

Be careful out there

July 3, 2010

I was almost killed in downtown Cadillac — twice! The first near death experience occurred about ten days ago at the corner of Mitchell and Harris. I had pushed the button on the crossing timer and was waiting to cross Mitchell Street. The traffic light turned red and the crosswalk indicator signaled it was safe for pedestrians to cross. Luckily, I paused to look both ways before proceeding because a lady in a pickup truck (cell phone in her right hand, cigarette in her left hand, and no hands on the wheel) barreled through the red light without even slowing down. Had I crossed without looking you'd have read my obituary in last week's paper.

The second brush with doom happened at the same corner last Monday. This time a young man in a sedan breezed through the intersection several seconds after the light had turned red. In his defense, though, his baseball cap was on backwards so perhaps he lost me in the sun.

In both cases, drivers who had stopped at the light witnessed the situation and gave me a big "whew!" while they shrugged their shoulders.

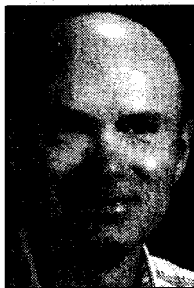
With these instances in mind, I think it might be wise for all of us to be extra careful this weekend. There will be a lot of activity in the greater Cadillac area due to the holiday. I'm particularly concerned about the roads around Lake Cadillac, which will become the I-75 of exercise this weekend. As the referee told the two boxers

before the fight, "Protect yourselves at all times."

What concerns me the most is the interaction between bicycle riders and automobiles. On weekends particularly I see a lot of families with small children riding around Lake Cadillac. The kids are sometimes a tad wobbly and they don't always pay attention. Since much of the bike path is on the shoulder just inches from traffic, it has the potential for tragedy. All it would take is for a driver to change a radio channel, sneeze, look at a pretty girl running by, or glance down at a cell phone for an accident to happen. That white line separating the highway from the bike path offers zero protection.

I'd suggest limiting the danger by riding less on the rim of the lake and more on some alternative side routes. For example, a dangerous part of the bike path is from Veteran's Memorial Stadium to the corner of Chestnut and Lake. People are pulling in and out of three parking lots, launching boats at the ramp, and paying more attention to the traffic on the lakeside walkway than the street in front of them. Riding a bike along this stretch is treacherous at times.

If you're riding with your children, consider riding on the sidewalk on the north



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side of Chestnut Street, on the Junior High and skate park side. This is permitted by city ordinance on this stretch as long as you give pedestrians the right of way and it gets you off the roadway.

Avoiding Holly Road is easy because you can ride the paved White Pine Trail between the corner of Lake and Holly all the way to Barbara Street.

Rather than riding the entire south rim of Lake Cadillac on Sunnyside, swing one block south off the main road and tour Michigan Avenue between Lansing Street and Ohio Street. Just west of Ohio the bike path leaves the shoulder of the road and is its own dedicated path all the way past Mitchell State Park and down to Kenwood Park on the north side of the lake.

Coming out of Kenwood Park, you can take a left onto Iroquois, Huron, Winona, or Otsego to Mohawk (which connects to Seneca) over to Chestnut Street and roll past Kenwood school to the corner of Chestnut and Leeson.

From there, rather than stay on the busiest section of Chestnut, consider sliding one block south down Forest Lane to Sunset Lane which comes out behind the Senior Center directly across from the stadium.

By utilizing these alternate

mini-routes, you can still circle Lake Cadillac plus keep your exposure to traffic at a minimum. And if kids are along on the trek, you'll pass playgrounds at the state park, Kenwood beach, and Kenwood school plus a nice place for a respite in front of the fountain in City Park.

Running or walking around the Lake is also popular. It's 7.2 miles around if you hug the rim, but traffic is still a problem. An alternative is to put together a run/walk entirely on the pathways that connect to the McKellop Walkway. The McKellop is along the north shore of Lake Cadillac.

The Clam River Greenway connects at the Clam River Bridge and winds through neighborhoods all the way to the soccer fields on the northeast side of town. The White Pine Trail goes from Lake and Holly to Barbara. Putting all of these together results in a 7.58 mile run/walk that is entirely off road. (A mileage chart for the walkways can be viewed and downloaded at www.neffzone.com/cadillacnews.)

All of these options make having a safe 4th of July weekend just a little bit easier. I'd urge locals to be extra aware and to help visitors to our community do the same. As the old Sarge on Hill Street Blues used to say: "Hey, hey...let's be careful out there."

JIM NEFF is a local columnist. Comments to neffzone@gmail.com. Read Neff Zone columns online at www.neffzone.com/cadillacnews.