



# Businesses, police team up to keep runners safe

KRONENWETTER -- What started as a close call for a Kronenwetter business owner has blossomed into a full blown campaign to keep avid runners and bicyclists safe on dimly lit roadways.

Matt Waldvogel, owner of Countryside Fence & Deck Service in Kronenwetter, said he started thinking about runner safety after a few frightening instances that nearly turned deadly. Waldvogel said that while driving during early morning or late evening hours, there have been several occasions that he didn't see a runner until it was almost too late.

"If runners are wearing dark clothing, they're hard to see. In fact, you don't see them until you're practically right on top of them," Waldvogel said. "It scares the dickens out of you."

Those close calls left Waldvogel shaken enough to do something about what he called a "serious safety hazard." He approached Kronenwetter Police Officer Andrew Zortman with his idea of distributing brightly colored vests to runners -- and offered a \$300

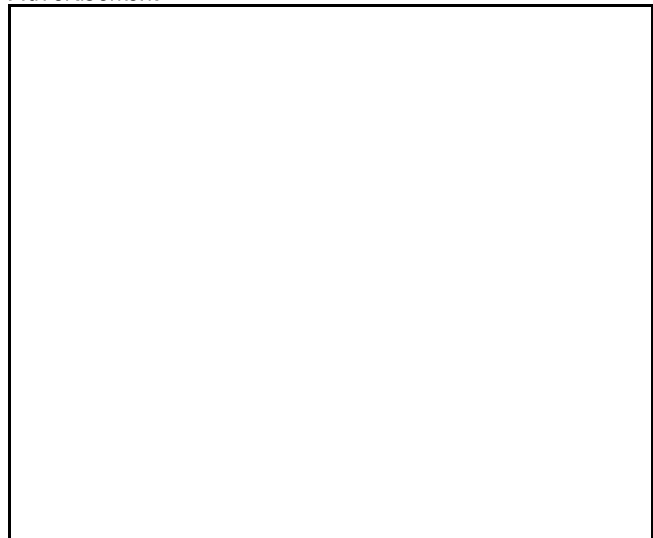
donation to help defray the cost if the police department would distribute them.

Zortman did more than just listen to Waldvogel's concerns and ideas. After some brainstorming and help from a variety of local businesses, Zortman came up with Project Run-Safe, a community partnership dedicated to the safety of runners, walkers and bicyclists in Kronenwetter.

"I consider myself a pretty serious runner, and I knew right away that (Waldvogel's) concerns were valid. The lighting in Kronenwetter is not the best for a runner," Zortman said.

The project ultimately will provide runners, bicyclists and walkers with a bright yellow Dri-Fit T-shirt, an LED headlamp, reflective wrist straps and information about Wisconsin bicycle

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and pedestrian laws. Kronenwetter Police Department officials currently are putting the packets together, but officers already are handing out coupons to residents. Coupons can be redeemed for no-cost safety packets as soon as they're ready to distribute, hopefully within the next several weeks, Zortman said.

On May 17, officers handed out the coupons at the Kronenwetter Bike & Walk event. One resident said she's happy the community is banding together to promote safety.

"I run every morning at 5 a.m. sharp, and it can be pretty dark and scary. I'll definitely be using my new equipment when I can turn in my coupon," said Diane Fox, 52, of Kronenwetter. "Anything that promotes community safety is something I welcome."

Officers also regularly hand out coupons to bicyclists and runners while they are on patrol.

"If we see someone biking or walking, we stop and hand them a coupon," Zortman said. "It's turning into a real community effort to promote safety."

Zortman said the police department has partnered with a number of local businesses to get the program off the ground. He first approached Eastbay in

Wausau to find out about style options and costs, and was pleasantly surprised when they offered to help sponsor the program. Brandon Scheck, an inside sales representative for Eastbay Team Services, said the company will supply one-third of the T-shirts at no charge.

"Because it's such a great idea -- and it's local -- we wanted to get involved," Scheck said. "The idea blew us all away."

Zortman said community involvement continues to grow. So far, more than 13 businesses have contributed and the Kronenwetter Lions Club donated \$1,000 to the program.

"People seem to think this is a good idea," Zortman said. "My neighbor sent an email that she pitched it to her boss, a business owner, and she

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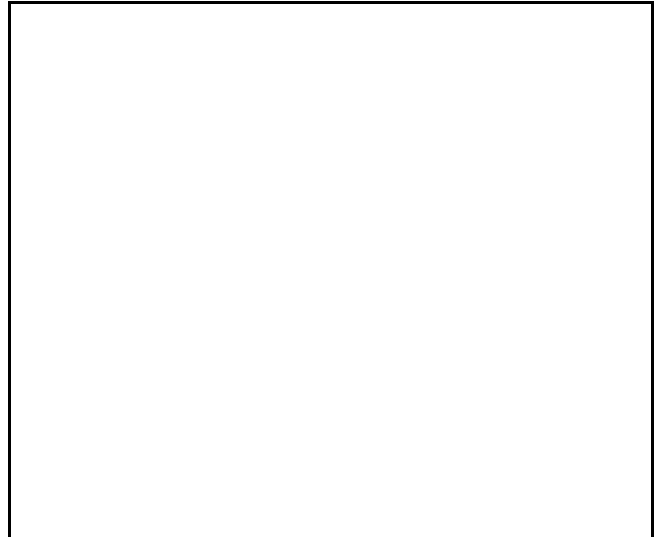


thinks that might get a donation for us. Other businesses have called. We've had great response."

Waldvogel said he's just glad his idea got the ball rolling to increase awareness of the runners on community roads.

"The thought that you could hurt someone is just devastating," Waldvogel said. "It's scary. Hopefully, this will help keep people safe."

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