

Batten down the metaphorical hatches, a political nor'easter is headed our way.

Hurricane Obama is due to make landing in or around coastal Maine on Thursday, yes April Fool's Day, bringing with him high temperatures and much turbulence.

U.S. Rep. Chellie Pingree announced the visit Friday morning, with a formal White House announcement following a few hours later. While details were not known, Pingree said the president will be addressing health care and promised more

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Going Dutch

City bikes are on the rise with debut of new shop, Facebook group

BY MATT DODGE
THE PORTLAND DAILY SUN

There are a litany of words that can be used to describe the type of bicycles sold at Josh Cridler's week-old shop on York Street.

"Vintage-inspired, European, Dutch. These are daily chore bikes," said Cridler.

Looking over the chromed-out inventory of cycles at Portland Velocipede, resplendent with leather accents and century-old styling, the word "fashionable" is inevitably added to the list.

Zippering around town on a road or track bike is fine for some, but for those who wants to arrive in one piece, and step from bike to boardroom in the same outfit, a Dutch-style city bike can be just the ticket.

Cridler and fiancée Gillian Kitchings said the decision to open such a speciality shop coincides with a paradigm shift in how we think about cycling and transportation in general, a shift that emphasizes lifestyle and comfort over recreation and speed.

"The last 20 years have been focused more on recreation," said Cridler, who has been repairing bikes for ten years, most recently at Center Street Cycles in Brunswick. "What's growing is more of a focus on 'the life bike,'" he said.

Cridler said the cycling scene in the 90's and early 2000's was all about speed. Race bikes, road bikes, whatever got you there fastest is what sold. "Now it's more about enjoying your bike and taking your time," said Cridler.

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Portland Velocipede owners Josh Cridler and Gillian Kitchings saddle up a child-carting bike at their York Street shop. The bicycle in the background is a vintage "Boneshaker" or "Pennyfarthing" which the owners have yet to ride without incident. (MATT DODGE PHOTO)

Velocipede culture promotes the journey over the destination

BIKES from page one

"It's about the romantic feel of the bicycle," added Kitchings.

Such bicycles are already the accessory de jour in fashion-forward Milan, as documented on fashion blog The Sartorialist.

Photographer/tastemaker Scott Schuman can hardly unsheathe his camera in the city without catching a well-dressed Italian riding one of the handsome city bikes.

The Dutch-style bicycles carried by the shop are mostly European made, with California-based Linus representing the lone American brand. "There are a lot of larger companies branching out into the market, but we like companies that focus on them," said Cridler.

Brands sold at Portland Velocipede include Dutch stalwarts Batavus and Gazelle, which have been manufacturing such bikes for over a century.

The Dutch cycle's heavy, solid construction and cruiser-styling allow riders to perch comfortably on their seat and offer a smooth ride. "Being upright, being able to see around you is so much more comfortable," said Kitchings.

"These bikes put a lot more into durability, and the heavier bike absorbs a lot of the impact," said Cridler, noting that the bike's steel frame provides a softer ride that the aluminum used in other styles.

The result? A weighty bike that, given it's internal gear hub, splash

"This is not going to get you everywhere as fast as a road bike. But we want people to be on there looking good and feeling comfortable." —

Gillian Kitchings

guards and chain cover doesn't require a lifestyle change, or even a change of clothes, making it the ideal bike for an errand-filled afternoon, or the daily commute — just don't expect to get anywhere in a hurry.

"This is not going to get you everywhere as fast as a road bike," said Gillian. "But we want people to be on there looking good and feeling comfortable."

The Velocipede team is capitalizing on a trend that promotes the journey over the destination, "it's about enjoying your bike and taking time," said Cridler.

And they are not alone in promoting this (down)shift in bike culture.

The "slow bike lifestyle" is also a passion of avid cyclist Julie Fitzgerald, who is hoping to promote the idea with her Facebook-based group Portland Slow Riders.

"I wanted to create a place on Facebook where people could post pictures and their experiences riding their bike," said Fitzgerald, who envisioned a group that places an emphasis on the relaxed cruise about town.

"I wanted to set it apart from the avid cyclist who is in it for speed," she said.

"I'm hoping people will participate and use it as a forum; to plan events," she added.

Fitzgerald has also been known to sneak into the fast lane. "I've dabbled in some racing, I trained hard last year and thoroughly enjoyed it," said

Fitzgerald, who has diagnosed herself with a serious case of gear-head.

"I have a bike disease; every kind of bike for every purpose," she said.

Still, for the day-to-day rides, see next page

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ABOVE: An Abici brand cycle on sale at Portland Velocipede. **FACING PAGE:** A row of Dutch-style bicycles from California-based Linus. Such cycles allow the city-dweller to do errands and commute in style. (MATT DODGE PHOTOS)

Riders embrace a new style

from preceding page

Fitzgerald saddles up the step-through bicycle. "The round-towner is my favorite of all, because I hop on that on and do my errands, and ride with my children to school," she said.

Fitzgerald said that with a style of bike accommodating to nearly any lifestyle, "the bike can replace the car in metropolitan area like Portland."

"Just today Obama's Transportation Secretary [Ray LaHood] said no longer can our transportation policy treat cycling as a second activity," said Fitzgerald. "We are experiencing a moment in bike culture where people are embracing this style of bike."

Fitzgerald is planning a slow ride parade for April's First Friday Art Walk, an event that will be distinct from the polarizing "Critical Mass" events held in bike-centric cities around the world, where cyclist jam the roadways and obstruct traffic as a means of taking back the streets. "This is just for fun," she said.

"I want to celebrate cycling in all its form," said Fitzgerald. "I love the sport aspect of it, but I am personally trying to find ways to use my bike more than just for training and exercise."

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