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Evanston businesses join program to promote biking

[Stephanie Kelly](#), Reporter
August 8, 2014 •

When Evanston resident Jack Hanson heard about the national program, Bicycle Benefits, as a student at the University of Vermont, he knew he wanted to bring it home.

So he did.

Working as a summer intern with the City of Evanston, Hanson, 20, has brought three Evanston businesses into the program.

Bicycle Benefits, established around 2004, encourages biking as an alternate form of transportation. Members purchase a \$5 sticker for their bike helmet as proof that they rode to a store instead of driving. When riders present the sticker at participating stores, they receive a discount on their purchases.

"It started as a local campaign to increase ridership and to encourage folks to drive less and ride their bikes more in the community they live in," said Ian Klepetar, the founder and national coordinator of Bike Benefits.

Now with more than 60,000 stickers distributed nationally, Bike Benefits is expanding to different communities through individuals like Hanson, Klepetar said.

Hanson, an environmental studies major, said he thought the City of Evanston would be interested in Bike Benefits after he saw how many businesses were receptive to it in Burlington.

"Evanston is a pretty bike-friendly city," Hanson said. "I thought it would be a good place for it."

Hanson began reaching out to different businesses at the beginning of the summer. The owners of Hewn, a bakery at 810 Dempster Street, were the first to agree to the program. They offer a 10 percent discount to Bike Benefits members.

Ellen King, the co-owner of Hewn, said she and the other owners of Hewn have worked with the city on new projects like this and agreed to it because of its environmental mission.

Hanson gave them a start-up kit, which has 10 stickers to sell to customers. King said the employees at Hewn were able to sell all 10 within one day.

"It was already worth it," Hanson said.

From there, Hanson was contacted by two other businesses who were interested: The Wine Goddess, 702 Main Street, and Sketchbook Brewing Company, which is opening this September at 825 Chicago Avenue.

Amy Wilkinson, a co-founder of Sketchbook Brewing Company, said she was drawn to the program because their business model focuses on limiting the amount of energy they use in the brewing process.

Hanson estimates that about 30-40 stickers have been distributed in Evanston. He said he hopes that after a couple more businesses sign on, the movement will take off by itself.

King said Evanston lends itself to biking already, as the city is creating projects to reduce carbon emissions. She said she hopes it continues because it instills a greater sense of community.


“As a merchant, it’s always better to see people out on the street, on the sidewalk, walking and biking as opposed to just a parked car sitting,” she said. “A community becomes much more vibrant when people are on the streets and they’re not barricaded by their car.”

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- Seeing all my NU friends, with the added bonus of not living with my family.
- Andy's Frozen Custard. It's been way too long.

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