

Pedal-pushing employees find unexpected benefits on way to work

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With gas prices rising, Alfred University employees are being urged to consider alternatives to driving to work, from riding the bus, to carpooling, to walking or bicycling to work. Among those who have opted for two-wheeled transportation are Kathy Woughter, vice president for Student Affairs, and Gary Roberts, director of Information Technology Services. For both, bicycling is more about lifestyle than saving money, although that's an obvious plus. "I have always biked to work at least once a week for the exercise and because I grew up relying on my bike for transportation," said Woughter. "I have five siblings, so 'getting the car' wasn't always easy growing up." She admits that when she lived in Andover, a community about 10 miles from Alfred, "biking to work was a bit more of a project." Now that she and her family have moved closer, "I bike to work every day that I don't have a meeting" that would require her to drive to an off-campus location. The trip in takes Woughter about 25 minutes; the return home she makes in about 40 minutes, "unless I take a scenic route (that is) super-hilly, so that is a better workout than it might sound." Exercise provides motivation for biking to work. Roberts started bicycling to work this spring, after a foot injury kept him from his usual form of exercise: running. "I needed another aerobic activity to keep in shape," said Roberts. "I am going to exercise anyway, so I might as well combine my exercise time with something practical like getting to work. The savings in gas money and getting to decrease my carbon footprint are also very motivating." Roberts said he bikes to work two or three days a week, logging 50 to 75 miles. The trip from Hornell to Alfred, which is mostly uphill, takes him about an hour, and the return, about 45 minutes. "I love the exercise," Woughter said. "It's great to start and end the day being outdoors, and I save gas money." It also used to give her an opportunity to indulge in her "books-on-tape" habit, listening to her ipod as she rode. "Until a couple of weeks ago, I congratulated myself that I was saving a couple dollars of gas money every day I rode my bike to work, then I got caught in an unexpected thunderstorm and ruined the ipod I had gotten as a Christmas present. So much for the economic advantage!" Roberts said the ride from Hornell to Alfred and back gives him time to think. "On the way to work, I have some time to plan my day and really sort priorities. When I bike home, it also allows me to review the day's events and 'decompress.' For me, biking and running are both relaxing and invigorating at the same time." Biking offers up-close view of nature. Like Woughter, he enjoys the opportunity to be outdoors. "It is great to see nesting bald eagles at Kanakadea dam in the afternoons. How many people can claim they bike past a pair of bald eagles on their way to work? Probably not many." Roberts' route takes him along some roads that are heavily traveled so "safety is definitely an issue. I wear a red blinking LED light that looks pretty goofy, but I know that bike visibility is an issue for motorists so I think it's important to take that precaution. Most of the road from Hornell to Alfred has a very wide shoulder, so that makes it easier." There are places along his route, though, where the road narrows "and there is greater activity and congestion," forcing him to be more aware and practice defensive riding. "Car-door collisions are perhaps the biggest potential hazard in towns where people are getting in and out of cars," and "then there are broken glass, nails, debris, and the occasional bike-swallowing pothole." For Woughter, "Preparation is everything - time, weather, clothing, knowing the schedule of the day. The weather can be a pitfall if I'm not prepared, but like most people who love the outdoors, riding a bike in the rain is still better than being indoors." This summer has brought more hail than usual, and that's presented a problem on a couple of her rides home. "But [it's] an adventure, for sure!" Biking to work takes longer than driving, so "I have to be willing to get up earlier and get home later than I would if I were driving." And it's a pain to carry clothing and have to shower, change and get from McLane to Carnegie (then reverse it before I go home), she said. "Every day, I need to choose clothing which I can roll, fold or stuff into my pannier and that will look okay when I wear it to the office - no summer linen for me!" Oops! Remember the shoes! There have been occasions when she's had an unexpected meeting come up that requires her to leave campus, but fortunately a co-worker is always willing to loan her a car. And there are times when she's forgotten a document or something at home and then "I'm stuck without it for the day." Both she and Roberts have experienced the Shoe Dilemma, forgetting to bring shoes to change into. "Once I forgot to bring a pair of good shoes to change into and had to wear my bike shoes all day," said Woughter. Roberts advises others interested in biking to work to "make sure to pack all the components of your wardrobe. Otherwise, you'll get to work and have to wear a button-down dress shirt, a pair of dress pants and a raggedy pair of sneakers."