

GREEN VALLEY NEWS AND SUN

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Happy trails to you

GVR Hiking Club celebrates 25 years of outdoor fun. **Sports, B1**

Court delays using fines to teach

English to Spanish-speaking students. **A3**

Furniture store, new restaurant coming to Kmart building. **Sahuarita, A4**

Community leader joins Prestige Assisted Living. **Business A10**



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Grant project may spur kids to walk, ride bikes to school

By **Tim Hull**
Green Valley News

One of the most recognizable changes in American childhood over the last 30 years is the drop in the number of kids walking or riding bikes to school.

In the 1970s and 1980s it was common to see groups of kids walking to school or riding bicycles, and the old long steel racks on campuses were crowded full with chained-up BMX bikes and 10-speeds.

Now the common sight is car-pools, with students packed into behemoth SUVs, waiting fidgety in the back seat as their parents inch through the drop-off line; or else they ride the big yellow bus, often spending an hour or more going to and from school even when they live relatively close.

For several years now the federal government has been working with state and local officials to stop this trend, seeing the change in school transportation norms as one of the many causes of the upswing in childhood obesity and lethargy.

Recently, the Santa Cruz Valley Bicycle Advocate

Committee was awarded a \$445,501 grant to bring this effort to the Continental School District through the construction of a pedestrian walkway and bicycle lane along White House Canyon Road.

Construction on the project is expected to be complete by 2007, according to Jim Jordan, a member of the advocate committee who worked on the grant proposal.

As it is now there aren't any students walking or biking to Continental, and Superintendent Ken Brown said the district discourages it for safety's sake.

White House Canyon Road is a busy route, being the only way in and out of the popular Madera Canyon Recreation area. And though the speed limit near the school is 35 mph, often cars speed by at 50 mph or more.

"We don't really allow anybody to walk," Brown said. "We have a bus seat for every child, including those from Madera Reserve, which is only about a half-mile away."

The project could change all that. The plan includes 1.6-mile bicycle lanes on both sides of the White House Canyon Road and a 0.8-mile shared-use pathway meant to

connect the school campus with the two nearest residential subdivisions and with the Continental Community Center.

Brown, who said he remembers walking to school in the snow while growing up in upper Michigan, added that the school has already promised to supply bike racks for students once the project is complete.

Misconceptions

Why have kids stopped walking or riding bikes to school?

According to Jordan, it has partly to do with a generational change in parenting techniques.

"This generation right now is so much more protective than ours was," he said. "The word bike lane didn't even exist when I was growing up; it's just a whole different philosophy today."

"The downside to all the protection, however, is that kids are always in the car or with their video games and not getting exercise, and they are also missing the camaraderie of walking or biking with other kids," he added.

SEE **GRANT**, PAGE A2



PHOTO BY AL CRAWFORD

The air up there

Winter visitor Sue Crosley gave a friend an 80th birthday ride in her hot air balloon over Green Valley Monday morning. Crosley has been a crew and pilot on balloons for some 26 years. Local photographer Al Crawford, a member of the GVR Camera Club, was on hand to capture the action.

SUPERVISORS MAKE IT OFFICIAL

No development on No.9 hole at Canoa course

By **Jim Lamb**
Green Valley News

cial development at the northeast corner of Camino del Sol and Canoa Ranch

ty, parts of blocks 12 and 14.

Many nearby property owners had protested the

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GRANT: May spur walking, bike riding to school

FROM PAGE A1

But studies done by the federal Centers For Disease Control and Prevention suggest that it isn't as dangerous for kids to get to school on their own as some parents might think.

In 1969, the CDC reports, 87 percent of students who lived within a mile of their school used so-called "active transportation" to get their (walking or riding a bike); by 2001, that number had dropped to 63 percent.

Parents in the study reported traffic danger and fear of crime as two of the primary reasons for the sharp decline; however, the numbers don't justify such fears.

For example, in 1973 the report rate of violent crimes against children aged 12 to 19 was 80 cases per 1,000 children, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics. In 2003, the rate had dropped to about 50 per 1,000 children.

Drop in traffic deaths

The number of traffic deaths among youths aged 5 to 15 has also dropped during the last 30 years, even though traffic on the roads has increased greatly

over the same period.

Locally, however, there's more to think about, said Heather Wunder, current president of the Continental School Parent-Teacher Committee.

She said that even with the new bike and pedestrian lanes, she would be wary of kids walking alone along White House Canyon.

"I definitely don't think it hurts to promote more activity among children," the young mother of a kindergartner said, "but I'm a little bit concerned because we often see groups of illegals coming down that road."

Wunder suggested that perhaps parents could volunteer to walk with groups of kids to school, providing an extra layer of safety.

"This will probably be more of an issue as the areas around the school become more developed," Wunder added.

Continental currently has about 325 students, but the non-age-restricted neighborhoods within the district are expected to grow in the coming years.

Right now there are about 300 non-age-restricted homes in the White House Canyon area, with another 100 planned. School of-

ficials expect a large increase in the number of families in the area in the next decade.

Regional effort

Schools all over Pima County and the nation are getting involved in the new movement for "active transportation," said Matt Zoll, Pima County's Bicycle and Pedestrian Program manager.

"It's becoming very popular in the region," he said, explaining that so far his program has received some \$2.5 million in federal funds for a variety of related elementary and middle school projects in just the last two and half years.

And it's not just about health and exercise, Zoll said.

"It's multi-faceted: It's about healthier kids, but also about helping them see that there are more ways to get around and helping to promote independent thinking," he said.

"Plus, if kids learn traffic rules related to pedestrians and bicyclists much earlier than they are now," he added, "especially middle school kids, we hope they become better drivers."

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Easter holiday travelers urged to apply early for I-94 documents

Mexican border crossing card (or "laser visa") holders who plan to make an extended visit to the United States during the Easter holiday season are urged to apply for their I-94 early to avoid the expected lines and delays at the Nogales port of entry.

Travelers seeking I-94 documents at the Nogales port of entry may apply any time, but are encouraged to apply early to avoid the rush during the days surrounding the holiday. The essential permit, which costs \$6, allows visitors to travel farther than 25 miles from the border and to stay up to six months in the United States.

Due to the large holiday demand and lack of parking at the port of entry, travelers are advised to take into consideration the option of walking into the U.S. to obtain their I-94 prior to their planned trip, as well as locations to park in both Mexico and the United States.

All traveling family members need to be present during the I-94 application process.

"In the past, travelers ap-

day of the trip, standing for hours in long lines outside in the heat and occasionally rain," said Port Director James Tong.

"Last year at this time, we saw an increase of 50 percent or more in both vehicle and pedestrian traffic, and an increase of up to 1,000 permits per day."

As the busiest land border port in Arizona, with an average of 10,000 vehicles and 20,000 pedestrians entering the United States daily, the Nogales port of entry is heavily affected by increased holiday traffic and I-94 processing.

"We will be providing extra staffing and resources to assist travelers," said Tong, "but also encourage everyone to plan ahead to help both themselves avoid long waits and to assist our officers in providing quick, quality service to the travelers."

Officials on both sides of the border have also agreed to extend the hours of operation at the Mariposa port of entry as needed to alleviate vehicle traffic during the

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