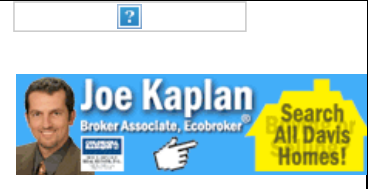


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Bike lanes easy ... unless you're inventing them

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It's easy to make a bike lane, right?

Slap down a white line of paint, stencil in "bike lane" and watch the bikes roll on through.

But what if you were trying to make the first bike lane in the whole country, and a lot of people thought you were crazy?

"They all told us 'Don't do this thing,' " said Donna Lott, who with her husband Dale advocated for bike lanes in Davis 40 years ago.

In 1967, Lott and many others were finally successful in getting the country's first bike lane open in Davis, and on the 40th anniversary of that accomplishment, she and a few others talked Wednesday evening at Freeborn Hall about just how hard it is to put bikes into a car's world.

"Taking macadam from the automobile had not been done elsewhere," said psychology Professor Bob Sommer, who studied bicycling for 40 years.

Lott and Sommer spoke at the Walk/Bike California 2007 conference held at UC Davis. Joining them were Frank Child, who with his late wife Eve, brought the concept of bike lanes back from a trip to Holland; Mel Ramey, a professor who helped design bike lanes that became the national standard; and Duane Copley, who helped design and implement bike lanes with the city's Public Works Department.

When Donna and Dale Lott came to Davis in the early 1960s, Frank and Eve Child had already geared up a letter-writing campaign in The Davis Enterprise and The Woodland Daily Democrat, calling for bike lanes. The Lotts saw one of the letters, and were soon knocking on the Childs' door.

The Childs, who sold one of their cars and bought six bicycles when they moved to Davis in 1962, were already riding their bikes all over the city.

The Lotts, too, rode bikes, but it was dangerous, Lott said. Bike lanes were the answer.

Although the City Council turned a mostly deaf ear to their cause, the call for bike lanes grew in the community. In 1966, with the endorsement of bike lane advocates, Maynard Skinner and Norm Woodbury were swept into city office, and bike lanes in Davis were finally under way.

A few attempts went wonky, such as sidewalk bike lanes — "They didn't work and they cost a lot of money, too," Copley quipped — and bike lanes tucked behind parking.

"Whenever you do an innovation like this, you've got to evaluate it and design it better," Sommer said. "Unless they are very, very lucky, no one is successful the first time."

The Mace Boulevard freeway overcrossing was built with stairs along one side, forcing bicyclists to carry their bikes up and down rather than riding.

Homeowners didn't want to give up parking on narrower Eighth and Third streets to allow for bike lanes.

But the bike advocates didn't give up, and eventually, Davis had the almost complete bike lane network of today.

Meanwhile, at the university, Ramey and Sommer were researching how wide to make bike lanes and how air pollutants would affect riders.

Ramey described experiments in which bicyclists would pedal steadily for an hour, wearing a mask that emulated outside air.

"We didn't know if we were getting air or ozone," he said.

Other experiments measured how people bicycled, and how much room they needed — from each other, from curbs and walls, and from cars.

"We needed to know what were the limits of the human interface," Ramey said.

Their experiments resulted in national standards still used today.

The hard work paid off globally (for Ramey, it's gratifying to see his designs all over the world) and locally.

"Davis became Bike City, USA, people came from all over the world to see it, the bicycle became our town logo," Sommer said.

The founders all used their bicycles, and their children and grandchildren — along with everyone else in Davis — flooded the lanes with bike traffic.

Now, Davis' bike lanes and greenbelts are beyond what the founders had imagined, Lott said. But knowing the determination of the people of Davis, she should have expected it, she said.

"It was the people who were here that wanted to get recycling started and solar panels, so we were an incubator for ideas," she said. "We had people who not only backed (bike lanes), but stuck with it."

Many of the transportation experts and health advocates who attended Wednesday night's discussion had earlier taken tours of the city's bike lanes, and came to Freeborn Hall on bicycles. The applause and calls of appreciation were frequent, and a proclamation for Frank and Eve Child, presented by Mayor Sue Greenwald, was met with a standing ovation.

"I hope you will be grateful to my wife Eve," Child said, "Not for being the first to think of bicycling, but for bringing the idea to Davis, a town that was made for bicycling."

"It is an extreme pleasure to be sitting next to one of the parents of all the bike lanes in the United States," Copley said to Child.

The other four panelists and several more bike pioneers were honored with their own proclamations at the Farmers' Market half an hour later.

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Davis' bicycle giants

Davis' bike lane pioneers, honored with a proclamation from the city, include:

Ralph Aronson, former mayor, who pushed for bike lanes and the Third Street Parade

Rick Blunden, who directed Caltrans' Bicycle Programs for 20 years

Jim Callaway, the city attorney who drafted state bicycle legislation and the bike-lane-oriented subdivision code

Frank and Eve Child, who wanted the bike lanes of Holland in Davis

Duane Copley, Dave Pelz and Art Eichorn, public works engineers who designed the City of Bicycles

Mark Francis, a professor who devised a greenway around Davis

Kent Gill, former mayor, the only bike-riding council member in 1965

Kathleen Green, who put bikes in Davis' first General Plan

Fred Kendall, former public works director, who directed his staff to design bike lanes ahead of council approval

Dale Lott, who studied bike lanes and advocated their use

Donna Lott, who lobbied for bike lanes

Jim Meyer, former chancellor of UC Davis, who always rode a bike to work

Emil Mrak, former chancellor of UC Davis, who pushed for bicycle lanes on campus

Mel Ramey, a professor who brought Davis' bike lane designs to a national audience

Maynard Skinner, former mayor, who first put bike lanes on the council's agenda

Bob Sommer, a professor who studied bike lanes for 40 years

Ed Spafford, who built the campus for bicycles

Norm Woodbury, former mayor, who helped pass bike legislation through the state Senate

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