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Photographs by Laurie Gabaard

Incoming students at Kent School got a chance to meet before classes began when 80 students took part in a bike tour of Kent.

Bike ride introduces students to classmates and Kent

BY STEVE MORTON
Staff Reporter

Everyone knows there's nothing more nerve-wracking than the first day of high school. The stress, the anxiety, the tension. But if you had the chance to meet your classmates in an out-of-school activity before that first day, it might help cope with the first-day jitters.

Last Sunday, new students at the private Kent School gathered for a chance to meet their future classmates during a specially organized bike ride and tour that stretched 15 miles.

The event was created by local business owner Sal Lilienthal, proprietor of The Bicycle Tour Co.

Mr. Lilienthal came up with the idea to hold a bike tour for freshmen beginning studies at the Kent School to give them a chance to meet one another in a

social environment.

According to Mr. Lilienthal, he suggested his idea to Kent School Dean of Students Jim MacLeod. Together the two men set the gears for the event in motion.

"It's a great trip," said Mr. Lilienthal. "There's no pressure on the kids. They can go at their own pace and really have a good time."

According to Mr. Lilienthal, the trip started at the Kent School on Route 341, where more than 80 incoming students gathered early Sunday morning. From there, the students, a handful of teachers and Mr. Lilienthal and his staff of helpers toured the back roads of Kent and South Kent.

The trip ran through Camps Flats to West Meeting House Road, through Barker Road in Merryville, to Cherniske Road, past Kent Hollow Road and ended at Lake Warramaug State Park just past the golf course.

At their final destination, bikers played games and were treated to a catered lunch provided by Kent's Davis IGA.

"It provided students the chance to get to know each other in an outside atmosphere," Freshmen Class Dean Mark Traina said. "It's like an orientation for students. It helps them be more comfortable." Mr. Traina also helped organize the trip.

The bike ride, according to Mr. Lilienthal, lasted two hours before students returned to school by bus from Lake Warramaug.

Mr. Lilienthal supplied the Cannondale mountain bikes for the trip.

"There's a marked difference in the level of communication and the students ability to reach out," Mr. Traina commented. "The trip helps them academically in the long-run by helping them socially."

Mr. Lilienthal has participated and planned numerous bike-related trips and events for the past 18 years.

In the 1992 National Olympics, he served as a mechanic for the United States Olympic Bicycle Team. During 1994-96, he was part of the Motorola Cycling Team, the top American professional cycling team, which had received national recognition in the sports world, according to Mr. Lilienthal.

"I have always enjoyed working with the community, especially the bicycling community," Mr. Lilienthal said. "I came to Kent for its scenic environment. It's a great place to have these kinds of tours."

Mr. Lilienthal opened his Bicycle Tour Company on Main Street, Kent in 1997. This is the second bike tour his company has held for Kent School students.

"I hope the school asks me to plan it again next year," he said.