

# Bicycle rodeo teaches children to ride safe on Southwest streets

By Allison Rupp  
The Southwest Portland Post

Over 30 children from Southwest Portland gathered at Bridlemile Elementary School with their parents May 16 to participate in a Bicycle Rodeo and Safety Fair.

The event, sponsored by Southwest Neighbors Crime Prevention and Public Safety Committee, was free to the public and featured safety training and inspections, a bike and accessory swap, and bike obstacle courses.

The committee had sponsored a smaller version of the event last fall at Capitol Hill Elementary School that drew only a handful of kids and parents.



Kids practiced obeying traffic signals outside Bridlemile Elementary School during the bike rodeo. (Post photo by Allison Rupp)

This spring, says Committee Chair Nancy Hand, they committed greater resources to advertising to ensure the rodeo would be a success, especially since the approach of summer puts more kids on the road.

Indeed the playground outside Bridlemile Elementary was teeming with kids and bikes of all sizes on the hot afternoon, each rushing to complete the series of bike safety stations and fill a completion card with stickers. At one station, participants practiced yielding to one another while biking in circles. At another, they obeyed traffic signs directing them to "slow" or "stop" when riding.

One of the most popular areas of the bike fair was the helmet fitting. Trauma nurses from Legacy Emanuel Hospital partnered with Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU) to donate 30 helmets for the rodeo. OHSU nursing student Kevin Shores was on hand to ensure each child received the right size helmet for his head and demonstrate a proper fit. Photos of bike crash victims in the trauma unit were on display as very real reminders of the danger of a collision.

When fitted correctly, a helmet should even prevent a delicate object like a watermelon from breaking, Shores explained while dropping a helmeted melon onto the concrete. Many of the



Participants in the Bicycle Rodeo and Safety Fair practiced yielding to other bikers with the instruction of bicycle officers from the Portland Police Bureau. (Post photo by Allison Rupp)

kids arriving at the station were wearing helmets that were not tightened enough, and some even had cracks forming—a sure sign that it is time to get a new helmet.

Shores volunteered at the bike rodeo as part of his Community Health curriculum, which also includes ride-alongs with Loaves and Fishes (Meals-On-Wheels) drivers. Loaves and Fishes is a charity that delivers meals to homebound seniors and the disabled. Shores said he is lucky to get to interact with the community in areas that interest him and have fun while doing it.

Volunteers inspected the bikes that

kids brought with them, addressing 19 different questions like "Is the bike the right size for the rider?" and "Does the rider wear glasses?"

Two bicycle officers from the Portland Police Department also came to the fair to teach safe biking practices and the rules of the road. Officer A. Caspar from Central Precinct, who lives in Southwest Portland with his own kids, has conducted a number of community meetings in the area to teach bike safety.

"Now that the weather's getting better, kids are going to be on bikes. They need to be knowledgeable about the hazards in the area and know they're not immune," he said.

The good news is that high-impact crashes between kids and cars are few; Sergeant Robert Voepel can't remember the last time he saw one. But even though kids ride at slower speeds than adults, their smaller size means that drivers don't always see them. Luckily, 75 percent of fatalities can be avoided with a helmet.

Southwest parent Jackie Waller attended the rodeo with her 7-year old daughter, who recently started to ride without training wheels, after reading about it in the Bridlemile Elementary bulletin.

"We discovered that the chin strap was too loose on her helmet," Waller said. "And she learned the different hand signals. I'm glad we came."



Trauma nurses from Legacy Emanuel Hospital donated 30 helmets for the bike rodeo in partnership with OHSU and ensured proper fit for the recipients. (Post photo by Allison Rupp)



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