

TRAIL OF GEARS

By Lauren Hammack Photo by K.O. Rinearson

Cycling enthusiast and bicycle shop owner Hal McKnight is hitting the trail, joining thousands of cyclists around the 11 miles of trails that surround Lake Hefner. After a \$1.9 million face-lift that included months of repairs and renovations, the Lake Hefner Dam Road has recently reopened.

McKnight sees the improvements as a major victory for the 15,000+ trail users who walk, jog and cycle in the area. "People really identify with and are impassioned by the area around Lake Hefner," McKnight explains.

"Impassioned" better describes McKnight himself. The owner of Wheeler Dealer bicycle shop (2729 NW 59th) for 36 years is on a mission to see that Oklahoma City becomes the bicycle-friendly city he envisions it to be. His hopes for a kinder, gentler cycling city fall right in line with the mayor's campaign to see OKC shed its pudgy image as one of the 10 most obese cities in the United States.

"The mayor (Mick Cornett) and the city manager (Jim Couch) get it," McKnight asserts, suggesting that the two city officials are equally committed to improving not only the city's image, but also its overall health.

McKnight cites the "Oklahoma City Bicycle Transportation Plan," approved this spring by the Oklahoma City Council, as a specific example of our evolution into a bicycle-friendly burg. The first phases of the Oklahoma City Bicycle Transportation Plan are designed to create 220 miles of "Share-the-Road" bicycle lanes on existing roadways and shoulders. A second phase, which hasn't yet been funded, would create an additional 330 miles.

After decades of commitment to augmenting the trails around Oklahoma City, McKnight expresses optimism and pride for the official show of support. "I'm proud of the city for committing to improve and

build a tapestry of multi-use trails around the city," McKnight says. "It makes a statement about the quality of life our city hopes to project."

Several other projects underway in the metro will "leave no cyclist behind," according to McKnight. Oklahoma City voted on and passed a general obligation bond last December, which raised more than \$12 million to construct and improve multi-use trails, including the construction of a bridge over Northwest Expressway from Lake Overholser to Lake Hefner.

Another recent bond issue will build a proposed trail along Grand Boulevard, connecting to the Deep Fork trail near Bishop McGuinness Catholic High School and connecting with the Katy trail, which will run from Remington Park to the River trail.

"What's so important about improving our trail system is that it allows people to have routes to go to and from work, connecting residential and commercial areas," McKnight says, pointing out that he's never seen a higher number of customers buying bicycles for alternative transportation, health and economics than he sees today.

McKnight has served as the chairman of the Oklahoma City Trail Advisory Committee for the past five years. He praises several officials and enthusiasts who have helped the city unveil the beginnings of more trails than ever throughout the community, including Larry Ogle, Assistant Director of Parks and Recreation, Lance Gross of the Oklahoma City Planning Department, Bob Thorpe, president of "Friends of the Trail Foundation," Bill Wiley and city councilman Sam Bowman, a staunch advocate of sidewalks and trails throughout Oklahoma City.

You can learn more about the new bicycle paths at www.wheelerdealerbicycles.com. While you're out hitting that trail this fall, it's good to remember the man who blazed it... Hal McKnight. ■

