

TRIBUNE-REVIEW

'Ghost bike' a cautionary visual

By Jewels Phraner

LIGONIER ECHO

Thursday, September 1, 2011

A glowing white bicycle on a grassy knoll greets drivers rounding the bend near Darlington Fire Department on Darlington Road.

The bike, painted completely white, was put on display to make drivers more aware of cyclists.

Ligonier Township resident Don Clemens, who set up the bike, said he thought motorists need that reminder to slow down.

"A lot of people speed through here -- sometimes going as fast as 50 to 60 mph -- but there are bicycle groups using the road during the summer and fall, and a lot of neighborhood kids on bikes. I thought the bike would be appropriate to get people to slow down," Clemens said.

Starting in St. Louis in 2003, "ghost bikes" typically are placed to mark a site where a cyclist died or was injured, but also serve "as quiet statements in support of cyclists' right to safe travel," according to ghostbikes.org.

Ghostbikes.org, a database that documents where the symbols are placed, is maintained by New York City's Street Memorial Project. Officials decline comment on bikes placed outside of New York. Clemens said he got the idea for the ghost bike from the website.

Ligonier Valley Trail coordinator Rose Stepnick said the winding Darlington Road is dangerous for pedestrians and cyclists.

"Bikers have to be able to stay on the road; therefore, automobiles and trucks need to realize around every corner there could be a runner or a cyclist," she said.

Stepnick supports Clemens' message.

"I think it's a necessary idea. But I worry what might happen is people who use the ghost bikes as a symbol they cherish to honor their biking friends who have lost their lives might feel that it's sending a mixed message to drivers," she said.

Clemens initially locked the bike to a 35-mph sign, but Ligonier Township police asked him to move it. Zoning Officer Cindy Turley said the bike could have interfered with snow removal and other road maintenance.

"I originally thought that, visually, it would serve as a better reminder to slow down than the sign it was posted to, but I think where it is now will still have an effect on drivers," Clemens said.

Ghost bikes can be found in more than 150 cities. Seven mark cyclists' deaths in Western Pennsylvania.

Greensburg cyclist Scott Raygor installed one memorializing Anthony Stephen Chianese, 21, who died after colliding with a pickup while riding his bicycle. The bike is posted along Mt. Pleasant Road, south of Neiderhiser Road in Mt. Pleasant Township.

"I didn't know him, other than riding past him a few times. But his story really, really hit me. I'm on the same roads he rode on all the time," Raygor said.

He said he knows the dangers of biking alongside vehicles.

"I've been grazed a few times, and a pickup truck's side-view mirror hit me one time. There's no doubt that there needs to be more awareness out there," Raygor said.

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