

Printed from THE DAILY JOURNAL, dtd. 10/04/2010

It's time to walk, not drive, to school

October 04, 2010, 03:30 AM

Wednesday is International Walk to School day when schools across the world join forces to cut carbon and pick the healthy option for getting to school. San Mateo County will have many participants including Baywood Elementary School in San Mateo.

Baywood is planning an extravaganza for its student walkers. Jenny Kuhn, a parent volunteer, has lined up numerous parents to chaperone the walk and almost as many celebrities to cheer the kids on. There will be DJ Jerry McNeil playing music as children approach Baywood, healthy snacks along the way, and stickers which proclaim "I walked to school" for each child.

But this is not just a school affair. The city of San Mateo is involved because encouraging more children to walk to school is a city goal to cut traffic and congestion. The homeowners association is involved because its members are concerned about extra traffic and congestion around the school during the morning commute.

Some residents who live near the school complain they can't get out of their driveway in the morning. And not too long ago a student was injured by a high school student racing to get to Aragon High School on time. Both Baywood and Aragon are located next to each other on the busy Alameda de las Pulgas, a major arterial street.

About a third of Baywood's 620 students routinely walk to school. That's excellent compared to the national average but not when you consider that most of the students live within a mile of the school (there are some who live a bit further). Baywood and other participating schools hope to double the number of children who currently walk not only on special occasions but as regular practice. Dave Leventhal, a Baywood parent, lives one and half miles from the school, up a steep hill, but his children walk the talk. His fourth grade son, Ilan, likes walking to school because he gets to spend time with his dad on the trip to school. Daughter Ariella, a third grader, said, "Walking to school is fun. I like meeting my friends while walking and it is a good exercise."

For those of us who trekked to school in snow, rain, hail and heat, all this fuss about walking when a ride to school from mom or dad wasn't an option, may seem ridiculous. But it has become a national health issue. Our children get fatter as they spend more time in front of televisions, computers, or on their cell phones and more time being driven from one activity to another than they do exercising. That's why a major player in encouraging kids to walk to school is the county health department.

So Wednesday will be a celebration of good health, clean air and exercise as thousands of children discover the joys of walking to school.

For those who have bravely navigated the slalom run of potholes on El Camino Real between Third Avenue and State Route 92, it is a relief to see Caltrans repaving the state's roadway. But what about our local streets and roads? State cutbacks have forced cities to delay major maintenance. The longer you wait to repair a pothole, the bigger it gets. Measure M on the November ballot will help. The City/County Association of Government (C/CAG), representing each city in the county, is requesting a \$10 increase in the motor vehicle fee for 25 years. Revenue will be used to help maintain neighborhood streets, fix potholes, provide transit options and safe routes to schools (including support for walk to school programs), reduce congestion and water removal from oil and gas runoffs. The fee will generate about \$6.7 million annually and all the money will be spent locally.

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