

Local Filmmaker Michael Bauch Chronicles What Long Beach Can Learn From Dutch Bike Culture

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When was the last time you discovered new elements of your neighborhood, said hello to the folks on the street, got in a good workout and grabbed the weekly groceries all in one trip?

Local independent filmmaker Michael Bauch raised such a question at the second screening of his 35-minute documentary “Riding Bikes with the Dutch,” a focused comparison on how the people of Amsterdam use bikes as a necessary appliance for life the way we use cars in Los Angeles.

The cultural perspective here and across the United States, according to Bauch’s film, is that we regard bicycles as either a children’s toy we are diverted from as we approach legal driving age, a high performance vehicle for those who like to wear spandex and dream of being the next Lance Armstrong, or a low status symbol for those who can’t afford a car.

Bauch’s film brings to light a different view of bicycles – that they are central to a culture that is healthy, environmentally conscious and efficient. Although his film began as more of a criticism of how unfriendly Los Angeles is about bicyclists, as the piece came together he watched Long Beach shift toward becoming a forerunner in the movement toward biking for healthier communities.

The film was screened on June 10 at the Art Theatre – the same venue where it premiered during the Long Beach Bike Festival in May. The annual festival is part of the Bike Long Beach campaign, the city’s plan to make Long Beach “the most bicycle friendly urban city in the nation.”

That same month, the Institute of Transportation Engineers presented the City of Long Beach with an award from the for best innovative project of the year for Belmont Shore’s green bicycle lane – or ‘sharrows’ – project, one of the first visible steps the city has taken toward making Long Beach more bike-friendly.

Other projects in the works this summer include the creation of Vista Bike Boulevard, a designated bike route along Vista Street that will make it safer for students to ride to Horace Mann Elementary, Lowell Elementary and Rogers Middle School, and protected bike lanes on Broadway and 3rd Street between Alamitos and Golden Avenues that will increase safety for both cyclists and motorists, benefit businesses from increased foot traffic and beautify the streetscape with landscaped dividers. The Long Beach City Council approved contracts for both projects on April 20 with MG Construction & Development Inc. and C.T. & F., Inc., respectively.

In his observations of Long Beach residents more than two years ago, Bauch says he failed to understand how others lacked the drive to ride. Most of his daily errands were local and within three miles of his home,



Long Beach resident Michael Bauch’s documentary, “Riding Bikes with the Dutch,” had its second showing at 4th Street’s Art Theatre on June 10. Members of the Long Beach bike community, elected officials and others from around town attended the viewing in celebration of the city’s goal to become the “Most Bike Friendly City” in the United States. (Photograph by the Business Journal’s Thomas McConville)



This is the image that independent filmmaker Michael Bauch saw upon his arrival to Amsterdam – a multi-story bicycle parking garage that exposed him and viewers of his film, “Riding Bikes with the Dutch,” to the strength of the bike culture in Holland. (Photograph courtesy of Michael Bauch)

and once he installed a basket on his bike, he was set to take his two-wheeler to the grocery store, bank, post office and cross-town meetings.

“Why am I the only weirdo on a bike?” Bauch told the audience at this month’s screening that he asked himself. “We need more weirdoes on bikes. We need more people on bikes.”

Bauch’s film chronicles the month he and his family spent in Amsterdam exploring the city’s bicycle culture. He documented 67 hours of biking, from a businessman in a suit and tie on his cell phone pedaling to work to a mother taking her children to school on a bicycle equipped for such precious cargo. People of all walks of life participate in the bike culture, and the film shows how the bicycle has been incorporated into the Dutch way of life.

“We don’t have to do things like the Dutch,” Bauch said at the film screening. “We can create our own unique bicycle culture, and I think we already have.”

In 2008, the League of American Bicyclists ranked Long Beach as the 23rd most bike friendly city in the U.S. with a bronze status among Bike Friendly Communities.

Bauch says using a bike can be just as easy as picking up the car keys if simple steps are made toward change. Bauch stores his bicycles in his backyard to make it easy to hop on and go.

“Just as someone would normally have that knee-jerk reaction to grab their car keys to go and run a short errand to the stores, I have a knee-jerk reaction to grab a bike,” Bauch says. “It’s just so easy to do that I just really wanted to spread the word. I figured making a movie about it would be the easiest thing to do. It’s one thing to tell people about it, but then it’s another thing seeing people doing it.”

Bauch says that one worldwide biking trend catching on is making bikes out of bamboo. Several companies are working with this sustainable resource that grows almost like a weed to make bicycle frames. The wheels and other parts are metal.

“You don’t need metal working tools to make these,” Bauch says. “They can be made in a simple shop with simple woodworking tools.”

Bamboo bikes are being made available to individuals in third-world countries who need alternative modes of transportation that not only get them to their workplace faster, but also are incredibly low cost. Calfee Designs of Santa Cruz has gained a reputation for its bamboo bike designs for everyday users and professionals over the years and has been highlighted by the Los Angeles Times. Check out bamboo bike designs at www.calfeedesign.com/bamboo.htm.

Environmental Simplicity And Efficiency Of Biking

Bauch thinks the bike is the best multitask tool and emphasized how ideal it is for short trips.

“I think that’s the low hanging fruit. The two miles or less area is where the bike is so great because if you start your car to do that short distance, the car isn’t even warmed up for 10 minutes,” Bauch says. “So you’re polluting twice as much or more, and you’re getting the worst gas mileage for these very short trips. Plus you’ve got to go fight the parking. So you have all of these things working against you with the car, plus you know you need 30 minutes of exercise a day anyway, so if you can incorporate your bike into that short trip it’s like you get everything in one shot.”

Bauch poses important questions about bike culture change on his Web site, including:

- Why do I see neighbors on my street getting in their cars just to drive around the block only to buy a loaf of bread?
- Why is almost two-thirds of our society in the U.S. overweight?
- Why do people regularly have to commute in traffic for over an hour each way everyday?
- Why do we continue our addiction to foreign oil?
- Why do we ignore the signs of climate change?

Bauch answers these questions on the site, explaining that old habits are hard to break.

“We have become a society that values bigger, faster, and more and we’ve lost sight of the larger picture,” the site reads. “What we are doing is simply not sustainable in the long term. Riding bikes certainly won’t fix all of these problems by itself, but it can be an integral part to a better life for everyone.”

So when was the last time you pedaled on two wheels?

For more information on “Riding Bikes With the Dutch,” visit www.everydaybike.com. For additional information on bicycling in Long Beach, visit www.bike-longbeach.org. ■



A man pushes his precious cargo along a path in Amsterdam using what Bauch refers to as the SUV of bicycles. Many residents of the European city utilize these carts for taking children to school or daycare, hauling goods from the store and even taking the dog for a ride. (Photograph courtesy of Michael Bauch)



Bicyclists pedal beside automobiles on a typical day in Amsterdam, where the majority of the population bikes to and from work, school, the grocery store and other daily trips. (Photograph courtesy of Michael Bauch)