

At Cambridge Elementary, students, families ‘think outside the car’

Supported by Safe Routes to School program, event draws 75 riders at Cambridge

By Richard Bammer, *The Reporter*, Vacaville

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They were probably thinking more about getting to class on time rather than the commendable theme of National Bike To School Day: “Think outside the car.”

Cambridge Elementary sixth-graders Kelsey Wall, riding a pinkish bicycle, and Alexis Sorenson, using a silvery metal scooter, both wearing safety helmets, pedaled and pushed their way to school early Wednesday, when the special day was observed at the Cambridge Drive campus, elsewhere in Solano County and across state and nation.

They were part of an effort, locally supported by Solano Safe Routes to School, partnering with the Solano Transportation Authority, to encourage the county’s elementary and middle school students to join in the one-day event, part of National Bike Month, celebrated in May.

As explained by Jayne Bauer, marketing and legislative program manager for the Suisun City-based authority, the organizing idea was to urge students and families to use means other than a motorized, gas-powered vehicle to get to school.

Wall rode her bike to school “because I’ve always done it,” she said after being greeted by City Councilwoman Dilemma Harris and Councilman Curtis Hunt, who handed out complimentary fabric backpacks, an estimated 75 of them by event’s end.

But Wall was aware of the day’s significance, saying, “I always participate in school activities.”

On most days, except during rainy or exceedingly windy or cold days, Sorenson rides a bicycle or pushes a scooter to school.

And both girls noted the environmental and health benefits of human-powered transportation:

“It doesn’t waste power or gas,” said Wall.

“It helps with pollution,” said Sorenson. “And it will help with the environment.”

“It will make you healthy,” added Wall.

Shortly afterward, under gray skies and cool temperatures, Makenze Munkner walked her bike past the black metal schoolgrounds gate. Harris, by day a public affairs manager for Kaiser Permanente, handed her a complimentary backpack.

Like her classmates, Munkner rides “for exercise,” she said.

“Not every day,” she added, clad in black safety helmet, a black top over blue denim jeans. “I was riding at the beginning of the year, but lately I’ve started to ride more,” as the spring weather becomes more temperate.

“It’s gets the heart rate up,” said Munkner, smiling at the thought of its health benefits.

Harris, wearing black riding shorts and chartreuse green top, appeared dressed to ride a bicycle, adding of her employer, “We’re big supporters of Safe Routes to School. It’s so nice to see so many students participating.”

She noted the students not only get exercise and health benefits by riding but also they learn “how to navigate (city streets), learn important safety lessons and learn about reducing their carbon footprint.”

Fourth-grader Ryan Labarga may have never heard the expression “carbon footprint,” but his largely black helmet, adorned with a spiky red Mohawk attachment, would definitely make an imprint on a human hand that touched it.

“I ride a lot of the times” to school, he said, admitting that he was unaware of the special day.

At 8:15 a.m., Principal Susan Nader, speaking on the playground, where many students gather before first period, weather permitting, said the school’s 570 students were told, for many days in advance, about National Bike To School Day. She even sent a email blast to parents about it, she added.

“It’s healthy for the kids,” said Nader, adding that biking rather than using a car or truck to transport a child to school also “cuts down on traffic” around the campus.

In a written statement, Rio Vista Mayor Norm Richardson, chairman of the Solano Transportation Authority board, added: “Studies show that physically active kids learn better and are more likely to become healthy adults. These are all great reasons to put your foot on the bike pedal instead of the car pedal!”

Online: Solano Safe Routes to School at solanosr2sinfo@sta.ca.gov (or call 399-3222); and National Bike To School Day at www.walkbiketoschool.org.

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