mendocino a healthier place to live,” said Davis. The staff and volunteers at Walk & Bike Mendocino now provide a counterpart to the many existing nutrition related programs in the county. The county now has a trusted source for information and best practices related to active transportation.

For more information please contact: Neil Davis, 707-972-0926, Neil@mendotrails.org or go to www.walkbikemendo.org

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