

Pedal power gears up for Bike to Work Day

By Pat Clark

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Spinning your wheels will be a good thing this week.

Your bicycle wheels, that is. Hundreds of people will take part across the region, the state and the country in annual Bike to Work Day rides and rallies, exercising their bodies while exercising their abilities to help the environment.

In Modesto, participants can join up at a morning event at Tenth Street Plaza from 6:30 to 8:30 a.m. on Thursday for a free breakfast of coffee, juice, rolls and fruit, as well as giveaways, including a free T-shirt to the first 150 people to join the party.

Bike to Work Day is a way to promote bicycling in general, and also as a means of commuting, Megan Distaso, Rideshare coordinator for the City of Modesto, said in an email interview.

"We want people to have fun and enjoy the morning, but also come away with positive feelings about biking," she said of Thursday's event. "Our goal is to show that bicycling is a true, viable alternative to driving each day."

Biking to work offers a double-pronged benefit, she said, both for community health by promoting exercise and for the environment by limiting car emissions.

"It is great exercise and you can get your workout done on your way to (and) from work," Distaso said. "Bicycling also reduces cars on the road, so this means a reduction in traffic and pollution."

That two-pronged benefit rings true for Modesto's Felicia Aleman, who often pedals her way to her job at Royal Robbins in McHenry Village to benefit both her health and the environment.

"Plus, I love my bike. Her name is Veronica. She was my first 'splurge' when I separated from my husband," she said in an email interview. "A 2010 Raleigh 7-speed beach cruiser."

Aleman's bicycle commute is just under 10 minutes, she said, which helps make it an enjoyable ride. This will be the first year she's specifically participated in the citywide event.

"I've heard about the event for a few years and I've been curious to attend," Aleman said. "The city has so many great events that I enjoy (like farmers market, Music in the Plaza), I'd like to give this one a try as well."

Similar kickoff morning parties will be held in other cities, according to Valley Bike Commute, including from 7 to 9 a.m. today in Newman at the Downtown Plaza; from 7 to 9 a.m. Friday at Escalon City Hall; and at 9 a.m. Saturday at the Turlock farmers market.

Valley Bike Commute serves as a resource for Bike to Work events and year-round support for bicyclists and pedestrians in San Joaquin, Stanislaus and Merced counties, according to its website, www.valleybikecommute.com. It's part of Commute Connection, a nonprofit program of the San Joaquin Council of Governments, Stanislaus Council of Governments and Merced County Association of Governments.

Distaso said she usually hears back from at least a few people each year who continue biking after the city's promotional event. "That is always very encouraging to hear," she said.

"I really encourage people to try biking on a small scale, perhaps once per week," Distaso said. "Sometimes people are hesitant to ride in traffic, but it really gets much easier the more you do it. And the more cyclists we have on the road, the more drivers become aware of cyclists. We all need to be courteous and share the roads."

She said that for those who prefer to avoid pedaling alongside cars, there are plenty of trails in Modesto that also offer a chance to work those leg muscles.

"I also really recommend our Dry Creek Trail and the Virginia Corridor Trail. Go biking with your whole family," Distaso said. "These are gems that we have available to us right here in Modesto."