



HEALTH & WELLNESS FINALIST: **EL GRUPO NORTE YOUTH CYCLING**

INITIATIVE: **Grand Traverse Bike Education Center at Civic Center Park**

OVERVIEW OF INITIATIVE - IN THE APPLICANT'S WORDS

At the heart of good health is movement.

And Norte believes in empowering kids — and those who love them — to sit less and move more as part of ordinary life, like walking to school or biking to the library. This effort is at the heart of transforming northern Michigan's culture of health.

Norte is actively planning a two-phase construction expansion project and capital campaign to support expanded services to meet ever-increasing community demand, and change the odds in favor of happy, healthy, strong families.

The expansion includes a world-class and family-friendly Pump Track that will build skills and confidence for all ages and abilities.

A fun quarter-mile Traffic Garden will teach safety and adventure.

A sustainably built Educational Center will provide expanded space for current and new programs. The center will host the Community Bike Shop and Kids' Bike Library and bring Norte's operations under one roof.

The following sections contain certain key information from the application, as written by the applicant. While detailed financial information has not been provided here due to its confidential nature, each applicant submitted an initiative budget and supporting financial documents as part of their application. Each proposed initiative and the supporting financial documentation has undergone a thorough financial review by our Community Investment Review Committee (CIRC) and the initiatives proposed by our finalists have met our standards for moving forward.

ORGANIZATION'S VISION STATEMENT

Happy, healthy, strong communities.

ORGANIZATION'S MISSION STATEMENT

Norte builds stronger, better connected, and more walk/bike-friendly communities by empowering the young and young at heart.

DESCRIPTION OF ORGANIZATION AND ITS HISTORY

Ty and Johanna Schmidt, Norte's co-founders, believe that bicycles are much more than tangible things or toys. They see bikes as powerful tools in promoting independence, freedom, confidence and stronger, better-connected communities. Whether it's commuting to work year-round or riding to the library with their two boys, Carter and Jameson, bikes are a huge part of their family's lives.

Ty grew up in Dauphin, Manitoba, while Johanna is a Leelanau County native. After graduating from the University of North Dakota and the University of Southern California, respectively, they met in Tucson.

It was in there that they not only fell in love with bicycles but with the Hispanic culture and people, the Mexican food and the Sonoran desert.

They moved north to Traverse City in 2006 to be closer to Johanna's family. The name Norte is a mashup of their time in Tucson and them coming back home to northern Michigan.

Upon arriving in Traverse City, they began to notice things: insanely long carlines wrapping around neighborhood schools, hardly any kids walking to school and even fewer kids biking.

Because they job share – Ty and Johanna are both physical therapists at Munson where they split a 40hr/week position – they had the time and decided to try to help fix these things.

They started inviting neighborhood families to drop their kids off at their house so they could bike with them to Eastern Elementary where their boys attended. Ty would lead the "bike train" in the morning and Johanna would pedal home with the group in the afternoon.

First, they had 2-3 kids join. Soon it was 6-8. Then it took off. Much more than just escorting, their train was very social. The kids talk. They chat. Minecraft. Recess heroics. Weekend happenings. And it was a lot of FUN.

Ty and Johanna also committed to making every bike train trip a teaching moment. They would take the time to teach the students about riding safely, intelligently, and predictably while they pedaled to school. A light bulb went off. They wondered, "What if this could help happen at all of Traverse City's neighborhood schools?"

Ty and Johanna reached out to some friends and talked them into forming their own trains and that's how Norte, Northern Michigan's bike-centric, youth-focused advocacy organization, was born.

Today, Norte has grown to become much more than just kids pedaling to school in Traverse City.

From systems change to Pro Walk/Pro Bike advocacy to a youth leadership council to active-for-life educational programs to community services like kids' bike libraries and community bike shops, Norte is transforming the culture of health in Northern Michigan by developing happy, healthy, ready-to-learn kids and building stronger, better connected and more walk/bike communities by empowering the young and young at heart.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF INITIATIVE

Norte is Northern Michigan's youth-focused, active-transportation-centered, neighborhood-based advocacy organization dedicated to developing active-for-life kids and building happy, healthy, strong communities.

Norte's headquarters is at the Grand Traverse County Civic Center in the heart of Traverse City. We currently have two facilities we affectionately call, The Clubhouse and The Wheelhouse. In the former, we operate a community bike shop where anyone, free of charge, can work on their bike.

The Wheelhouse hosts many activities, and chief among them is the Grand Traverse Regional Kids' Bike Library and the main launch point for multiple youth bike programs.

In the last five years, our youth programs have exploded by nearly 500%. And, although we have trailheads and branches across a five-county region, our headquarters must expand into a larger, dedicated space. We call this future home The Grand Traverse Bike Education Center at Civic Center Park.

Norte's education center is a transformative project that will be one of a kind in Michigan. It will feature three elements:

1. A 10,000/sq ft world-class Pump Track (phase I)
2. A quarter-mile Traffic Garden to teach critical skills (phase I)
3. A two-story 7,200/sq ft building housing our community bike shop, kids' bike library, classrooms, and offices.(phase II)

We see the education center as the hub of activity to drive the health and mobility goals of Grand Traverse County while adding community value to help the region attract and retain talent, families, and recognition for being happy, healthy, and strong.

The Grand Traverse Bike Education Center at Civic Center Park recently received a vote of confidence and commitment from the Grand Traverse County Parks and Recreation Commission. The commission included the education center in their master plan and committed to Norte with a long-term land lease of 2 acres in the southeast corner of the park.

COMMUNITY TO BE SERVED

3-18 year olds - and those who love them - in Grand Traverse county.

NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY TO BE SERVED

The Education Center will provide a fun, accessible (open to the public dusk till dawn), in town (the Civic Center is in the heart of Traverse City and well connected by trails, bike routes, and bike lanes), family-friendly (moms and dads are going to love it!) bike safety education facility.

As you know, bicycling is one of the most popular activities that is currently going through a pandemic-induced boom.

Bicycling has many health benefits, allows individuals to explore the local environment, reduces environmental impacts, lessens household transportation costs, and can result in increased academic achievement.

Bike safety education is not part of school curriculums here in Northern Michigan. Decades ago, bike safety was taught in many districts by law enforcement sector patrol officers. With funding cuts and shifting priorities, most schools no longer have patrol officers, leaving a bike safety education void. Norte provides bike safety education programs and encouragement of biking and walking to school through events and regular programming. By providing "bike field trips" to entire classrooms in the region, the Education Center will allow hundreds of children to learn bike safety skills in a safe environment.

SUSTAINABILITY OF THE PROPOSED INITIATIVE

Norte has strategically established a broad, diverse and very healthy balance of revenue from individual gifts, business sponsors, foundation and governmental grants, fees for programming, fee-for-service offerings like bike repair and bike valet, earned income via used bike sales, consulting, and four very popular annual fundraising events.

An example of a financially sustainable Norte program is the Grand Traverse Regional Summer Bike Camp. Founded in 2016, with the help of a small seed grant, it now pays for itself (program fees and corporate sponsors that help provide scholarships) in 5 different communities reaching 700 kids aged 6-14 years old.