

Electric bicycles scoot into Provincetown

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PROVINCETOWN — Heather Baker and Erica Apicella are rolling out something new in town — an American-made electric-powered bicycle that will give tourists a chance to explore the 17.5-square-mile town without breaking a sweat or pushing a pedal.

The URB-E is quiet, folds up for convenience, weighs a mere 35 pounds (lighter than most baby strollers) and achieves a top speed of 14 miles per hour. They are manufactured in Pasadena, Calif.

“There’s no emissions and no gasoline,” Apicella said on Saturday. “They look intimidating because they are unfamiliar, but we have really done our research and safety is our top priority. The good thing is your feet are near the ground. Anyone can ride it and feel safe. Unlike a regular bicycle, you don’t have to dismount. It’s not fast, but it’s convenient.”

Their new business will operate online at coastprovincetown.com and under a concierge delivery service business certificate.

The idea came to them during a conversation over meatloaf.

“It was the beginning of last summer and Danny Gurney ‘Brooks,’ the drag queen and manager at the Governor Bradford, called out of the blue and said, ‘I’m craving meatloaf today. Do you want to go to the Mayflower?’” Apicella said. “So there we are and I see this older lady, almost 70 years old, and she has something tucked under her table. At first I thought it was a mobility device, but it looked funky. Then she gets up and picks it up and unfolds it. So I’m like, wait a minute. It was an URB-E that the woman bought at an RV show. She let me ride it and I started thinking, this would be the perfect thing for Provincetown.”

The two decided to investigate. Baker works as the medical case manager for the AIDS Support Group in Provincetown and Apicella has served as a paramedic in Plymouth for the last 16 years.

“We couldn’t afford a brick-and-mortar type business, but we’ve always dreamed of owning one, particularly based in Provincetown,” Apicella said. “And one that is good for the environment and celebrates all the town offers. And being a full-time paramedic, my first priority was safety. This business can’t be anything if it’s dangerous.”

They purchased 14 URB-E bicycles at a price of \$2,000 each.

With the bikes, accessories, legal fees, a new van, a website and other expenses, the pair have invested about \$70,000, Apicella said.

The business officially opens today, May 17.

“We are working with local inns and offering a concierge service,” Apicella said. “Say people take the ferry here. We will meet them there, take their bags, hand them an URB-E and drop their bags off at their inn. So their vacation starts the minute they set foot on the pier.”

The electric bikes can be parked just like any other bike, at a bike rack with a lock, or folded and brought indoors. They will be picked up nightly between 8 and 9 p.m. for inspection, and not left around town at night, Baker said.

Riders are required to wear helmets and are provided with bicycle locks and cellphone holders at no charge. Full-day rentals, up to eight hours, cost \$99; or bikes can be had for \$24.99 for the first hour. A 25-percent discount will be offered for year-round resident and town employees, any employee of the AIDS Support Group and anyone working for the police or fire departments, the two owners said. Renters must be at least 18 and each rider will be required to return the bicycle to a pre-arranged location.

“I love bicycling, but I haven’t ever done it in the summer because I can’t handle all the people, the cars, and having to stop and go and get my feet back up on the pedals,” Baker said. “I’m not a confident enough bicyclist. I’m 5’2” and have a 28 inseam on a good day. I can put my feet on the ground with the URB-E.”

Since the URB-E does not require a license and does not use fuel, it does not fall under the town's bylaw that covers scooters, mopeds or other motorized vehicles. URB-E riders are required to abide by all bicycle rules and regulations.

The town doesn't have a right to say e-bikes aren't allowed, Apicella said.

"[The town] says no two- or three-wheel vehicle can be for rent or hire, but we aren't a vehicle," she said. "You can't take vehicles on a plane or store them in a hotel room, and the URB-E is TSA-approved. The bylaw was created to prohibit mopeds and inexperienced drivers, and they are usually loud and require gasoline. That's why the bylaw was designed. These [e-bikes] didn't exist when they made the bylaw. We hired an attorney who looked into it. We really did our research. We want the town to realize that we want to work with them and these will be a benefit."

Town Manager David Panagore would not comment on the new business. The select board met on Monday in executive session to discuss the "rental of motorized two-wheeled vehicles," according to the agenda.

"We're not the type of people looking for a problem," Apicella said. "We want to work with the town so that this can be easygoing for all sides of it. It's going to bring in tourism. People can go to Fanizzi's in the East End or the Red Inn in the West End. Tourism isn't just in that little center. There's so many restaurants and art galleries on each side of Commercial Street. And for people who don't feel comfortable riding a bike and don't want to be sweaty, this is a great alternative."

As for competition with other bicycle shops, Baker said that won't be an issue.

"We never went into this thinking we are in competition with anyone," she said. "It's like picking from a menu. We only have 14 bikes and other shops have anywhere between 500 to 800 bikes for rent. We don't rent to children and you can't take our bikes through the Seashore. We're really just marketing to inns and the downtown area. If we do not have a rental available, we will share the love and recommend other shops for bikes."