



Sixth-grade students at Blue Heron Middle School on Tuesday spent their physical education class learning bicycle safety. Kees Kolff, a volunteer from The ReCyclery and the Port Townsend Cycle School, explains some final rules of the road to the eager riders before biking off on a route of discovery around the local neighborhoods, out to North Beach and to Fort Worden. (Jeannie McMacken/Peninsula Daily News)

## Blue Heron Middle School students pedal in a new curriculum in Port Townsend

By Jeannie McMacken

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**PORT TOWNSEND** — Blue Heron Middle School students are learning how to operate bicycles safely through a program that gets them outside to discover local neighborhoods and trails as part of the curriculum.

Kees Kolff, board member of the ReCyclery and the Port Townsend Cycle School, working in conjunction with the Port Townsend School District, put all sixth-, seventh- and eighth-grade school children on bikes for two weeks as part of their physical education classes.



“Working with physical education teacher Mark Tallarico, volunteers teach kids how to ride safely,” Kolff said. “We give them lots of exercise, too, which we think is good for their academic performance.”

\$25,000 grant

Kolff said The ReCyclery helped the school district write a grant for \$25,000 that paid for 30 bikes and a trailer. Another trailer and 30 bikes belong to the city.

“The city was part of a pilot program with Blue Heron,” Kolff said. “They partnered to be part of an eight-session safe walking and biking curriculum that has been adopted by the Washington State Department of Transportation and Department of Public Instruction.”

Jonathan Arp, mechanic at The ReCyclery, was on hand at the school Tuesday morning to check over the bikes to ensure they were in the best working order.

“There are 60 bikes available that range from single-speed 20- and 24-inch bikes to 7-speed 24- and 26-inch bikes,” Arp said. “The kids choose their own and like riding certain bikes.”

When it was time for PE class to begin Tuesday morning, students sprinted from the front door to the waiting bikes, heading directly to their favorites. Many jumped on and sped off, riding around the parking lot circuit while waiting for the road trip of discovery to begin.

Arp spent some time working on seat adjustments and made sure all the gears were working properly. Every student had a helmet and all were anxious to get going.

Kolff talked to the students about safety and then broke the group into three sections, each student deciding which route to take.

The road to North Beach was one choice, to Fort Worden was another.

Volunteer Nora Petrich led one group on a trail ride around the school grounds.

“There is no way the school can do this with one P.E. teacher and 35 children on bikes out in traffic,” Kolff said. “The program is dependent on volunteers who work from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.”

Other options for students are off-road rides through Cappy’s Trails, and a trip to Point Wilson Lighthouse and through the bunkers at Fort Worden.

The classes are typically 50 minutes long; some days they are 80 minutes. The longer days allow for more miles and more discovery, typically rides to Chetzemoka Park.

“This is our second week and we do it five days a week, working with about 180 kids a day,” Kolff said.

As the kids rode away behind their leaders, they settled down and started peddling, off to spend some classroom time out in nature, giving their bodies a workout in the process.

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