

Gearing up

A new Western bike-share program preaches power of the pedal

KEEP YOUR EYES on city streets this fall and you may notice the occasional flash of purple whizzing by. Fifteen bikes belonging to the Purple Bikes program will be on the road by September, and if Alison Fine has her way that number will grow exponentially over the coming year.

Fine is one of the Western students behind Purple Bikes, an initiative that is part bike-sharing service and part bicycle repair co-op.

Fine's first experience with a bicycle co-op came when she was an undergrad student at McMaster in Hamilton. When she came to London to study dentistry, she assumed Western would have a similar program. "I got here and my tire broke and I asked, 'Where's the bike co-op?' Luckily, members of the bike racing club at Schulich [School of Medicine & Dentistry] helped me out."

That incident led to partnerships with like-minded people, including fellow student and Purple Bikes co-chair Diane Burns, EnviroWestern and campus police who have donated unclaimed bicycles recovered on campus. In true Western tradition, the freshly painted bikes are purple and proud. "We're not too worried about people stealing them," says Burns.

Almost half of Canadian universities have bike programs, so both Fine and Burns were surprised that Western, with its 30,000 students, did not. Their first step in establishing the co-op was to conduct research, starting last fall with a campus-wide survey of students and staff. More than 90 per cent of respondents were interested in beginning to cycle or

currently owned a bike and indicated they would be supportive of a Purple Bikes program. "It helped that the city buses were on strike," Fine says wryly, "we got a great response."

Even without the fortuitous timing, Fine was pretty sure students would embrace the concept. For their \$5 annual fee, Purple Bike members who are Western students can borrow a bike for up to 48 hours. "As a student, it is great to have an inexpensive way to get out and explore the city. Along the river is a gorgeous place to bike, and if you go downtown, you don't have to pay for parking. Bike riding is my favourite form of transportation."

The co-op is also geared to students and London residents who own their own bikes. Purple Bike members needing repair work can purchase parts at cost and trained volunteers will provide advice and guidance throughout the repair process. "The co-op is open to everyone in the community to encourage people to start taking bikes and stop taking cars," says Fine.

With a vision of getting a lot more Londoners out on their bikes year-round, Fine concedes that not everyone feels safe riding on city streets. To that end, the Purple Bike program also aims to educate both bicyclists and drivers about biking etiquette. **KYRA WOLFE**



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purple



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Alison Fine, co-chair of Purple Bikes