

Former students enter workforce powered by pedaling

BOONE N.C. Aug. 15, 2018-- During Christians Houpe's last semester at Appalachian State, he decided to start up his own business, Boone Pubcycle.

The mission of Boone Pubcycle is to provide Boone with safe, fun, and sustainable transportation in a reimagined way through the Tour de Boone, private parties, pub crawls and transportation for App State football games. With his business partner and friend, Cable McGuire, they are making history in this college town with its first ever pedal-powered pub party.

"We focus on our local people," said Houpe. "Students and the service industry receive a ten percent discount. During games, ASU fans can receive safe transportation to and from the game for a flat price of ten dollars, from Ale House or Elevations to the Peacock parking lot." He joked about charging the opposing team a higher rate.

"That Was Great!" Jonathan an ASU fan said. "I got to finish my beer and didn't need to walk from my tailgate to the game. I hope I can catch a ride on the way back."

The Pubcycle is a low-speed, battery-powered multi-occupant vehicle fueled by pedals for each guest to give the cycle an extra kick of energy. The driver takes care of all the technical details; all the guests need to do is drink their beer and peddle. This interactive attraction safely transports guests to and from the locations of their choosing, giving them an experience that is unforgettable and sustainable. Guests of the Pubcycle are encouraged to bring no more than a six pack or wine packaged in non-glass containers and enjoy the ride.

The inspiration for this venture came one fall weekend in Raleigh where Houpe met his girlfriend's family joining them for a pubcycle ride. Houpe said the experience was a blast hopping from bar to bike to bar. Returning to Boone, Houpe wished there was a similar

experience. He took the idea to the business college at Appalachian State in Peacock hall, learning of an entrepreneurial contest about to take place. Months later, returning from a local farm from building a new green house, Houpe suited up and made his pitch. Winning the competition and receiving the start up capital for his new business.

"What you see is what you get—me, Cable, Remmy the dog, and of course, the bike," said Houpe.

The road forward for these two partners is long; their teamwork keeps them moving.

"We were naive pedaling into this, but the naivete is what kept us going," said McGuire. "Not knowing what we were up against allowed us to funnel our ambitions to one problem at a time."

Houpe said this road would not have been possible without help along the way. Houpe brought the idea of the Pubcycle to Erich Schlenker of the Transportation Insight Center for Entrepreneurship in Peacock Hall. With Schlenker's guidance and Houpe's homework, Boone Pubcycle received unanimous approval from the Boone Town City Council.

"When it came to business, I had no experience," said Houpe. "I was a sustainable technology major and was building greenhouses. Schlenker was a great door opener and mentor with so many connections here in Boone."

Houpe said he met with everyone he could imagine before getting town approval: several of the members of the Boone Police Force, Appalachian's University Police, a handful of DMV employees, banks, and other pubcycle companies. Houpe did such a thorough job; he had an answer for every question thrown at him during his Boone Town Council approval meeting.

"Dealing with the DMV was the hardest part," said Houpe. "No one in Boone had experience with this kind of vehicle. I knew from talking to similar companies I needed a low-

speed-vehicle license to be on the road and a limousine license to serve alcohol, but no one wanted to get in trouble. So, I was passed from person to person until I got what I needed.”

As Houpe and McGuire look toward the future, there is one thing on their minds, giving back. So far, Pubcycle has participated in several philanthropic events: Blood Sweat and Gears After-Party, Boonies Mini-Series (offered free rides to assist with crowdfunding), and the Out of my Mind Mental Health Community Potluck.

Blood Sweat and Gears is an event in which cyclists ride 100 miles through the Watauga area raising money for the Red Cross. Pubcycle was a big hit with the bikers as they celebrated the 20th annual event.

“It was a fundraiser of cyclists, how could we not go,” said McGuire. “Seeing people excited about the bike is great, I know they are having a good time with their big smiles. Some let me capture their excitement and we use it for promotional content for social media and our webpage.”

The Out of my Mind Mental Health Community Potluck is a potluck designed to bring a community to those who deal with social isolationism and mental illnesses in hopes of reframing mental illness as a mental opportunity. Boone Pubcycle joined this event. Houpe said this event was important for bringing awareness to mental health and how it violates people's lives. Remmy is an emotional support animal, a business partner, and an essential member of the advertisement team.

In participating in three events in the two months, Pubcycle is open for business, a sure sign of the motivation of this organization. Places to interact with Pubcycle and make changes to support the local community are at Earth Day (cleanup shuttle and refreshments; teaming up with

AMB), High Country Breast Cancer Foundation, Watauga High School Future Farmers of America (FFA) and Boone Greenway Skatepark.

Appalachian Mountain Brewery (AMB) is a local brewery and favored spot for Pubcycle guests. It is teaming up with Pubcycle for safe transportation, making friends, and protecting the earth this Earth day, Monday, April 22, 2019.

Boone Greenway Skatepark is a passionate topic for Houpe and McGuire. Their business is all about sustainability and utilizing human power for transportation. The two were excited when Boone allowed skateboarding on public streets last year, and now, they want to make sure there is a safe space for this activity to take place. McGuire said the simple fact is skateboarding is a wonderful source of human transportation. They get you from point A to B quickly and you don't have to worry about chaining up your cycle or finding a place to park.

It is the end of its first summer, and the team is already looking at its gear and making some upgrades. Pubcycle is a low-speed electric vehicle. For the first season, the system worked much like a golf cart. Large lead and acid batteries were strung together to create power output capable of transporting 14 participants and a massive cooler for the two-hour tour. The system worked well, but its long recharge time limited the number of Pubcycle tours to two per evening. With help from Schlenker and other ASU mentors, Houpe and McGuire conducted a cost analysis to find the most-effective way to improve their product.

"Do we upgrade our gear system, get an AC regulator, buy new batteries, get lithium ion, new lead-acid, fix our chain?" said Houpe. "So, we did a cost analysis and realized we didn't have enough information. We bought more equipment for measurements. So, when we decided to get lithium-ion batteries, we were informed and made a good decision."

With a new battery system, the Boone Pubcycle will be able to make more trips a day and not have to make the difficult choice: "Do we take the six o'clock shuttle or eight o'clock pub crawl?" These new batteries last longer and can be swapped out between rides. A wait that was two hours has been shortened to 15 minutes.

To keep the Pubcycle moving through the winter, the team is looking for solutions. One of the options is plastic siding to keep the party roiling, the guests dry and comfortable. The cold season on its way in and won't stop this pedaling pub-party.

Houpe and McGuire have shown creativity, resilience, and application of their education in their way. If you are interested in booking your trip, contact them at:

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