

COMMUNITY

Learning to ride

iCan Bike program helps people with disabilities balance on two wheels

BY SEAN HART
HERMISTON HERALD

After several days of practice through the iCan Bike program, a teenager with autism rode a bicycle on her own.

Krista Cliff, 16, Umatilla, was one of about 25 people with disabilities who participated in the weeklong training program that uses specially designed bikes to gradually teach the fundamentals of balancing and riding on two wheels.

Her mother, Sandi Cliff, said she has two daughters with special needs, and both have learned to ride through the program, which has been offered in Hermiston for four years. She said both enjoyed the program last year, and Krista wanted to come back again this year.

"I was looking forward to coming again to help her get more confidence on the bike," Sandi Cliff said Thursday. "They didn't want to take off on their own, so having the training and the bikes was helpful. The special bikes really make a difference."

Pete Bataillon, a staff member from the nonprofit organization iCan Shine, which provides the bike program throughout the United States and Canada, said the modified bicycles



SEAN HART PHOTO

Krista Cliff, 16, who has autism, rides a bike at the iCan Bike program Thursday at Armand Larive Middle School with the help of Karen Timmons, from left, Abbi Feltner, Mindy Barron and Autumn Wiley. Feltner travels to host weeklong camps at various locations, and the others are local volunteers.

help people learn to balance better than by using training wheels. The bikes have rollers that touch the ground on both sides of the back wheel, he said, but they can be adjusted to provide less support for a more realistic

experience. "The roller bikes allow for the riders to feel on their own," he said. "With training wheels, you can rock from one side to the other side, and there's always something there to

catch you. With the rollers, they're able to feel a little bit of imbalance, but, as they progress, they learn the balance they need to get closer to riding on two wheels."

When the participants have learned to balance, Bataillon said they progress to regular-wheeled bicycle with a single handlebar behind the seat that someone else can hold to help stabilize the rider if needed.

"We use the modified equipment to start them early on in the week, and the ultimate goal is to have them riding on two wheels by the end of the week," he said.

He said about 80 percent of the participants learn to ride a bike, and Cassie Anderson, a Hermiston teacher who volunteered to help with program, said she has seen many people succeed. She said about 20 people participated in the camp last year, and many more volun-

teered to help. "For the participants, it's learning how to do something new. It's physical fitness. It's very empowering," she said. "The second important group that benefits from this is there are a lot of high school kids who are volunteers, so they're learning to care. They're learning to meet the needs of people that are different than themselves. They're learning work skills and building relationships."

Volunteer Autumn Wiley, 15, Hermiston, said she saw many participants learn to ride.

"The first couple days, we had a lot of kids that were scared, and then throughout the couple days, they were on their bikes and loving it," she said. "I think it's an awesome idea. This is my first time (volunteering), and I love it. I would definitely do it again."

Highland street resurfacing project to begin next month

Roadwork to take place from S.W. 11th to S.E. 8th

One of Hermiston's major east-west corridors is slated for a resurfacing project to begin in mid-July and conclude by the end of the month. The project will affect 19 blocks on Highland Avenue, from Southwest 11th Street on the

west side of town to Southeast Eighth Street on the east side of town.

The project will be a "cape seal," which involves placing a chip seal, to be followed up two weeks later by a type II slurry seal, according to a city press release. A cape seal is a major preventative maintenance procedure and is ideal for streets that call for a smoother texture than a chip seal because it combines the

durability of a chip seal with the smoothness of a slurry seal on top. Although the finished product will work well for pedestrians and bicyclists, with a slightly textured surface, there will be a rougher surface than usual

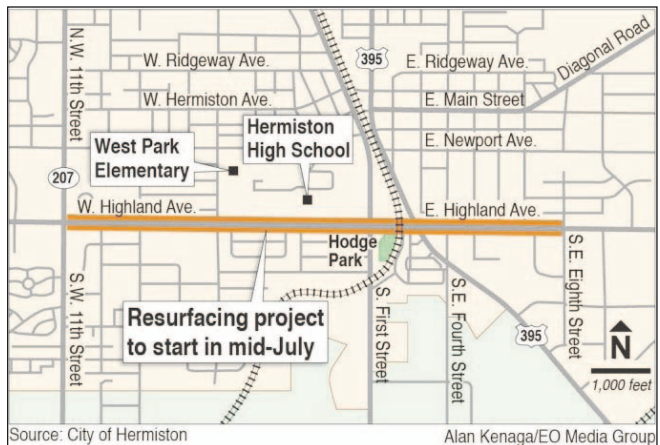
during the time between the two phases, according to the press release. Pedestrians and bicyclists should use caution during this phase of construction.

"This project will greatly improve the long-term

viability of Highland Avenue at an affordable price, because we're proactively maintaining it before major problems start to arise," Street Department Superintendent Ron Sivey said.

Although there will be

some traffic impacts as a result of the project, the work has been scheduled for July to minimize the impacts to classes and events at Hermiston High School, as well as the Umatilla County Fair.



The city of Hermiston is slated to begin a street resurfacing project on Highland Avenue beginning next month. The graphic shows which parts of Highland will be under construction.

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