
A new shift in driving around town

From trips to King of Prussia to liquor store runs, PhillyCarShare has become ubiquitous on campus

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College senior Adrienne Juarascio enjoys an afternoon joyride in a PhillyCarShare Mazda Miata Convertible.

Last year, third-year Engineering graduate student Darren Brey was tired of having a car in the city.

Now, he has over 400.

Frustrated by the high insurance costs and lack of parking, Brey traded car ownership for car sharing and now saves about \$700 per year.

A quick walk down Penn's campus shows Brey is not alone - over the last year, PhillyCarShare has expanded to over 30 locations around University City and has lowered its age requirement to 18.

The changes have made PhillyCarShare more accessible to students, many of whom say it's now an indispensable part of college life.

Started in 2002 with only two cars in tow, the non-profit PhillyCarShare now boasts more than 400 cars - including Audis and BMWs for those who want to impress a date - and over 28,000 members in the city.

The service, which allows users to pick up cars at hundreds of locations across Philadelphia for rates as low as \$2.90 an hour, has been praised by both city residents and energy experts.

"Our mission was to help reduce automobile dependence in the Philadelphia region," said

Clayton Lane, PhillyCarShare's co-founder and a Penn alumnus. "We envision that sharing a car with PhillyCarShare will be more convenient than owning the car, and that means we'll have literally hundreds of thousands of people signed up."

Without the funds or the parking space in the city, college students seem especially receptive to the service, and over 1,000 Penn students have signed on as members.

Once confined to the boundaries of public transport, users are seeing the traditional Penn 'bubble' expanded.

College senior Nazlee Navabi has done all of her house shopping in PhillyCarShare vehicles this fall. Wharton sophomore Nathan Kleban and his roommate have used the service to go to the Wegmans in Cherry Hill. Others have used PhillyCarShare for everything from liquor store runs to camping trips in the Poconos.

King of Prussia "is a great mall that's kind of close, but I always felt like it was out of reach," Navabi said. "Now, I don't feel like it's out of reach anymore."

Philadelphia is not alone in its affinity for car-sharing: Cities across the country are seeing huge jumps in the number of car-sharing companies and users, and experts say the growth of the service is necessary.

"A lot of people are trying to invent a better hybrid, or a this or a that, but the simple reality is that we cannot all own a car," said Kevin McLaughlin, editor of Carsharing.net and president of Toronto's AutoShare. Given the population growth and congestion in most cities, "we need to figure out a way to move people more efficiently."

But nowhere are these companies more successful at courting the college demographic than in Philadelphia.

After a senior design project by three Penn engineering students recommended adjusting its appeal to Penn's college crowd, PhillyCarShare became the first and only service to eliminate all membership fees.

"Basically, we're hearing that students, they don't want commitments," Lane said. "They just want freedom without any hassles."

In the last month alone, 4,000 new members have signed up. And, like Brey, 55 percent of users have sold their cars, saving on average \$4,000 annually.

From an energy standpoint, the company has been just as successful, saving one million gallons of gas and reducing emissions by 95 percent.

But in the end, the appeal is in the operation's simplicity.

"It cost me \$6 to drive to Target and back, and pick up the supplies I needed," Navabi said. "PhillyCarShare is just ridiculously convenient."

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