Bikes, Trains and No Automobiles

There are few things more uplifting than a kid on a bike, unless maybe you throw a train in there, too. That inspiring combination made for a great day along the D&L Trail, September 18, as members of the LVPC, Community Bike Works and Coalition for Appropriate Transportation (CAT) rode the train through the Lehigh Scenic Gorge and then made the 25-mile trek back to Jim Thorpe by bike.

The daylong excursion was part kick-off for Bike Works’ annual spin-a-thon fundraiser, and part celebration of the Bike Works students winning LVPC’s 2020 FutureLV Heroes Award, given each year to individuals or groups that exemplify the policies of FutureLV: The Regional Plan.

Community Bike Works, with two locations in Allentown and one in Easton, teaches life’s lessons through bicycles to more than 500 students from across the region each year. Community Bike Works’ student leadership council won the award specifically for their work advancing multimodal transportation alternatives in the Lehigh Valley.

“The folks with us today are the recipients of the 2020 FutureLV Heroes Award for their bike leadership throughout our region now and into the future,” said LVPC Executive Director Becky Bradley, in leading off the 25-mile ride. “So, these folks get to ride with capes flying behind them as we take this beautiful ride down the D&L Trail. “
The day began in Jim Thorpe, where 17 adults and students boarded a Reading and Northern Railroad train, with their bikes loaded in the cargo car, and took the hourlong scenic rail ride through the Lehigh River Gorge to White Haven. After lunch in White Haven, the group embarked on a three-hour bike ride that marked the start of Community Bike Works Spin-a-thon 2021, benefitting youth programs such as the organization’s groundbreaking Earn a Bike Program.

“We’re about to ride down into Jim Thorpe and we couldn’t be more excited,” Community Bike Works Executive Director Kim Schaffer, flanked by several youths in the program and staff from CAT and LVPC. “This will be the longest ride for some of the teens we have here today. We’re raising $100,000 for bike mentoring this year, and we’re just grateful for everyone’s support.”

Along the way the group stopped several times to rest, take in the scenery, enabling teaching moments such as the history lesson at Lock 22 at Mud Run, where the 20-foot tall lock walls from the former Lehigh Canal remain as a reminder of how the canal was once used to move coal, lumber and other materials through the region before the lock was damaged and closed during a deadly flood in 1862.

Some of the students also made an unplanned stop to cool off in Buttermilk Falls (photo below shows Ronald and Jose from Community Bike Works).
That the students enthusiastically absorbed it all – from the panoramic views of the scenic gorge to the wild waters of the Lehigh to the 10-story waterfalls – was not lost on CAT Executive Director Scott Slingerland.

“The Community Bike Works riders were tearing it up. They made the most of this trip,” Slingerland said. “That section of the trail is like being in another world. It’s like being on a vacation, but it’s so close to home. They were really pushing to go faster, see more.”

The spin-a-thon closes Oct. 3. More information about Community Bike Works programs is available at communitybikeworks.org.

The LVPC will be announcing the 2021 FutureLV Heroes award winners December 9, during its 8th Annual Gala + Awards virtual event. Check back at lvpc.org in the coming days for information about the Gala and how to get tickets.