

The Accidental Cyclist

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Although he's never been on a 100-mile ride, and he's not climbing mountain trails, Brian Parnell is still a serious cyclist. And it all started with doctor's orders.

After seeing those around him become more physically active, Parnell, a program manager II in the Director of Construction Office, decided he needed some physical activity in his life.

Running seemed like the natural choice. His wife, Michele, is an avid runner and has run in five marathons. So, to keep up with her, Brian started running three to four times a week.

"It was a great hobby. It was something I wanted to do," Parnell said.

But in March of this year, something in him snapped. Not in his head --something in his foot. It was a tendon tear and stress fracture in his left ankle

After a visit to his doctor, Parnell was told that he should never run again.

So after six months of running, he was back without a regular physical activity. But not for long.

Parnell's doctor suggested cycling. It's a low-impact activity and would not complicate the healing process of his injury.

"I really didn't want to. I couldn't see myself as the typical serious cyclist," Parnell said. "Racing in spandex or trekking up and down a mountain slope didn't seem like something I wanted to do."

He decided to look at his new physical hobby more practically as a commuter. He'd had a little experience doing that back when he was a student at the College of Charleston.

Parnell bought a Trek commuter bike. And for a while, he would make the 10-mile ride from his home in Lexington to his office at SCDOT headquarters in Columbia several times a week. The 45- to 50-minute bike trip is only 20 minutes longer than the commute by car.



He says the ride is beautiful with the sunrise in the morning. "You experience the beauty of the outdoors more than if you're riding in a car."

And while he looks at it as an alternative method of transportation, he's indirectly getting a good exercise workout as well. He joined a gym downtown so he can shower after the ride and change before coming in to work.

In August, Parnell had surgery to correct the tendon tear. That, along with the time change, has put his bike commute on hold temporarily.

Physical therapy after the surgery has strengthened his ankle, and his attitudes on cycling issues have also gotten stronger. The experience has changed the way he looks at cyclists. He understands now why people want more bike lanes and multi-use paths. His riding has turned into much more than a two-wheeled hobby.

He's joined the Palmetto Cycling Coalition and has purchased the 'Share the Road' license tag for his car. He's become a proponent of providing the public with a way to get around without relying on an automobile.

In fact, his whole family goes out on bike rides together. In the next couple of years, he and his family are thinking about moving to the Shandon area of Columbia where bike riding in the neighborhood would be easier.

"I want to see myself going to the store with my family on our bikes and coming back with the broccoli and bread sticking up out of the basket."

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