



Tom Underhill, Peninsula News

From left, Andy Bradford, Blair Harkins, Kevin Koyanagi and, in front, Chris Jensen, are working on an internet-based program that will identify safe bike paths to school for kids on the Peninsula.

Program to steer students on safe path

PVNET is looking for interns to develop what organizers hope is a groundbreaking effort that gets kids to ride bikes to school.

By Chris Boyd
Peninsula News

Once a pristine open area with few roads, the Palos Verdes Peninsula, much like the rest of Los Angeles, now has traffic problems in many locales.

To encourage kids, particularly teenagers, to get out of the car and onto their bicycles, Palos Verdes on the Net, or PVNET, launched a summer program called Safe Bike Paths for Kids. Interns will develop a Web-based system providing maps that show the safest bike paths to school.

“The purpose of the project is to sync up with the momentum that is out there for ecologically sound projects,” said Ted Vegvari, founder of the Rancho Palos Verdes-based PVNET, located next to City Hall. “There are a lot of kids who'd like to ride bikes, but it's simply not safe in some areas.”

Vegvari said PVNET wants to work with the Hill's four cities and the Palos Verdes Peninsula Unified School District to determine safe routes to school.

“These [student interns] are able to rise above all the politics and all the fighting and bickering,” said Dave Tomblin, project chairman and a former School Board member. “People like to rally around kids.”

During the course of the program, interns will use Geographic Information System, or GIS, technology to map out all the bike paths on the Hill and designate them as safe or unsafe, Vegvari said. He expects the effort to continue for about a year as interns collect loads of data from cities and develop the system that residents one day will access simply by visiting the Internet.

“What this will create is an awareness,” Tomblin said. “These maps will help bring that awareness forward.”

RPV resident Chris Jensen, a student at El Camino College, will help make Safe Bike Paths for Kids a reality. “I started out with Ted in animation ... Now I have this opportunity to work on GIS, which is major in the real estate industry,” Jensen said, noting that he wants to work in real estate. “Everything ties in with what I've been doing before.”

Fellow El Camino student Andy Bradford has interned at PVNET for two years. While most education involves listening to lectures and taking tests, he said, PVNET gives him hands-on experience.

“Ted showed me GIS, and I got the opportunity to learn by doing,” Bradford said. “It's a really valuable educational system. I always learn from the other interns I'm teaching?”

“I think it's really cool,” said Peninsula High student Kevin Koyanagi. “We're learning and we're really doing something productive?”

Countywide reach possible

But are there enough bicycle paths on the Peninsula to make this program feasible? “Actually, I think there are quite a few in the community,” said Jim Bell, RPV director of public works. Bell added that the project could extend to neighboring communities like San Pedro, Torrance and Redondo Beach.

“Ultimately, we could take this as far as having maps for the entire county;” Vegvari said.

Interns will spend the first few months gathering information and maps from local cities' public works departments before developing the software using GIS technology. Vegvari wants to give interns a real-life experience to prepare them for the working world.

“[GIS] is pervasive in all industries,” he said. “We purchased a very high-end GIS server that allows us to put all this information on the Internet ... There are very few restrictions or limits?”

Vegvari said professional staff will review the interns' work and ensure the maps are current. “Our intention is to keep things always up-to-date electronically,” he said.

Interns will make presentations at city council and School District meetings to let officials know the system is available. “We're hereto provide a service, and this service is the protection of children,” Tomblin said. “If we can present a safe-school alternative [route], this may allow staff and the city councils an alternative to address a number of different issues. People will rally around making sure our kids are safe.”

Also, the program could provide information on where bike racks are located at schools across the Peninsula, as well as data on how many kids ride their bicycles to school, Vegvari said.

Tomblin hopes to roll out the system by the second semester next year.

Still, the question remains: Will students actually get on their bikes and pedal to school? “We're looking for parental buy-in, No. 1,” Tomblin said. “Give the kids the incentive, show them the purpose for it.”

If you would like to participate in Safe Bake Paths for Kids, go to www.palosverdes.com/safecycling.

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