

Neenah library adds pedal power

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FULL TEXT

NEENAH - As spring weather returns, residents are certain to see an abundance of bicycles and motorcycles moving about the community.

On rare occasion, one might even spot a unicycle, but what hasn't graced Neenah's streets before is a Bibliocycle —a bicycle pulling a custom-made cart with shelves that unfold into a traveling library.

Think of it as a mini bookmobile that is green in both color and conservation.

The Neenah Public Library recently acquired the Bibliocycle and plans to put it to use by the end of the month, weather permitting. It will be stocked with books and equipped with a laptop or tablet computer, a barcode scanner and a WiFi hot-spot to allow patrons to check out materials on the spot.

The Bibliocycle was brought to fruition through the guidance of Assistant Library Director Nicole Hardina-Wilhelm. Friends of the Neenah Public Library, not taxpayers, covered the cost.

"I love to bike, so I thought it would be a great way to get out into the community and go to the parks and go to where people are and bring the library to them," Hardina-Wilhelm told The Post-Crescent.

Hardina-Wilhelm said the Bibliocycle will encourage biking and demonstrate "how easy it is to bike to the library." Neenah's Bibliocycle isn't a new concept or even unique to the Fox Cities, but the library staff and volunteers are amped up all the same. They plan to take it to the city swimming pool and farmers market and to parks, trails, assisted-living communities and apartment complexes.

"It looks so cool," Neenah Public Library Director Gretchen Raab said. "It's bright green. We're really excited about it."

The Bibliocycle will be operated by a staff librarian because it involves checking out materials and issuing library cards. The materials on the cart likely will vary depending on the destination.

"If we would go to a retirement community, we're going to have a different collection than if we're going to the pool," Raab said. "They may be pulling things right from our shelves and putting them on the book bike. There may also be a separate collection that's specific to the book bike."

The Menasha Public Library has operated its own version —simply called the Book Bike —for the past two years. Librarians have pedaled the bike to community events like Bazaar After Dark and to the Boys & Girls Club, farmers market and swimming pool.

Library Director Vicki Lenz said the Menasha Rotary Club paid for the bike, and students in an advanced welding class at Menasha High School built the cart.

"They didn't charge us a thing," she said. "It was really nice of them."

Lenz said the Book Bike has generated plenty of interest and has been "just a lot of fun." Practically, though, she said it serves more as a library ambassador than as a driver of circulation.

At the swimming pool, for example, patrons often don't have their library card with them, or they don't want to carry library materials into the pool area. It nevertheless remains a talking point.

"To me, it was a success when people starting asking about it," Lenz said. "They say, 'Are we going to see the Book Bike again this summer?' If people know about it, that's a success."

The Menasha Book Bike stopped at Menasha High School for the school district's Spring Fling on Tuesday. If you missed it, it will be at Jefferson Elementary School from 10 a.m. to noon May 18 for the Jefferson Park

Neighborhood Kite Fly.

The Appleton Public Library doesn't have a book bike, at least not yet.

"That's a really cool idea, though," said Tina Krueger, marketing coordinator for the Appleton library. "That's starting to be a popular service."

A Google search showed that book bikes are in operation in Eau Claire, Madison, Milton and Verona. Outside Wisconsin, they are in Boston, Denver, Los Angeles, Oakland, Philadelphia and Seattle, to name a few.

Contact Duke Behnke at 920-993-7176 or dbehnke@gannett.com. Follow him on Twitter at [@DukeBehnke](https://twitter.com/DukeBehnke).

Want to visit the Bibliocycle

May 18: Jefferson Elementary School from 10 a.m. to noon

The Menasha Public Library's Book Bike has been in use for the past two years.

Courtesy of Menasha Public Library

CREDIT: Duke Behnke

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