

LTUSD students eager to make biking the norm



Some Bijou students came from as far as the Tahoe Keys.
Photos/Provided

By Rebecca Bryson

Although this was the first year for South Tahoe Middle School to participate in Bike to School, they hit it out of the park.

Kathleen Whatford, the school's PE teacher, along with Principal John Simons and Assistant Principal Karen Holmes, spearheaded a major initiative with "biking school buses" coming from all over town. Students met each morning at designated spots. Then a teacher or parent would lead them to school, picking up more kids along the way.

It was a major coordination effort, involving teachers, parents, students and the Lake Tahoe Bicycle Coalition. And as

a result of this big push, there were 85, 120 and 150 bikes at the STMS last Wednesday through Friday (as opposed to the usual 5-15).

There were so many bikes that Simons opened up the tennis courts to lock the bikes there.



Students and adults use pedal power to get to STMS.

Andre Albanese, a sixth-grader who biked 9 miles each way from North Upper Truckee every morning said, “It gave me a real sense of independence. I realized how beautiful Tahoe is and hope to keep doing it some other mornings as well.”

And the good news is that the kids keep coming. There were still at least 50 bikes at the middle school again this Monday – despite the fact that the official Bike to School event ended last week.

Parents and teachers at Bijou and Sierra House elementary schools also set up designated routes this year for the first time. At Sierra House, Principal Ryan Galles led a group from the Bijou Bike Park to the school each morning. Sierra House and Tahoe Valley are at a disadvantage from being located on

busy streets, but that didn't stop the kids from coming.

Jamie Lowe, first-grader at Sierra House, exclaimed that it was so fun and special to ride to school every morning with her daddy.

Kids at Tahoe Valley were fired up for Bike to School week as they had just had a Bike Rodeo the previous Tuesday where California Highway Patrol officers taught bike safety skills to all third-, fourth- and fifth-graders. Ariel Carreau, third-grader at Tahoe Valley, declared that "biking to school makes me stronger. My family will keep biking and walking to school until the end of the year."



Magnet school students ride down Apache to their school.

At Bijou there were six designated routes assigned for June 1, but the momentum kept going the other two days as well. When Lizbet Cedeno (second grade) arrived by bike at Bijou last

Wednesday morning, she immediately asked the organizers, "We are going to do this again tomorrow and the next day, right?" Dulce Zepeda, a first grader, was part of a walking group, but she declared that she definitely wanted to get a bike so that she could ride to school next time.

By the end of the week, students and families were organizing their own routes. A group of more than 15 came all the way from Tahoe Keys. Joel Bingham, a Bijou parent, lead a group of 10-15 every morning from his house near the meadow. The kids saw coyotes, birds and wildflowers along the way. The kids on his team declared that it was a very special way to get to school. They plan to keep going as many days as possible.

The Environmental Magnet School's big day was Friday. For the second straight year, teachers and parents led kids to school from all along North and South Upper Truckee as well as along the new Saw Mill Road bike path from the Y area. At 8:50am, they all convened at the Meyers Post Office to ride down Apache en masse. This year, kid bikes alone were estimated at 165 – certainly surpassing last year's numbers.

A very big thank you all the teachers, parents, and Bike Coalition members who participated and led kids to school. And, a big congratulations all the student bikers. Keep those wheels rolling!

Rebecca Bryson is co-chair of the Community Mobility Work Group and co-founder of Small World Parent Network.