Mike Clements

Final Assignment

JTC 210

**We Want to Ride Our Bicycles**

**By: Mike Clements**

You might not be able to tell from all of the snow that has plagued the streets of Fort Collins, Colorado this spring, but the city is actually one of the top four “bicycle friendly” communities in the country. Earlier this week The League of American Bicyclists awarded Fort Collins the “Platinum Bicycle-Friendly Community” status, a highly prestigious reward that firmly places the city near the top of the ranks with only “Diamond” status left to be achieved.

One doesn’t have to search very hard to find evidence of the ways that cycling is engrained in the DNA of this city. Aside from not being able to find a single street that doesn’t have at least three or four cyclists cruising next to cars in the designated lanes, it is a common occurrence for the massive amount of bike racks that line every street of Old Town to be packed completely full of bikes.

An expansive 280 miles of bike lanes and 133 miles of off-street trails help to designate the city’s high status as well as innovative programs like the Fort Collins Bicycle Library, which allows Fort Collins residents, students, and visitors to borrow a bike for as short as one hour or as long 3 days. The FC Bike Library also offers a variety of self-guided tours ranging from brewery and historic tours to an environmental learning tour along the scenic Cache La Poudre River Bike Trail.

There is a very large population of citizens who bike to school or work at Colorado State University, Front Range Community College, or the hundreds of businesses throughout the city. This kind of alternative transportation is highly encouraged by city officials, as evidenced by the large offering of bike parking, cycle-friendly programs, and an intensive infrastructure.

The Larimer County Bicycle Ambassador Program looks to address the nearly 60 percent of the population that is classified as “interested but concerned” in the idea of cycling as a legitimate means of transportation. By instilling programs like the ones already in place and teaching things like safety techniques for riders and bicycle rider-awareness to the city’s drivers, it is well on its way to lowering that number.

In addition to all of the programs and movements occurring in the city, a substantial number of bike shops call Fort Collins home. From high-intensity, long- distance riders to those wishing to partake it the occasional leisurely cruise to the bars or to campus; there is a bike shop in Fort Collins to fit every need. This availability and visibility of the cycling community help to establish and spread the city’s cycle-heavy reputation.

Brave New Wheel, a bike shop located near Old Town specializes in vintage cruiser style bikes and has launched an innovative “One More Bike” campaign, which helps to promote alternative forms of transportation. The owners are major advocates and sponsors of many of the local bike-related festivals and events.

“We love to get out to all the events and things like Tour de Fat because it not only gets our name out there, it also helps us to further our mission of transitioning some people from their attachment to automobiles,” said Nathan Hope, the owner of Brave New Wheel. “We love bikes and the more people that feel the same way, the better we do as a business and as a community.”

Recycled Cycles, another local shop, has two locations, including one right on the CSU campus. This shop buys and sells used bicycles and keeps the town’s citizens fitted with an endless rotation of affordable bicycles.

There are also several ways in which the community’s small business mentality and bike friendliness blend together perfectly. Every summer New Belgium Brewery, Fort Collins’ favorite local beer makers, brings their “Tour de Fat” bicycle tour through its hometown streets. Thousands of people hop on their bikes, don the craziest costume they can find and flock to experience the popular celebration of beer and bicycling that has been bringing a bit of insanity to the city’s bike scene for the past 14 years. Last year’s “Tour de Fat” brought 21,000 people to the festivities, according to New Belgium. This mark proved to be the largest number of participants of the 15 cities that hosted the event, which included much larger cities like Denver, Chicago, and San Francisco.

“I think this city is more than deserving of this kind of title,” said Nathan Klabaca, a volunteer at the Fort Collins Bick Co-op. “We are definitely one of the best bike cities in the country with all of the trails and people who are so passionate about riding.”

According to the co-op’s website, their main goals include: keeping the [community](http://fcbikecoop.org/community.php) riding bikes, educating neighbors in all things bike-related including bike maintenance and safety, and to keep good bikes out of the landfill by refurbishing and donating bicycles for a wide variety of charity events and programs for those in need.

“It’s programs like the co-op and the bike library that make this town’s bike scene alive and well,” Klabaca said. “The title we’ve earned belongs to all of the citizens of this town and we should all wear it proudly.”

There are currently 259 Bicycle Friendly Communities across America but only four of them are considered to have the ‘Platinum’ status. After earning the silver status in 2003 and gold in 2008, Fort Collins now joins just the three other cities to achieve the reward. These cities are Boulder, Colorado; Portland, Oregon; and Davis, California.

After another couple years of responsible practices and the instillation of a few more policies that will help sustain the attitudes for the next generation of cyclists, Fort Collins has a legitimate shot at reaching what no city is yet to reach, the ‘Diamond’ level. This would take a lot of effort on the part of both city officials and citizens but many think it can be done.

While tuning up his 1979 Italian-made road bike, Klabaca confessed, “It’s a great honor that we have gotten this far, but who can honestly say that they don’t want to be number one? Especially over Boulder.”