
Advocacy Column

Sue Barker, advocacy@nbwclub.org

Paul Martens, NBW 2007 Volunteer of the Year and advocate for bicycling

There are people who are willing to spend long hours writing letters, waving flags, or marching to support a cause. That's not the only way to be an advocate. By encouraging more people to enjoy the many benefits of cycling, we become advocates for our sport.

We are grateful to those in the NBW who volunteer many hours so the rest of us can participate in a safe, scenic and well-arrowed Sunday ride. This advocate column highlights one of those hard working NBW members, Paul Martens, 2007 NBW Volunteer of the Year.

Before moving to Rhode Island Paul lived and rode in Massachusetts. When he moved here in 2003 he continued cycling but was dismayed by the condition of our roads. He discovered the Narragansett Bay Wheelmen website and joined a Sunday ride. Right away Paul was attracted to the convenience of arrowed and mapped rides and the camaraderie with other members who rode at his skill level.

On his first NBW ride Paul found new friends who welcomed him to their group. He still rides with that group at an average speed of 13-15 mph, always over the longest loop. He continues to ride two or three times a week with one of the first NBW members he met, John Satterlee.

He did not discover his girl friend, Barbara Pacheco, at an NBW ride. In fact, she was not a cyclist when they met. When she realized how important cycling was to him, and how much time he spent on his bike, she took up the sport. She quickly fell in love with cycling and now joins him on many rides as an enthusiastic companion. Soon after joining the NBW Paul discovered the post ride tent. It provided an enjoyable place to meet others and share tales of each Sunday ride. Dave Andrews, then NBW President, met Paul after a ride, identified him as a willing new member, and asked him to take over the duties of Sunday Ride Starter in 2004.

Ride Starters play a big role in successfully kicking off NBW Sunday events. Each week Paul located and printed copies of the latest version of that week's map to ensure that everyone attending that week received a copy. He arrived at the starting location early each week to set out the maps and contact club members to learn of any important announcements for that day. Before the starting time, Paul gathered everyone around his truck to review details and changes to the route, make announcements, acknowledge the week's arrowers, welcome first time riders, and initiate the graduated start for groups traveling at various speeds. He handled this responsibility alone for two years before passing it on.

Paul and John Satterlee continue to volunteer for the NBW by arrowing the routes for many of our rides. Paul's suggestion to those new to arrowing is to work with partners who have some experience. Starting with shorter rides, arrowers can work up to longer rides over time. Working with friends makes arrowing fun and easy. Paul, John, and their friends often arrow the roads on bikes in good weather.

Paul is grateful to the NBW for honoring him as NBW 2007 Volunteer of the Year. He looks forward to the NBW Get in Gear Campaign to encourage people to get involved. Paul encourages everyone to Get in Gear right now – just in time to make 2008 NBW's best year yet on our roads.

Bike Lanes on Blackstone

A public meeting was held on the East Side of Providence March 3 to reconsider striping Blackstone Boulevard to include a bike lane and parking lane down the length of the Boulevard from the end of Butler on the South end to East Ave on the North end. The meeting was well attended by home owners, cyclists of all levels, and interested residents of the East Side.

Several years ago at a similar meeting to consider striping for bike lanes, only a few cyclists and pro biking people showed up. Residents far outnumbering the pro bike lane folks made a strong case against a bike lane, using the standard "nimby" approach. Sometime after that meeting a stripe was painted down the center of the road on each side of the Boulevard destroying the residential feel of the neighborhood. By turning it into a two lane roadway with a perceived passing lane, traffic increased and became noticeably faster.

What a change in attitude that narrow white stripe created! Residents are sincerely alarmed by more and faster traffic on the two lane road, trash in their yards, accidents sending cars onto their lawns, and dangerous conditions entering and exiting their driveways into fast moving traffic. Now residents are almost unanimously in favor of a bike lane. Many people contributed individual perspectives on the pros and cons of a bike lane. The overwhelming majority was in favor of a bike lane on Blackstone Boulevard.

Each victory that brings reasonable cycling resources to Rhode Island increases awareness of our presence and recognition of our right to share the roads. We can count the creation of a bike lane on Blackstone Boulevard as substantial progress toward making Providence bicycle friendly.