

Published February 7th, 2018

Can this company encourage more college students to Shop Moraga?

By Nick Marnell



Photo courtesy LimeBike

LimeBike, a San Mateo-based bike-sharing company that is spreading across the U.S., pitched to begin operations in Moraga at the Jan. 24 town council meeting.

A company representative said that LimeBike bicycles could not only instill less reliance upon automobiles but could also be a driver of commerce by bringing Saint Mary's College students into the town more frequently.

"It could be a real boon for the college and the town," said Kathe Nelson, executive director of the Moraga Chamber of Commerce. "A big issue retailers have is finding and keeping help. The public transportation from BART, and the bus, is irregular. To have those bikes available would really help overcome that obstacle."

Pat Vahey knows about hiring Saint Mary's students; he has eight of them on his payroll at Pennini's Restaurant.

"I see people walking around after we close, and I see them walking back and forth between school and here. LimeBike could only help bring more students to the shopping center. I don't see how it could miss," he said.

LimeBike's first client was the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

"We have no problems with them," said Desiree Coltrane of the school's Parking Operations and Campus Access Management division. "Every once in a while we'll have to move a bike that is lying around, but LimeBike comes by once a day and takes care of everything. We even let them use a facility on our campus to repair their bicycles."

The city of Greensboro noticed how well the project worked at the school that the city made a deal with LimeBike as its exclusive provider for 1,000 bicycles. "We have very little involvement. No need to fill a bike rack, no maintenance to take care of, no payments to worry about. I don't have the staff to do all that anyway," said Adam Fisher, city transportation director. "My only concern is that I hope they're going to last."

If something sounds too good to be true, it usually is checked out by a journalist. "We have a very nice looking campus, and we don't want any bikes or bike racks lying around. If we see those bikes on our campus, we have them removed," said College of the Holy Cross transportation manager Jerry Maday. Holy Cross is a private college in Worcester, Massachusetts, similar in enrollment size to Saint Mary's.

The company is pitching not only Moraga but also the college. "This is in its nascent stage, and more study needs to be done in order to move forward," said Mike McAlpin, director of media relations for Saint Mary's College.

"LimeBike looks like a healthy way for all to get out of cars and bike around town. I look forward to learn more about this when it comes to council," said Vice Mayor and Saint Mary's liaison Teresa Onoda.

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