

Community

Volunteer Spotlight: Rob Williams is bicycling into the future



Margaret Sloan/Calaveras Enterprise

Rob Williams cycles with wife Cynthia Przybyla at New Hogan Reservoir.

By MARGARET SLOAN
SPECIAL TO THE ENTERPRISE

When was the last time you took to the open road on a bicycle?

If it's been a while, bicycle advocate Rob Williams wants to change that. His mission is to expand cycling in the Mother Lode; he's a shameless booster for all things bicycle.

"There's so many different kinds of biking," Williams said. "You can commute on your bike. Go out cycling with your best friends. Then go out after for a pint or a coffee. Cycling is healthy, and it's affordable."

Williams is chairperson of the Motherlode Bicycle Coalition (MLBC), an advocacy group that's part of the education arm of the California Bicycle Coalition (CalBike), a nonprofit that promotes bicycling throughout California.

CalBike and the MLBC recently collaborated with transportation agencies from five counties—Alpine, Calaveras, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, and Tuolumne—and Caltrans to study opportunities for bicycle tourism and economic development. The report, which is now the responsibility of the MLBC, identifies potential projects in each county to improve cycling and pedestrian access. Williams pointed out that recent construction in Angels Camp along Highway 4 is one of those projects, part of the Angels Creek Trail, a 5.1-mile planned trail along Angels Creek from Murphys Grade Road to New Melones Reservoir. "When Angels

Creek trail is finished, it will open up bike riding for all skill levels," Williams said.

He believes that making space for cyclists in our car-centric infrastructure has many benefits for Calaveras County—health, recreation, travel. "We have beautiful quiet rural roads that don't have much traffic. Some of the most popular rides for people who like to climb hills have recently been paved, so we have upped the quality of riding."

He stressed that it's good for the economy, too.

"People come to Calaveras and the Mother Lode to hunt, to fish, to ski, to camp and picnic. I think we need to add bike riding as a tourist amenity." He pointed out that cyclists often stay overnight—"heads in beds," he joked—and spend money in restaurants and local shops.

A retired elementary school principal, Williams has lived in Valley Springs for over 30 years. Along with his work with the MLBC, he also organizes cycling events. Six years ago he started Ride & Walk 4 Art (coming up on March 20), the Calaveras County Arts Council's fundraising event that supports the arts in Calaveras County public schools. This year he's organizing the reboot of Mr. Frog's Wild Ride (May 7) to support Feeney Park in Murphys.

Williams still finds plenty of time to bicycle. "I like everything about bike riding," he said, "from going out on electric bikes with my wife, to racing to the top of Jesus Maria

Road with my bike pals." The love of cycling has extended to his kids and grandkids. "We ride as a family."

"It's something I find satisfaction in. Something like this, for me, is so meaningful. It's something that I can put my hands on, it's tangible. I love to encourage families to enjoy Calaveras County," he

said. "More and more people are riding for recreation, and I want to be part of that."

Learn more about the Promoting Safe Bicycle Travel Opportunities report at www.bikevalleytosierra.com. Get involved with cycling in the Mother Lode at www.motherlodebike.org.



Courtesy photo/Susan Conner

Rob Williams organizes and manages biking events like Ride & Walk 4 Art in West Calaveras County.

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Courtesy photo/Rob Williams

Rob Williams with granddaughters Eleanor and Rosie Dondero.



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