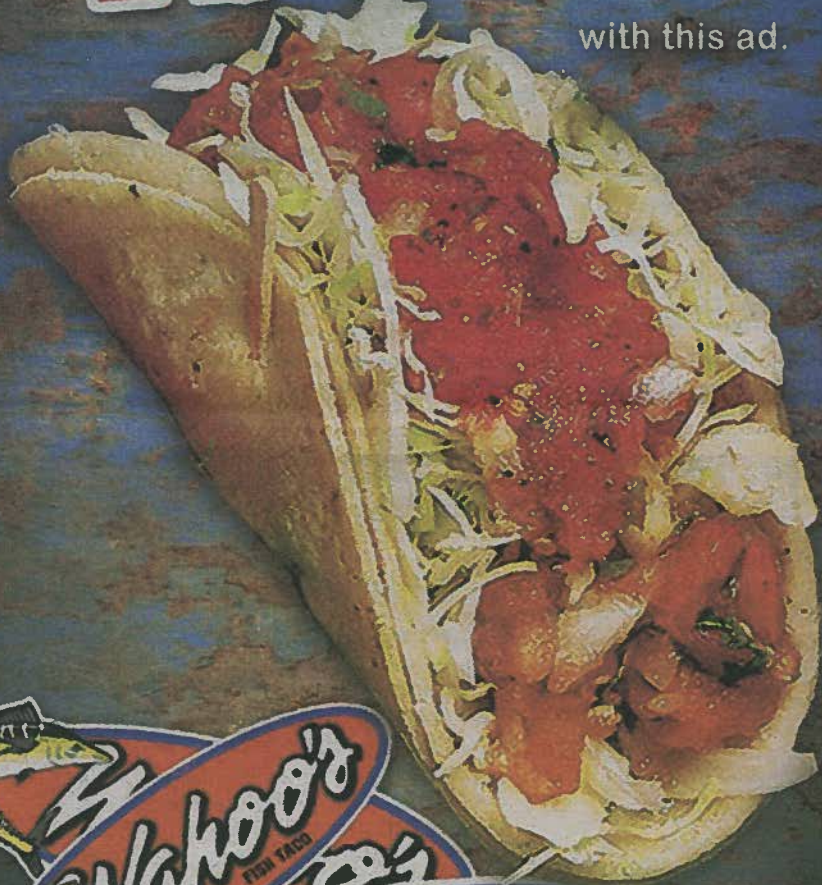


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Freewheelin promoted its free bike program with a demonstration ride Monday at the Senior Games. Palo Alto Mayor Peter Dreke is in blue shirt on left.

Freewheelin bikes get around

Athletes have another option for exploring the campus

By Darren F. Weiss

When they want to get around the Stanford campus or come to Palo Alto, Senior Games athletes and their families can take part in an innovative bicycle-sharing program called Freewheelin. Co-produced by Humana, a gold-medal sponsor of the Games, and the City of Palo Alto, the idea is simple: Give people bicycles free of charge so they have the opportunity to explore the Stanford campus and surrounding area while staying physically active.

Breck Thomas-Ross, a media consultant for Humana's Innovation Center which developed the program, sees the Senior Games as a logical setting for this newborn idea.

"The athletes here are already in a mind-set to do good things for their body so this was a no-brainer," she said. "Stanford lends itself to bike-sharing."

Freewheelin has 120 bikes at two stations on campus, one in Nelson Mall by the Avery Aquatic Center and the other at Ford Plaza, outside the Arrillaga Center for Sports and Recreation. The City of Palo Alto donated 45 bikes to the program.

Riders must go through a simple three-step process to get a bike: register, grab a helmet and lock and pick out a bike. A photo ID and credit card are required for security purposes, though no charge is assessed. Bikes range from three to 21-speeds and can be checked out as early as 8:30 a.m. and must be returned by 6 p.m. A detailed map of the area is provided for each rider.

The reception of the program, which runs the duration of the Games, has thus far been positive.

"We thought the senior population would be responsive and they have totally delivered," said Trisha Finnegan, of Humana, who has been fitting riders on bikes the past two days. "A lot of people aren't driving so it's a great way for them to get around."

Finnegan estimates more than 70 percent of riders are athletes participating in the Games.

Robert Witty, a 64-year-old New Yorker who will be swimming and playing tennis in this year's Games, completed his second ride in as many days.

"I've never seen anything like this (program)," he said as he pulled in on his 21-speed Trek bike under a tall oak tree by the Aquatic Center. "Everyone's up on it. People know a good thing and this is a good thing."

Tom and Barbara Arcangeli of Rhode Island took a ride with their son on Sunday, weaving their way from the shopping center, up Sand Hill Road and all over campus.

"This is one of the best things of the Games so far!" Barbara exclaimed with a child-like grin. "And to be able to get everything for free? What a great asset!"

"I don't bike that often at home, but it allowed us to actually see the campus," said Tom, who is competing in basketball at the Games. "Plus my wife doesn't want to sit in a smelly gym and watch me play!"

Humana's idea for the bicycle-sharing program began at the company's Louisville, Ky. headquarters two years ago as a way for the 10,000-plus employees to get from building to building. It was present at last year's Democratic and Republican National Conventions and was so well received, the company decided to bring it to the Senior Games.

Each bike is outfitted with an electronic device that tracks each rider's mileage and calories burned. Results are updated daily on a large "scoreboard" in the AstraZeneca Athlete Village. As of Monday afternoon there had been 356 rides, 2,008 miles ridden, 67,836 calories burned and 0.9 metric tons of carbon footprint reduction.

Freewheelin has attracted first-time and inexperienced riders. Finnegan told a story of a man who had not ridden a bike in 46 years and of a 26-year-old woman whose father was literally pushing her along with his hands under her seat.

"I saw her riding by herself today," Finnegan said. "She had a huge smile." ★

Ted Washon/Humana