Bike, fire safety on display in Belmont

By TIM CAMERATO | Jun 01, 2015

BELMONT — The Belmont High School parking lot was transformed into a small fair on Saturday, during Belmont Safety Day.

Members of the Rotary Club passed out food to families, as children on bicycles made their way through a safety course and others took turns checking out fire engines and firefighter gear.

Officer Derek Gray said police were inviting children to take a helmet and goodie bag before trying their hand on a slalom, figure eight and “cone city” course. That last course was one of the coolest, where a traffic light would either signal a cyclist to stop or signal before turning to continue on.

“It helps reinforce and refresh all those things that you don’t always think about, like thinking about the fact that you might see the car but they might not see you,” Gray said.
He’s been organizing the event since its start in Belmont three years ago. Gray said it was once known as the “Bicycle Safety Rodeo” but the name changed when the Fire Department offered to take part.

Lt. Michael Newhall said firefighters were also offering their own “swag” to families during the event. Children were also invited to tour on of the town’s ladder trucks, try on some firefighting gear and “play firefighter for a day.”

Newhall said it’s important for the department to interact with families, so they can help keep them informed on all types of safety.

Gray shared his sentiment and said the event also helps get officers interacting with the town. He said Chief Mark Lewandoski has led a push for more community engagement, which led to the safety day and last year’s National Night Out happenings.

“We want people to know that we think the community’s important and being part of the community is obviously very important,” Gray said.

Walking and biking through the event also helps further that mission, he said.

“You’re wearing shorts. You’re super approachable,” Gray said. “Kids really like it and it’s a good chance to interact with kids at a younger age.”

Personally, Gray said Bike Safety Day gives him the chance to interact with children and help them walk away with a positive view of police – that they’re here to help and teach safety, not just punish people.

“When you’re around for so many years, you essentially see these kids grow up,” Gray said. “in a small community, like Belmont, everybody knows each other and you see the same officers year after year after year, and you get to know people.”