

# Bike Week wheels back to town

By Gary Henderson  
Staff Writer

Spartanburg's bronze award for being a bicycle-friendly city never shines brighter than it does in May each year.

That's when Partners for Active Living and a collection of other supporting nonprofit groups roll out a month packed with events such as cycling races, school bike programs and bicycle repair workshops.

This year organizers also are announcing that the total distance of marked bike lanes on Spartanburg streets has risen from just over six miles in 2005 to more than 31.

Bike Month gets under way May 1 with an evening closed-course race through the streets of downtown Spartanburg. The race, called a criterium, will feature events for local, regional and professional riders. It is part of a professional circuit of races in South Carolina and Georgia.

This year there are additional Bike Month events, and the Web site, [www.bike-townspartanburg.org](http://www.bike-townspartanburg.org), will have a Twitter feed and a Flickr stream.

Bikes decorated by 10 Spartanburg artists will be on display in downtown during the month of May.

Also, the name of the race changes to the Spartanburg Regional Classic, in recognition of the event's title sponsor, Spartanburg Regional Healthcare System.

"We chose to be the lead sponsor for Bike Month because we strongly support the work Partners for Active Living is doing to combat the issue of obesity in our community," said Renee Romberger, vice president of community health, policy and strategy at the healthcare facility.

The League of American Bicyclists is a national group that makes its bicycle-friendly city awards based on a community's successes in five areas.

High profile events, bike safety education, bike facilities infrastructure, encouragement

to help broaden the types of groups that ride and better enforcement of bike laws are considered when making the award.

A demonstrable result of the Partners for Active Living efforts to make Spartanburg a bike-friendly town can be seen at Pine Street School. On average at least 100 of the school's students walk or bike to school in a program called Walking and Wheeling Wednesdays each week.

PAL continues to work closely with the school on projects related to the "W3."

The school received a \$200,000 grant from the national Safe Routes to School program that allowed school officials to install bike racks and to purchase pedometers and iPods as premiums that are awarded for participation.

This year's criterium, the fifth since the series began, will happen on the opening day of Spring Fling, an annual city festival.

Jean Crow, the Partners for Active Living associate director, said the criterium has drawn a larger crowd each year.

Crow said the race and the events that follow have become deeply entrenched in the life of Spartanburg.

Bike Town, a coalition of PAL, Mary Black Foundation, Palmetto Conservation Foundation and the Freewheelers of Spartanburg bicycle club, began working to receive the award in 2005. A Mary Black Foundation grant of \$106,000 funded the efforts.

The league gave Spartanburg an honorable mention award in 2006, and followed with the city's targeted bronze award the following year.

Hub Cycle is another program spawned by the Bike Town initiative. Spartanburg residents who don't own a bike can borrow one from Hub Cycle. The loaner bikes have all been donated. A trained bicycle mechanic checks each one given to the PAL-run program and makes any needed repairs.

Hub Cycle tripled its service to the

community within two years, increasing from 53 transactions its first year to nearly 160 in the next, Crow said.

Many of the same groups working to increase bicycle use in the city and county also have plans to make it easier for pedestrians to move around.

Partners for Active Living is assisting Spartanburg Area Transportation Study with help from the consulting group, Greenways, Inc. in Raleigh, N.C., to develop a county-wide pedestrian and bicycle master plan.

Mary Black Foundation, the city of Spartanburg and Spartanburg County have each contributed \$70,000 for the study.

Lisa Bollinger, a transportation planner for the county, is heading the effort. "We're in the data-gathering phase," she said. "Hopefully, we'll be done in late fall of 2009."

Bollinger said SPATS will have an

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information table set up at the criterium so residents can drop by to view what's planned and to offer suggestions.

The study, Bollinger said, centralizes the efforts of several organizations that were already working on better bike and pedestrian paths, and creates a network of alternative opportunities for people to get out of their cars and walk.

Bollinger said initial efforts are focused on getting schools connected with neighborhoods so kids can walk or bike to classes.

The 10-year goal: to see all the municipalities in the county connected by bike and pedestrian paths.

"Our focus right now is on the urban Spartanburg area, but we are interested in the municipalities," Bollinger said.

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