“Bicycle-friendly” is one of the many accolades in which our city takes tremendous pride. *Bicycling* magazine, citing attributes such as “commuter rails [that] allow bicycles [and] a bike shuttle across the Bay Bridge during rush hour,” named San Francisco number 6 of “America’s Top 50 Bike-Friendly Cities.” In September 2011, the League of American Bicyclists recognized our community for “providing safe accommodation and facilities for bicyclists and encouraging residents to bike for transportation and recreation.”

Cycling—for recreation, commuting, or competition—is growing in popularity. According to the *2011 Bicycle Count Report* from the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency, “since 2006, counts have increased an impressive 71%.” It’s estimated there are 75,000 people who hop on bikes here every day.

Among those riders are our colleagues, and several recently shared their enthusiasm and advice for getting from here to there on a bike.

Bess Kennedy, an associate at Bingham McCutchen who practices commercial litigation, evolved from typical kid to cyclist-for-a-cause to regular commuter. “We were always active,” she says of her childhood, “and my parents made me bike everywhere.” In 1998, she participated in the AIDS/LifeCycle event, a seven-day, 500-plus-mile ride.
from San Francisco to Los Angeles that raises awareness of and funding for HIV/AIDS services. It was a “huge achievement and loads of fun,” she says, but then she didn’t get on her bike again for eight years until she started riding with friends. Now, in addition to weekend outings (with her children in bike seats or a trailer), she commutes to work, riding Caltrain part way on some days.

The bike and train commute is a popular option, one that Sandra Zuniga Nierenberg employs. To get from her home in San Carlos to Bingham McCutchen, where she is part of the securities and financial institutions litigation group, she rides two miles to catch the train, then rides a couple of miles to the office. “It’s such a relaxing way to start and end each day,” she says. “I come to work with a clear mind.”

Christopher Kearney, managing partner at Keker & Van Nest and president-elect of BASF, has also discovered that cycling is good for the body and soul. “The pace of riding lets you absorb the scenery and views, and my mind wanders freely,” he says. “In periods of stress, it helps keep me sane.” He has biked in Italy and Nepal, yet says some of the most spectacular scenery he’s experienced can be found closer to home. Leaving Mill Valley around 6:00 a.m. allows him to witness sunrise on the Golden Gate Bridge. “The bridge lights up an incredible shade of orange,” he says, “and it’s magical.” He’s been commuting on his current bike for five years and confesses “I’m more attached to it and like it better than my car!”

Sometimes the impetus for commuting by bike is necessity. David “Duff” Beach of Bingham McCutchen is a self-described “average guy cyclist.” He wasn’t interested in cycling until he needed to get from the Outer Mission to his U.S. Army Reserve unit in Dublin—and he and his wife shared one car. He began by riding to the local BART station, then from the Dublin station to work, and soon he was hooked. Currently, he commutes twenty-six miles along Cañada Road, “a gorgeous ride with virtually no traffic.” Plus it provides a regular workout and allows weekends to be family time. “Good exercise, time outdoors, without taking time away from family”—a family that still has just one car.

Cycling time can be family time too. When San Francisco Superior Court judge and former BASF president Jeffrey Ross moved to San Francisco in the late 1970s, he began riding in Golden Gate Park, adding seats for his children. “Some of my fondest memories of their childhood are weekend rides in the park,” he says. He continues to ride for fun on weekends. His favorite ride starts in the Haight, winds through Golden Gate Park, down the Great Highway, around Lake Merced, and back. “I enjoy observing the hawks and herons, flowers and trees in the park, and especially the section along the beach,” he says. “The ride is the same, but the sky and waves are ever changing.” He travels seventeen miles in ninety minutes or so.

For some riders, seventeen miles is just a warm-up. VLSP volunteer coordinator Jason Luu hadn’t been on a bike since he was eight; then last summer he got inspired while watching the AIDS/LifeCycle event. “I wanted to do something positive within the community,” he says. In December he started training for this year’s event, scheduled for June 3–9. On Sundays he joins a training group for long rides, slowly building endurance, something he’ll need to complete daily rides ranging from 42 to 107 miles.
Training also involves getting used to the bike and gear. At the time of his interview, Luu was breaking in a new seat... and reports the seat was winning!

L. Julius M. Turman was seeking a physical challenge as well as a way to give back to the LGBT community when he registered for June's AIDS/LifeCycle event. A partner at Morgan, Lewis & Bockius who last year was named to the San Francisco Police Commission, Turman began training in January 2011. To get used to a new bike, he started riding from Potrero Hill to his downtown office. Now he's riding sixty to seventy miles every Saturday and every Sunday, rain or shine.

Laura Vartain Horn, a litigation associate at Latham & Watkins, played water polo in college. When she graduated, she needed a new sport, so took up running, then triathlons. “I like to swim and run, but cycling was a whole new challenge.” It wasn’t long before Vartain Horn had mastered all three disciplines. She’s preparing for her first Ironman triathlon, Ironman Coeur d’Alene on June 24, where she’ll swim 2.4 miles, then ride for 112 miles, then run a full marathon—all in under seventeen hours.

Although lengthy rides are part of her training, she thinks of them as riding “just for fun.” Over the Martin Luther King holiday weekend, she rode from her home in the Marina to Santa Barbara. She describes the first day as “120 miles and two flat tires.” The second day, she cycled 110 miles to Morro Bay, a ride that included “7K of climbing.” A dose of reality motivated her—“there was no other option”—but it was the beauty along her route that inspired her—“we could see whales in the ocean and it was one of the clearest days.” The ride ended with 110 miles on day three.

Getting outdoors and enjoying spectacular scenery—not, as Vartain Horn says, just “whizzing by in a car”—is one of the best parts of cycling and a benefit of living in San Francisco. “I can go out my door for an hour or two and get in some great views,” she says.

Jason Luu’s favorite ride takes him on a loop around China Camp State Park in Marin. “You pretty much have the road to yourself,” he says, as well as “absolutely gorgeous views of San Pablo Bay.” (A route starting from San Francisco can be found at www.bikely.com/maps/bike-path/China-Camp-loop47402. A 9.7-mile mountain bike trail loop, suitable for beginning and intermediate riders, can be found at www.marinfattire.com/ChinaCampBikeTrail_BayViewShorelineTrail.html.)

Bess Kennedy loves the incredible views by Half Moon Bay. “You climb up over Kings Mountain, over to Half Moon Bay, then you get a view of the ocean—it’s so awesome!” (For more information about cycling this area, visit www.hiddensf.com/866-biking-skyline-ridge-map.html.)

But you don’t have to go all in for the intense rides to experience the joys of cycling. “Start off by incorporating it into your life in small ways,” Kennedy says. “Ride to work, or go over the Golden Gate Bridge on the weekend then ferry back.”
Some of the best advice Sandra Zuniga Nierenberg ever received was, “Tie your shoelaces!” Others caution that expenses can quickly get out of hand. “Don’t spend big money on a fancy bike and crazy equipment until you know what you want to do,” says Kennedy. “Borrow from friends or rent to try out different bikes and find out what you like.” Vartain Horn says the key is to “get a bike you like and get a professional fit so that you are comfortable on it.” No trendy labels needed.

And don’t worry about breaking speed records. “You don’t have to be a racer or hard-core cyclist to enjoy it,” says Beach. “People—like professional athletes—will be passing you by,” says Luu, who sees new riders get frustrated. “Go at your own pace, especially when doing beautiful rides.”

Most of all, “Ride cautiously and think about what you’re doing. Stop at traffic lights,” says Beach, who has seen collisions along the Embarcadero.

Turman encourages cyclists to become familiar with their responsibilities under the vehicle code. “Being a biker has made me a better driver,” he says. “I am much more aware, more conscious of sharing the road.” He feels there’s a spirit of “Let’s protect each other,” and that’s a very friendly attitude.

Kathleen Guthrie Woods is a San Francisco–based freelance writer. She and her husband spent a week cycling in the Loire Valley of France for their recent honeymoon.

FREE BIKING WORKSHOPS

Inspired to get back in the saddle? The San Francisco Bicycle Coalition offers free workshops. Visit www.sfbike.org/edu for more information.