

Car-free Riders Take Bow After Challenge
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By Samara Kalk Derby The Capital Times

During a recent two-week period, Allan Czecholinski rode his bike 40 miles round trip each day from his home in Cross Plains to his job in Madison, where he works as a solid waste engineer for the Dane County Department of Public Works.

Czecholinski, 57, was one of nearly 200 people to take part in the second annual two-week Car-Free Challenge sponsored by the Madison Environmental Group. The challenge ended last week.

Participants were challenged to go "car-lite" or "car-free" and their combined efforts amounted to 16,268 saved miles, or the equivalent of driving from New York to San Francisco 5 1/2 times.

The results of the challenge will be announced at an awards presentation and prize drawing Saturday morning outside the group's headquarters at 25 N. Pinckney St.

Czecholinski recorded 400 miles during the challenge and modestly chalks it up to weather conditions.

"I don't normally commute if the weather's going to be bad. It's too far to bike in the rain. But that whole period was also beautiful weather and so it made it easy to bike every day," Czecholinski said. Now that the days are colder and darker it wouldn't be as easy, he said.

It also helped that his youngest daughter turned 16 this year and can now drive herself to school.

"I don't have to chauffeur her every day. That freed me up to bike more often than I've been able to do in the past," he said.

Plus, Dane County has made recent efforts to get its workers out of their cars, he said.

"I'm not trying to sound like I'm doing this as some kind of martyr. I enjoy the biking and I enjoy being out, so if I can stay out of the car that's what I'll do," he said.

Jon Edwards, 45, was another top finisher in the Car-Free Challenge. His commute from Cottage Grove to his job as an exhibits builder at the Madison Children's Museum is about 20 miles a day.

One day he even made the commute on the penny farthing -- or high wheel bike -- his wife got him eight years ago.

Edwards was one of 17 people in the challenge who went 100 percent car-free, but Edwards said he wouldn't have used his car other than for grocery shopping during that period anyway.

He recorded 437 miles traveled during the two weeks.

The challenge fell, in part, during a trip to New York where "I took trains and trams and boats and what not," Edwards said. He also racked up the miles by taking a train up to Boston and local trains while he was there. He also rode his bicycle during the vacation.

Edwards says he prefers biking to work and only drives in when he has large objects to bring in.

He even bikes in cold weather.

"Once you get riding, after the first mile and a half you warm up really quickly and you start sweating. And you start to remove clothes and what not and you have to carry those with you, too," he said.

Melissa Amos-Landgraf also went car-free during the challenge. That meant taking the bus to work exclusively, walking her children home from school and carrying her groceries back from the store.

Amos-Landgraf admits that she is in a unique situation to do all of these things.

For one, her home and her work are on a convenient bus route and her employer offers free bus passes. Her children have a one-mile walk home from school, and in terms of grocery shopping, there's a Copps store 500 feet from her front door.

"See why this isn't that impressive?" asked Amos-Landgraf, an assistant dean for administration at the UW-Madison School of Business, who lives directly behind Borders Bookstore on University Avenue.

During the Car-Free Challenge Amos-Landgraf figures she bused 90 miles and walked three.

Even without the challenge, riding the bus is something Amos-Landgraf has been doing often.

"It's been made so easy for university employees because our new director of transportation, Lance Lunsway, has done so many great things," she said.

Besides the free bus passes, Lunsway has introduced a flex parking program so Amos-Landgraf doesn't have to buy a \$1,000-a-year parking permit, but can instead purchase parking in what amounts to a parking debit card. That way, on

days when she really needs to drive, she can use her flex card and park right under the building for 55 cents an hour.

Her husband, Jim Amos-Landgraf, rides his bike to school with their kids in the morning and then continues on to his job, also on campus.

Randol White is a committed bike commuter even though he needs to be at work at 3:30 a.m. each day. He travels nine miles round trip from where he lives in Shorewood Hills to his morning anchor job at NBC-15.

He racked up 400 miles during the challenge, in large part due to a decision to take the Van Galder bus down to Chicago one weekend instead of his Jeep.

White, 37, said he did some calculations and figured it was much cheaper for him to take the bus and public transportation than to pay for gas and parking.

He's been biking to work for 20 years, ever since he was a teenage lifeguard.

In fact, this summer White didn't fill up his gas tank from July through mid-September.

Ironically, as soon as the Car-Free Challenge started he encountered a series of circumstances that forced him to drive to work about half the time.

"I actually drove more during the Car-Free Challenge than I typically do," he said.

Biking to work helps White feel energized and awake by the time 5 a.m. rolls around and his show starts.

"I notice that on days when I drive I do not have nearly the energy that I have on the days when I ride my bike. And I really just feel better when I come home from work, too. I feel like I got part of my workout done for the day and it was really just part of my commute."

BY THE NUMBERS

Participants: 198 people participated in the second annual Car-Free Challenge, Sept. 22 to Oct. 5.

Vehicle miles reduced: 16,268 or the equivalent of removing 1.4 cars from the road entirely. (The average American drives 12,000 miles per year.)

Average per person vehicle mile reduction: 82.

Amount saved on gas in two weeks: \$1,303 (at current Madison price of \$2.01 per gallon).

Emission reductions: 12,963 pounds (6.5 tons) of carbon dioxide (greenhouse gas) in two weeks, or the amount of emissions produced by electricity during a year by the average U.S. household.

Total miles bicycled: 11,950.

Total miles walked: 990.

Total miles bused: 3,656.

Total miles carpooled: 10,904.

Participants who went 100 percent car-free: 17.

Participants who reduced more than 200 miles: 20.

-- Compiled by Rebecca Grossberg of the Madison Environmental Group

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