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Program to offer UNC students bikes when they need them

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CHAPEL HILL – Students at UNC who need a bike but didn't bring one to campus will soon be able to borrow one in much the same way they can borrow a book from the library.

A new bike-sharing program titled Tar Heel Bikes will kick off on Thursday by making 30 new bikes available to students who can borrow them for free for up to 24 hours using their student identification cards.

The two-year pilot program was created by the Bike Share Task Force in conjunction with the Residence Hall Association. The kick-off Thursday is from 2-5 p.m., at UNC's Student & Academic Service Plaza.

The program is the brainchild of business students and rising juniors Danny Allen of Greensboro and Akhil Jariwala of Raleigh who want to provide bikes to students who need them, promote sustainable practices and create a bike culture on campus.

"It's something that they can take with them their whole life, that bicycle transportation is a good, healthy, sustainable alternative to motor vehicles," Allen said.

The bikes will be available at Craige, Ehringhaus and Hinton James Residence Halls. They'll be hitched to new blue bike racks denoting Tar Heel Bikes.

Students who need a bike will simply go to the residence hall's front office and use their One Card to checkout one out. It's free for students who return bikes in good shape and on time. Damages to bikes will simply be charged to students' One Cards.

"These bikes will be available so they can go to the grocery store or if they're late for class," Allen said.

The bicycles for the program were bought from the Kona AfricaBike Three program, which donates bicycles to healthcare workers, schools, water monitoring officers, and goodwill organizations throughout sub-Saharan Africa.

For every two bikes purchased in the United States, Kona sends one abroad.

"We choose the Africa Bike because it's made really well and because for every two bikes you purchase they donate one to the KonaAfrica Bike program," Allen said. "That can have a pretty substantial impact."

Allen said in order to purchase the bikes, Tar Heel Bikes raised \$40,000 in grants

from the Residence Hall Association, The New Student & Carolina Parent Programs, UNC Housing and Residential Education, Strowd Roses Inc., ReCYCLERY NC and Renewable Energy Special Projects Committee (RESPC).

He said the next two years will be spent weighing the feasibility of the program, gauging interest and working out the kinks in anticipation of expanding it to include more bikes.

“To demonstrate feasibility we wanted to start with a small scale program, but even with 30 bikes it’s one of the largest programs of this type in the country,” Allen said.

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