



# AMERICAN BICYCLIST

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**READY TO RIDE • THE FUTURE OF FEDERAL FUNDING FOR BICYCLING •  
SPOTLIGHT ON CHEYENNE • OUR YEAR IN REVIEW**



## LCI SPOTLIGHT: MARCO SPEEKS

BY MARLEE TOWNSEND

*The League certifies hundreds of League Cycling Instructors every year, and there are thousands of LCIs across the country leading bike education efforts in their communities. In our LCI spotlight series, we share the stories of League Cycling Instructors doing what they do daily: educating, mentoring, and empowering.*

**B**eyond the numbers, there are individuals—like Marco Speeks, an LCI and advocate based in Detroit, Michigan. Marco is the founder and executive director of Major Taylor Michigan Cycling Advocacy (MTM) and serves as a thought leader and liaison for Bikes 4 Employees. His work is rooted in breaking down systemic barriers in cycling and ensuring that the freedom of bicycling is accessible to all Michiganders. From programs that give transportation-insecure residents access to bikes, to serving on the board of the League of Michigan Bicyclists, Marco's advocacy reflects his vision for an inclusive and equitable cycling community. As an LCI, he uses bike education as a tool for empowerment and transformation.

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## **Tell us a little about yourself and what got you involved in the world of bikes.**

As a kid growing up in West Africa, we'd always ride to school and back. It was a great time to bond, gossip, and provide therapy for each other. All of those relationships still benefit me today. It's come full circle: the kids I once biked with are now adults who donate to help children growing up in the same regions, so those kids don't face the transportation challenges we did. That's what I want to bring to the bike movement. That's why cycling is so important to me—it's part of my upbringing, a respected value, and I want to pass that on.

## **What first motivated you to become an LCI?**

I wanted to be able to share my knowledge and experience with those who wanted to adopt a cycling lifestyle. I also wanted to have access to the library of educational content for League Cycling Instructors.

## **Tell us about the work you do in the Detroit area.**

There's this program called Bikes 4 Employees that's really doing something special for folks in Detroit, Hamtramck, and Highland Park who are struggling to get around. B4E for short. You know how it is when you don't have reliable transportation—it's hard to keep a job or stay in school.

We partner with big employers like the City of Detroit, Henry Ford Health, and Wayne State University, plus social service agencies. They help us find employees, students, or clients who could really use reliable transportation. If you live more than half a mile from work or school and transportation is a real challenge for you, you might qualify for a highly discounted bike—we're talking regular bikes or even e-bikes.

But it's not just the bike. You get everything you need: helmet, lights for the front and back, fenders, a pannier bag, locks, pump,

bike rack, reflective vest, tools—the whole setup. Plus, you get safety training and 80% off repairs at pretty much every local bike shop. When you add it all up, we're talking about an \$1,800 value. We make it work through small weekly payroll deductions, donations, and grants.

As the liaison for the program, I stay connected with everyone. I do monthly check-ins with everyone, send out helpful newsletters, run bike workshops over Zoom, organize and lead group commute rides to workplaces and build community.

The results have been incredible. Last year, 95% of people said their physical health improved, 82% can get to work or school way more reliably now, and 86% are saving money by biking instead of using other transportation. It's really rewarding to see how something as simple as a bike can change someone's whole situation.

A lot of people think Major Taylor Michigan is just another cycling club, but we're doing something completely different. We're a non-profit that's all about helping people who really need cycling in their lives—whether that's folks trying to get to work every day or people who are dealing with health challenges. That's where we come in with what we call wraparound services—we don't just hand you a bike and walk away. We're there for the whole journey, making sure you have what you need to make cycling work for your life.

When I started Major Taylor Michigan, I really wanted to get kids excited about using bikes to get around. That's what inspired me to launch Detroit's first Joe Louis Greenway Bike Bus for public school kids. We organize groups of students and teach them how to safely bike to school using the Greenway.

We start young with our "Stride and Glide: Learn How to Ride" program for

kindergarteners through third graders. We created this classroom program that connects bike mechanics to real science—like how gears work with physics or how cycling impacts the environment. When kids learn to ride early, it actually helps their brain development and makes them better at math and problem-solving later on.

We do a lot more than just teaching kids to ride. We hold bike safety clinics, maintenance workshops, and these “Fireside” chats at schools where we talk about making cycling part of your everyday life.

My favorite program might be our Youth Earn a Bike initiative. Kids must show up every single day for training, learning everything about how bikes work and how to fix them. If they stick with it and really commit, they get to keep the bike at the end. It’s amazing watching them earn bikes through dedication.

### **What do you find to be the biggest barriers to cycling?**

The biggest barriers that come to mind are the equipment, the attire, and access to education. The vocabulary of bicycles is complicated—what’s a pannier? What’s a drivetrain? Can you afford a \$12,000 bike, and can you afford the time to ride it 45 miles? Where do you go to learn to ride, and to learn to maintain your bike?

There’s also a stigma associated with a cycling lifestyle. Those who have the means to ride for recreation and fitness look different than the people who depend on a bicycle for transportation. The cycling ecosystem is not reflective of communities that need and depend on cycling—commuting to work and picking up children, traveling from outside of food deserts, dealing with food insecurity, etc. We all benefit from better biking, but some of us need it for economic reasons, to make money or to survive on the income you have.





### Do you have any favorite memories from teaching cycling education?

So, there was this one student who drove out to meet my class in the park, but she didn't even have a bike to ride with us. We weren't about to let her just sit there and watch, so we scrambled to find her one of those MoGo rideshare bikes and hunted around until we found a helmet that fit. Once we got her set up, I made sure to give her extra attention during the ride. Since she was just starting out and didn't have much cardio built up yet, we kept it slow and steady—low speed but good distance. She hung in there with us the whole time, though by the end she was definitely breathing hard.

Right after we finished, she looked at me and said, "I'm going out to buy a bike today." That just made my whole day. That's the kind of moment that reminds me why I do this work.

### Tell us about any current advocacy campaigns you're working towards, or any wins you're celebrating.

After months of advocating, we finally got something incredible done. Governor Gretchen Whitmer just officially proclaimed September 15, 2025 as "Major Taylor Day." To help make this happen, I pulled together a coalition of key organizations and supporters for critical support. Frank W. Ervin III, Bobby Lawrence, Robert Kosowski

### Support a Congressional Gold Medal for Major Taylor!

Representatives Jonathan L. Jackson and Jim Baird have introduced a bill to award Marshall "Major" Taylor with the Congressional Gold Medal, the highest honor Congress can bestow. Please join us in this much-deserved



and belated recognition of a trailblazing athlete and cyclist by contacting your member of Congress.

along with the League of American Bicyclists, League of Michigan Bicyclists, Bike Friendly Kalamazoo, and Ann Arbor Bicycle Touring Society all stepped up to support our campaign. Michigan is the first state in the entire country to honor this cycling legend with a gubernatorial proclamation.

Major Taylor has gotten local recognition and state awards before, but we're talking about the first official state proclamation for "Major Taylor Day." Marshall Walter "Major" Taylor lived from 1878 to 1932, and he was absolutely revolutionary. Back in 1899, he became the first Black American world champion in cycling—he called him the "fastest man on a bike." This guy was breaking barriers and setting records, achieving international fame decades before other Black athletes. But this proclamation isn't just about looking back and honoring history. It's about building a future where Michigan's cycling community actually reflects the diversity and excellence that Major Taylor stood for. Every time you get on your bike, you're carrying on his legacy.

Visit [mtmca.org](https://mtmca.org) to learn more and support Marco's work. 🚲