

## Change: a collaborative process involving the whole community

Thousands of people visit our city and are taking notice of the transformation that began on a historic day in August nearly five years ago. We are truly blessed to have a citizenry that takes great pride in our community and thrives on making it the best it can be and it shows.

What does it take to bring about this change? As an example, let's use one committee of Team Punta Gorda, Spokes and Trails, to see how they are going about being change agents. The word "Spokes" refers to bicycles. The goal of this committee is to promote safe bicycling in our community. That sounds simple enough. With literally dozens of volunteers working on the various subcommittees, "Spokes," as it is often referred to, is making a difference. Committees are not only comprised of caring citizens but also Punta Gorda City Staff, Charlotte County Health Department, Metropolitan Planning Organization, the business community, and other non-profits who are interested in this program.

Spokes members have attended the National Bicycle Summit in Washington, D.C., and the first Florida Bicycle Summit in Tallahassee. While in Tallahassee, we had the opportunity to discuss bicycle issues with our local legislative delegation. Spokes interfaces with the League of American Bicyclists, will attend the Pro-Bike Week in Florida, and is a member of the Florida Bicycle Association.

Recently Spokes members both City of Punta Gorda staff and

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citizens) submitted a "Bicycle-Friendly Community" application to the League of American Bicyclists. This is a prestigious designation that we hope to bring to Punta Gorda, making it the first city in Southwest Florida to receive such recognition. Four other cities in Florida have received this designation: Boca Raton, Gainesville, Orlando and St. Petersburg.

Spokes members have been active in planning meetings and discussions on the developing linear park system in Punta Gorda that will link with the Harborwalk. This path and park system will form the "ring around the City" and also link to the paths being developed on Punta Gorda's south side. The Spokes goal is for Punta Gorda to become a hub connecting to trails leading to Venice, Arcadia, and Fort Myers.

Another subcommittee is working on developing a bicycle loaner program in the city in many cities this is known as the Yellow Bicycle program. The goal is to have a fleet of yellow bicycles that residents and visitors may use to tour our wonderful community. The Punta Gorda Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Merchants Association, Main Street Punta Gorda, and Fishermen's Village have joined in this effort.

Part of promoting bicycling is also holding events. Quarterly Bikes and Brunch events are held to host no-spandex rides for the casual rider.

A Bike Week is held annually that promotes education of not only the bicyclist but also the community. Bicycles are street legal and must obey the rules of the road. Cars must respect bicyclists, too, and provide a three-foot buffer when passing a bicycle. Don't forget to wear your helmet when riding.

The Hibiscus Bicycle Tour is coming up on June 20 and registrations are already starting to come. This year we're offering a 62-mile (metric century) ride, 30-mile ride, a new addition of a 15-mile ride for the more casual rider, and the very popular city manager's ride. Ride registration forms are available on the Team Punta Gorda Web site at [www.teampuntagorda.org](http://www.teampuntagorda.org). All rides include lunch catered by Skyview Cafe, drink vouchers, goody bags, and more!

Thanks to all of the citizens and organizations who collaborate to bring about these and many other changes in our community. If you want to help with Spokes and Trails or join Team Punta Gorda as a member and/or volunteer, call us at 637-8326, e-mail us at [team@teampuntagorda.org](mailto:team@teampuntagorda.org), or visit our Web site. Your contributions are also welcome.

And please, shop and dine locally. Our entire business community needs and deserves our support.