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'Bike Tech at School' program offered at five area high schools

By KIMBERLY WHITE

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SCOTTS VALLEY - Scotts Valley High School is the latest in a string of area high schools to offer a course geared toward fostering students' interest in bicycles - and teaching them lifelong skills along the way.

Project Bike Trip, a Santa Cruz-based non-profit organization, has partnered with five high schools to offer "Bicycle Tech at School," a program administered through the schools' respective regional occupational programs and operated similar to auto shop.

Students enrolled in the one-year course learn practical skills about building and fixing bicycles, as well as the health, recreational and environmental benefits that result from alternative transportation, said Katie DeClercq, Project Bike Trip's director. By the end of this school year, she estimates more than 150 kids will have taken the class.

Students not only learn the skills a bike shop mechanic needs and take quizzes and tests to ensure they've absorbed the information, but also skills that can be used later in higher-level positions within the bicycle or other sports-related industries, she said.

For example, guest speakers from companies such as Santa Cruz Bicycles and Easton Cycling have given presentations to the classes and explained that they "started out with basic interest and skills in bicycles, and now they're in top positions in companies in the county," DeClercq said. "A lot of people in these local companies started in a bike shop because they

love bikes" and worked their way up to top-level positions.

Steve Hess, who rotates as instructor for Harbor, Aptos and Natural Bridges high schools, considers the program successful even if students only learn how to use tools, change a flat tire or start biking more. But some of his former students have gone full bore, obtaining internships and jobs at businesses including Fox Racing Shox in Watsonville and Santa Cruz-based Ibis Cycles.

"This year, I'm emphasizing more that the shop is a business, and I'm hiring you as a student employee for my bicycle shop," Hess said.

Each school also has partnered with an area bike shop that helps obtain bicycle parts for the classes, promotional activities and even host fund-raising events. For example, Andrew Cavaletto's worked at Scotts Valley Cycle Sport since his senior year in high school and has owned the business since 2008. When Berri Michel, Project Bike Trip's founder, contacted him about sponsoring Scotts Valley High's Bike Tech at School program, he signed up.

"I remember being in high school and wanting to know more about bicycles and how they work," he said, adding that it's a "great way to help get

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kids involved in something other than the standard stuff" like auto shop.

event.

For information, go to www.projectbiketrip.org.

Bicycle Tech at School launched in January 2007 as a one-semester pilot program at Harbor High and has proved so successful that it's now running through the entire school year.

"One hundred kids signed up wanting to take the class, and we ended up having to turn down 30-35 students," DeClercq said.

The students are not only learning a trade, she said, but also other skills that they can use in other fields such as how to work within a company and how to interact with customers.

Aptos High and Natural Bridges High also offer the course, and it's been so successful at Pajaro Valley High that three course offerings are now being offered each semester thanks in part to a \$12,000 grant from the Community Foundation of Santa Cruz County. Scotts Valley High recently signed on as a partner as well.

Project Bike Trip's 2011-12 budget is about \$125,000. DeClercq said the group receives funding from various community organizations, local businesses, individuals and the Santa Cruz County Regional Occupational Program.

Bike Tech at School

The program is offered through the ROP programs at Harbor, Aptos, Pajaro Valley and Scotts Valley high schools, and through Natural Bridges High School's Green Career Center.

All of the schools offer one course per semester, except for Pajaro Valley High School, which offers three.

Each of the schools has a sponsoring bicycle shop, which helps provide students with bicycle parts and is expected to host a fund-raising

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