

Bike-Friendly Businesses

Keeping your carbon footprint to the minimum? There are some places in Houston ready to reward you. **BY BRITTANIE SHEY**

For the past several years, Houston's infrastructure for cyclists has been steadily improving. Now several local businesses are hopping along for the ride by giving discounts to customers who opt for greener transportation.

NuRide.com, a federally backed Web site that provides incentives for members who use sustainable transportation, boasts almost 20,000 members in the Houston area, and several contributing bike-friendly businesses, both local and national. One of those local businesses is Blue Line Bike Lab, which has locations in both the Heights and the East End.

Fred Zapalac, who co-owns the bike shop with his brother David, said NuRide is a commuter program that operates on the honor system. Each time members use a sustainable method of transport, they can log their miles and then redeem those miles for rewards. A half-mile bike ride earns riders 100 points.

"There are a lot of local businesses on there," Zapalac said. "H.E.B, Theatre Under The Stars. We give a 20 percent discount on \$50 purchases."

Next door to Blue Line's EaDo location is Bohemio's, the charming little taco shop. Every Thursday evening for about the past year, Bohemio's has hosted an East End Rider's Club, said assistant manager Mark Dealejandro.

"We'll have specials, like a dollar off," he said. "Some people come, grab a bite to eat, grab a beer. The ride is family-friendly — some people bring their kids."

In the Heights, One Green Street

is also taking advantage of its proximity to the Rails to Trails. The boutique, which sells organic clothing, skin-care products and other gifts, used to be located on Buffalo Speedway. Manager Yuliana De La Rosa said even back then she tried to encourage shoppers to use green transportation with parking signs that read "Carpool Only."

It's much easier now that the shop is located on White Oak Drive, close to the bike trails, she said.



Every Thursday evening, Bohemio's hosts the East End Rider's Club.

"We try to encourage people to bike instead of park. We offer a 10 percent discount for people who bike."

De La Rosa said the weather is a big factor in how many cycling customers she sees.

"But Saturdays are always good. We get a lot of people who bike to the shops on 19th street."

On the Facebook page for the biking group Houston Critical Mass, Hay Merchant on Westheimer was repeatedly listed as one of the most bike-friendly businesses in town. The beer bar boasts a B-Cycle rental station right outside its front door, and provides \$3 pints of locally-brewed Karbach Beer to cyclists, said general manager Sean Jensen.

"We are good friends with the guys from Karbach. They are big supporters of the bike community here in town — they hold a bike ride to the brewery on the first Monday of every month. We also really like their beers," he said. "We wanted to offer an incentive for folks to ride bikes here, and it just seemed like the right fit."

Jensen said Hay Merchant also hosts its own ride the second Sunday of each month.

"The B-Cycle thing is a lucky circumstance," he said. "They were expanding and wanted to be in the Montrose. The parking near our front door just happened to be city easement. We have even had people rent them for the Karbach Bike Ride and our own Second Sunday bike ride."

As more businesses in Houston become bike-friendly, Fred Zapalac has some advice. Those businesses need to apply for a Bicycle-Friendly Business Award from the League of American Bicyclists.

"It's embarrassing that we have so few. So many Houston businesses would qualify for that, and the application is pretty simple," he said. "When we go to apply for Bike-Friendly Community from the League of American Bicyclists, it looks bad that we have so few businesses with the Bike-Friendly Award. Companies that provide bike racks and showers for their employees should apply. Every single major corporation in Houston with an MS150 team should apply."