

By **KENT JACKSON**
Staff Writer

Bicycling to work saves gas, keeps riders healthy and curbs air pollution, but Al Martino has another reason to ride.

"I can get to work two minutes quicker than driving my car," said Martino, who commutes four miles between Park Avenue and Waller Street in Wilkes-Barre.

On national Bike to Work Day on Friday Martino invites other bicycle commuters to join him at 12:30 p.m. for a lunch break in Public Square in Wilkes-Barre.

Around the region and the nation, people like Martino are suggesting that adults consider riding bicycles to improve their quality of life and create more livable cities.

As more people pedal to work or school, traffic congestion lessens.

Martino said bicycles can bring people to businesses in downtowns where their presence also deters crime.

In Wilkes-Barre, he is circulating a petition asking the city council to consider creating bike lanes.

"If bike lanes are implemented, they help end the guessing of where the biker is going to turn. You improve safety a lot," he said.

Philadelphia dedicated new bicycle lanes on Cedar and Spruce streets this year. A \$375,000 grant to install 2,600 bicycle racks helped Philadelphia win a Sustainable Community Award last week.

In the Hazleton area, But-

ler Township created a bicycle lane for the Drums Elementary/Middle School three years ago. A bicycle lane also is marked on Route 309 in Mountain Top.

On Wednesday during a meeting of the regional transportation planning organization, committee members discussed grant applications, including a request for bicycle racks in Hazleton.

Hazleton Public Transit submitted the grant for \$8,000 to buy and place racks at the new bus station on Mine Street and other locations, city Engineer John Ackerman said.

The Laurel Mall, the Hazleton Area Public Library and Whispering Willows Park in Conyngham are among the places in Greater Hazleton that already provide bicycle racks.

Even without racks, people who want to try bicycling often can store their bike inside their workplace or by locking to a pole.

Riders pulling an old bike out of the garage should make a safety check before they start to pedal. Tom Jones of Around Town Bicycles in Wilkes-Barre said.

Jones said to check the tire pressure, spin the wheels to make sure they're straight and squeeze the brakes to

A SAFE COMMUTE

The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation offers encouragement and advice to bicycle commuters through its website, www.pacommute.net.

- Be visible. Wear bright clothes and piece lights and reflectors on the bike.
- Carry a pump, a patch kit, spare tube, drinking water and cell phone.
- Don't be crowded off the road. PennDOT says bicyclists have a legal right to a lane so they should take as much room as you need to feel safe.

considering it more," Jones said.

In Bloomsburg, a college town, it isn't just students who ride.

"Biking has changed. It used to be the college students to people in their 20s and 30s. Now I have people

50, 60 and in their 70s buying new bikes to exercise," Frans Verstraeten, the owner of the Dutch Wheelman bicycle shop, said.

Verstraeten, who grew up racing bicycles in Europe, still commutes 10 miles to the shop in 35 or 40 minutes, about 15 minutes longer than the trip takes in a car.

"We're lucky in this area. We have so many nice, back roads," he said.

To keep safe, he uses a lights, as state law requires after dark. He also obeys other laws that require bicyclists to ride on the right side of the road, just like a

motor vehicle. "Some go on the left side. That's the wrong side," Verstraeten said.

He stays on the road when cars pass because the lip at the edge of the road can upset a bicyclist.

"It's safer to stay on and force the car to go around you," he said.

jackson@standardintelligencer.com