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An Online Edition of *The Keene Sentinel*

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## Bicycle bennies

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*Travelers operating on pedal power eligible for discounts*

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Published:  
Monday, May 4, 2009 12:42 PM EDT

The benefits of bicycling are multi-fold. It's a workout, gets people outdoors and the greenhouse gas emissions are zilch.

Here's another pedaling perk: 15 percent off all your burrito-gorging or gift-giving needs.

Keene businesses Armadillo's Burritos and Pocketful of Rye are offering these discounts through Bicycle Benefits, a program that urges people to leave their cars at home.

A local effort led by Antioch University New England students brought Bicycle Benefits to the Elm City last fall, but it was started several years ago in Saratoga Springs, N.Y., by a man named Ian Klepetar.

Since the initiative's founding, Dillon T. Klepetar said he's helped his brother spread the go-gasless-gospel throughout the country.

Here's how it works:

Businesses purchase Bicycle Benefits stickers from the Klepetars at a rate of \$2.50 per sticker and re-sell them for up to \$5 each. The business owners then choose an incentive to offer bicyclists, who can redeem the savings by flashing their stickers.

"It's extremely simple but it has so many incredible benefits," said Elena C. Caldwell, who just graduated from Antioch University New England and heads the campaign in Keene.

While Bicycle Benefits started in the Empire State, Dillon Klepetar said he brought it to Burlington, Vt., a couple of years ago while he was a student at St. Michael's College.

"From Burlington, it really took off," he said, estimating that about 50 businesses in the city have signed on. "Every person I see biking around has a sticker."

Caldwell said she became acquainted with Bicycle Benefits while spending a summer in Burlington. As a participant, she saved money on everything from groceries to restaurants.

"I was moving down to Keene at the end of the summer and I was sad to leave the program behind," she said.



Elena C. Caldwell, who just graduated from Antioch University New England, heads the Bicycle Benefits campaign in Keene. Michael J. Goudzwaard, a fellow Antioch student, helps promote the program.

## Siren Tests

Emergency sirens in area towns will be sounded on

**Tuesday, May 5**  
(rain date Wednesday May 6)  
**10 a.m. to 4 pm**

The three-minute siren sounding test, which has normally been done in November, is being done in May to verify the operability of the recently upgraded emergency notification system.

The test will sound all 37 sirens in local towns in Vermont, New Hampshire and Massachusetts including 16 new sirens recently added to the system.

Residents with questions on the annual testing can contact their town's emergency management director or Mark Gilmore at Vermont Yankee at (802) 258-4168

The Elm City's vibrant downtown business community, she said, makes it a fitting Bicycle Benefits breeding ground.

So why is this such a big deal?

"If we get fewer people driving cars and more people riding bikes, there will be less pollution," Caldwell said.

The program also promotes bicycle safety by requiring participants to affix the stickers to their helmets. And Caldwell predicted motorists will become better accustomed to driving around bicyclists if there's more of them on the road.

Meanwhile, she said involving area businesses in the program will stimulate the local economy.

Michael J. Goudzwaard — a fellow Antioch student helping promote this program in Keene — echoed her. Goudzwaard said that by offering Bicycle Benefits, businesses can build their customers bases and loyalty.

In addition, he said, as these companies and stores are listed on the Bicycle Benefits Web site, "It places us on a national stage as a community that's being proactive about bicycle ridership and addressing greenhouse gas emissions in a positive way."

Ann K. Heffernon, owner of Pocketful of Rye, signed on the Bicycle Benefits dotted line last week and said she'll roll out the program as soon as she receives her stickers in the mail.

Heffernon said she liked the idea of encouraging people to drive less. And because of the city's environmental track record, she said, "It's the perfect type of thing for Keene. It's great for any city."

Plus, she added, "I think any incentive to get people into stores is great."

Still, the initiative in Keene has a long way to go before it becomes the household name it seems to be in Burlington.

The seeds of support for this kind of program appear to be sprouting in the Elm City, which is awaiting the building of two new bike and foot bridges, across Route 101 and Routes 9, 10, and 12.

For the second year, Antioch is offering its Green Bikes program, according to coordinator Goudzwaard. This program allows members of the campus community to borrow bikes from the front desk for up to 48 hours.

And at a recent meeting of the city council's municipal services, facilities and infrastructure committee, officials recommended that city staff apply for a grant to buy more bike racks downtown.

However, as of Thursday, Caldwell and fellow volunteers had only secured Bicycle Benefits commitments from three Keene businesses.

The most recent is Antioch's book store, which will now offer a 10 percent discount on certain books and food.

Karen J. Lyle, owner of Main Street framing and art store Creative Encounters, said she's been approached with the idea but has yet to climb aboard.

While saying she's behind the concept of Bicycle Benefits, Lyle said she's struggling to zero in on an incentive she could offer.

"We're not a discount store here. Our focus is to get our prices as low as we can and just keep them the same for everybody," she said.

According to Dillon Klepetar, Lyle's not the only one with this hesitation.

"We kind of understood very quickly that not every business is cut out for blanket discount," he said.

Bicycle Benefits allows companies to choose whatever incentives they want to offer.

David J. Morrill, who is also a Bicycle Benefits volunteer from Antioch, said he's encountered similar concerns and said a representative from one business expressed fears about threatening profit margins in a bad economy.

But with Bicycle Benefits' potential to draw customers, he said, "I might argue that it might actually help your bottom line."

Another challenge Bicycle Benefits faces is standing out in a world full of solicitors and causes.

"I think there's such a plethora of people asking businesses for money that sometimes it makes it hard to set yourself apart," Dillon Klepetar said.

But he emphasized a few ways his program distinguishes itself from others.

One is in Bicycle Benefits' no-bells-and-whistles, minimal bureaucracy approach — evident in the fact that it's run by two brothers whose mom handles the books.

Another is Bicycle Benefits' focus on modifying behaviors instead of simply throwing money at problems.

Of the latter, Dillon Klepetar said, "I think that's a really powerful notion — that you're creating incentives that are helping businesses, communities and the planet. I think few organizations and few programs have that kind of synergy going on."

With strong Bicycle Benefits participation in the Northeast and West, Dillon Klepetar said he plans to put a greater focus on bringing the program to the South, where it hasn't yet caught on.

He also intends to launch Bicycle Benefits in Washington, D.C., where he'll be studying as a graduate student at American University in the fall.

Caldwell similarly expressed high hopes for the program's future locally and said she's confident it will catch on here.

"It's really starting to move now, which is great," she said. "The response has been overwhelmingly positive."

Despite wrapping up her Antioch studies Sunday, Caldwell said she hopes to gain funding to promote Bicycle Benefits in the area full-time.

"That may be a total dream," she acknowledged.

But regardless, she said she knows volunteers who stand ready to keep the wheel turning.

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