

FREEWHEEL

■ PONGPET MEKLOY



Young and active



This is an age when news and information (true as well as false, of course) is readily available. But despite the fact that your internet connection speed is not below average and you spend quite some time online each day, there are still certain decent things going on that you probably never knew about. Sometimes, the most likely reason you missed them is very simple: you're not young enough.

The Active Campus Network (ACN) was a case in point, at least to me. The programme has already completed its second "season" but I had never heard about it until recently. Let's get to know what the young people are up to.

Run by Coca-Cola Thailand and *a day* magazine, the ACN is made up of cycling clubs from various universities. In each season, members are required to conduct and participate in bike-related activities. In the recent season, 12 cycling clubs from different universities were selected from their project proposals. Each participating team was provided with funds and training to help them carry out the proposed projects during the period from November

last year to mid-August this year when their works were evaluated.

The students' projects were divided into two categories: "Active Campus" and "Active Trainer". The first (with a 100,000 baht fund for each project) was aimed at promoting bike culture within the campus, and the latter (50,000 baht plus 20 bicycles worth 100,000 baht for each project) at extending such culture to younger students in nearby schools.

Yes, for teenagers that's quite a lot of money. The projects were obviously no child's play; the organisers expected solid results. According to Nuntivat Thamhatai, Coca-Cola Thailand's director of public affairs and communications, the students' projects this year coupled with the 12 "Active Thailand Tour" bike trips which were held as another part of the ACN by *a day* magazine, managed to involved as many as 12,000 people. "The ACN has successfully promoted a cycling culture in universities," he said. "We have also focused on creating a model in which our participants act as change agents within their communities."

Editor-in-Chief of *a day* magazine Zcongklod Bangyikhan said he saw the power of creativity in the submitted projects. "A series of workshops were developed for participants to enhance their cycling skills and knowledge, as well as to provide guidelines that would help them in implementing work plans, from planning and brainstorming to financial management," he elaborated.

To ensure the students do their best in carrying out the proposed plans, the organisers also offered an incentive: the most successful teams would be awarded with a trip to ride in Singapore.

And recently, four winning teams, two from each category, were flown to Singapore for three days to experience the city state's extensive bike route network and related facilities. They were from Chiang Mai University, Silpakorn University, University of Payao and Mae Fah Luang University. The students were joined by two cyclists who have the highest accumulated ride mileages from the Active Thailand Tour bike trips.

Suthinee Rakchart, a senior student and core member of the winning team from Payao University, said her cycling club's project comprised a variety of activities, from holding a daily exercise ride for students and personnel of the university and free bicycle maintenance service for the public to sharing ride experience with school students.



Photos courtesy of COKE ACTIVE CAMPUS NETWORK

The ACN, she explained, not only allowed her and her teammates to work on a worthwhile project that benefits society and the environment but also gave them the chance to meet up with like-minded peers from other institutions.

"The Singapore visit was also a great experience," she said. "We got to see how roads and other public spaces could be shared by bicycle users and other commuters. We can use what we have learned from the trip to make bike traffic at our university more efficient and safer."



With ACN Season 2 just completed, it's still too early to say if, or when, the third season will be announced. But should it happen, I'll keep you posted, just in case you have teenage cyclists in the family who might be keen on taking part in this useful project.

Well, see you here again next Thursday. Until then, if you have questions, news or biking insights you wish to share, please feel free to send an email to pongpetm@bangkokpost.co.th or go to Freewheel Bangkok community page on Facebook.

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