

Student's dream becomes Hub of campus bicycling success

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Back in 2006, an Alfred University (AU) freshman named Ian Cramer (AU &10) had a vision, one in which student transportation and the scenic outdoors of Alfred could complement, rather than contrast, one another. The means towards accomplishing his vision? The bicycle.

And so, two years later and with an organized proposal for a Saxon Bike Hub in hand, Cramer took his vision to Student Senate, where he was able to secure \$10,000 in start-up funds for the endeavor. Word soon reached the Alfred University Board of Trustees, in particular one trustee, Les Gelber (AU &77), whose daughter had been an integral part of a similar endeavor at Eckerd College in Florida. The trustees have provided the Bike Hub with an annual gift of \$2,000 ever since, helping fund the computer which assisted in transitioning the hub from neat idea to smooth operation. Information Technology Services was integral in providing Internet to the hub, and the Physical Plant helped make Davis Gym an appealing venue where Cramer and company could grow their business.

“I loved bicycles, and I felt a vibe at Alfred University that one individual student can really make something happen,” notes Cramer, now a certified athletic trainer at PT Solutions in Georgia.

Five years later, with its digitized rental forms and students charging bicycle rides to their Alfred University account, the Saxon Bike Hub has surpassed even Cramer's wildest dreams.

Kathy Woughter, vice president for Student Affairs, loyal patron of the hub, and the person Cramer credits most for making his vision a reality, notes that the success of the Bike Hub was par for the course when it comes to student innovation merging with community encouragement.

“The Bike Hub is a great example of what students can create here at AU, and how the entire community can collaborate to make a great idea happen,” said Woughter. “From my perspective as the VP of Student Affairs, any effort to encourage students to get outside and enjoy our beautiful roads and villages is great,” she added.

Today, the Bike Hub has grown to be a fixture on campus, and remains fully student run and managed. While Cramer is no longer present, sophomore Douglas Sassman has taken over the managerial reins, and the transition has been a seamless one. Sassman and the four students currently on staff (all either 19 or 20 years of age) possess a combined two decades of experience working in bicycle shops. Rental rates for a bicycle are currently \$3 per day, \$8 per week, and \$25 per month, so as to offer students an incentive to rent for a longer period of time.

Sassman's rates have worked, as he notes that a majority of the 20 or so bikes which belong to the hub are currently being rented long-term. He estimates that six new bikes will be ordered in the spring to meet the growing demand for rentals, adding he has been encouraged by the recent turnout at the hub since last spring.

“A very diverse group of people have been coming in, some you might not expect to ride a bike, they come in and throw on a helmet,” said Sassman. “This allows us to see that there is real growth potential.”

In addition to rentals, the hub offers repairs for a reasonable fee on bikes students bring from home, and will order necessary parts to get the bikes them up-and-running again. Sassman estimates that approximately 20-30 percent of the student body brings a bike to school. The Bike Hub offers free storage for student bikes during the spring and fall semesters, and charges a small fee for storage during holiday breaks.

Sassman has also made a series of tune-ups to the Bike Hub policy which has improved the efficiency of the operation exponentially. Since students must sign four different forms upon renting, Sassman’s successful digitizing of all paperwork has been a godsend. He has also instilled a stricter policy on locking bikes - sending students an email when they forget to do so and late returns.

While Cramer’s original vision has been more than fulfilled, Sassman has his own plans for the future of the Bike Hub. He hopes that the profit coming in from repairs and potentially locating a wholesale distributor for bikes and parts will allow the hub to be fully self-sustained in a couple of years, which would allow Sassman and his staff to re-invest profits into the creation of more jobs and more bikes for rent.

While Davis Gym has provided a home to the hub, Sassman hopes the growth potential of the Hub can return the favor. Sassman hopes the success of the hub can provide an impetus for the University to renovate the building in which it resides.

“There are so many cool teams and clubs that call Davis home,” said Sassman. “Renovating the gym would really benefit the AU community as a whole.”