

## Cycling franchise provides rentals to Lakes Park visitors

By [Laura Ruane](#)

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A national cycling franchise that's new to Florida has rolled out at Lakes Regional Park in south Fort Myers.

Wheel Fun Rentals specializes in three- and four-wheeled, pedal-powered machines sporting such names as Sling-shot, Chopper, Quad sport, Deuce Coupe and Surrey.

Although traditional bikes soon will be part of the mix, the target market is not serious cyclists, but rather families who just want to have fun, said Don Kasper. He moved here from Columbus, Ind., to own and operate the local franchise.

"Lakes Park has 21/2 miles of paved trails. And, before Hurricane Charley, it got 600,000 visitors a year," Kasper said, explaining what attracted him to the park.

Kasper approached Lee County Parks and Recreation with the concept. At the time, Lakes Park had no concessions, having parted with the last food and boat vendor after Charley struck in August 2004.

Wheel Fun Rentals' contract with the county calls for a monthly rental payment of \$150. It's for a year, and can be renewed if both Kasper and county parks leaders agree. If other bicycle vendors indicated an interest after the initial year, the concession would be advertised for proposals, said Barbara Manzo, deputy director for county parks and recreation.

The bike rental "is a service to our visitors," Manzo said, adding that safety, reliability and qualities other than income to the county are most important when evaluating park concessionaires.

Lee, Collier and Charlotte comprise Kasper's franchise territory. He's been operating at Lakes Park for eight weeks, and is scouting for a second location on Fort Myers Beach.

Kasper's park concession is open weekends only, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Ventura, Calif.-based Wheel Fun Rentals began franchising in 2000. It now has 75 locations in 15 states. The first Florida franchise debuted in January at Holiday Inn SunSpree in St. Petersburg. Those operators since expanded to Fort DeSoto Beach and The Pier, also in St. Petersburg.

On Saturday, Fort Myers resident Anne Hughat rented a two-seater surrey and then pedaled around the park with five members of her family, including young children.

Hughat said she enjoys walking the pathways around Lakes Park, but it is often difficult for children to keep up and they get tired.

"Instead of taking the walk, which takes at least two hours, now we can just pedal around together," Hughat said.

Trish Riddell of Cape Coral shared a Deuce Coupe with her daughter.

"It's a nice family thing because it is so nice and peaceful out here," Riddell said as she paused on the park's causeway. "It's a little pricey, but I figured we would give it a try at least once."

— The News-Press staff writer Tim Engstrom contributed to this report.



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• Andrew Jeffers, 2, and his big brother Patrick Jeffers, 5, from St. Clair Shores, Mich., spend their last day of vacation cycling around Lakes Park with their mom, each trying out the different types available. A new bicycle franchise, Wheel Fun Rentals, has come to Lakes Park and specializes in such things as four-wheel "Surrey Bikes" and "Deuce Coupes."

### WHEELS AT A GLANCE

Available at Wheel Fun Rentals at Lakes Regional Park in south Fort Myers:

- **Slingshot:** A three-wheeled bike for a single rider. It sits low to the ground on a central pivot and "slingshots" the rider from side to side while bobbing, weaving and turning corners. \$10 an hour. Ages 6 to 60.
- **Deuce Coupe:** It has two seats, side by side, and two sets of pedals. There's a jump seat in the back to carry kids 6 years and younger. \$15 an hour. Ages 2 to 80.
- **Quad Sport:** A four-wheel ride for one person, with steering that lets the operator turn on a dime. \$10 an hour. Ages 6 to 60.
- **The Chopper:** A single-seater designed for laid-back cruising and sightseeing. The handlebars and seat are designed for comfort, like a motorcycle chopper. \$10 an hour. Ages 6 to 60.
- **Surrey:** Various versions of this four-wheeler seat from three to nine adults (models vary upon location), plus two children. \$15 an hour for single seater; \$25 for double. Ages 1 to 99.