Evanston cyclists circumnavigate city

Downtown Evanston, Evanston Transit Alliance kick off new Evanston Rides! program

by Alan K. Cubbage
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More than 30 bicyclists circumnavigated Evanston Tuesday evening on the inaugural 2024 Evanston Rides! bike ride, sponsored by Downtown Evanston and led by the Evanston Transit Alliance.

Thunderstorms and threatening skies loomed over the city for much of the afternoon but cleared just in time for the ride, which began at Fountain Square and headed east to the lakefront path. The route then made its way through the southern and western portions of the city before returning to the starting point. Traveling at an easy 10-mile-per-hour pace, the riders enjoyed cruising through local neighborhoods on a perfect spring evening.

Monthly adult social rides, held on Tuesday evenings, are a collaborative effort of Downtown Evanston and the Evanston Transit Alliance, a cycling advocacy group. In addition, Downtown Evanston is collaborating with Chicago Family Biking/Evanston Kidical Mass to promote monthly family rides designed for parents riding with children either on their own bikes or as cargo on the grownups’ bikes.

Andy Vick, executive director of Downtown Evanston, said the idea for the monthly rides is based on a similar program in Colorado Springs, where he previously worked, that held a weekly event for runners. The Evanston Rides program will feature monthly rides from now through October, he said.

“We hope to expose the community to the assets and resources of downtown Evanston and bring people together,” Vick said. “We hope the riders will enjoy the beauty of Evanston and good fellowship on these social rides.”

That appeared to be the key attraction for those who participated Tuesday night.

“We’re excited to try this. It’s fun to ride with a group and meet new people,” said Carrie Stewart of Evanston, who was riding with her friend, Sessy Nyman of Rogers Park. “I like to ride up to Winnetka for ice cream, so this will be something new.”
Afterward, a number of cyclists adjourned to Bat 17 downtown to enjoy post-ride refreshments and a drawing for a gift card from Gearhead Outfitters, a downtown clothing and outdoor equipment store.

The adult social rides are designed for casual riders, and no major cycling experience is necessary, said John Fervoy, leader of the Evanston Transit Alliance. However, helmets are required on the rides.

“We’re trying to come up with interesting and safe routes to explore Evanston and nearby areas,” Fervoy said.

This month’s ride, for example, went south on the lakefront around Calvary Cemetery into the north end of Rogers Park before returning to Evanston on Mulford Street and following the new bike/pedestrian path on Oakton Street to the North Shore Channel.

“We wanted to enjoy the camaraderie of the community and go for a nice bike ride in Evanston,” said Brian Johnson, who rode with Jeff Plewa, both of Evanston.

The next adult social ride will start at 5:30 p.m. Tuesday, June 4 from Fountain Square.

Family rides

The monthly family rides are organized by Evanston Kidical Mass, led by Scott Mangum. The name Kidical Mass is a play on the term Critical Mass, which are bicycle rides held in cities throughout the U.S. where large numbers of cyclists take over streets. However, the Evanston rides, which are an offshoot of Chicago Family Biking, are a very different type, Mangum said.
“These rides are very family-oriented, with lots of kids on bikes, parents riding with them and carrying kids in cargo bikes,” Mangum said. “We pick routes on very low-stress streets and generally ride for only a mile or two.”

Although this is the first year that the group is collaborating with Downtown Evanston, it’s the third year for Evanston Kidical Mass. The rides have attracted as many as 50 participants with kids as young as 3 or 4 on their own two-wheelers, Mangum said.

This year’s first ride will be at 10 a.m. Saturday, May 25, departing from Raymond Park and riding to the King Arts playground. The Evanston Parks and Recreation Department will offer free giveaways for riders, starting with Wheel & Sprocket, the downtown Evanston bike shop, which is providing free bike inspections and safety tune-ups.

For more information on the 2024 Evanston Rides! program, check out the website.

Editor’s note: This story has updated to correct the last name of Scott Mangum.

Jeff Balch
May 9th, 2024 at 12:54 PM

Fine article, Mr. Cubbage. And great photos, Mr. Metzner. And thanks, Mr. Vick, for promoting this event. I like the idea of Evanston Rides! as a good-fellowship outing, but we can think more broadly too. It’s not so hard to foresee, in a compact city like Evanston, a cultural shift such that most rides into and around downtown are by bicycle rather than car—a shift toward sustainability and better health.