

Minneapolis mother of 4 fills Twin Cities' bike-camp void

Article by: CURT BROWN
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About five years ago, Angie Gustafson was scrambling to sign her four kids up for this camp and that one. There were hockey camps and basketball camps, and summer was rapidly approaching. Her two oldest, Zach and Wyatt, asked a fair question:

"Mom, why aren't there any biking camps?"

While some parents might have shot back an exasperated: "*There just aren't*," Gustafson started asking around at bike shops. All she got were shrugged shoulders.

So she e-mailed friends and invented her own bike camp.

Now in its fourth summer, with 137 families on the e-mail list, the Mill City Cyclomaniacs -- christened after a kid-driven naming contest - gather every Friday morning in Minneapolis. Parents and kids strap on helmets and head off for three- or four-hour rides around lakes and down myriad trails -- with a food break always sandwiched in the middle. Kids range from kindergartners on one-wheel extensions hooked to parental bikes to ninth-graders. Parents were once split evenly on gender lines but have been skewing mom-heavy of late.

On one recent sun-kissed Friday, 13 kids, six moms and a dad came hauling around some trees and hopped off their bikes at the middle of a 17-mile day near Sea Salt, the one-time concession stand turned scrumptious seafood bistro next to Minnehaha Falls. Gustafson was among the last to arrive, rounding up some stragglers as Zach and Wyatt lined up for calamari.

The camp is free, not counting money for squid.

"At first, people were telling me the kids were too little to ride 20 miles," Gustafson said. "But you know what? I didn't think so. They have endless energy, especially when they're with their friends."

Her kids are now 14, 12, 10 and 8, and she, like all the parents, is amazed at how a few hours pedaling reduces the whining and fighting among siblings.

Gustafson grew up around the Midwest, moving from Iowa to Indiana to Rochester, Minn., as her father sold women's clothing. She met her husband, Brian, when they worked at the Minnesota Mutual insurance company (now Securian) in downtown St. Paul. Eight months after their wedding, they joined the Peace Corps, spending a couple of years in the mid-'90s in the Dominican Republic.

"We knew it would either solidify our relationship or destroy it," she said. "We had a wonderful experience."

Brian now works in finance at the Carlson Cos., and Angie stays home with the brood. They recently added a boxer puppy named Rocky to the mix. As if she weren't busy enough, Gustafson has a publishing operation with her own children's book about houses around the world (www.ootbooks.com).

If it's a summertime Friday, though, her home is her bike seat, surrounded by her fellow Mill City Cyclomaniacs. For more



Angie Gustafson, founder of the Mill City Cyclomaniacs
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information, including upcoming routes, check out their snazzy website at www.mccyclomaniacs.us.

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