

Cornell Chronicle; June 26, 2008

Cornell-supported Ithaca Carshare provides vehicles for pickup at your nearest 'pod'

By Franklin Crawford

Ithaca Carshare, the result of two years of grassroots partnering among Cornell, Ithaca College, the city of Ithaca and Tompkins County, is ready to roll.

David Lieb, assistant director at Cornell's Transportation Management Services and chairman of the board of Ithaca Carshare, beside one of the seven new Nissans that are part of the initial fleet of Carshare vehicles. The car, one of two now on campus, is parked in its designated "pod" near the Cornell Dairy Bar.

Founding members of the first car-sharing service in upstate New York tested their passwords and key fobs during a launch of the business at the Ithaca Carshare office on College Avenue, June 25. Many Cornell students and staff members played an important role in developing the non-profit service.

At a carshare "pod" -- the designated spot for one of the vehicles -- at the corner of College Avenue and Dryden Road, members used their key fobs to unlock the door. The key was in the ignition, the tank was full and they were good to go -- one reservation at a time.

The self-service program provides 24-hour access to six Nissan hatchbacks, with a pickup truck on the way. Members make reservations online and have the choice of belonging to a "Just in Case" plan for occasional use, or to "It's My Car," for drivers who want to replace car ownership.

Members pay an annual or monthly fee and then by the hour and mile for use, which covers gas, insurance, cleaning, maintenance and other vehicle ownership costs.

Cornell has purchased more than 2,000 carshare memberships and is offering membership discounts to faculty, staff and students who are part of such university transportation programs as Rideshare and OmniRide.

"I don't have a car, and I need to go shopping about once a week," said member Daniel Lee '10, a mechanical engineering major. "I take the bus, but I have to transfer, and it is not always the most convenient way for me to get things done."

Bob Wigden, executive assistant in Campus and Cornell Business Services, said he recently sold his vehicle in anticipation of Ithaca Carshare.

"I have a scooter and an electric bike," Wigden said. "I joined the carshare program for those last-resort needs, like going out of town or if the weather is really bad."

Ithaca Carshare, which eventually plans to run on membership fees, has received support from the New York state Department of Transportation and the Energy Research and Development Authority, and help from Cornell, Ithaca College, the city of Ithaca, the Ithaca-Tompkins County Transportation Council and EcoVillage at Ithaca. Daniel Roth, Cornell's sustainability coordinator in the Office of Environmental Compliance and Sustainability, was one of the originators of the idea when he was a graduate student at Cornell.

David Lieb, assistant director at Cornell's Transportation Management Services and chairman of Carshare's board, said the program is designed to serve as a model for other communities. "Any community that wants to try this can come to us, and we can give them carshare in a box," Lieb said. "Proving that this can work in a small urban market is an important part of what we're trying to do."

The program's vehicles are located in Collegetown; on the Cornell campus outside Trillium dining room in Kennedy Hall and at the Cornell Dairy Bar; at Ithaca College; and at EcoVillage on West Hill. And more vehicles are on the way.

Ithaca Carshare is part of a growing network of independent car-sharing organizations. More than three dozen cities, including Chicago, Cleveland, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Minneapolis, Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal and Ottawa have such programs for a total of 2,000 vehicles and 75,000 members.

Cornell Discounts

Students: Until Sept. 15, Cornell will pay the annual fee for the "Just In Case" plan (normally \$50) for any student. Students can also choose the "It's My Car" plan at \$140 for a year.

Staff and Faculty: Cornell will pay the annual fee for the "Just In Case" plan for any employee enrolled in a commuter program (RideShare, OmniRide, Occasional Parker and VanPool). Commuter program participants who prefer the "It's My Car" plan pay \$105 a year.

Employees not enrolled in a commuter program can get a "Just In Case" membership for \$35 (normally \$50) a year, or an "It's My Car" membership for \$140 (normally \$200) a year.