

## Courts lax with bike violators

by Ted Mellnik  
Staff Writer

It seems impossible nowadays for a bicycle rider to be convicted of violating a traffic ordinance in Chapel Hill's District Court.

Even if he pleads guilty. Almost all state and local traffic ordinances apply to bicyclists. Chapel Hill policemen will issue citations as quickly to bicyclists as to automobile drivers, and Chapel Hill's assistant solicitors will even prosecute the citations with equal vigor.

However, while a motorist before the court stands a good chance of having to pay a fine, a bicyclist facing the same charge might not have to pay at all.

"No one has been fined or found guilty," assistant district solicitor Lunford Long said last week, "even when they pled guilty." In several cases, Long said, the judge has excused payment of the court costs. Usually everyone who appears before the court regardless of the charge, is required to pay the \$25 fee. However, a judge may use his discretion and waive the cost in cases he considers minor.

"We have prosecuted bicycle riders who received citations, but the judges have not taken these cases seriously. Given the nature of the judges, I don't think the treatment of these cases will change," Long said, adding that he will continue prosecuting bicycle

citation.

The number of tickets issued to bicyclists is not affected by the treatment such cases receive in court. According to Chapel Hill Police Lt. Arnold Gold, the level of enforcement is determined by what the department perceives as the level of the problem.

Currently, bicyclists' compliance to the rules of the road is relatively high, so enforcement of those rules is receiving relatively low priority, Gold said. But an officer will issue a citation when he judges a violator to be in danger of injury.

"My feelings are, of course, that I would rather not issue a citation," Gold said. "But sometimes, if nothing else works, it is necessary."

"There really haven't been that many citations issued. It's not that we have overloaded the court and they can't handle the cases."

During the past year, less than 20 such cases were disposed of in court.

### Bike ordinances

State and local ordinances require that persons riding bicycles:

- Keep to the right next to the curb when riding on roadways.
- Adhere to right-of-way laws at intersections and yield to pedestrians on sidewalks.
- Use a white light on the front and a red reflector on the rear when riding at night.
- Park only in a bicycle rack on streets or sidewalks.
- Stop and assist in the event of an accident.
- Give signals when stopping and turning.

The ordinances prohibit:

- Riding while intoxicated.
- Habitual use of a narcotic drug.
- Riding under the influence of any narcotic drug.
- Reckless riding.
- Riding on the East Franklin Street sidewalk between the intersections of Henderson and Columbia Streets.



This Chapel Hill bicyclist need not worry too much about conviction in court for breaking traffic ordinances or about theft of his bicycle. For the reasons, read the stories on this page.

## Bicycle registration

### Sticker program decreases thefts, facilitates recovery of stolen bikes

by Ted Mellnik  
Staff Writer

Last year a bicycle was reported stolen in Chapel Hill almost every day. Now, because of the town's bicycle registration program, reported thefts are down to about three a week. And they are expected to drop further.

"The program has paid off," Chapel Hill Police Lt. Arnold Gold said. The value of bicycles stolen last year totaled over \$25,000. Because of decreasing theft and increasing recovery of stolen bikes, this year's losses should be almost half that amount, he said.

Thefts have risen slightly during the past few months because many students left their bikes here during the summer, Gold said. Also, police manpower was decreased because of officers' vacations. But, Gold said, the thefts will probably drop in the next few weeks.

Most of the drop since last year is due to the readily visible stickers which registered bicycles display, Gold said.

"Before the registration program began, if we stopped a pickup truck containing two or three bikes and there was no visible sign of burglary tools, there was nothing we could do except take the names of the driver and passengers and a description of the bikes," he explained.

In a similar situation with the registration program, Gold said, if one of the bicycles bears a registration sticker, an officer can radio the police station and determine ownership of the bicycle within minutes.

"We feel that the program is vital," he said. "Thefts have been high and they have to be stopped some way, but we can't do it without cooperation."

Although the ordinance establishing the program states that bike registration for town residents is mandatory and provides for fines not to exceed \$10 in cases of violation, the ordinance is not enforced and the program remains voluntary.

"The only way I want to shove it (the registration program) down anyone's throat is with good publicity," Gold said.

Despite the program's success in reducing theft only around one-third of the 12,000 bicycles owned by Chapel Hill residents are registered.

Bicycle owners can register their bikes by taking them to a registration station and paying 50 cents. The driver's license number of the owner, or the owner's parent or relative, is stamped onto the bicycle's frame.

The owner receives a registration sticker and a pamphlet outlining state and local ordinances which apply to bicycle riders and suggestions for safe riding.

Bicycles may be registered at the following places:

#### Chapel Hill

Police Department, 100 W. Rosemary St.  
9 a.m.—4 p.m. Monday—Saturday  
Fire Station 1, 302 N. Columbia St.  
Fire Station 2, Glen Lennox  
Fire Station 3, Elliot Rd.  
9 a.m.—6 p.m. Monday—Saturday

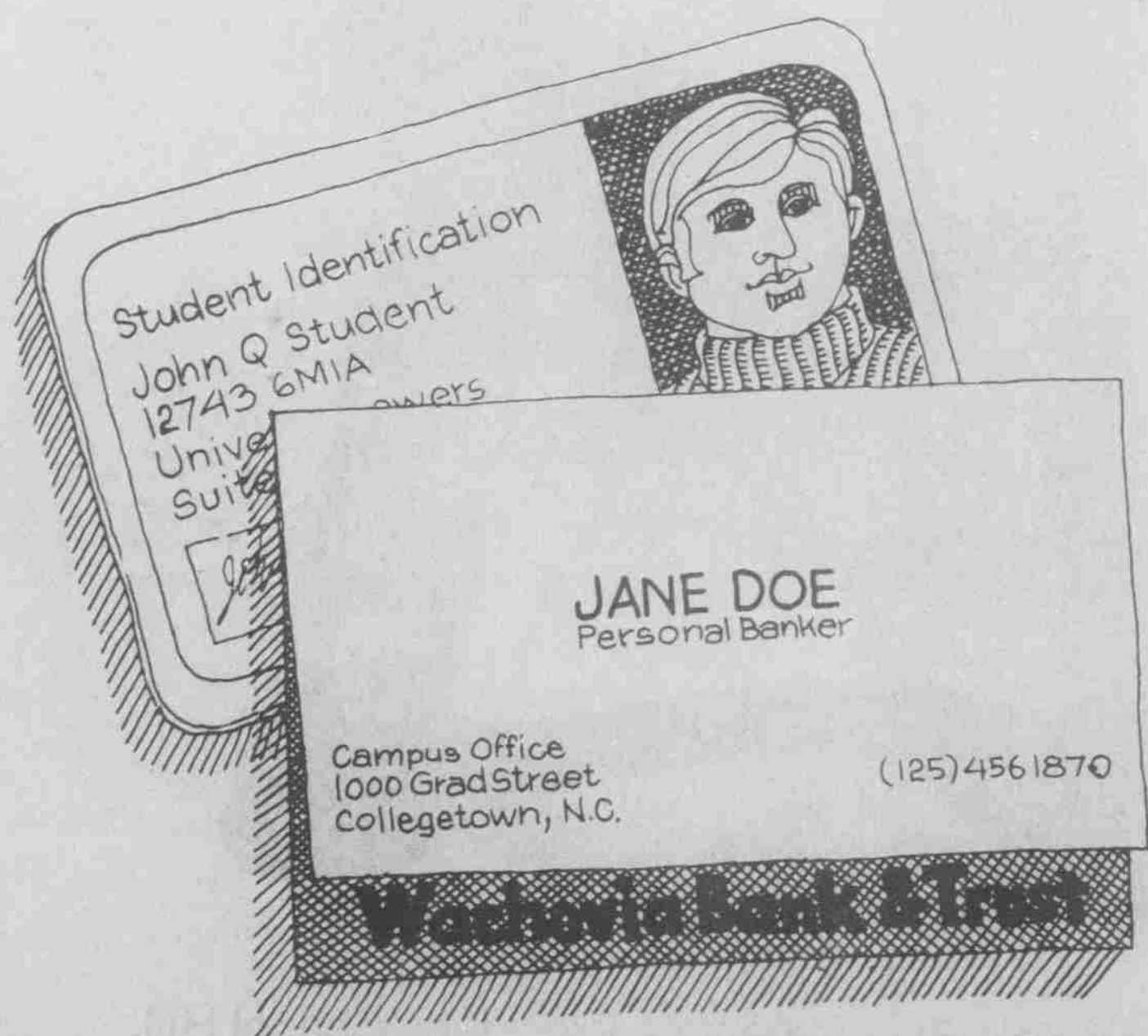
#### Carrboro

Police Department, W. Main St.  
9 a.m.—5 p.m. Monday—Friday

Carrboro's registration program is only slightly different from Chapel Hill's. The registration fee is \$2.00 (\$1.00 after December), and no number is stamped on the bike frame unless the serial number is illegible.

Registrations in both Chapel Hill and Carrboro are valid until December 1, 1976. Both towns will also register bicycles owned by nonresidents.

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