

Cycling without worrying about age

Crystal Lake man introducing McHenry County to international group

By **LINDSAY WEBER**
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Crystal Lake resident Greg Glover believes everyone has the right to feel wind in their hair.

The 64-year-old retired AT&T Systems architect was looking for an opportunity for a volunteer effort. One day, while online, he stumbled across a website for Cycling Without Age, an international nonprofit program originally started in Copenhagen in 2012 to get elderly with limited mobility the opportunity to relive the feeling of being on a bicycle.

Now, with more than 1,600 chapters in 42 countries, this highly successful program has volunteer pilots offer free bike rides to isolated seniors and those who can't ride on their own. Pilots take riders on trishaws, three-wheeled bicycles with an up-front seat with footrest that can fit up to two passengers, a rear seat for the pilot, seat belts, multi-gear derailleur chain drive plus electric assist, and a canopy for use in sunshine or inclement weather.

Rides are conducted on trails or quiet side streets and are intentionally slow and gentle, providing the passengers an easy, stress-free experience. It allows for an easy exchange of conversation and stories between passengers and pilots.

"I thought, now that looks cool. That's something my mother would have loved," Glover said. "She loved taking walks and, eventually, she couldn't do that anymore. This seemed like a gentle, caring way to get people outside."

Last winter, not really knowing how to start this venture, Glover contacted Sharon Smith, head of the Harvard Community Senior Center, to propose the idea. Smith responded with a resounding, "Yes! Let's do this!"

For passengers, the rides can reduce the feelings of social isolation and help them feel they are part of the community in which they live, able to go out and about in the places they call home and enjoy the outdoors. For pilots, this is an opportunity to take a break and share their time, energy and conversation while giving back in a caring way.

Glover and Smith are working to



Photos by Matthew Appar - mappar@shawmedia.com

Early morning light filters through a stained glass window onto Greg Glover, with Cycling Without Age, prior to his presentation to providers with Seniors Service Associates regarding a trishaw, a three-wheeled method of transport, during a meeting on Oct. 10 at Lords Park in Elgin. Glover presented the recreational transportation method, which cost about \$10,700 each, to the agency as a way for seniors to enjoy outdoor leisure activity.



Greg Glover, with Cycling Without Age, gives a presentation to providers with Seniors Service Associates regarding a trishaw, a three-wheeled method of transport, during a meeting on Oct. 10 at Lords Park in Elgin.

introduce the program to McHenry County, along with the help of the rest of the steering committee made up of McHenry County residents David Smith, attorney and chairman of Community Crosswalk; Patrick Polidori, a McHenry Police Public Affairs officer; Jim and Peg Bolm of McHenry, both active bike riders; and Lake County resident Suzanne "Sam" Martinez of Wauconda, an employee of Advocate Aurora Health and active local Rotary member.

"I didn't realize how much work it would be, but it's going to be so

worth it," Glover said. "Sharon has been a great partner through this endeavor, as well as the rest of the team. We're going to get there, though, because I can't wait to be a pilot."

All members of the steering committee will volunteer as pilots. The group already has seen a lot of interest from community members to become pilots, as well.

Peg Bolm is a steering committee member who is excited to become a volunteer and can't wait for her first ride.

"It's a great way to give back to the community," Bolm said. "Jim and I are both going through this thing with aging parents, so we understand how it can be difficult for them to get out. The opportunity to share my love of the outdoors and my love of riding with those that used to ride and maybe can't do it anymore, and just to get outside will be really amazing and rewarding. I think nursing homes do the best they can, but it takes something extra special to get clients outside. McHenry County has so much beauty to offer and it will be a pleasure to share it with others."

The group is looking for volun-

teer pilots who are friendly, good listeners and open to learning about the lives of their passengers. They also need to learn how to safely operate a trishaw and will be required to complete an interview and background check, participate in training on working with seniors and piloting a trishaw, and have a valid driver's license.

"I think this program will really bring the community together. People involved in their community really solidify it and make it a special place to live," Bolm said. "I'd like to take my first ride on the McHenry Riverwalk or by the McHenry Dam. It's so neat to see the turtles on the logs and the colors changing. It's so beautiful to be out watching the seasons change and I think passengers will enjoy that."

The group's sole goal is to give those who are incapable of riding a bike on their own the opportunity to enjoy the outdoors, share their stories and "feel the wind in their hair." The McHenry County chapter has been nicknamed, "The Free Wheelers." McHenry County Cycling Without Age operates as an independently funded project under Community Crosswalk, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit.

"The Free Wheelers" currently are seeking grants, sponsorships and individual donations, with the goal of ordering their first two trishaws this fall. Partners and sponsors of the program currently include Community Crosswalk, the Harvard Community Senior Center and KA Fund. The McHenry County Conversation District has donated space to store the trishaws while they are not in use.

Pilot training will take place in March or April, with the first rides taking place in May. The program also is seeking volunteer pilots as well as those interested in serving on the steering committee. For information on the McHenry County chapter program, email Greg at mchenrycounty@cyclingswithoutage.com. For information on the Cycling Without Age organization, visit cyclingswithoutage.org.

"You have people from all walks of life coming together to share an experience," Glover said. "It's not about the destination, it's about the experience. We're excited to get those tires turning!"