

Remarks by David Wilson, president, Bike Walk Alliance of Westchester & Putnam

9/28/2010 Bronxville Women's Club

Welcome to the celebration of bike advocacy and passage of Merrill's Law. What an outpouring of support from old and new friends, from cyclists and the bike industry, from friends and family of Merrill Castle, and to new partners, like Westchester ARC, the social service agency for kids with developmental disabilities, which cyclists have supported for so many years, raising millions of dollars for the nonprofit. And now the nonprofit is giving back to the cycling community, which has supported Westchester ARC for so many years.

First, would like to thank the volunteers and my friends from Westchester Cycle Club – Judy Tripodi arranged the food; Laura Griswold did our beautiful program; Amy Balter got the wine; Gary Steinel is handling the Captain Lawrence; Richard Ruge, Joan Billows, Lorri ovryn, Deb Keiser Nadia Loniado helped with setup; Karen Ferdinand and John Petti are selling raffles, our Golden Apple coordinator Kate Marshall at the door.

Also like to recognize the public officials who are here – county leiglstors Tom Abinanti, Jim Maisano and John Nonna; state legislaltors Paulin and Stewart-cousins, mayor Fitzpatrick and trustees Claire Gorman.

We are the Bike Walk Alliance of Westchester and Putnam. And Alliance is the key word here because we've been successful over the past 18 months of our existence through alliances and partnerships throughout the region. It began with the Westchester Cycle Club, the recreational club that runs the Golden Apple and will sponsor close to 1,000 member-led rides throughout the region.

We have people from the regional cycling community – our friends from the New York Cycling Club. We have folks from the non-profit world, who have been on he receiving end of fundraising by cyclists. We have public officials like Amy Paulin and Andrea Stewart Cousins, and Dave DeLucia, Westchester County's deputy parks commissioner.

And we have the cyclists themselves, the people out there on the road, and in town halls, Peter McCartt of Eastchester, and Rona Shapiro from the Yonkers Bike Club, and Donna Jackson from Mount Vernon. The work done by citizens of Eastchester, through the Eastchester Environmental Committee, is a model for other communities to emulate. Working together with town officials, they've put down sharrows - broad stencils that alerts motorists and cyclists that this road is good for riding – on California Road and have promoted bike riding throughout the town and its villages.

We also have people here who remember Merrill Cassell, the former budget director of the United Nations and an ardent cycling advocate who was sideswiped by a Beeline bus last November and killed. The bus rider didn't get a ticket and was out driving the next day.

This law evolved from his tragic death, and tonight we're here to announce our statewide bike-safety campaign, to help educate motorists and cyclists about safe riding on our roads.

It will start with a 30-second video clip, which we'll put up on YouTube and circulate through social media, with our friends in the New York cycling community, helping spread the word. It will detail how cyclists need to wear helmets, obey the rules of the road and ride consistently on the right-hand shoulder. And it will show how cars should pass, according to Merrill's Law, at a safe distance, giving cyclists at least a three-foot buffer when they pass.

In addition, we're going to develop a cycling jersey, with a graphic on the back, that will depict what a safe distance means, so cyclists wearing the jerseys will be part of the educational campaign.

The bike safety campaigns are part of our efforts to make Westchester and Putnam counties more friendly for cyclists and pedestrians. We've made great strides since Westchester Cycle Club held its Bike Commuter of the year contest in 2008, and Karin Weisburgh, who commutes daily from Larchmont to Consumers union in Yonkers, was the winner.

At the press conference that day in Yonkers, there was such a positive energy, which led to the 2009 Westchester Bike Summit, support from the Westchester Community Foundation and a chance to rally cycling advocates and work with municipal officials and planners.

In 2009, we celebrated when County Executive Andy Spano backed our call to install bike racks on county buses, despite the opposition of the county's transportation commissioner. We were dismayed, however, when the current administration reversed that policy, and we plan to re-energize that campaign, to bring Westchester in line with 80 percent of the public bus systems in America.

That effort will be part of our growing relationship with Westchester County. We met last week with the Environment Committee of the County Board of Legislators, and plan to continue those discussions on how best to develop a countywide bike and pedestrian initiatives. The county has made important investments in creating the South and North County trailways. And none was more important than the decision this year to invest more than \$2 million in completing the final two-mile stretch in Yonkers. We'll be at the groundbreaking for the completion of the South County Trailway on Friday, Oct. 8. And I urge folks here to join me in a bike ride that morning,

which will arrive at the groundbreaking at 9.45, to show county officials we appreciate this investment. I'm starting my ride in Mahopac, and hope folks will join along the way.

There are other issues in play as well. There's the \$1 million federal grant obtained in 2002 by the city of Yonkers and Westchester County, which remains dormant because neither have provided the matching funds needed to unlock the federal funding. The project, which will link to trails in the Bronx, is on a state planning schedule for 2013, and we hope the city and county funding will be provided.

We're also working with communities along the Sound Shore to put up signs along the East Coast Greenway as it comes through 15 miles of Westchester roads. That process – which began in 2003 but stalled – became revived this summer after the village of Mamaroneck proposed a bike parking ordinance with some particularly onerous penalties – fines of up to \$250 and up to 15 days in jail for mis-parking your bike.

Village officials reached out to us for our comments, and when a dozen of us showed up at the public meeting, they listened to our point of view, and quickly sat down to revise the ordinance. It was the beginning of a great partnership that continued on Sept. 13, when the village board voted to install signs along the Greenway – which goes on palmer to Halstead Ave on its way to Calais Maine, and reached out to other municipalities to follow suit.

With your help, we can continue this work, which takes considerable time and energy during working hours. So thanks for your support, and we look forward to safe riding and walking throughout the lower Hudson Valley.