

COMMUNITYconnections

POWERING LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS

Member shares love of biking with students

By Duane Kanagy, *Penn Lines Correspondent*

IN 2017, Michael Connelly, a co-op member in Carroll Valley, Adams County, began to share his lifelong enthusiasm for mountain biking with local students, many of whom are not involved in any organized sport.

At the time, Connelly attended a meeting of people exploring creating a mountain bike racing team in Adams County.

“Count me in,” he told the organizers.

Following that meeting, Connelly and fellow mountain biker Tony Gipe gathered six kids (including Connelly’s son) and formed the Adams County Composite Mountain Bike Team (ACCMTB). The group, supported by Adams Electric Cooperative and other local businesses, is open to Adams County boys and girls in grades 6-12. This year, the group includes 20-plus kids riding and training on Tuesday and Thursday nights during the summer to compete on weekends in September and October against other Pennsylvania teams. Pennsylvania now has 40 teams like ACCMTB, according to Connelly.

Riders are trained to race on single track trails in state parks and national forests. Courses are designed by the National Interscholastic Cycling Association (NICA) to challenge riders



FULL SPEED AHEAD: A young student concentrates on the course ahead during a pre-season “Team for a Day” event hosted by the Adams County Composite Mountain Bike Team in early May at the Liberty Mountain Resort in Carroll Valley.

PHOTO BY KIMBERLY CONNELLY

physically, yet not put them in harm’s way.

Connelly describes the group as an “adventure-based” team.

“Our goal is to ride safe and have fun,” he says. “Many of our first-year students have no mountain bike racing experience.”

The group can even loan bikes to students who do not yet own a mountain bike.

Connelly compared competitive mountain bike racing to cross country running. It is a private, independent sport, but participants are still part of a team. Unlike cross country racing though, mountain biking is not yet a recognized high school or collegiate sport.

The group shares five core values created by the NICA and the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Mountain Bike Cycling League (PICL):

- ▶ Inclusivity (every finish counts);
- ▶ Equality (everyone rides);
- ▶ Strong body (lifelong fitness);
- ▶ Strong mind (NICA athletes are students first); and
- ▶ Strong character (work hard, play fair, respect others).

The team helps students develop a lifelong athletic interest that provides the opportunity to enjoy the outdoors, stay healthy, and participate in riding with family and friends, according to the ACCMTB website.

By the time students are in middle or high school, the opportunity to join a team sport is limited, Connelly explains. Girls may have even fewer opportunities.

“It’s a competitive sport, but the goal is to create a healthy pattern and to enjoy riding for the rest of their lives,”



PHOTO BY DUANE KANAGY

FOR THE LOVE OF BIKING: Michael Connelly, head coach of the Adams County Composite Mountain Bike Team, is proud of the 22 Adams County students who will compete this fall and discover the benefits of riding and racing mountain bikes.

Connelly says. “It’s great to ‘see the light come on’ as these kids start to ride. It’s rewarding. ... The feedback from parents is that their kids have more confidence. They can thrive.”

The group has several goals for 2019, its third year, including continuing to get the word out, adding more female coaches and moving practice sessions from the bunny slope at Liberty Mountain Resort in Carroll Valley to a private farm closer to Gettysburg. The new location will include a two-and-a-half-mile trail that includes all the features a rider will see during competition.

For additional information, visit ACCMTB on Facebook or on the web at accmtb.org. 🌱