

2011-10 Focus on Members

This month's Focus is on Karen Jenkins, educator, local activist and cycling proponent.

Thanks to the friendship, guidance and inspiration of many members of the Princeton Free Wheelers, I am riding a road bike, teaching safe cycling, meeting legislators, bike advocates and community leaders in NJ and across the nation while contributing to making the roads safer for all users.



Within 3 years of learning to ride a road bike and joining the Princeton Free Wheelers I found my passion: advocacy for cyclists and pedestrians. In that time I became president of the NJ Bike & Walk Coalition, attended the 2011 National Bike Summit, and travelled with my daughter to France to see the end of a stage of the 2010 Tour de France. In April of this year I became a League Certified Instructor (LCI) of the League of American Bicyclists and recently agreed to serve as the chair of the Legislative Sub-Committee of the NJ Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Council of the Vorhees Transportation Center of Rutgers University. In July I participated in my first multi-day bike tour around the (hilly) Finger Lakes.

It started with a chance meeting with Matt Rawls, PFW member, along the D&R Towpath. I had seen Matt riding around my West Trenton neighborhood with a group of cyclists and that day somehow managed to stop him on the towpath as he and another cyclist flew passed me. I was on my hybrid bicycle, which I'd never ridden more than 5 or 6 blocks on the streets. Within a month with Matt I was on a road bike in clipless pedals and, yes, spandex. Once on my road bike, and at Matt's urging, I joined the PFW. Riding with so many different people was exciting, fun, and helpful.

I began by joining the rides offered by Dan Rappoport. Each "D" ride with Dan was always an adventure. I was thrilled to feel confident enough to join "C" rides. Watching Pat Van Hise take off was a joy and an example that I could become a stronger rider. As long as the roads were dry, Kyle Nylander rode with me during my first winter on a road bike, while talking non-stop about how to improve. Andy Chen and Jeff Lippincott were always welcoming on evening rides even though I was at the back, huffing and puffing to keep up. It was on their rides that I learned to be a skillful "sweep". I smiled as riders like Ed Post or John Powers joined "C" rides to keep their legs warm for upcoming "B" and "A" rides as I clung onto the back. They were always encouraging as they rolled to the back, helping me improve my form while pulling me to ride faster. Last year, when I moved to New Brunswick, John

Smolenyak, who lives nearby, would ride with me. Riding with John, who has an incredible knowledge of the roads, proved to be a pleasant way to learn about my new area.

I consider my membership in PFW to be one of the best investments and I intend to remain a member for a very long time. Riding with PFW groups has taught me valuable lessons that have transferred to my work as the executive director of an international higher education association. Learning to ride with anyone gave me a deep appreciation for working alongside and encouraging people to work at improving their skills in order to achieve more. Group rides quickly teach that anything can happen. In addition to being prepared I learned to rely on the kindness and skills of strangers to call out road hazards, fix a flat, or assist if there is a crash. Since riding with PFW groups, I have found myself paying close attention to building strong teams at work to achieve objectives. Just as ride leaders work to make sure everyone returns safely, I too make sure that the people who work with me achieve success. My career has been exciting and varied, with 7 years living in Zambia. My life, like any other, has had challenges. But falling on a bike and getting back on it despite the hurt and bruises certainly taught me a physical tenacity I did not know I possessed.

Three years ago, at the age of 60, when I learned to ride a road bike and I joined the Princeton Free Wheelers, I never anticipated I would meet so many people, have so much fun, spend so much time outdoors, and become healthier. Perhaps most importantly, I've expanded my life-long education in an entirely new and unexpected direction. Membership in the PFW has been a gift I will always cherish!