

Making it safe to bicycle on Maui

Most Maui Realtors live in their cars, running from one point on the island to another to make appointments, putting up signs, getting contracts signed. When Dave DeLeon was an active Realtor, he realized that necessity and controlled his natural urge...to be on a bicycle.

Four years ago, Dave hung up his Realtor's license and became the Government Affairs Director for the REALTORS® Association of Maui. In that position he works to promote Realtor policy positions and the rights of Private Property Owners in the halls of government. That's his day job. His avocation is being a bicycle advocate. For the last 25 years Dave has worked to promote safe bicycling on Maui. And he is back on his bike.

"We've come a long way in the last couple of decades. Back in the 1980s we called ourselves the 'white line gang' because the only place to ride was on the white line that marked the edge of the road. Riding a bicycle on Maui was definitely a scary, hair-raising experience back then," he said.

The Maui bicycling community got organized and got the attention of the county and state governments, which used federal funding to start building bike lanes on the edge of



the roads. Before long the hardcore "roadies" could ride for 80 miles (Makena to Kapalua and back) on dedicated bike lanes. Kahului and Kihei got lanes on local roads that made it easier and safer to get around. But most residents still shied away from cycling.

"The bike lanes gave the type 'A' riders what they needed. Most of the strong riders can move around the community easily," Dave said. But he was concerned about the "type B and C" riders. Type B riders – which surveys have shown are the far majority of Maui residents – are adults who fear riding in or near traffic. Type C riders are children.

"Most sensible people don't want to be anywhere near traffic when they ride bikes. They need a safe place

to ride," he said.

"Since the 1990s we have been working on creating off-road trails – we call them greenways – that allow for all kinds of non-motorized transportation. Walkers, runners, roller bladers, skate boarders, wheelchairs are all welcomed. But it has been a long, hard slog," he said.

In 1996 the county built the first two and a half miles of the Northshore Greenway, a route meant to connect Kahului to Paia. Fourteen years later, a dedicated band of Maui cyclists are still trying to get the route completed.

Recently the county completed a half-mile section of the route, from Paia to Baldwin Park. Because it parallels the Hana Highway, the public gets to see the activity on the route everyday.

"It's been a tough fight, but it does my heart good to see families walking their dogs; moms pushing strollers; dads teaching three-year olds how to ride their bikes. That is what this route is all about. Giving our community a safe way to move around using their own bodies. Giving our kids a chance to freely enjoy themselves without fear of getting run over.

"We have effectively designed our kids and our senior

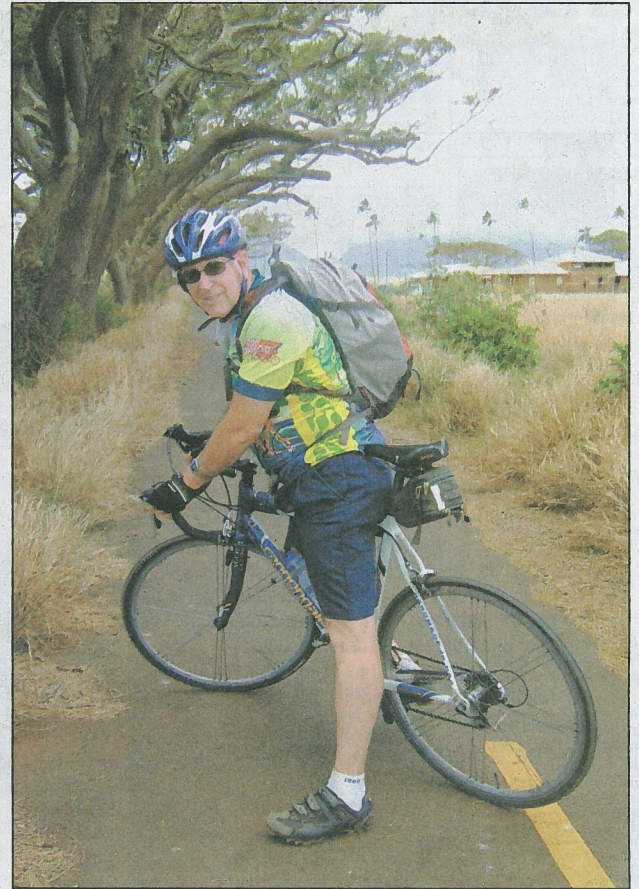
citizens out of our communities in favor of automotive efficiency. It is time that we redesign our communities so that they are included and can be safe," Dave said.

Over the years the nation has come to the realization that this is also a public health issue. For over a decade the national Centers for Disease Control have noted a troubling rise in obesity and adult type diseases in children due to the lack of physical activity. The state Department of Health has joined the response to this situation through its Healthy Hawaii Initiative, an effort to get people off their duffs and to get moving.

Dave has joined a coalition of Maui public health agencies and individuals to focus on the Maui situation. As the Chair of the Maui Physical Activity and Nutrition Coalition's Built Environment Committee Dave is continuing the effort to change public policy so that people can move safely through their communities without the use of a 2000-pound machine.

"If we make it safe and convenient, people will start using their bodies to get around again," he said.

The fight goes on, Dave said, and he encouraged anyone interested in joining it to email him at gad@ramauai.com.



Dave DeLeon is shown riding on the Northshore Greenway last month. In 1996 the county built the first two and a half miles of the Northshore Greenway, a route meant to connect Kahului to Paia. Fourteen years later, a dedicated band of Maui cyclists are still trying to get the route completed. Recently the county completed a half-mile section of the route, from Paia to Baldwin Park.