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Park gets new riding option

Donated tricycle is designed for adults with disabilities

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Tara Bustard rides an adaptive tricycle at Bellevue State Park. The trike can be borrowed for two hours at a time.

BELLEVUE -- Tara Bustard, 28, never had ridden a bicycle before last week. Bustard, who has Down syndrome, has problems with balance which preclude riding anything with two wheels.

"I've looked for years for something Tara could ride both safely and enjoyably but couldn't find anything," said Bustard's mother, Pat Maichle, a senior administrator with the Delaware Developmental Disabilities Council.

Maichle wanted to find an outdoor activity Bustard could participate in beyond Special Olympics, where Bustard is a multiple medal winner in swimming.

Enter Terri Hancharick, chairwoman of the Adult Transition Services Committee of the Governor's Council for Exceptional Citizens, who learned from the University of Delaware's Center for Disabilities Studies of a Massachusetts program that advocates universal access to parks.

"I learned from the Massachusetts program that bicycling is a relatively easy activity to increase accessibility for people with disabilities in our parks systems," she said.

Hancharick contacted the Delaware Bicycle Council, which runs free rental programs at three of Delaware's state parks and learned of a New York company called Rifton which manufactures a three-wheeled bicycle for adults with disabilities.

"My daughter has used their therapy equipment for many years," Hancharick said, "and when I called to ask them for the donation of an accessible bike for Bellevue State Park, they didn't hesitate."

On June 16, at a presentation coordinated by the center with several state agencies, a Rifton Adaptive Tricycle was donated to Bellevue State Park to add to its inventory of adult and children-

sized bicycles.

"The federal stimulus package will provide Delaware school districts with \$30 million in stimulus money over the next two years, specifically earmarked for purchasing equipment for students with disabilities," Lt. Gov. Matt Denn said at the presentation. "We hope this equipment will be enjoyed by as many people as possible."

In addition to recreation, the adaptive tricycle also is a tangible symbol of a much broader and meaningful initiative for people with disabilities. Fifty percent of respondents to center surveys engaged in no physical activity on a regular basis.

"I'm happy for this opportunity," Bustard said as she mounted and strapped herself into the Rifton tricycle. "I'm going to use it to help me lose some weight."

"Looks like I have to get a bike of my own, then," her mom said.

Providing increased recreational opportunities also helps close a challenging gap that occurs when children with disabilities become adults.

"When my daughter, Brigitte, was young, there were so many opportunities for her," Hancharick said. "We would spend our evenings doing Girl Scouts, horseback riding, children's camps and challenger league T-ball. Most of the opportunities that were available to her when she was a child are no longer available in the adult world, or are not available because her orthopedic issues have gotten much worse as she has aged into adulthood."

Hancharick added that individuals such as her daughter do not have many opportunities to make friends.

"Their friends are people who are paid to be with them or people from their own families," she said. "That is why I am so excited about what is happening here today. People of all abilities can come out to this park and ride bikes or go on the accessible swings. They can be physically active to the best of their abilities and most importantly make friends."

Bustard, who works in support services for Bank of America, plans to tell friends and colleagues about the tricycle.

"I'll be planning more trips to the park from now on," she said, as she pedaled off.

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