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Inman eases path to fitness

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Lynn Skinner-Johnson, right, and her children Elsa, 3, and Elanor, 1, use the path at the Food Lion in Inman.

An Inman grassroots group is helping make its community more friendly to cyclists and pedestrians, and members have others listening to their ideas.

PEACHES - People Enjoying Active Community Health Safety - has gotten a couple of crosswalks in the last couple of years and recently requested that the town's new Food Lion have a path for pedestrians and cyclists to safely get through the store's parking lot.

"There's a whole lot of communities that could walk or bike if they felt safe," said Lynn Skinner-Johnson, a PEACHES member and member of the town's planning and zoning committee.

PEACHES asked the state Department of Transportation for crosswalks in popular pedestrian spots, where Mill Street crosses Highway 176 and at the end of Littlefield Street near a set of railroad tracks, and they were built.



Inman Chamber President Bessie Fisher

"We want this to be a family community where you can walk and shop," said Bessie Fisher, president of the Greater Inman Area Chamber of Commerce.

The group is also active in promoting a walking trail that could be complete within the next month. The trail will be about a mile long and connect downtown to the town's American Legion Post, where there's a baseball field and cattle roam just past the outfield. Lawson Fork Creek also flows through the area. The group is designing a map for the town's visitors that will include information on historical sites along the new walking path.

PEACHES has 10 members and was formed in 2005 during a workshop on making communities more walkable. The group hosts bike rodeos and 5K races and raises money for safe routes to school.

"We hope Inman will become a living-room community, instead of a bedroom community, for families like ours," Skinner-Johnson said. "We've got a great infrastructure already. We want to make it better."

Since Food Lion was building a new store in Inman, the group approached store officials about making a special marked path for cyclists and pedestrians entering the parking lot, and Food Lion agreed.

Tom Long, Food Lion's store manager, said the store in the Cedar Spring community also has a marked path for cyclists and pedestrians.

PEACHES originally asked for the path to be in the center of the parking lot leading to the store's doors but Food Lion suggested having it along the right side of the parking lot because it would be less congested with cars.

Allan Davidson, the store's co-manager, said the center and left side of the parking lot would probably have more traffic because of other stores in the strip mall to the left of the grocery store.

"As they evolve and build new stores and people ask about it, they add it in," Long said of Food Lion adding the paths.

Long said the store, which opens April 23, hasn't made plans to install a bike rack for cyclists.

Customers walking to stores

Skinner-Johnson said she sees a lot of people walking to grocery stores on Highway 176 from nearby neighborhoods and sometimes sees people traveling in wheelchairs.

Her family has one car, so she often rides a bike to run errands and tows her two children, Elanor, 15 months, and Elsa, 3, in a bike trailer.

She credits Upstate Forever and Partners for Active Living workshops for helping PEACHES learn how to approach the projects it has attempted.

Ned Barrett, program manager for Upstate Forever, said there's a lot of interest in making smaller communities in the county more friendly to pedestrians and cyclists.

There are plans for walking paths in Duncan and Lyman, too. Barrett said people like the traditional neighborhoods and sidewalks the smaller communities offer.

"Towns like Inman surrounded the mill, and it's no longer there as an employer," Barrett said. "Those towns kind of died, and there's a revitalization. As the development moves out there, they're seeing revitalization not so much with the industry being there as much as the people moving there."

Residents, local governments, businesses and developers are often coming together.

"It shows the importance of partnerships and other groups getting involved and seeing how it affects them," said Laura Ringo, executive director of Partners for Active Living.

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