

Downtown commuter center has secure indoor bicycle spaces

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By Joyce Gannon, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette



Pam Panchak/Post-Gazette

Bill Gatti, president of the Trek Development Group, on the site of the new Bicycle Commuter Center in the Cultural District, Downtown.

Real estate developer Bill Gatti was overseeing conversion of the Century Building in Pittsburgh's Cultural District into residential apartments in 2008 when gas prices shot up to more than \$4 a gallon.

When he noticed people seriously beginning to consider alternatives to driving, he thought perhaps more Downtown commuters would try biking to work if they had a secure place to leave their two-wheelers. An informal poll of his 10 Trek Development employees found, "If gas hit \$10 a gallon, we'd get everybody to bike."

Then gas prices fell, and the majority of workers kept driving.

But Mr. Gatti, who sometimes bikes to his Downtown office from his home in Shadyside, still believed that there was adequate demand for a bicycle commuter center.

While Pittsburgh has a way to go to rival bike-commuting capitals like Portland, Ore., or Amsterdam, those who want to pedal to work now have a new place to stash their bikes. The city's first bicycle commuter center - a prominent fluorescent green facility with a black-and-white bicycle painted above it on the north side of the Century Building - opened last month on Seventh Street between Penn Avenue and Fort Duquesne Boulevard.

With the kickoff Friday of the first in a series of car-free Fridays throughout the region, Mr. Gatti and others who provided financing and support for the \$164,000 bicycle commuter center project hope it will attract wider attention and use.

The monthly car-free Fridays series was launched last year by Bike Pittsburgh, a nonprofit that promotes safe and accessible bike transportation, to encourage commuters not to drive solo to work and instead to bike, walk or ride public transportation. It will be held the third Friday of each month in May through October.

This month's car-free Friday coincides with Bike to Work Day and falls during National Bike Month - timely exposure for the new commuter center, proponents say.

Though the city has more than 300 public bike racks, the new commuter center "is unique because it's secure and covered," said Lisa Kay Schweyer, program developer for the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission's CommuteInfo program that promotes ride sharing and helped to fund the commuter center.

Of the center's 26 indoor spaces, about 20 have been leased, said Mr. Gatti. Fifteen outdoor spots are free to the public, but indoor spots cost \$100 a year plus a \$10 key deposit. Lease holders access the center with an electronic key.

The Cultural Trust donated the land - valued at about \$25,000, Mr. Gatti said - and the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission provided two federal grants totaling \$117,000. Trek Development contributed \$22,000.

The center is made of recycled metal shipping containers sanded, painted and installed by Guardian Construction; it was designed by Moshier Studio and Koning Eizenberg Architecture.