

## Park the car and jump on a bike this week

Shanna McCord - Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — Jamie Uyematsu hasn't paid much attention to the \$4-a-gallon gas prices, and she doesn't worry about rising insurance premiums.

The 26-year-old optician pedals to her downtown office daily from her home near Branciforte Avenue on a lightweight bike that folds neatly into a package small enough to be tucked away out of sight.

Uyematsu's boss, Dr. Daniel Shen, who often rides one himself, helped pay for the fold-up bike, which costs about \$500, as a way to encourage his employees to commute by bike and reduce the need to buy permits for the parking garage. At least five of his nine employees took him up on his offer.

"It's a lifestyle change," Uyematsu said. "You don't have to give up every other mode of transit. It's just about being more creative in how you get around."

Santa Cruz County's 21st annual Bike Week, celebrated this week with a range of bike activities from Watsonville to Santa Cruz, hopes to get more people to think like Uyematsu -- to get in the practice of leaving their cars parked once in awhile and instead pedaling to work or school or the store.

The benefits of bike commuting are numerous, Bike Week organizers say. Hauling yourself to work on two wheels is a health boost for you and the environment. And with escalating gas prices, it's also a healthy financial move.

The weeklong Bike Week is expected to draw 5,000 people out on bikes for the various events, especially Thursday's Bike to Work/School Day, which includes free breakfasts handed out at more than 40 spots across the county.

Today's event involves a race in Watsonville between a cyclist, motorist, a rider on an electric bike, two riders on a tandem, and other forms of transportation. They'll compete to see who can navigate traffic and reach a particular destination first.

No numbers are kept on how many area residents make a habit of biking to school or work, said Piet Canin of Ecology Action, primary organizer of Bike Week.

However, Bike Week participation grew 24 percent in 2007 over 2006, Canin said.

There are numerous excuses to avoid biking to work or school, including safety, lack of time and the need to pack a change of clothes.

### BIKE WEEK SCHEDULE

TODAY: Commuter race.

WEDNESDAY: Food delivery, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the HUB, 703 Pacific Ave. Volunteers will transport the juice, muffins and bagels needed to feed 4,000 for Bike to Work/School Day.

THURSDAY: Bike to Work/School Day. Free breakfasts served around the county 6:30-9:30 a.m.

SATURDAY: Rail and Trail Day: a train ride from Depot Park in Santa Cruz to Felton. Bring your bike on the train and ride down Highway 9 with a CHP escort. Helmet required. \$6 adults, \$3 children under 12.

INFO: [www.bike2work.com](http://www.bike2work.com).

Bonnie McPike, a Bike Week coordinator with Ecology Action, hasn't let those issues slow her down. She said she bikes to her River Street office from home in Live Oak in about 15 minutes, and throws a pair of high heels into a pack to wear during the day.

"I try to pack my bag the night before," she said. "Now it's a routine I got into."

Martin Spierings, a logistics coordinator at Seagate in Scotts Valley, cycles to work from Seabright at least three or four days a week to get in the necessary mileage to keep his competitive edge as a triathlete.

He also leads other Seagate employees in Santa Cruz who are hesitant to try the bike commute alone. The group meets at 7:15 a.m. every Thursday at Java Junction on Seabright Avenue.

They then wind around town to Glen Canyon Road, a road with lighter, slower traffic than Graham Hill Road, which takes them up to Scotts Valley.

"It's a matter of getting over your first scare and doing it once," said Spierings, 31. "It's a good start to the day. You sort of get into the rhythm of doing it."

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