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Biking for a worthy cause

By James Cummings (<http://www.daytondailynews.com/life/content/life/daily/1016biker.html>)

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VANDALIA | Well before dawn on most mornings, gets to the fastest leg of his morning commute as he rides his bicycle down a hill on Little York Road.

"I get up close to 40 miles an hour coming down the hill," Smith said. "There's nothing like having the wind in your face at that speed. If that doesn't wake you up in the morning, nothing will."

For about 15 years Smith has been riding a bike back and forth from his home in Vandalia to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, where he manages computer systems for the Air Force Materiel Command. Smith's daily commute is 40 miles round trip.

"I ride every day, weather permitting," Smith said. "I won't ride when my traction is compromised like when there's ice on the ground.

"And if it's raining in the morning when it's time to start out, I won't ride. Riding in the rain can be kind of unpleasant. Of course, if I ride in on a dry morning and it's raining by the time I leave work, I end up riding home in the rain."

Smith, 55, said he always enjoyed bike riding as a child but got away from it while a college student and as a young adult. He took up bicycling again in 1989 and by the next year he was regularly bike commuting to work.

He joined the Dayton Cycling Club and in 1993 started writing a bicycle-commuting column for the



club's monthly newsletter. Through the column, Smith said he fostered a friendly competition by publishing monthly figures on the total number of miles club members were commuting on their bikes.

The competition spread to Cincinnati when a former Dayton Cycling Club member moved there, and today Smith said the members of the two clubs combine for more than 100,000 miles of bicycle commuting per year.

Smith said he owns a car and that his wife, Christy, and two children enjoy driving more than he does. He has several bikes, including the long-framed touring bike he uses for his daily commute and a lightweight racing bike he uses in speed competitions.

"It's a lifestyle choice," Smith said. "You just look for opportunities to ride on two wheels instead of driving on four."

Smith's work day starts at 5:30 a.m., and he said he gets out on the road most mornings at about 4.

"At that time of day I see more deer on the roads than cars," he said. "My head lamp seems to attract wildlife. The deer come out and cross my path so close that I can hear their hooves clicking on the asphalt."

Smith is trim and fit at 6 foot 4 inches and 202 pounds, and he says regular bicycling makes it easy to stay in shape. He also says it's important to him that he and the other area bike commuters are cutting down on air pollution and consuming less of the world's fossil-fuel supplies.

"I get 20 miles on a bowl of oatmeal," he said.

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Photo: Jim Witmer, Dayton Daily News; caption: Bicycle Computer: Chuck Smith rides on the bike path at Taylorsville MetroPark.