

TWO WHEELS GOOD

A new generation of bike enthusiasts chart a course for Eugene's future

STORY AND PHOTOS BY COLIN HOUCK

For the past several decades, since the great hippie invasion of the '60s, Eugene has enjoyed a reputation as being one of the most progressive cities in the nation. A quick internet search confirms this fact, with Eugene routinely appearing at or near the top of list after list on the subject.

But what makes a town more or less progressive? History and politics both play a role, of course, and it can certainly be argued that Eugene's history of progressive politics is as long and distinguished as any in the post-Civil Rights era.

However, much like the people in them, cities change and grow over time, and it takes a concerted effort on the part of both citizens and civic leaders for communities to maintain any kind of cultural identity.

In practical terms, this means moving beyond ideological inclinations, and looking at concrete actions people take every day to help shape the character of their community.

In Eugene's case, perhaps no other aspect of its cultural identity speaks more strongly to the community's progressive roots than the pervasiveness of alternative lifestyles, especially as they concern outdoor activities and environmentally-minded personal choices.

This is particularly true when it comes to how Eugeneans choose to get around, and bicycling has been a long-time favorite, not just as a pastime, but also as an everyday way to get to and fro.

According to census data on "mode-share," a term used by planning and transportation professionals to describe how citizens move around in different ways, per capita there are more commuters in Eugene choosing to bike than in many other cities its size, or any size for that matter.

For instance, even though Eugene and Tempe, Arizona, are similar in size, and both towns have a "gold" rating for bicycle friendliness from the League of American Bicyclists, Eugene pulls slightly ahead in percentage of commuters who choose to bike.

Additionally, Eugene placed 18th among the top 50 cities for cycling in *Bicycling Magazine's* 2016 biennial rankings, just behind Boston, Massachusetts.

Of course, none of this is by accident. The city of Eu-



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gene began installing bike lanes in earnest in the 1970s, and today boasts more than 150 miles of bikeways, bike lanes and shared-use paths connecting almost every part of the city.

Perhaps even more important, however, Eugene is home to a large and active community of cyclists and advocates who have made it their life's work to promote cycling as a lifestyle choice and make cycling more accessible so others might choose to ride more frequently.

APPROPRIATE TRANSPORTATION

One of those cycling enthusiasts and advocates, Jan VanderTuin, came to Eugene in the early 1990s by way of Massachusetts and New York, where he had been building cargo bikes after having seen them while living abroad in Switzerland in the early '80s.

When he moved to Eugene, VanderTuin joined a small yet passionate and dedicated community of cycling engineers, designers and builders making up a kind of pipeline to then-new Burley and Bike Friday, two companies still deeply involved in almost everything bike-related in Eugene.

After working with Bike Friday, VanderTuin opened the Center for Appropriate Transport (CAT) in October of 1992 with the idea that, if he could make it easier for

people to access affordable biking options and spark a DIY ethic at the same time, he could help foster growth in Eugene's cycling community.

In other words, for VanderTuin, it's about culture — and if Eugene's bike culture is going to grow, it needs more people on bikes.

"The thing that's important to me is the connection," VanderTuin said. "You're not just one person out there riding, but you're connecting with the community, and that's just a huge piece of it for me."

Today, VanderTuin and CAT are, in turn, attracting aspiring builders from around the country and even the world, having hosted dozens of apprentices for Human Powered Machines (HPM), the company he founded to build and sell cargo and electric-assisted recumbent bicycles.

If you spend any amount of time on the road in Eugene, you've probably seen one of HPM's cargo bikes — Pedalers Express, another business run out of the CAT location, is Eugene's premiere bike courier service and has a large fleet of cargo bikes frequently seen zipping around town.

(Full disclosure: Pedalers Express is contracted to deliver the paper edition of *Eugene Weekly* to our boxes and stands across the city.)

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