Bath learns more about Safe Routes to School

By Andrea M. Fitzgerald

BATH – New Hampshire Safe Routes to School (SRTS) coordinator, John W. Corrigan, gave a presentation on behalf of the New Hampshire Department of Transportation to a small group at Bath Village School last Thursday evening. SRTS is a nationwide effort encouraging children in kindergarten through eighth grade, including those with disabilities, to safely walk or ride bikes to school. SRTS is just part of the solution to get children out and active in an effort to combat the rise in childhood obesity and the resulting negative emotional and physical effects.

John W. Corrigan, SRTS Coordinator of the NH Dept. of Transportation, answers questions after giving a presentation at Bath Village School last Thursday about the popular nationwide effort to encourage children to safely walk or ride bikes to school.
TBWS/Andrea M. Fitzgerald

The benefits of SRTS are many: better physical fitness, less traffic, cleaner air, and fun. The challenges are many, too, especially in the North Country where winter takes a toll on infrastructure. One usual hurdle, funding, is already taken care of with 100% funding by the Federal Highway Administration which has allocated New Hampshire $1 million per year for five years, most of which will be used to reimburse 100% of local expenses to make routes to school safer.

Stairs on the steep bank in front of the school were torn down years ago, so children now must pick their way along a path up and down the bank. Still, they come out on busy Rte. 302 and either have to cross the road or walk through the square to get home. The thought of a child walking or riding a bicycle on the shoulders of the steep hill abutting the school property along Rte. 302 is unnerving. So, how can Bath's students get to school safely while reaping the rewards of walking or riding a bicycle?

Colleen Strout of Bath, who has a child in kindergarten and first grade, is spearheading a committee which will be looking into a feasible plan and eventual application to SRTS for funding. Right now, Strout says a sidewalk which will get children to the center of town is a definite possibility. She lives right across Rte. 302 from the school, but her children take the bus because it's just not safe to try to cross Rte. 302. Bath Village School Principal, Mike Amsden, said the majority of the school's students ride the bus right now. He thinks one option would be to build a sidewalk from the school's driveway down Rte. 302 to the square, with a second phase of continuing the sidewalk on the other side of the covered bridge to that neighborhood, as well. The idea of children walking on a sidewalk along the steep hill on Rte. 302 is still problematic since logging trucks and tractor trailers will be driving by. Amsden said another consideration in that case might be to look into adult supervision or a walking bus. "At least look at it so there is access safer than what we have."

Bath Police Chief, Dennis Mackay was asked about an eventual Rte. 302 upgrade in Bath and how it would affect any SRTS implementation. County Commissioner and Executive Councilor Ray Burton commented that the plan is that any upgrade would be within the existing alignment, and he would be happy to report back to the school board or SRTS committee.

Corrigan showed examples of other communities' successful solutions. Many towns have built sidewalks, bike paths, and/or added signs, signals, and stripes which allow a walking school bus, escort program, or rolling bike train. Corrigan sited Gorham, N.H. as one of the best examples in the state with its new $15,000 infrastructure enabling students to walk and ride their bikes to school.

Corrigan did say the project can be completed in phases. One crucial point that must be made in applying for funding is to document a home to school connection. SRTS awards three different types of grants: $5,000 start-up to assist communities with initial planning and non-infrastructure programs, up to $15,000 for travel plan grants, and general grants for comprehensive safe routes which includes infrastructure and/or non-infrastructure programs. He also said that there is growing support for SRTS, and more applications are received than there is money. "Don't wait. Start planning now," said Corrigan. "A rural town like Bath presents a challenge, but the spirit is great in the North Country."

Newbury EMS: Off and running

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commented that "this is a service that has been needed for some time. Dan and Nancy Martin have worked really hard to pull everything together, and they deserve kudos for that. It's important to have someone to assist with first aid or life saving measures or even just having the reassurance for the patient and the family that there is someone there that has the skills and is there to help."

Several organizations and individuals have also played a key role in helping get Newbury EMS started, including the WNFD who allowed Newbury EMS to use their facility as a base of operations. "Though we go [on critical care calls] from separate points and don't come here afterwards," Dan says, "we needed a wall to hang [our license] on…a place to call home."

Likewise, during last year's Town Meeting, Newbury residents voted to give EMS $8800 in start-up funds to help cover the cost of basic life support equipment, including first responder kits for all members and two larger trauma bags with oxygen kits; safety vests and other identification equipment; communication equipment that allows the squad to maintain contact with Woodsville Ambulance and Cottage Hospital via Twin State Dispatch; and the training necessary to meet licensing guidelines. A handful of individuals also provided monetary donations as did the Cohase Lion's Club, whose generous $1300 contribution was earmarked for the purchase of two Automatic External Defibrillators (AEDs).

Other supporters included Jerry Senturia, Head of the Peacham Fast Squad, who provided "a model to go by. He helped a lot with the licensing process and getting set up." Newbury EMS member and certified paramedic Jon Bouffard also served as instructor for a 50-hour First Responder Course, which included a computerized "final" exam and a state-administered practical exam required for licensure. Several members of the Woodsville Ambulance crew shared their expertise as well, volunteering to take Newbury EMS members through each of the different stations in preparation for the practical exam.

As part of their continuing education, Newbury's nine certified first responders will also begin participation in six bridge modules, a pre-requisite of sorts to taking the EMT-Basic exam, and Jon has agreed to stay on as Newbury EMS's training and quality control officer.

"We have a diverse group of people who work well together. Thirteen people signed up the first night, and all thirteen are still with us. That says a lot about the type of person on this squad." But with the loss of one member who recently left for Afghanistan, the squad is down to 12 people. "We get stretched pretty thin during the daytime in the middle of the work week. We'd welcome new members to the team."

Newbury EMS meets at the WNFD on the second Thursday of every month, with additional trainings held at least one evening each month. Anyone interested in joining Newbury EMS is encouraged to attend a meeting or contact a current member for more information.

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