

Bike safety a lesson for beyond the classroom



Charlie Baker makes his way through the obstacle course as CHP Officer Jeff Gartner times him. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

If a stop sign isn't enough to get the cyclist to stop, the tennis ball does the trick when it hits the tire. That ball represents a vehicle without the consequences of not following the rules of the road.

"The whole goal here is for kids to be safe through the summer," Officer Jeff Gartner told *Lake Tahoe News*. California Highway Patrol officers were at Bijou Community School on May 19 for a bike rodeo and will be at the other Lake Tahoe Unified School District elementary schools before the end of the school year, with the goal of reaching all K-5 students.

This event is something officers try to do at the end of each school year as kids are more likely to be getting back on their bikes.

Using some of the painted lines on the blacktop and chalk for the course, the goal is to maneuver through without falling, colliding with others, and all the while obeying the signs.



Simone Sitchon practices staying in control. Photo/Kathryn Reed

“Something I learned is to control my bike and to go around turns slower so I’m not out of control,” Simone Sitchon told *Lake Tahoe News*.

She is in Cynthia Pastore’s fifth-grade class. For Pastore, she sees events like this as a real benefit for the students – especially in a practical environment where they can practice what they are being taught.

Before students get on their bikes the officers do a quick inspection to make sure the brakes are working and the steering mechanism is good. They make adjustments if they can, but no unsafe bikes are allowed in the rodeo.

For those who didn't have a bike, they share with friends. Officers even have a few helmets to hand out that the kids can keep.

At first the cyclists seem a bit wobbly and aren't inside the lines. The extremely tight angles are like going through the hairpin turns at Emerald Bay in a car. Soon, though, the youngsters are getting a handle on how to adjust their speed, keep their balance and ride in a controlled manner.

The more experienced riders were timed through the course. Go outside the lines, knock a cone over or ignore a road sign and the cyclist was disqualified.

"This teaches kids how to not ride mindlessly," Charlie Baker, who regularly rides his bike to school, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "There is some (awareness) to not cut in front of cars."