It’s a cold, drizzly morning as students and parents make their way to Bacich School. The first rainy day after a long dry spell didn’t dampen the spirits of the Woodlands Walking School Bus. As the core group of ten gathered, the children were all smiles, greeting their friends for their weekly social time—otherwise known as walking to school.

The Woodlands Walking School Bus is one of six “buses” that were launched in Fall 2008 by the Bacich Site Council. After studying their Safe Routes to Schools parent surveys last spring, the Site Council determined that parents would be more willing to let their children walk to school if the children were accompanied by parents.

Thus, BEST – Bacich Elementary School Transit – was born, in order to promote transit, carpooling and walking school buses. The stated goals are to increase physical activity, reduce traffic congestion around school, teach safe walking skills, and support the Cool the Earth initiative.

Each route has a parent organizer who is committed to being there every Wednesday morning to lead the pack. Site Council members held a series of meetings with the organizers to determine the parameters of the program. They organized a BEST kickoff for Back to School night, and teachers and room parents helped spread the word. Parents received a flyer outlining the program and a map showing the walking school bus routes.

**Try it, it’s fun**

Debra Fletcher is one of the coordinators. “I was walking a lot of the time anyway,” she explained, “and when I heard about this I said let’s do it.” Walking is easy for Debra. “I live at the bottom of the hill. It only takes me five extra minutes to walk. People thought it was so far and so long. But then people started joining us and found out how easy it was. People who live up at the top of the hill drive down to meet us.”

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2
The Transportation Authority of Marin (TAM) launched its Street Smarts Marin program in August 2008, to coincide with the start of the school year. Street Smarts is a public education campaign designed to promote behavior change by drivers, pedestrians, and bicyclists. Through education and focused community outreach, the program aims to raise awareness, influence attitudes and change behaviors such as speeding, running red lights, jaywalking, and bicycling infractions.

Three communities—Corte Madera, Larkspur and Mill Valley—stepped up to pilot-test the Street Smarts program. TAM retained a program coordinator and formed a Street Smarts Committee comprised of city managers, public works officials, planning staff and police department representatives from all three cities. The committee identified and targeted the “Top 5” traffic-safety issues in each community.

The Street Smarts campaign launched with a series of banners and signs aimed at “hot spots” in the pilot communities. As part of the educational outreach, Street Smarts safety education brochures went home to 7,000 families of school children during the first weeks of school, in backpack mail or electronically. All public and private schools, K-12, in the pilot communities partnered in the program by posting banners, sending announcements and providing other educational outreach.

The pilot program was assessed by TAM and the three pilot communities to guide future implementation throughout Marin County on a jurisdictional basis. Comments from citizens, city staff and council members were overwhelmingly positive. The signs were viewed as attractive and effective. Many residents requested signs for their neighborhoods.

The program will be deployed in the pilot communities again this spring. This second phase of the pilot will incorporate what the committee learned from the first phase. The program will be further refined for a larger rollout in the 2009-10 school year that will include Tiburon and Belvedere and the Ross Valley communities of Ross, San Anselmo, and Fairfax.

Street Smarts gets people thinking, but the true goal is to educate communities to change their attitudes and behaviors, making Marin County streets safer and friendlier for everyone who uses them. To that aim, TAM will be introducing additional neighborhood and school safety education programs. Go to StreetSmartsMarin.org to see more information, including examples of the materials used in the campaign.

Debra has a core group of about ten kids who walk every week. When the weather is good they get as many as 20 kids, plus other parents. Each Walking Bus needs at least two parents—one in the front and one in the back. Debra’s leaders carry flags and the children are to stay within the two flags. “We have kids of all ages ranging from kindergarten to fourth grade.”

Social Networking

One boy joined the group reluctantly. “My mom used to make me do it even though I didn’t want to,” he told Debra. “But now I want to do it.” Debra said that now he sees that it’s cool: “Every week he gets to hang out with a group of gagging kids.”

An added bonus of the program is the social networking. Now that she is walking with several kids, Debra has met a lot of her neighbors. Chris Prescott, one of the key organizers, said the feedback so far has been very positive. “People love it. My kids love it—they look forward to it. They get to school energized, pumped and ready to go.”

Chris urges other schools to form their own programs. “The key is identifying leaders who are willing to organize the route. It helped that the [Bacich] administration was on board to support us.”

“It’s definitely a commitment,” noted Debra. “But it’s really been fun. It’s given my kids a sense that we have a job to do. My daughter is really conscious of the green thing. If you have a core group—a few families—give it a try. That’s what we did and it really worked.”

Bacich Launches Walking School Buses CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1
THE BICYCLING PRINCIPAL

Principal Smith Inspires Her Students to Savor the Outdoors and Bike to School

Eileen Smith is a true roll model for the students at Loma Verde Elementary School in Novato. Smith, the school's principal, bicycles to and from school, three or four days each week. Her round trip each day is 28 miles. By motivating her students to bike to school when they can, Smith is helping to fill up the bike racks at Loma Verde.

Smith is not only a shining model for her students, showing them how to make the time and enjoy the effort to get to school via bicycle. Her commute is now a part of the school's fourth-grade math curriculum.

“Let’s calculate how many miles per week Principal Smith bikes,” fourth-grade math teacher Emily Cavallero says to her students. “And how many miles does she bike in one month? Each year?” According to Cavallero, “Principal Smith is great content for our word math problems, but more importantly, she is hands-on showing our kids how they can get to school, have fun doing it, and keep physically fit. My daughter is now excited about learning how to ride her bike so that she too can ride her bike to school, because she sees Principal Smith's red bicycle in the office.”

Communing with Nature

Nature and regular exercise are two of the driving factors in Principal Smith’s choice to ride to school. Deer graze in a field as she pedals by. Fall foliage, frost on car windshields, California poppies, changing landscapes and an occasional full moon enrich her way to Loma Verde. Principal Smith says that she has always had real gratitude for her surroundings. “When I’m biking to school I feel happy like I’m on vacation, and I observe things that I would normally not see if I was in my car.”

Principal Smith finds the morning air invigorating. She starts her commute at 5:45 a.m. and arrives on campus at 7:00 a.m. “The fresh air and ride sets the tone for a great day,” she says. On the way home her bike ride is 20 minutes longer, owing to traffic and more uphill pedaling. “I’m often tired on the start of my ride home, but feel energized by the time I reach my doorstep.”

Equipment and Practice

Principal Smith decided a year ago that she wanted to make commuting to school a priority, but was apprehensive because she was afraid of traffic and doubtful about her personal abilities to ride her bike on busy roads.

A runner and sometimes mountain bike rider, Principal Smith needed the right bike for her commute. “I wasn’t used to skinny tires, but decided to shop around for an appropriate road bike that would also transport my laptop.” She now loves her new Breezer, a bike designed for commuters. “In July I practiced the route many times to build my confidence so that when school started I would feel comfortable with the route.”

Principal Smith, 53 years old, is no longer afraid of the traffic on the road, but instead is part of the natural flow of it. “Biking instills in me such a strong sense of freedom, and simply makes me feel alive and very happy. Biking is also contagious and the benefits to your long-term health are tremendous.”

“When I'm biking to school I feel happy like I'm on vacation, and I observe things that I would normally not see if I was in my car.”

– Eileen Smith,
Principal of Loma Verde Elementary School
Teens at Miller Creek Middle School Go Green

Students in the Teens Go Green (TGG) club at Miller Creek Middle School have been very busy for the last few months, meeting weekly at lunch, after school and occasionally on weekends. They decided to participate in the Lexus Eco-Challenge, a competition that challenges middle and high school students across the country to design and implement a project to benefit environmental issues concerning water, the air or the land (learn more at www.scholastic.com/lexus).

TGG students collectively selected the air/climate challenge and created a project that involved collecting, restoring and redistributing used bikes to children in Marin County who do not own bikes. They chose this project because it not only supports a healthy alternative to vehicle transportation, it also makes bikes available to kids who otherwise might not be able to purchase them.

TGG students were supported by science teacher Mike Schulist, Miller Creek Team Leader volunteer parents Kel Harris and Craig Tackabery, and TGG coordinators Gwen Froh and Aviva Joseph. To collect the bikes, students promoted the program in all Dixie District schools and in local community businesses, in the Marin Independent Journal and in the e-newsletters of both Safe Routes and MCBC. They were expecting to receive about 20 donated bikes, but in fact they received 68, in many sizes and colors. Unable to find a suitable storage space for all of the bikes, the Team Leaders stored the bikes in their own garages.

Helped by a BikeWalk Marin grant, the students organized a workshop so that they could learn basic bike repair skills. After the workshop, students and adults met several times to clean and repair the bikes with the help of Spokey Godfrey, a professional bike mechanic from Summit Bicycles. Trips for Kids and Performance Bikes donated bike parts such as seats, tires and chains to help with the initiative. This was definitely a community-based project in which many people and organizations lent a hand.

Towards the end of the project, students presented their eco-challenge to the Safe Routes Novato Task Force meeting, asking for support with the redistribution of the bikes. For over a year the Novato Task Force had been discussing the idea of getting refurbished bikes in order to provide bikes for students who could not take part in Safe Routes to Schools curriculum for lack of a bike. The Task Force unanimously welcomed the initiative and greatly appreciated the students’ thoughtful endeavor and their dedication to promoting a healthy plan.
Miller Creek Middle School campus has some new additions as a result of the Teens Go Green club’s walkabout recommendations from the Fall of 2007. Students walked the grounds with SR2S staff members and provided input on what improvements could promote more walking and biking to school. As a result, two important projects were completed during the first few months of the 2008-09 school year.

A renovated path, completed just before the start of school, is 765 feet long and connects the Marinwood Park, near the tennis courts, to the back side of the school. In addition to the path improvements, a large mound of earth and some low-hanging tree branches were removed to increase safety and visibility. The change has resulted in more than double the number of path users since last year. Some parents now use this access point to drop off their kids and avoid the traffic congestion of the school parking lot. The intersection at the beginning of this path was also recently enhanced with bright school-crossing signage, with the aid of Marin County Public Works. The cost of the path was paid by the Dixie School District and by a generous contribution from the Marinwood Community Service District.

The second project was the addition of two new lockable, large-capacity bike enclosures with new racks. The lockers were placed at the front and back entrances to the campus. Now students have safe and secure places to store their bikes while in class. SR2S and Dixie School District secured a clean air grant from The Bay Area Air Resource District, targeted for bike parking, which provided funding for much of the cost. The locked enclosures have been in steady use since they were installed.

Since these projects were completed at the 600-student school, bike travel has gone from 30 to 40 students a day last year to over 100 on most days this year. Now, more kids than ever use healthy, non-motorized means to get to Miller Creek Middle School each day.

“Helping people is as easy as greasing a chain; when we asked for help, so many people in the community responded.”
– Zara Thompson

“I learned how much riding in your car, even for a short distance, contributes a whole lot to global warming”
– Alyssa Ceccanti-Harris

“I learned what it feels like to help others who don’t have as much money – it felt meaningful and purposeful, and made me feel warm inside.”
– Evan Tackabery

Kiera Yee cleans up a bike. Photo by Kel Harris.
Riding with Youth

A Guide to Fun and Safe Riding Together About Town

For kids, the bicycle is their first vehicle, a source of pride, and a fun and important way to get around. In addition, bicycling is, generally, a safe activity. But when bicyclists make mistakes, they are the ones most likely to get hurt. For this reason, the attitudes you instill in your children now will determine how they will ride for years to come. Below are some guidelines to prepare adults and children for riding together on the streets.

Is your child ready to ride his or her own bike with you?

- How fast can they go?
- How far can they go?
- Can they ride in a straight line? While looking over their shoulder?
- Can they climb hills/work gears?
- Can they brake down steep hills?
- Do they pay attention and follow directions?

What adults should do to help children ride safely on streets:

- Make sure that everyone wears a properly fitting helmet; straps may need frequent adjustment for correct position.
- Make sure your child’s bike fits properly and is in good working condition.
- Teach them to stop at the end of the driveway before riding onto the street.
- Teach them to ride on the right side of the street, in a straight line, three to four feet from parked cars, and in front of you (except downhill).
- Make sure the child is within hearing range and within your sight at all times.
- Teach the child how to shift and when to change gears.
- Teach them to scan over their left shoulder to see what’s behind them before moving to the left. (Moving to the left is often necessary to avoid obstacles or parked cars, or for left turns.)
- Teach them to follow all traffic laws, even if others set a bad example. This includes full stops at all stop signs. Parents, remember that this not only fosters safe behavior in your children; it also improves the image of the cycling community in the eyes of the public. The benefits of responsible riding cannot be overstated!

ABOUT

Riding with Youth classes are made possible by a recent $25 million federal grant funding the Nonmotorized Transportation Pilot Program (NTPP) in Marin County and the collaboration between WalkBikeMarin and the Marin County Bicycle Coalition.

Workshops are held six times per year after school or on a weekend day at various locations throughout Marin County. They are taught by Safe Routes to Schools instructors.

MORE INFO

To learn of scheduled workshops and to register, go to www.marinbike.org or www.walkbikemarin.org.

To learn more or to schedule a Riding with Youth Workshop contact Peggy Clark at 456-3469 ext 8# or email peggy@marinbike.org.
Children Teach Their Parents How to Drive!

Faith and Fantasia Book Is Now Available

Copies of the brief book *Faith and Fantasia* are now available on loan to schools that would like to impart Street Smarts to their parents and students. Faith is a seven-year-old girl whose mother drives Faith to school because she is concerned about Faith's safety. However, Faith is more concerned about her mother's driving. Fortunately, Faith has an alter-ego, the super-hero Fantasia, who is able to save the day whenever Faith's mom runs a stop sign or drives too fast.

Children take the book home and read it with their parents, and the parents then take a quiz. It’s all in good fun, but it also impresses on both parents and their children the importance of following the rules and being a courteous road user.

To check out a set of books, contact Peggy Clark at 456-3469 ext 8# or email peggy@marinbike.org.

I don’t know how they taught driving a hundred years ago when mom was in school. But I know that stop signs mean STOP.

This year, Mr. Rodriguez the crossing guard is my “special project.” I’m going to spend a lot of my special powers assisting him in insisting on a safe environment. What would Vine Elementary do without Mr. Rodriguez?
Vallecito School held an all-school rodeo on October 8th, the same day as International Walk to School Day. The rodeo was held after school and more than 60 kids signed up. Team Leader Phil Slack organized the event and Safe Routes to Schools staff assisted in running the rodeo.

*Vallecito photos courtesy of Vallecito School*
Parents, are you tired of chauffeuring your teens around? Maybe it’s time to put them on the bus. Safe Routes to Schools (SR2S) is offering a new class on how to use public transportation, for teens in seventh through ninth grades. SR2S staff will teach students how to effectively and safely use services, including a practical exercise with a bus right at the school campus. Students who take the class will see an engaging audio-visual presentation created by Drake High School students and teachers.

Creating the presentation was a group effort. Transportation Authority of Marin photographer Peter Oppenheimer took pictures as Drake students acted out a story about bored teens restricted to their home town, unable to recruit a willing parent driver. The kids’ situation was transformed by their discovery that public transportation provides access to friends in neighboring towns and opens up the possibility of new adventures. By lucky coincidence, a festival was taking place at the bus destination point in San Rafael. The owners of Double Rainbow, Charlie and Joanne Garfink, provided ice cream and a place to socialize in their restaurant before the teens made their return trip by bike, foot, skateboard and bus.

To accompany the slide show, Drake ROCK students, led by drama teacher Jasper Thelin, wrote and composed a rap piece. Lyrics included “spare the air, with the wind in your hair” and “avoid those trips in the automatic shifty.” The students then learned how music is professionally recorded onto computers at Drake's popular ComAcad studio with teachers Morgan Paar and Ryan Hilderbrand.

Safe Routes to Schools will partner with Marin County Transit District to bring a bus on campus so that the students can learn how to use the bus, put their bikes on the bike rack, pay their fare, get a transfer, and ask the bus to stop. They will learn how to read a transit guide and plan a trip. SR2S, with the student leaders, is looking forward to presenting this first Public Transportation class for teens in Marin County. Through encouragement and instruction, students will learn how accessible and teen-friendly public transportation can be. To schedule a class for your school, contact Peggy Clark at 456-3469 ext 8# or email peggy@marinbike.org.
Measure A, Marin’s half-cent transportation sales tax, provides funding for Safe Routes to School programs in all Marin schools. If your school is not currently participating, contact Wendi Kallins, Program Director, Safe Routes to Schools. 415-488-4101 wendi@marinbike.org

Prizes and contest materials were distributed to 35 team leaders, who gathered on February 9th for Safe Routes to Schools’ annual Valentine’s Day luncheon. They received their spring contest supplies, learned about the contest and how to use online mapping from Vallecito team leader Phil Slack. A Thai curry lunch was provided by Good Earth Natural Foods.

Forty-four schools have signed up for the annual Safe Routes to Schools spring contest. Student will receive little walking charms and shoe laces as their rewards for walking, biking, carpooling or taking the bus to school. Participating schools were offered two contests, the Pollution Punch Card or Frequent Rider Miles. High Schools develop their own competitions. Each participating school gets contest materials, prizes and a certificate for a new Marin Bike, offered at cost and paid for by a grant from Kaiser Permanente.
Many new sidewalks, pathways, crosswalks, and traffic calming enhancements have been made at and near schools in Marin County. This illustrates just some of the infrastructure projects recently undertaken by jurisdictions throughout Marin.