

Bicycle and pedestrian safety highlights Streets Alive!

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Bicycles shared space with pedestrians, children and leashed animals along a maze of closed downtown Fort Myers roads Sunday as the second annual **Streets Alive!** spread a gospel of staying safe and healthy.

Brisk temperatures and gusting winds combined with blue, sunny skies to make the morning and afternoon event pleasant. The transfer of the Taste of The Town to Jet Blue Park opened the way last year for Streets Alive!

"It's a very new concept," said event-planning Chairwoman Kate Gooderham. "It is taking a while for people to get it."

Originally the event was called "Ciclovia," a Spanish word meaning cycle paths and referring to "open streets."

Gooderham said the Fort Myers event was patterned from this and envisioned giving roadways back to people who like to move around without benefit of motors and engines

"People are wanting to not be so isolated," she said. "A lot of what we do is drudgery, and a lot of diving isn't really fun."

Gooderham said there is a trend nationally for people looking for things to do. "This provides that opportunity," she said. "This mixes everybody together."

Streets Alive! cut a swath through the heart of downtown, closing off streets to motorized traffic and allowing bikes, wagons and pedestrians and dogs on a leash and a while host of other modes of non-motorized travel. There were 10 areas, called villages, that focused on aspects including health, dance, track, food, tennis, Lee County parks and more.



(Photo: LINDSAY TERRY/THE NEWS-PRESS)

"We spread the booths out. That was intentional," Gooderham said. That made it look like there were fewer people there than there actually was. A steady stream of bikes and foot-traffic passed by the Second Street headquarters and down Hendry Street to the yacht basin area, crossing over closed portions of Second, First, Bay and Edwards Drive in the process.

"I think this is really super they closed the streets down," said David Arle, sitting along Hendry with his Bassett hound Tellula. "It is a perfect day for it.

A bulletin board and special map area at BikeWalkLee's booth collected information from area residents on what can be done to help making walking and biking safer in Lee County.

Ashley Skalecki, an FGCU grad student, was helping Cindy Banyai, an FGCU adjunct professor specializing in research and evaluation, take whatever data the board and map generates and then turn that into a report.

"This is telling us where people want to go," Banyai said.

Griffin and WanidaStoutenburg of Fort Myers pointed out several routes they wished would have a bonafied bike trail.

"I'd take a bike all the way to Fort Myers Beach, Griffin Stoutenburg said. "I wouldn't go now, it's too dangerous."

The Stoutenbergs said they ride often, mainly keeping to the roads along the Caloosahatchee River. "There are a lot of small roads," he said. "It's pretty nice."

The event was sponsored by the Florida Department of Transportation and closed city streets to traffic from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Fort Myers joined similar events in Orlando and Tampa.

"These events promote bicycle/pedestrian safety in a way that's fun for everyone. I want to see Florida reduce our rates of injuries and fatalities among bicyclists and pedestrians. It's about changing behaviors, and 'streets alive' really says it well," said FDOT Billy Secretary Hattaway.

Florida has among the highest rates of bicycle and pedestrian fatalities in the U.S.