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Tour spreads their energy saving message in Austin

By Kristen Berns/Austin Daily Herald



The “Green Bike Tour” rolled into Austin on a soggy Friday afternoon to showcase the use of wind power and ethanol in the Midwest.

The renewable energy supporters took their message to the streets with their solar-powered, electric assisted bicycles.

The tour is highlighting energy projects while riding through five Midwestern states. In addition, bikers demonstrate uses of solar power. They stopped at Good Earth Natural Foods in downtown Austin to tour solar installation and later the Jay C. Hormel Nature Center to see the progression of a solar installation there.

At Good Earth Natural Foods, owner Owner Caron Jagodzinski gave the riders a donation to give to the nature center for the solar installation.

“The Green Bike Tour highlights clean energy projects that can make the Upper Midwest a leader of global warming solutions in the 21st Century,” a Fresh Energy, a non-profit organization leading the transition to a clean energy system with research,

advocacy and community engagement, press release said.

The bikers even had their bicycles equipped with solar panels to produce electricity to help with uphill rides and to play music.

The whole purpose of the ride was to bring awareness about global warming, renewable energy and how rural areas can benefit economically from renewable energy, rider and University of Iowa professor Thomas Cook said.

“Farmers can be sitting on a renewable energy gold mine,” he said.

Former Iowa state legislator, University of Iowa associate professor and rider David Osterberg also joined the team with his electric bike. He said his type of bike is popular in Europe and is only recently gaining in America. "A lot of people are doing clever things," he said, hoping to inspire others to learn about what people are doing with renewable energy. "Every place in America, people are doing something about global warming."

The bike tour began in Waterloo, Iowa, Sept. 21 at the Center for Energy and Environmental Education at the University of Northern Iowa. Bikers stop in cities like Austin, Mankato, LaCrosse, Wis., St. Peter, and others teaching and learning with local leaders the success and potential of renewable energy.

The tour will also visit wind farms, college campuses and other solar installations and complete the journey at the conference of Engineers for a Sustainable World in Iowa City, Iowa, on Sept. 28.

Riders joined the group in LaCrosse during a rally earlier Friday and students also joined the group at a stop at Luther College. While the group didn't gain any riders in Austin, they said their goal for this Midwestern stop was to raise awareness and give ideas.

"We want to get people's attention," Osterberg said. "Finally people are realizing that global warming is real."

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