

# Punta Gorda kicks off bicycle loaner program

By GREG MARTIN

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**PUNTA GORDA** — This city joined Paris, Barcelona and Copenhagen when it launched a bicycle loaner program Saturday

that allows patrons to hop on a sturdy, yellow bike, ride around and return it for free.

"This fits perfectly with the goal of Punta Gorda to become the premier bicycle-friendly and pedestrian-friendly city in the state of Florida," said Mayor Harvey

Goldberg, during a program kickoff event.

The program, which calls for individuals or businesses to donate \$300 to supply the bikes to the city, which provides liability insurance, also is an example of how the city is partnering with a community group, Team Punta Gorda, and the business community to achieve its goals, Goldberg added.

Anyone who wants to take a casual ride around town can pick up one of the bikes at either Laisley Park or Fishermen's Village. More locations will be added

as sponsors and host businesses get involved.

All people need to check them out is an identification card and a credit card, which will be photocopied. Copies will be held until the bike is returned.

As part of the event, riders hopped on 10 brand new single-speed Sun bikes, with coaster brakes.

With a bicycle patrol officer and City Manager Howard Kunik leading the way on their bikes, they rode from the ACME Bicycle shop at Cross Trails Shopping Center to Laisley Park, where four of the bikes and a new utility tricycle were to be dropped off.

The other six bikes then were to be ridden to Fishermen's Village.

The tricycle was purchased specifically for Laisley Park Marina in order to allow transient sailors the ability to purchase such essentials as "a case of beer," said Gene Pawloski, a Team Punta Gorda committee member who came up with the idea for the bike loaner program. Pawloski said he

witnessed the program while sailing in a regatta to Menominee, Mich.

The marina provided bikes for the sailors to get downtown, he said.

Paris has 10,000 loaner bikes, Barcelona has 7,000, and Copenhagen 9,000.

In the U.S., cities with bike programs include: Austin, Texas; Portland, Maine; Madison, Wis.; and Annapolis, Md.

However, Punta Gorda became the first city in Florida that loans out bicycles, said Nancy Prajke, CEO of Team Punta Gorda.

As a next stride toward becoming a bicycle haven, educational programs on bicycle safety are needed, Prajke said.

She noted that, by law, bicycles have the right to use both the roads and sidewalks, but some motorists aren't aware of those rights.

Larry Friedman, a councilman credited with being a strong advocate for establishing the city as friendly for bicyclists and pedestrians, said Punta Gorda throughout its 127-year



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**These bicyclists broke in Team Punta Gorda's bicycle loaner program by delivering the bikes to Laisley Park and Fishermen's the old fashioned way — by pedaling.**

history has "never been short on visions and objectives."

It has taken time to achieve them, however, he added.

He cited the fact that the redevelopment of Laisley Park was envisioned for more than 20 years.

Friedman and Goldberg also empha-

sized the city has made strides in developing the Harborwalk, a Linear Park and Multi-Use Recreational Trail that will create a 15-mile "ring around the city" for bicyclists and pedestrians.

"This (bike loaner program) brings the community, the local business people and the city together," said Roger Peterson, board president of Team Punta Gorda.

Punta Gorda community groups already are planning to sponsor the city's first major bicycle event, Pedal and Play in Paradise, set for May 1-2, Goldberg said.

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