

slow roll Buffalo—

A unique way to experience city neighborhoods

By Shannon Traphagen

A few weeks ago, my husband I and decided to take part in a group cycling event known as Slow Roll Buffalo. Sitting in front of a pack of cyclists that stretched at least two miles long, I was taken aback by the enormity of what has become a global community movement.

"Slow Roll" biking is a movement in which groups of bicyclists leisurely coast through struggling communities, drawing awareness to urban neighborhoods. The phenomenon began in Detroit in 2010 as a way to buck negative perceptions of neighborhoods while encouraging revitalization. Since then it has become a non-profit organization, and has expanded globally.

Slow Roll Detroit founders Jason Hall and Mike MacKool, whose weekly rides with a small group of cycling enthusiasts four years ago has evolved into a procession of roughly 4,000 bicyclists weekly.

Interviewed in a Detroit newspaper in 2014, MacKool states, "How could we imagine it would grow from five people to 4,500? It's been a pretty wild ride, but all we're doing is giving people a platform."

That platform has catapulted a series of free slow rolls in cities across the globe from Cleveland Ohio to Stockholm Sweden, and the sheer size of each group is impressive. As this was my first experience with slow roll Buffalo, I wanted to find out what others thought of this growing movement in the city of Buffalo. One individual stated, "For me, it's all about community, friends and fun." Another states, "Slow roll gives me the chance to become familiar with a city I've lived in my whole life but have never really known."

As I push down on one peddle and then the other, our ride began as city police took their positions, blocking off traffic for 1,300 riders weaving in and out of downtown streets. Taking in the magic of the moment, I notice one woman whose energy had become deliriously infectious to those around her. I hung back to ask her what she thinks of this movement. "I suffered a stroke not too long ago. After months of therapy, I found an activity where the pace is perfect for me and I'm support by an amazing group of individuals. I'm not alone," she states with a tearful glow in her eyes.

The amount of support we received as we rode through the Essex community was the most memorable. Kids and parents hung out their windows clapping for us; people stood on corners and sat in cars, honking their horns and cheering in support. A mother of two stood on her porch and as I passed by, going a mere seven miles an hour, she thanked us for bringing awareness to their neighborhood. Slow Roll is about so much more than riding a bike; it's connecting with forgotten neighborhoods,

taking in details that until now had gone unnoticed, and sharing an experience that I won't soon forget.

WNY Resource:

Slow Roll Buffalo rides happen weekly on Mondays. Rides are free but pre-registration is required. For more information and location of rides, visit www.slowrollbuffalo.org or visit them on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/slowrollbuffalo/files/>