

# Bike and pedestrian advocate killed by bus

## Susie Stephens was a friend to many



**Carolyn Price**  
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Publisher

Susie Stephens, well-known in local and national bicycle and pedestrian safety circles, was killed when hit by a bus in a crosswalk in St. Louis March 21. Stephens, 36, died instantly.

"Susie would have been really pissed to know she was hit by a bus," mused

friend and former business associate Elisa Shostak, "but she would have been really jazzed to know they served jumbo shrimp at her wake!"

Stephens, who served as the Executive Director of the Bicycle Alliance of Washington in Seattle from 1994 to 1998, had recently finished travels around the world, moved to Winthrop and established her own bicycle and pedestrian safety consulting service.

She was in St. Louis under contract with the National Bicycle and Walking Center at the time of the accident, which is currently under investigation. The irony of her being struck down by a bus, when the safety of pedestrians was her life work, will never be understood.

Stephens made a difference in the lives of many people. And at least 100 of them came forward during a wake held for her April 1 at Hale's Ales Brewery in Ballard. The evening was a gathering of who's who in Seattle and Portland bicycling circles and a toast to her life by the people in the room, as well as around the world, was held at 6 p.m. sharp.

"To know Susie was to know a bright and wonderful star," said Barb Culp, who succeeded Susie at the helm of the Bicycle Alliance in 1998. "She was a beautiful, talented and dedicated professional advocate. Her loss will be felt throughout Washington and across the country."

Stephens leaves a long legacy in bicycle advocacy, starting at the age of 28 when she applied for the position of Executive Director, going up against an older and more politically active bicycle candidate.

"We were going to offer the job to someone

else," recalled Russ Steele, a Bicycle Alliance (formerly NowBike) Board of Director at the time. "But she just sat on the edge of her seat the whole time and told us what she wanted to do – and just blew us away!"

Stephens walked her talk, agreed Culp. "She had so many visions and ideas, and the

provided funding for bike and ped safety programs at the local level in Washington state.

She also was very involved in getting a statewide bicycle and pedestrian safety conference in this state off the ground. The Footprints and Bike Tracks Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Conference provided

educational information to planners, law enforcement, related advocates and bureaucrats from local governments.

During her Bicycle Alliance tenure, Stephens also rode her collapsible bicycle around the state to spread the gospel about bicycling which eventually grew the Seattle bike organization to a statewide level.

Eventually Stephens was part of the core group that began the Thunderhead Alliance, a national coalition of state bicycle advocacy groups from around the country. She was hired as the organization's first Managing Director in 2000.

"Susie had a contagious enthusiasm," said Adam Spey, Executive Director of



*Photo courtesy of the Bicycle Alliance of Washington*

*Susie Stephens was a popular bicycle and pedestrian advocate in Seattle. She was struck and killed by a bus while on business in St. Louis March 21.*

enthusiasm for making them happen, that the Board took a chance and she came through."

Come through indeed. Stephens championed the passage of the 1998 Cooper Jones Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Education Act which

the Thunderhead Alliance. "Advocates from Australia to Alaska, Florida to Vancouver have told me that after meeting Susie at a conference or a Thunderhead Retreat they returned home energized and rededicated to the work at hand."

Others described Stephens as having a knack for turning negatives into positives, a natural skill that reduced tough bureaucrats to butter when it came time to buying into her advocacy ideas. Her upbeat, girl-next-door personality and sponge-like ability to soak up information

and turn ideas into action were other traits.

Stephens will not be forgotten. The City of Seattle, for one, is seeing to that. They have issued a proclamation making every March 21 "Susie Stephens Ride for Life Day." Others, such as REI CEO Dennis Madsen and Doug Walker, CEO of Seattle business WRQ, have pledged matching memorial funds.

"There are many opportunities there," said Louise McGrody, Program Manager at the Bicycle Alliance, of the city's proclamation and the funding that could help make an annual memorial to Stephens a reality.

Russ Steele agreed.

"People die every day but this one has a ripple effect," he said. "We need to do something about it."

There are thousands who couldn't agree more.



Photo courtesy of the Bicycle Alliance of Washington

Susie Stephens (center, front row) was happiest when among friends. Among those were former Bicycle Alliance Board of Directors Russ Steele, Elizabeth Bennett and Amy Carlson.

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