

Becoming bicycle-friendly is a regional trend

In his State of the City address, Mayor Harvey Goldberg cited Punta Gorda as becoming a premier pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly city among the five-year goals and the city means it. Developing a bicycle-path program and applying for bicycle-friendly community recognition from the League of American Bicyclists is in the city's strategic plan.

Team Punta Gorda assisted the city in completing the application one year ago. We were elated when the city was awarded Honorable Mention on the first attempt. Other Southwest Florida communities have not been this fortunate.

The city is already putting its plan into action with the "Ring around the City" that is garnering much attention. Projects like the

Nancy Profke

Profke is CEO of Team Punta Gorda. Readers may reach her at team@teampuntagorda.org.

Harborwalk, linear parks, and multi-use recreational trails are actually being implemented right now. It's gratifying to see the increasing number of bicycles in our community making use of the new facilities.

If you don't own a bicycle or can't transport one, come to Fishermen's Village, Laishley Marina, or the Four Points by Sheraton and enjoy use of the free loaner bicycles to explore what Punta Gorda has to offer. This is a program launched by Team Punta Gorda in partnership with the city this past February. Thank you to the generous sponsor donations that make this

program possible.

Bicycle events are another way to promote bicycling in our community. The Pedal and Play in Paradise bicycle tour hosted by Team Punta Gorda is coming up on May 1-2, and offers local rides through historic Punta Gorda and longer rides through Charlotte County and beyond. Go to www.pedalandplayinparadise.com and sign up now. Local merchants are offering discounts to participants. Make sure to participate in Main Street's Coconut Craze Eve the evening before on the steps of the historic courthouse



beginning at 5 p.m.

Speaking of Charlotte County, our county growth management department is working with the Charlotte County-Punta Gorda Metropolitan Planning Organization to make sure bicycle-friendly considerations are incorporated into the county's strategic plan and the MPO's 2035 long-range transportation plan. The Charlotte Harbor CRA's planned Gateway Park will connect bicycle paths and sidewalks on the north of Charlotte Harbor with the amenities in Punta Gorda. They are also working with Team Punta Gorda to determine how to implement additional bicycle programs in their area.

On April 16, Team Punta Gorda hosted a meeting of Southwest Florida regional

representatives from the City of Punta Gorda, the county's growth management and health departments, the MPO, county bicycle shops, Charlotte Harbor businesses, Fawcett Hospital, the Desoto County planning department, the Naples Pathway Coalition, Commuter Services, a free program by the Florida Department of Transportation to begin the discussion on how we can regionally connect and become a bicycle-friendly region.

We want to encourage active and healthy lifestyles. Can you imagine being able to safely move around our Southwest Florida region on a bicycle? Those in attendance were very pleased with the discussion, and will be meeting again soon. We'll be looking to include school systems and representatives from Lee and

Sarasota counties. If bicycling is your passion, join us in one of the many bicycling committees Team has, and participate in the Pedal and Play in Paradise event next weekend.

Don't forget to purchase the beautiful, new coffee-table book Destination Punta Gorda: Pride of the People featuring Charlotte County from Team Punta Gorda. It's an illustrated tribute to the people who make Charlotte County a wonderful place to live, work, and play. Visit us at the Punta Gorda Chamber of Commerce and get a copy now. You may also contact TEAM at team@teampuntagorda.org or 941-637-TEAM. Team is honored to have been selected as the Punta Gorda Chamber of Commerce 2009 Non-Profit Business of the Year.