

Ride and Seek throughout York Region with Smart Commute Markham, Richmond Hill's Chair and Vice-Chair

Since 2008, more than 100 cyclists, volunteers and exhibitors convene at WSP's Thornhill office on the last Monday of every May to participate in [Bike to Work Day](#), Smart Commute Markham, Richmond Hill's (SCMRH) annual signature event. This annual SCMRH-organized group ride allows cyclists to build confidence riding on the road as a group, enhance their cycling skills and explore bike lanes, trails and shared pathways that could be incorporated into a cycling commute. To ensure Bike to Work Day is a success, SCMRH relies on support from our sponsors, partners and Advisory Committee in the planning process during the months leading up to the ride.



Kevin (L) and David (R) cycle on the Lake-to-Lake Cycling Route and Walking Trail during the 2018 Bike to Work Day group ride

SCMRH's Advisory Committee meets or corresponds at least four times per year to share ideas, discuss recent Smart Commute initiatives and provide input on potential bike routes for Bike to Work Day. Composed of several Champions from our Smart Commute workplaces, the Advisory Committee not only advises SCMRH on best practices regarding sustainable commuting, they also walk (or in this case, ride) the talk!

Due to COVID-19 restrictions in lieu of organizing large-scale group rides, SCMRH and the York Region TMAs collaborated to create the Ride and Seek Campaign, which encourages residents of York Region to explore and photograph cycling infrastructure throughout nearby municipalities. Between September 14 and October 9, participants were challenged to cycle to [87 landmarks](#) in the Region's nine municipalities, and take a photo of their bikes at each location. Among the 152 individuals who pledged to join the campaign were David Richardson, Manager of Transportation at WSP and SCMRH's Advisory Committee Chair, and Kevin Phillips, Manager of Municipal Transportation at AECOM and SCMRH's Advisory Committee Vice-Chair. As avid cyclists and regular participants of the Bike to Work Day group ride, David and Kevin have brought experience, insight and passion for cycling to their Advisory Committee roles. Upon learning of this new opportunity to explore York Region by bike, David and Kevin eagerly joined and promoted the "Ride and Seek Campaign" within their respective workplaces. SCMRH invites you to read more about both cyclists' experiences during the campaign, their favourite landmarks, and how you can continue to enjoy cycling York Region this fall!

About David and Kevin



David is an avid participant in the Ride to Conquer Cancer

If you cycle in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area on weekends between the spring and fall, you may have passed David enjoying a leisurely ride on some of his favourite routes, including the [Don Valley](#), [Humber](#), [Waterfront](#), and [Beltline Trails](#), the [Finch](#) and [Gatineau Hydro Corridors](#), the [Tom Taylor](#) and [Nokiidaa](#) trails, the [North Maple Regional Park](#) and the

[Uxbridge Rail](#) trail. David is a Markham resident and cycles locally two to three times a week; he often enjoys the nine-minute cycling commute from home to WSP's Thornhill office. Internationally, David has participated in cycling tours in 12 countries, including the [Dick Allen Lansing to Mackinaw Bicycle Tour](#) in Michigan and the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. David also pedals for a good cause. He has participated in the two-day [Ride to Conquer Cancer](#) from Toronto to Niagara Falls and the [Ride for Heart](#) on the Gardiner Expressway and Don Valley Parkway on numerous occasions.



David is pictured at WSP's annual Bike and Hike to your Roots walking and cycling event



Kevin proudly wears his 2020 Bike Month t-shirt during a weekend ride in East Gwillimbury's Rogers Reservoir

During work hours, Aurora resident Kevin manages several municipal transportation projects at AECOM's Richmond Hill office, such as the recently constructed design of a 140 m long and 23 m wide flyover of Highway 404 just north of Highway 7, which features sidewalks and bike lanes to encourage active transportation. Kevin played an active role in showcasing the flyover during the 2019 Bike to Work Day group ride by inviting AECOM's Vice President, Patrick Puccini, to speak about the significance of the flyover in providing safer connections for cyclists between Markham and Richmond Hill. On weekends and several weeknights, Kevin enjoys cycling along roads through northern York Region several times a week. His favourite local routes are the rolling hills of King, and up to Lake Simcoe through Whitchurch-Stouffville, Georgina and East Gwillimbury. Kevin is a seasoned triathlete having trekked to events with his bike throughout Canada, US, Mexico and South Africa in recent years and is also on Triathlon Canada's National Team attending the 2021 World Championships in the Netherlands. With COVID and a lack of races this year, Kevin purchased a cyclocross bike from [BikeSports](#) of Newmarket (one of the Ride and Seek campaign destinations) and developed a love for off-the-beaten path bike

adventures through the [Jefferson](#) and [Durham](#) forests, and rural gravel routes.

Pledging to Join the Campaign

When SCMRH promoted the Ride and Seek Campaign to our Advisory Committee and greater network, we were thrilled that David and Kevin showed their support by pledging to join and sharing photos of their bike rides at pre-selected landmarks across York Region. Both the Chair and Vice-Chair have always been proactive in leading SCMRH's cycling activities, including tests of potential Bike to Work Day routes, volunteering to lead lesser experienced cyclists during a group ride and promoting CAN-BIKE sessions and cycling workshops at their respective workplaces.

When asked why he decided to participate in the Ride and Seek Campaign, David responded that he was enticed by exploring “a host of fascinating locations to visit,” and that he “welcomed the challenge of finding as many of the ‘places of interest’ (or landmarks) as possible for the contest.”

Despite experiencing a shoulder injury from a cycling accident in early September, Kevin was eager to participate in the Ride and Seek Campaign as a “fun and active way to see some local sites and attractions around York Region.”

After receiving custom resource packages provided by SCMRH staff that included landmark maps for each municipality, contest rules and instructions for submitting photos, David and Kevin embarked on cycling journeys that introduced them to some of the Region's hidden gems.

Embarking on a New Path

The main goal of the Ride and Seek Campaign was to encourage participants to explore landmarks located outside their municipalities of residence. Smart Commute was pleased to learn that 40% of participants cycled to two or more municipalities (with one individual cycling to all nine municipalities)! Among those participants were David and Kevin, who cycled to six out of the nine municipalities: David explored Richmond Hill and Markham, while Kevin cycled throughout Newmarket, Georgina, Aurora and East Gwillimbury. Although both David and Kevin have cycled throughout the Region numerous times, they were both surprised to encounter lesser-known cycling amenities and infrastructure in York Region.



Even the most experienced cyclist may encounter minor problems or issues during a leisurely ride, which could require immediate attention. Luckily, David discovered bike repair stations in Markham and Richmond Hill that may be useful if his bike needed a tuneup or some air. To many cyclists, these

David cycled to the bike repair station at the Richmond Hill Centre Terminal

are easy to miss: Markham's repair station is located at the entrance to the Rouge Valley Trail east of Main Street Unionville, and Richmond Hill's station is hidden behind two large evergreens and is mainly visible to commuters waiting for Viva or YRT buses at the terminal. These stations



Kevin's bike is pictured outside Georgina's Recreational Outdoor Campus

feature screwdrivers, wrenches, tire levers and an air pump, which are accessible and easy to use. For those who are unsure of how to use the tools, a QR code on the Markham station provides [simple instructional videos](#). These are two examples of new cycling amenities that David did not know existed, but would be incorporated into his ever-expanding cycling routes!

When selecting the 87 landmarks for the campaign, Smart Commute chose a variety of trails, bike lanes, municipal structures, green spaces and heritage sites to highlight the Region's diverse natural and cultural spaces. In many cases, a single landmark offered an opportunity to explore a new trail system while learning about the historical significance of that location. Kevin's cycling experience through Georgina led him to discover a pioneer village just inside the grounds of the [Recreational Outdoor Campus \(ROC\)](#). Called "York Region's Adventure Headquarters," the ROC features a multitude of amenities including a bike park and [bike trails in the North Shore](#) (please note both spaces are closed for the season). Proving that the Ride and Seek Campaign introduced him to routes that he would have otherwise not cycled, Kevin noted he was so impressed with the trail network in the valley area that he returned the next week with his trail bike for a new adventure.

Ride and Seek Highlights from David and Kevin

Overall, both cyclists visited a total of 46 landmarks over a four-week period: David visited six in Richmond Hill and eight in Markham, while Kevin visited five in Georgina, seven in East Gwillimbury, eight in Aurora and 12 in Newmarket.



Two of David's favourite landmarks included: (L) the Lake to Lake Cycling Route and Walking Trail and (R) the Rouge Valley Trail near Toogood Pond, a 33-hectare park located just north of historic Main Street Unionville.

When asked to list his favourite landmarks, David chose Beaver Greenway and the [Lake to Lake Cycling Route and Walking Trail](#) on Leslie Street. When complete, this recreational and commuter

trail will span 121 km from Lake Ontario to Lake Simcoe, and will connect to existing trail systems, transit hubs, and other amenities such as parks, beaches and community centres. ([Click here](#) to read SCMRH's blog about the top four reasons to cycle the Lake to Lake Cycling Route and Walking Trail.) David also mentioned Toogood Pond where he encountered Markham Deputy Mayor and Regional Councillor (and fellow SCMRH Advisory Committee Member) Don Hamilton.



Kevin was one of several cyclists who photographed their bike at Sharon Temple during the Ride and Seek Campaign

Participating in the campaign has inspired David to cycle to the other landmarks in York Region that he did not get a chance to explore, although he acknowledges that he may have to wait until next spring - "unless the weather co-operates!"

When asked to name his favourite landmark, Kevin chose the [Sharon Temple National Historic Site and Museum](#), which he selected for its impressive structure, architecture, history and setting. Designated as a National Historic Site of Canada in 1990, Sharon Temple is located on Leslie Street and Mt. Albert Road, and can be accessed by bike from Leslie using the paved shoulder, or from Mt. Albert Road using the in-boulevard shared pathway (east of Leslie), or the shared roadway (west of Leslie). [Click here](#) to view these routes on York Region's Interactive Cycling Map. Kevin was not the only participant interested in visiting Sharon Temple; 77% of cyclists who explored East Gwillimbury during the Ride and Seek Campaign also submitted photos of their bikes at this location.

A Successful End to a Great Campaign!

At the end of the campaign, Smart Commute received 649 photo submissions from Ride and Seek participants, with the majority being from Newmarket (203 photos), Markham (139 photos) and Aurora (80 photos). After this first joint campaign with York Region and other Smart Commute offices in the Region, planning for a cycling-themed campaign for 2021 is underway, featuring new challenges and ways to engage with the cycling community. In the meantime, we encourage you to check out the [87 landmarks](#), by cycling or walking, throughout the fall and winter! Check your municipal website to ensure the locations are accessible according to provincial and regional guidelines. Share your photos of these landmarks by emailing them to info@smartcommutemrh.ca or tagging us on social media at [@smartcommutemrh.ca](https://www.facebook.com/smartcommutemrh.ca). Visit [york.ca/cycling](https://www.york.ca/cycling) to learn more about cycling safety during the fall and winter months.

SCMRH would like to thank David and Kevin for participating in the Ride and Seek Campaign, and for their ongoing great support of the Smart Commute program. We are encouraged to see so much enthusiasm for cycling in the Region, so – to quote David – "let's do it again next year!"