



ATTACHMENT 3-D: OBERSTAR AWARD PRESS RELEASE

Congressman Petri joins National Center for Safe Routes to School to present Safe Routes to School Award to Omro Middle School

MENASHA, Wis., (DATE) — Congressman Thomas Petri (R-Wis.) will join the [National Center for Safe Routes to School](#) as it presents Omro Middle School with its prestigious James L. Oberstar Safe Routes to School Award, the highest honor a school can receive from the National Center. [Omro Middle School](#) was chosen for its outstanding achievements in promoting safe walking and bicycling.

“The school has established a variety of successful programs to make bicycling safer, more accessible and more fun,” said Lauren Marchetti, director of the National Center for Safe Routes to School, the information clearinghouse for the federal SRTS program. “The award committee was particularly impressed with how comprehensively Omro Middle School’s Safe Routes to School program changed the student culture to one based on active transportation.”

In the small, rural city of Omro, about 42 percent of middle school students live within two miles of the school, but many of these students must cross one or more major barriers, including two highways and a river, to get there. As a result, 90 percent of students are eligible for bus service.

In response to these challenges, Omro Middle School has promoted an active lifestyle by establishing a bicycling-focused school culture. The school has developed a bike share program with a fleet of more than 35 bicycles available to students during physical education classes, lunch and special events and trips. The bicycle fleet is maintained by the school’s “Young Mechanics,” who are trained high school and middle school students working in a fully tooled bike shop. Each year, eighth-grade students participate in a 30-mile bike ride that integrates bicycle safety and physical activity with puzzles and quizzes relating to other school subjects, such as math and reading.

In addition to these activities, the school has made walking and bicycling safer and more accessible for students. To address parents’ safety concerns, teachers staff Walking School Bus stops to supervise students. To make bicycles more accessible to students in low-income families, the Young Mechanics program allows students to earn credit toward a bicycle or equipment. As a result of these initiatives, approximately 42 percent of students living a distance of 2 miles or less from the school now walk or bicycle to school.

“These programs are admirable examples of the idea behind Safe Routes to School – to make active transportation to school safer for children, and to encourage and enable bicycling and walking to school,” said Renee Callaway, Wisconsin’s state SRTS coordinator.

“The staff at Omro Middle School saw Safe Routes to School as a way to augment physical activity years ago at a time when budget cuts reduced the number of weekly physical education

classes for students,” said Melissa Kraemer Badtke, [Safe Routes to School coordinator](#) and associate planner at East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission. “Students are developing a bicycling culture and want to make bicycling their primary mode of transportation to school and to and from their friends’ houses. It fulfills middle school aged students’ wants and desires to become independent.”

In 2009, Wisconsin Department of Transportation awarded \$21,054 for the school to complete a Safe Routes to School (SRTS) plan, and the majority of \$101,438 has been authorized for infrastructure changes and to upgrade the school’s bicycle education course.

Omro Middle School and Heatherwood Elementary School in Boulder, Colo., were selected to receive the 2011 Safe Routes to School Award by a committee comprised of representatives from: the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE), the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO), the Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center (PBIC), the Safe Routes to School National Partnership and the National Center for Safe Routes to School.

About the Safe Routes to School Award

The James L. Oberstar Safe Routes to School Award is given annually for outstanding achievement in implementing a Safe Routes to School program in the United States. The award is named for James L. Oberstar, former chairman of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee (2007-2011) and former U.S. Representative for Minnesota's 8th Congressional District (1975-2011), to honor his dedication to American schoolchildren as the pioneer for the federal Safe Routes to School Program. Mr. Oberstar sponsored the Safe Routes to School legislation that strives to create safe settings to enable more children and parents to walk and bicycle to school.

The National Center for Safe Routes to School opens a call for applications each year, usually in the fall, and evaluates applications with assistance of an expert panel representing organizations that promote safe walking and bicycling. For more information, visit www.saferoutesinfo.org/data-central/success-stories/safe-routes-to-school-award.

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About Safe Routes to School

[Safe Routes to School](#) programs encourage children grades K-8 to walk and bike to school by creating safer walking and biking routes. These programs are funded through the revised federal transportation act - [SAFETEA-LU](#) - signed into law on August 10, 2005. This legislation provides funding to state departments of transportation to create and administer SRTS programs. SRTS programs improve walking and biking travel options, promote healthier lifestyles in children at an early age and decrease auto-related emissions near schools.

Parents and community members will also be able to follow the ECWRPC’s Safe Routes to School program through recently launched social media platforms such as [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Flickr](#) and [YouTube](#). For more information, please visit www.eastcentralsrts.org.