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in for free bikes

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How do you get a thousand kids, their parents and a Bear mascot to stand for hours in the freezing rain? Simple. Just give away a bunch of free bikes.

That was the formula last Saturday at the Intermountain Medical Center parking lot in Murray.

For the second year in a row, Bikes for Kids Utah accomplished its goal of giving away 1,000 free bikes to underprivileged second-graders from across the state. The event was a big draw - despite weather that deserved an ark.

Following the advice of the administrators of Bikes for Kids, most of the parents of the lucky recipients hadn't informed their children of the free bikes until they were en route to the giveaway.

"I guess they didn't want them to get too excited," said parent Chad Lamb of West Jordan.

The children weren't exactly calm after they arrived at the event and grasped the nature of their upcoming windfall.

"It feels like Christmas morning!" yelled one nameless and vocal member of the child mob as she sprinted toward a semi trailer filled with boxes of unassembled blue Huffy bikes.

The gravity of the situation also wasn't lost on Tour de France stage winner and spokesman for the event Dave Zabriskie. His participation in an auction and a sponsored bike ride helped fund the giveaway.

"The kids seem pretty happy, except for the rain," said Zabriskie.

Besides feeling like Santa Claus, Zabriskie has several reasons for his continued involvement with Bikes for Kids.

"The number one factor was that [Bikes for Kids] was a local charity. It's nice to help kids fight obesity, and being a bike rider sticks with you. But don't get me wrong, I like video games as much as the next guy, but it's nice to mix it up once and a while," said Zabriskie.

In addition to receiving a bike, each child received a helmet, a bike lock and the opportunity to cruise the Bike Rodeo on a preassembled bike. The Bike Rodeo was a cone-directed obstacle course made bleak by the icy rain.

The purpose of the Bike Rodeo was to give the children a chance to feel out a preassembled bike before being awarded one of their own. For many of the second-graders, their prize from Bikes for Kids was their first bike, as was the case for 7-year-old Ester Torres.

"I'm not excited, I'm very excited," said Torres as she waited patiently with Grizzbee, the Utah Grizzlies mascot, for her turn to receive a bike.

With increased participation and donations, Zabriskie and the Bikes for Kids organizers are looking forward to the future of their program.

"I'd like to smash all the cars, encourage riding, be able to give bikes to old people, too, and take biking as far as it can go," said Zabriskie.

Regardless of its increased level of growth, Bikes for Kids seemed determined to incorporate at least one significant change to the program.

"Next year, I think we're going to do this giveaway in summer," said drenched public relations director David Politis.

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