



Local News **Mainline Extra**

Megan Riner

Variety presents adaptive bikes to area children

Children's charity launches new identification campaign

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Riding a bike is a rite of passage for many youngsters, but some kids are not physically able to operate a traditional bicycle. That is where Variety's "My Bike" program steps in.

Variety – the Children's Charity strives to enable children with disabilities to live life to the fullest with a focus on mobility, communication, and social inclusion / interaction. The "My Bike" program provides eligible children with disabilities with a Rifton adaptive bicycle, complete with accessories, that is customized for each individual.

The "My Bike" program was so successful that Variety began a "My Stroller" program and a "My Voice" program as well, enabling nonverbal children a chance to communicate.

On Wednesday, April 5, Variety presented 11 local children with bikes, strollers, and/or communication devices at the Cambria County Courthouse. Five other kids were fitted for adaptive bikes during the event. The equipment – with costs totaling \$1,800 for a bike, \$1,500 for a stroller, and \$1,200 for a communication device is funded through donations to Variety earmarked for the specific program the donor wishes to sponsor.

"The Variety 'My Bike' program is a great gift to the children in our community who otherwise might not have the opportunity to experience the freedom, exercise, and joy one feels from riding a bike," Cambria County president commissioner Tom Chernisky commented.

Laughter rang out in the courthouse rotunda as the children took their bikes for a ride for the first time, parading down the ramp outside. The parents walked behind with smiles to rival that of the children, and a few shed tears.

"It is an extraordinary in the 'Cambria County neighborhood,'" Variety CEO Charles LaVallee said, quoting the late Fred Rogers from the television show "Mister Rogers' Neighborhood," "as these amazing kids are given the opportunity to do something they've never done before – ride a bike, have their own voice to communicate, and for parents, who now have the chance to get their kids more involved in daily activities that most of us take for granted with a stroller."

Mandy McCarty's daughter, Kaycie Wills, received a stroller during the presentation. She first heard about the "My Bike" program through Kaycie's school, and Kaycie received a bike last year.

"It was absolutely amazing to see her do something I never thought I'd see her do," McCarty shared.

McCarty was glad for Kaycie's new stroller because it is so much lighter than her wheelchair.

"It makes life easier," McCarty said, "and she has a blast on her bike."

This spring, Variety launched an initiative to identify every eligible child who could benefit from its adaptive equipment programs. The "My Bike" program serves children and youth ages 4 through 2 whose families meet the income guidelines. "My Bike" applications can be obtained through Variety's website, www.varietypittsburgh.org/MyBike, or by calling the Variety office at 724-933-0460.

"Every child deserves to have a bike and ride with their friends and family," added commissioner B.J. Smith.