

Go Mom! Beyond Brunch • Mother-Daughter Fashion • Adoption Journey

BRAVA

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Madison's leading magazine
for women of style & substance

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Shown here: The
gals of We Are All
Mechanics.

Pedal Pushers

Meet 6 women who help make
Madison a cyclist's paradise

THINK SPRING

Fresh Eats
Outdoor Adventures
Garden Whimsy
Shapely Shades
... and football?



GOING HIGH DISTANCE

They advocate for more bikeways, push legislators for improved laws and network the local cycling world — meet six local women working in high gear to make Madison a better place to ride

By Emily Leas
Photographed by Sarah Maughan

STREET CRED: Commercial Bike Parking Manager, Saris Cycling Group

Setting the pace: As a Madison native, Sarah Reiter grew up thinking that all cities were like her home—covered in bike paths and marked lanes. When she left for college and realized that wasn't the case, her passion for supporting cycling as an alternative transportation was solidified.

That personal passion morphed into a professional mission two years ago when she became the commercial bike parking manager of Saris Cycling Group—a company specializing in bike racks that launched in Madison in 1989 and has since become an industry heavyweight.

Saris' core business is manufacturing and selling the slickest, latest accessories for carting your two wheels, as well as corrals for public and private bike parking. It's the latter where Reiter spends her time, assisting cities of all sizes in deciding what type of products will work best for streetscapes and city developments.

"The work I do is focused on infrastructure that cities need to promote biking," she says. "I also focus on product innovation and what cities can do to encourage people to get on a bike, then support *having* more people on bikes."

During her time at Saris, Reiter has worked with cities as small as Manhattan, Kan., which received a grant to create more cycling infrastructure, and as large as San Francisco as they chose options to increase commuter station parking for cyclists.

Reiter notes that this kind of infrastructure—including protected bike lanes and off-street networks—is critical for creating a safe biking environment and driving economic development.

"Cities that have high investment in biking infrastructure, and a strong biking population, are healthy cities, both physically and economically," she explains.

The chain reaction: Reiter classifies herself as a purely recreational cyclist. But her passion lies in studying environments and how access to safe cycling and easy parking can revitalize a community—and she sees the impact this can have firsthand

"It amazes me what a small investment it is and what a huge payoff it has," she says. "You can see not only people changing their

SARAH REITER



behavior, but also the change in the community. And it's happening right now."

Even though her day-to-day focus tends to be on the national level, Reiter is plenty busy pushing for better biking opportunities closer to home.

"Having world-class biking in Dane County is very important to us, and because of that, we have a really strong commitment to advocacy," she explains.

Through events like the Saris Gala—which is in its 10th year and has raised more than \$725,000 to benefit the Wisconsin Bike Fed, a group dedicated to cycling activism throughout the state—Saris and Reiter hope to ensure attention and time are spent on local biking issues.

Cycling style: Most mornings, Reiter's commute begins by joining her two youngest children on their bikes to school, then heading home to jump in her car and trek

to work. She remembers the not-so-distant days in her family when one parent pulled the tagalong, the other pulled the toddler in the trailer, and a young emerging biker rode on her own. Now, they're a full-on gang of five cyclists who regularly take advantage of their proximity to downtown Waunakee.

"My husband and I want the kids to learn the skills you gain by having that independence and responsibility that biking allows," she explains.

Dream bike: "I've spent some time visiting cycling cities like Copenhagen and Amsterdam, and I've fallen in love with the upright city bikes," she says happily. "There's one made by PUBLIC bikes that I have my eye on...Mother's Day is coming up!"

Favorite path: "I'm really partial to coming into town along John Nolen Drive and the view of the Capitol and downtown," Reiter says. "I just don't think there's anything better than that."

10
The number of bikes that can be parked in an on-street parking spot in place of a single car

STREET CRED: Rideshare coordinator and planner, Madison Area Transportation Planning Board; founding member of MadFORCs (Madison's Female Off-Road Cyclists)

Setting the pace: Renee Callaway has made a career out of a steadfast mission: assisting Madisonians with ditching their car and finding other ways to travel.

"I was UW-Madison's first bike and pedestrian coordinator, so I oversaw everything from bike parking to route planning, and eventually managed their alternative transportation program," she says.

These days Callaway paves the way for transportation alternatives through a program called Rideshare Etc.

"People can search for a carpool partner, a vanpool, even a bike buddy," she explains. She also fields calls and emails from individuals who want to try bike or bus commuting, but are nervous about some of

the unknowns: What route should I take? What if I get a flat tire? How do I get the bus to stop and how much does it cost?

From 2006 through early 2012, she was the coordinator for Safe Routes to School, a program organized by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation.

"When I started, it was a brand new program so I had to set up everything for the entire state," she recalls. "It's a great program because not every kid wants to play soccer, but every kid does need to get to school. By biking, they are able to be active in another way."

Cycling style: Quite simply, Callaway loves being perched on any bike.

"I just love riding," she states. "But I probably ride my commuter bike the most. I ride to work every day dressed in my work clothes!"

But her main passion is in the dirt-driven world of mountain biking and the

growing sport of cyclo-cross—a type of racing that involves short courses on various terrain. It's an up-and-coming sport she describes as "a big community hanging out at a party. We just happen to race our bikes in between."

When wielding a mountain bike, Callaway remains active with Madison's Female Off-Road Cyclists, or MadFORCs, a group she co-founded in 1994. Today, she helps host and coordinate clinics and weekly rides for women of all experience levels wanting to hop on a mountain bike and hit the dirt.

The chain reaction: Professionally, Callaway has turned her laser-beam focus toward the Dane County Bike Plan. Slated for later this year, the joint project brings together advocacy groups, city transportation offices and Dane County—an effort that could have a lasting impact on local communities.

THE AL-TRANSPORT GURU

RENEE CALLAWAY



"It's not just about infrastructure, but also education and encouragement," she says. "It's an important project because it will focus on the priorities for the future to make Dane County a great place to be a cyclist."

When it comes to her work with MadFORCs and love for cyclo-cross, Callaway has no plans of slowing down soon.

"I think sometimes these sports can seem a little intimidating," she says.

But by sharing her passion with others, she hopes to help more women get over the hump of thinking rocks and roots are too much for them to handle on a bike.

"Both are sports people can learn, but sometimes if you're out there and you're not getting instruction, it's frustrating," she says. She's got the right mix of tools to show any wannabe biker the skills to get rolling.

Favorite bike vacation: "I've biked from the north to the south of Switzerland on my road bike, and my husband and I went to Italy and Wales for mountain biking," she says. "And various places in the U.S., but the European locations sound sexier!"

Favorite pit stop: "I like to ride to New Glarus and stop at the [New Glarus] Bakery. It's kind of a classic stop," she says.

THE GEARHEADS

ALI DWYER &



STREET CRED: Co-founders of We Are All Mechanics

Setting the pace: Even as Ali Dwyer and India Viola proudly share that this is the 10th year of the We Are All Mechanics series, which provides hands-on bicycle education for area women, disbelief shows in both of their smiles.

Viola recalls, “When we met 10 years ago...”

“No it had to be 13 years ago,” Dwyer corrects.

“That’s right, wow,” says Viola as she tells the story of the common dream she and Dwyer were striving for. Both found their passions working as mechanics in local bike shops, and as Viola points out, being a female bike mechanic was a novelty.

“Most women who work in bike shops get steered toward the sales floor because they don’t have training,” she says. “I saw that happen enough that it made me want to share what I’d learned with other women.”

Viola describes Dwyer as the catalyst that helped put the idea into motion. Their plan? To create a comfortable space for women to learn mechanical skills—from fixing flats to everyday maintenance and more. They outlined a curriculum and began testing it on friends.

Viola wanted the name of the series to be an affirmation, or a powerful statement to give students a feeling of confidence from the get-go. We Are All Mechanics was the perfect fit, and soon the two began offering it to the general public in rented space

at Revolution Cycles on Atwood Avenue.

Surprisingly, the monthly class series is neither woman’s full-time job. Since they began, Viola completed a Ph.D. in zoology and is now a full-time mom. Dwyer has a master’s degree, teaches yoga and works part-time for a naturopathic doctor.

Both agree that balancing these roles, as well as being bicycling advocates, has driven their passion to continue teaching and sharing their skills.

“We really appreciate that people put an emphasis on this in their lives and come to the classes open to learning,” Dwyer explains.

The chain reaction: Through their work, these cycling dynamos not only hope to promote biking in Madison, but also hope

INDIA VIOLA

to give female bikers the mechanical chops they need to feel confident with their bikes.

“We just want to get more women on bikes and feeling comfortable about riding, cleaning and fixing flats,” Viola says.

“And helping build that confidence off the bike as well,” Dwyer adds. “When our students leave the class, they feel good about themselves and go home to teach their neighbors, their kids, their partners what they’ve learned.”

They also aim to strengthen the network of local riders.

“We’re always amazed at how many women come to our class and say they mostly ride alone,” says Dwyer. “So maybe our classes and organized rides keep people connected and they can benefit from that community.”

Cycling style: Free and independent—these are the words Viola easily finds to describe how she feels on a bike. As a cyclist, she tries to be an ambassador and a connector. “It’s become a main part of my identity in Madison and that’s really gratifying.”

Dwyer chimes in that she and Viola have a very similar mindset when it comes to

cycling. She admits she used to be more of a “die-hard” cyclist during her years as a bike racer and working at the Wisconsin Bike Fed.

“Now I’m a lifestyle bicyclist,” she says. “Getting downtown and not having to worry about parking, it’s just so easy in Madison.”

281
The number of miles of designated bike paths, lanes and routes throughout Madison

Favorite local rides: “I haven’t done it much, but it’s really fun to ride to the end of Picnic Point and have a bonfire,” says Dwyer after some pondering.

“When I was road biking more, I used to ride to Oregon and stop at the Chocolate Caper, buy a box of chocolates, eat half, then head home,” Viola says smiling guiltily.

Dream bikes: “I think I have mine,” says Dwyer. “It’s called an Xtracycle. It’s got an extended rear end and is very comfortable and cruiser-ish.”

“I don’t think I have a dream bike,” Viola says. “When you work in a bike shop, you collect bikes like shoes. None are super fancy, but they all serve a purpose and they all have a story.”

Hit the Road (Or Trail)! Group biking clubs to get you rolling

Relaxing Rides Through Town

Capital Brewery Bike Club: Capital Brewery’s Middleton location offers the perfect spot to launch a trip. With 5- to 25-mile rides through town or rolling hills on Tuesday and Thursday evenings, bikers really earn their post-ride beverage. [Capital-brewery.com](http://capital-brewery.com)

CycloFemme: Ring in Mother’s Day on a bike with this 18-mile journey beginning and ending at the Froth House. Cyclofemme.com

Team LUNA Chix: Pedal 10- to 15-mile routes every Thursday and Saturday with this recreational group that helps develop new riding skills. Teamlunachix.com

Pedal Through Nature

Bombay Bicycle Club: Whether you’re riding for fitness or leisure, Madison’s largest cycling club offers Saturday, Sunday and Thursday rides to suit your biking fancy. Pedalers push off for 25- to 50-mile rides through scenic back roads. Bombaybicycle.org

Mad FORCs: If off-roading is more your speed, join in weekly mountain bike rides with Madison’s Female Off-Road Cyclists—a group open to women of varying biking levels that even has its own race team. Madforcs.org

Intense Weekly Expeditions

Capitol Velo Club: A women’s only cycling club with a focus on road racing but open to various levels and goals. Thursday evening rides can reach up to 40 miles. Capitolveloclub.com

Wednesday Night Bike Rides: Take 20- to 35-mile excursions on routes chosen for minimum traffic and maximum scenery every Wednesday night. Wnbr.org

STREET CRED: President, Downtown Madison Inc. and biking advocate

Setting the pace: As a lifelong Madisonian, biking is ingrained in Susan Schmitz as a valid way to get around. As a child, that meant hopping on a bike with friends. As a mother raising a family in the '70s and '80s, it meant encouraging her daughter to do the same. As an advocate and leader for Downtown Madison Inc. (DMI) for the last 14 years, it means supporting opportunities for others to find the same joy in biking.

One of those opportunities was Madison B-cycle—a bike-rental program launched throughout downtown Madison two years ago by Trek.

“For years, people in Madison talked about needing a downtown circulator, which usually meant some sort of bus,” she recalls. When the B-cycle program became

about biking to work. And she believes that improving biking infrastructure will help root that workforce here and keep Madison a thriving town full of young professionals.

“It all starts with planning,” she says simply. “When cities are planned and built for people instead of just cars, those are the healthy cities of the future.”

Biking style: Whether it's for a commute to work or a joyride whizzing down an open road, Schmitz can be found most days of the year cheerfully biking somewhere—even when most of us would rather hide indoors.

“One day this winter I was riding to work in ice and snow a few inches thick, getting bounced around and I felt like a kid!” she laughs. “The best thing about any kind of

biking is that the minute I hit that seat, life is good.”

Favorite trail or path: “I love the Capital City Trail and the access it provides our citizens,” Schmitz explains. “I also think the [contra-flow] bike lane on University Avenue is great. It feels so safe because of that bump between the cars and the bikes.”

Favorite pit stop: “There's a section along the Great River Road, just north of La Crosse. The shoulders are wide and paved, and it twists and turns through a beautiful part of the state,” she says. “There is a tiny town along this road called Stockholm—population 87. It's quaint and quiet and the perfect place to stop.”

12,000
The number of
bicycle trips per day
on University Avenue
during peak season

THE COMMUTER QUEEN

SUSAN SCHMITZ

an opportunity, DMI jumped on board by suggesting real estate for the various bike corral locations and promoting the project around town.

“It's safe, easy and users can determine their own routes instead of being limited by a bus route,” she says.

Her love of transportation doesn't stop at two wheels. Schmitz is also the executive director of the Transportation and Parking Committee for DMI. She finds that it's a great place to advocate for innovative biking infrastructure in a city that is already at the forefront, as well as creating access for pedestrians and cars.

After a 2010 trip to Amsterdam with a contingent of Madison city officials and local biking advocates, Schmitz's eyes were opened to the possibilities of creating an equal share for all modes of transportation.

“It makes so much sense! We have stop lights and traffic management for cars; sidewalks and walk signs for pedestrians; why not have the same for bikes?” she says with a shrug and a smile.

The chain reaction: While Schmitz can be found out on the open road, or bumping along on winter-studded tires, her passion is commuter biking.

“All of us who support commuter biking believe if you build it, they will come,” she says. “Meaning, if you build safe and accessible infrastructure, people will use it.”

Schmitz points out that Madison businesses are nurturing a growing population of young employees who are enthusiastic



THE ADVOCATE

BETSY POPELKA MASSNICK



bicyclists and pedestrians,” she explains. “Right now, if a motorist kills a bicyclist, that person doesn’t have to appear in court. It’s alarming.”

Meanwhile, Bike Fed also plays an important role in statewide goals such as creating a connected intrastate bike system, developing more mountain bike destinations and increasing the number of “Bicycle Friendly Communities” in the state.

“Bicycle Friendly Communities are designations received through a national group called the League of American Bicyclists,” Popelka Massnick explains. “We assist communities with achieving the designation because [they] become a destination for people who want to live in a healthy community that provides safe cycling options.”

As Bike Fed celebrates its 25th year, Popelka Massnick says she’s privileged to be part of one of the largest bike advocacy organizations in the country.

“I love the fact that biking helps me feel more connected to my community,” she says. “And I just love encouraging that type of community building through my professional work.”

Biking style: Dodging turkeys, monitoring the progress of the seasons, enjoying an evening sunset. This isn’t what most of us get to do during our daily commute. But Popelka Massnick considers herself one of the lucky ones.

“My commute is six miles through the Arboretum, so it’s really the best way to start your day,” she says happily. “It puts me in such a good mood.”

Dream bike: “I think it would just be bikes, plural. I’d love to have the perfect bike for any kind of weather,” she says.

Required gear: “A helmet, obviously,” she says. “For winter, I have a pair of lobster claw gloves, which I love, and a windproof and waterproof jacket are a must.”

She also notes that wearing her work clothes, even a skirt, during her commute helps her feel like she’s spreading the message that you don’t have to wear Lycra to be a cyclist.

“I think seeing regular people in regular clothes makes biking seem more accessible,” she says.

STREET CRED: Marketing and membership manager, Wisconsin Bike Fed

Setting the pace: After graduating from college, Betsy Popelka Massnick’s friends talked her into a three-month journey to bike the length of the Mississippi River.

“We started at the headwaters in Bemidji and went all the way to New Orleans,” she explains. “It was a fantastic trip. We also wrote and self-published a book about our journey called ‘It’s Not All Downhill.’”

Still high from her biking odyssey, Popelka Massnick returned to the Midwest and landed a job in the Milwaukee office of Wisconsin Bike Fed, the state’s largest biking advocacy and education organization, as a bike/walk instructor for fifth and sixth graders.

The program also included afterschool sessions and weeklong camps in the summer, where Popelka Massnick helped many kids who had never been on a bike take their first ride.

“It was such a cool experience,” she says.

In early 2012, she and her husband moved to Madison and she accepted a job with the local Bike Fed office as a membership coordinator. Soon after, she became the marketing and membership manager and got more involved in organizing community leaders, business owners and everyday bicyclists to promote opportunities and issues in Wisconsin.

The chain reaction: “At the Bike Fed, we represent the several million people who are cyclists across the state,” Popelka Massnick says. “The larger our membership, the louder our voice.”

And Popelka Massnick is all about holding the bullhorn for that collective voice. As a key spoke in the wheel at Bike Fed, she helps organize volunteers as well as various programs and events, including Lobby Day, which this year brought local cyclists and legislators together to discuss bike-related laws.

“We’re pushing to get harsher penalties for motorists who kill vulnerable users like