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Recycling a passion



Students re-enter collegiate cycling competition



AMONG THE VALLEY'S RICH SOIL, babbling rivers and sparkling caverns lie some of the greatest natural resources and areas amenable to outdoor sports enthusiasts. A favorite outdoor sport in the Shenandoah Valley is mountain biking.

"Harrisonburg is very close to some of the best bike trails in North America," says Josh Patterson ('04), "The town has a very vibrant cycling community, and I've encountered many JMU students expressing interest in riding."

In an effort to help students fuel their cycling interests, Patterson relaunched the JMU Cycling Club. The student club acts as a liaison between the Harrisonburg cycling communities and allows students to share a common passion. The group started out as a special-interest club and during the past year completed the steps necessary to be a recognized JMU sports club. Last spring, the group earned student club status by the university.

"The JMU team rides with local clubs all the time, but you'd never be able to tell there were two distinct clubs in the group," says Thomas Jenkins, owner of Shenandoah Bike Company. "Everyone gets along and enjoys the sport." JMU cyclists often visit Jenkins' store to purchase equipment and ask cycling

advice. Patterson, too, has fostered a good relationship with Jenkins and other local riders. Leaders of the student club sought Jenkins' support as they tried to gain university recognition. "The students needed letters of recommendation [to obtain club status], and we were happy to offer them our support," says Jenkins.

JMU student cyclists manned a successful team in the late '80s and early '90s. The group was strictly a road racing team and eventually membership dwindled. But many former team members currently work in the cycling industry, including, Matt Bracken of Somerville, Mass., vice president of sales for Independent Fabrications.

The current team is open to all disciplines of cycling, including mountain biking, downhill, cross-country and road events. JMU's original cycling team focused mainly on competition, while the new team "is here to get people interested in riding for the sake of enjoyment and fitness," says Patterson. "We welcome riders of all ability levels. Whether you're a serious racer or just interested in casual weekend rides, our purpose is to get more people off the couch, out of a car and on a bike."

In spring 2004, Patterson led four team members to Moab, Utah, where they spent Spring Break enjoying some of the best mountain biking in the world. The weeklong experience was so memorable the group is going to make it an annual event.

The team is still young and has about 20 active members. "In the short time we've been around, I have already watched the club grow and the younger members take on leadership positions," says Patterson, referring to club president, Dan Delli-Colli ('07).

"As president, I run organized meetings and get events planned and executed," says Delli-Colli. Events for the club include various rides, educational lectures and competitions. While on rides the group will stop and work on specific bike handling skills. They have also held a skills clinic with local pro-mountain biker, Jeremiah Bishop.

As a recognized sports club at JMU, the team became eligible to compete in the Atlantic Collegiate Cycling Conference races in 2004. They also compete in a variety of cycling events such as Criteriums, Road Races and Time Trials. Some members participate in the Shenandoah 100, a hundred-mile mountain bike race. The team's dedication and hard work earned recognition in cycling communities across Virginia, Maryland and North Carolina and mentions in *Blue Ridge Outdoors*.

Delli-Colli and his teammates hope to become a well-established and respected team both at JMU and throughout the ACCC. Jenkins believes that the team will be successful in many ways. "There is always someone on the team that will push them to do well," he says.

Patterson adds, "It's a great way to meet new friends and become a more proficient cyclist."

For more information on the JMU cycling team, E-mail jmucycling@hotmail.com.

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