

Out in the fresh air

Cycling Without Age program rolling into the area

By Heather Ruenz
STAFF WRITER

Cycling Without Age aims to bring joy and vitality to non-driving, older adults and those with differing abilities via a trishaw, a three-wheel, pedal-assist cargo bike.

The Dementia Friendly Community Initiative is bringing the program to this area.

Eric Russow, who leads the DFCI with his wife, Bernadette, said when they learned about the program, it was too good of an opportunity to pass up.

"It will benefit so many people, from pilots to riders, but also the community as a whole," he said.

Cycling Without Age was started in 2012 in Denmark by Ole Kassow, who wanted to help the elderly get back on their bicycles but needed to find a solution to their limited mobility. The answer was the trishaw and he began offering free bike rides to local nursing home residents.

As of earlier this year, there were 2,200 locations around the world and more than 3,000 trishaws. In the United States, there are 24 states with programs and Wisconsin currently has 14 chapters, according to the website cyclingwithoutage.org.

Each bike costs \$10,400 and the accompanying blanket that attaches to it is an additional \$300. The program recently got a big push start.

"We've been awarded a \$25,000 grant out of Bader Philanthropies, which is a big supporter of Alzheimer's-related issues all over the world," Eric Russow said.

He said the program has also been awarded grants from United Way of Walworth County and Advia Credit Union in addition to several other donations that have been received.

The grant from Bader will be used to purchase two bikes but the ultimate goal for the program is to have six bikes in all. The first two bikes should be ordered soon – they'll be coming from Denmark – and if all goes according to plan, they'll be in service next spring.

"We'll also need a trailer, a place to store the bikes and electricity to charge the bikes



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The Dementia Friendly Community Initiative is leading the charge to bring Cycling Without Age to the area. The program aims to bring joy and vitality to non-driving, older adults and those with differing abilities via a trishaw – a three-wheel, pedal-assist cargo bike.

with," Eric said.

Bernadette said the program will be suitable for a wide variety of people who are disabled, isolated or have mobility issues.

"It's all about getting them out so they can enjoy the fresh air," she said.

And it's about getting younger people involved.

"Not only to drive the bikes, but to have conversations – and the elderly will have someone to listen to them. It's a way of bringing the community together," Bernadette

said.

Eric said they're reaching out to several groups about becoming involved, including two local bike clubs.

"We have a goal of getting high school students involved. Other ideas are getting businesses to donate gift certificates and there might be opportunities down the road for groups to reserve the bikes and pay a fee, which would help pay for maintenance or help buy more bikes," he said.

Different approach

While many of the Cycling Without Age programs are run through United Way or local parks and recreation departments, the DFCI will be a different approach.

"Currently, there are no public-type uses in Walworth County. Lakeland Health Care Center and Fairhaven Senior Services have similar programs but are restricted to their residents," Bernadette said.

"We don't know how it'll all play out but foresee this being something we can get in place and have operating seven days a week, at least at times," Eric said.

There are many ways to support the program including the following:

- Be a volunteer pilot after going through training and becoming certified.
- Be an event host by allowing program volunteers to pedal trishaws for a specific organization.
- Be a sponsor by making a donation to help support the purchase of trishaws for the program.
- Be a passenger.

Safety first

The vehicle used for the program is a trishaw – a pedal-assist cargo bike on three wheels that can fit one to two passengers.

The bikes are safe, equipped with a seatbelt and driven by a trained and certified volunteer pilot. Pilots pedal slowly and obey the rules of the road.

Typical rides will be 30, 45 or 60 minutes depending on the location, comfort and destination.

About the DFCI

The Dementia Friendly Community Initiative, which was founded in 2016, continues to grow.

The organization provides free training to businesses, agencies, churches and others to create



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Cycling Without Age requires pilots who are trained to safely operate the three-wheel bikes, which can hold one or two passengers. Volunteers are being sought to train as pilots for the local program, which is expected to be up and running next spring.

dementia-friendly spaces and promote awareness. More than 65 groups have been trained by the DFCI thus far.

Recent trainees include Geneva Town Hall, Old World Wisconsin, Open Arms Free Clinic, Delavan Town Hall, Someplace Else Restaurant, Calvary Community Church, The Boutique Closet, Lovey's Gift Boutique, Walworth County Corporation Counsel, and the Egert Law office.

Volunteers are needed, Bernadette said, adding that helping people understand dementia is important.

"A recent survey in USA Today reported that 80% of Americans want to reduce their risk of Alzheimer's but only 35% know the symptoms," she said.

Eric agreed.

"This training is becoming more and more important as the county population grows older. By helping people understand what dementia is and how it affects families, we can make a difference," he said.

For more information about the Dementia Friendly Community Initiative, or the Cycling Without Age program, visit dfcwalworth.org, send an email to dfcwalworth@gmail.com or call 262-320-7325.

We dream of creating a world together, in which the access to active citizenship creates happiness among our fellow elderly citizens by providing them with an opportunity remain an active part of society and the local community.

We do that by giving them the right to wind in their hair, the right to experience the city and nature up close from the bicycle and by giving them an opportunity to tell their story...

That way we build bridges between generations and we reinforce trust, respect and the social glue in our society.

Cycling Without Age



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The Cycling Without Age program was started in 2012 in Denmark as a way to get the elderly back on a bicycles while taking limited mobility into consideration. The bikes will be used to help get non-driving, older adults and those with differing abilities out in the fresh air.

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