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PedalPower Youth Bike Program Brings Skills and Safety Training to Ashland's Elementary Students

ASHLAND, OR — During the 2025-2026 school year, every 4th and 5th grader in the Ashland School District will receive comprehensive bicycle safety education. The PedalPower Youth Bike Program represents a new dawn for youth bike safety in Southern Oregon and a reinvigoration of a beloved pre-pandemic program.

PedalPower began in the early 2000s as a collaboration between Ashland Parks and Recreation and Rogue Valley Transportation District (RVT), but was discontinued during the pandemic. A reboot of the program has been hampered by severe federal funding cuts at RVT and the need to replace aging equipment. Beginning in fall 2024, the Ashland Climate Collaborative joined the partnership to help with additional fundraising and promotional support.

"PedalPower sparks joy and embodies our vision for a healthier, more sustainable community," said Erin O'Kelley Muck, executive director of the Ashland Climate Collaborative. "By giving our youth the skills and confidence to ride safely, we're investing in our children now, and in a future culture of active transportation, reduced pollution, and a more resilient community."

The new PedalPower Youth Bike Program has been realized with support from Ashland Parks and Recreation, RVT, Ashland Climate Collaborative and their Streets For Everyone action team, Ashland Community Health Foundation, Schwemm Family Foundation, Ashland Schools Foundation, Carrico Family Foundation, and Rotary Club of Ashland.

Thanks to these sponsors, the program has undergone a complete transformation in 2025:

- Replaced the aging fleet of 35 bicycles with brand new bikes for 4th and 5th grade students

- Purchased an enclosed trailer for safe transport and storage
- Acquired new helmets and additional safety equipment
- Brought on additional certified instructors
- Created an official PedalPower program identity with a new logo

In the 2024 school year, the program served 145 students at Helman and Bellview elementary schools. This fall, all 362 4th and 5th graders across Ashland's five public elementary schools will participate in a ten-hour on-bike skills and safety course.

"The kids get a huge confidence boost knowing that they have the skills to ride safely in our community, and that's what this is all about," said Mike Vergeer, a Streets For Everyone volunteer who has been instrumental in expanding the program. "This year's progress represents so many hours of work by dedicated volunteers and partners. Most importantly, it means hundreds of Ashland kids will grow up confident, skilled cyclists."

Ashland Parks and Recreation and the Ashland Parks Foundation have been integral since the inception of the PedalPower program, raising funds via the annual Ashland Community Bike Swap held each April since the early 2000s. The proceeds generated from the Bike Swap have funded major program components.

PedalPower includes both the Youth Bike Program and the Community Bike Shop that operates out of the Grove, located at 1195 E. Main St. in Ashland. At the Community Bike Shop, dedicated volunteers give hundreds of hours to repairing donated bicycles, and will maintain the new bikes purchased for the program's instructional fleet. Work parties take place on Tuesdays from 5:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. and/or Thursdays from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

The continued success of the entire PedalPower program relies heavily on its volunteers, according to Ashland Parks and Recreation volunteer manager Sulaiman Shelton. "The support from volunteers is crucial in maintaining this partnership and program," said Shelton.

Already this school year, students at Helman Elementary and TRAILS Outdoor School have received instruction. "The PedalPower program is mindblowingly awesome," said Dan Ruby, a member of the Ashland School Board. "I got to volunteer with TRAILS last week to help out, and I was so, so impressed. Several kids told me it was the best day they've ever had at school."

The program's future plans include expanding to serve kindergarteners and 1st graders in Ashland, then extending to Talent and Phoenix elementary schools — ultimately teaching over 1,300 students annually. To achieve this vision, the program organizers say they would need funding for 35 additional balance bikes, helmets, and a dedicated program manager position.

For community members and organizations interested in learning more about PedalPower or volunteering, please visit ashlandclimate.org/pedalpower.

To make a monetary donation, please send a check to Ashland Parks Foundation, 340 S. Pioneer St., Ashland OR 97520. Write PedalPower in the memo line.

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About Ashland Parks and Recreation

The mission of Ashland Parks and Recreation is to provide and promote recreational opportunities and to preserve and maintain public lands. Ashland Parks and Recreation is a department of the City of Ashland with an elected Parks Commission of five (5) members that oversees park and recreation policies.

About Ashland Parks Foundation

Established in 1995, the mission of Ashland Parks Foundation (APF) is to enhance Ashland's quality of life with financial support for its parks and recreation programs. APF accepts tax-deductible contributions that support the 18 Parks and 800 acres of land and trails within Ashland, including Lithia Park and North Mountain Park. APF also provides financial support for programs and projects of Ashland Parks and Recreation.

About Ashland Climate Collaborative

The Ashland Climate Collaborative is a 501(c)3 formed in 2022 to serve as a hub for community-based action to reduce Ashland's climate footprint and build a resilient community. With community action teams that focus on topics of transportation, home energy, composting, water conservation, and wildfire preparedness, the collaborative aims to ensure a healthy, equitable, culturally and economically vibrant community now and for future generations.