

# Haven Avenue Bike Path dedicated

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It was a time to herald the work behind them, but also a time to look to the future and imagine the possibilities.

With gas prices hitting the stratosphere and a new citywide "bike cop" initiative to make police more accessible through Community Oriented Policing, the bicycle is making a big time comeback. Ocean City could be on the cutting edge of a nationwide trend.

"New York has its subways, LA is known for freeways, I'll take a beach cruiser any day," said Drew Fasy, the head of the Mayor's Council on Physical Fitness.

"Bicycles are part of our lifestyle; it's a quality of life issue."

Gathered to celebrate the completion of one phase of a planned city-wide bike path, the faithful promised the path would not only be part of a connector running from the Ninth Street Bridge to Mays Landing, it would help connect the North and South ends of the island from North Street to 35th Street on Idyllic, bike friendly Haven Avenue.

With the cutting of a bright blue ribbon on Friday morning, the Haven Avenue bike path was officially open for business. In unison, the city's five bike cops were the first official riders.

"This is a great example of a great community coming together," said Mayor Sal Perillo. Crediting a potpourri of city departments and civic organizations, including the Community Arts Project, CAP he said it was a "great coming together of a group of people" focused on a cause bigger than themselves. "The bike is the symbol of Ocean City and the symbol of the police department," he said.

The CAP has donated a large steel sculpture of a bicyclist in motion, which, when completed, will be on display at the corner of Ninth Street and Haven Avenue to officially dedicate the Bike Path while designating the beginning of the southbound route off of Ninth Street.

Perillo said city officials envision a "gateway" for Ninth Street as the new \$400 million Ninth Street Bridge comes to completion, with landscaping and other amenities. They hope the bike path coming off the bridge will seamlessly lead to Haven Avenue and the downtown.

The sculpture, signaling the bike path, he said, would be Ninth Street's greatest asset.

"We are excited to keep pedaling forward to beautify Ocean City," said Leslie Skibo, president of CAP, adding that the organization had painted murals, mosaics and commissioned statues at the city's Community Center. "This combines two passions, it's reflective of our love for biking and arts."

With the assistance and approval of the New Jersey Department of Transportation, NJDOT, Haven Avenue has stop signs at every street running East to West along Haven Avenue, including streets that used to be "cross streets," such as 10th, 14th, 18th and 24th Streets.

The path takes riders from the busy Ninth Street corridor past the public works department, behind the Intermediate School and Wesley Manor and through residential neighborhoods across 34th Street before ending in the wetlands. It winds through the Howard Stainton Wildlife Refuge from 24th Street to 28th Streets.

"We're very excited to be here," Fasy said. "It's been roughly a year that we have been talking about a dedicated bike route. Our goal is safer roads. We've worked with a lot of people to get this done, and the more people that got involved the more encouraged we became."

Each street has new 36 inch stop signs with painted signs indicating that bikes and automobiles are to "share the road." In addition, the speed limit has been lowered to 15 mph on Haven Avenue to discourage through traffic.

The city unveiled new "sharrows" painted on the road, large bright white arrows with a bicyclist template to indicate to cars that they must share the road with bicyclists. Designated **OC 1**, it is the city's first official asphalt bike path. The famed Boardwalk is the original, and remains the premier bike thoroughfare, but officials hope the Haven Avenue bike path presents a nice alternative.

If residents like Chuck Betson are any indication, the bike path is sure to be a big hit.

"It's all good, it's all good," said Betson who followed the five members of the COP on their bikes. "Congratulations, it's just great. I am so enthusiastic about this bike path. You know what I like about it? You can use this at all hours; you're not confined to having to be off by noon like on the Boardwalk. It's spread out and it's not going to be crowded like the Boardwalk. It's nice to have an alternative without having to dodge a million people."

"I really love the section that goes through the wildlife sanctuary, that's really cool," he said. "I am psyched. If I want to ride I can hop on here and have a nice, safe ride. This is beyond cool."

Tom Heist IV worked closely with Fasy getting the bike path off the ground. "If the community comes out and uses it as we hope they do, there will be inertia, and the bike path will keep growing," he said. "Bicycling is definitely where we're heading, we want to keep pushing this, offering people more and more places to ride." Heist said communities like neighboring Linwood, Somers Point and Northfield use their bike paths as a safe route for children to ride to school. With Haven Avenue running along the back of the Intermediate School and within close proximity to both the high school and primary school, he said organizers are hoping to see parents and children riding to and from school and activities. "People are chomping at the bit for more of this," Heist said. "It's all about safety. Good projects have to be community driven and I think this one has definitely had a lot of support. We want people to come take a look at this and say, wow, why isn't it coming into my neighborhood? You know you've won when people are saying bring it to me. For us, this is about safe bike riding. We want to give people, and children, a safe alternative. "We're really happy to be able to provide an outlet for family bike riding, in a relaxed atmosphere," he said. "We'd really like to keep vehicular traffic down as much as possible on Haven Avenue. We're going to be trying some new things to discourage car traffic, other than people who live on Haven and want to park in front of their homes."

Niclas Elmer, owner of the Surf Buggy Center in Ocean City and the Tuckahoe Bike Shop, said he thought the bike path concept was "awesome." "People are riding a lot more than they used to," he said. "And they want to ride more than they are. We have a number of customers who are riding to work, but you can't do that just anywhere. Some people live or work on busy roads. Bike paths like Haven Avenue provide a nice alternative. "With gas being so expensive, people want an alternative to save money, but at the same time they see a bike as a way to get exercise and stay healthy," he said. "You can't go wrong; riding a bike is the healthiest way to get to work or school."