

## MARKETPLACE

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## Open for Business Once Again

*Pedaling for Fares on Wall Street*

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With few taxicabs on the streets of New York's financial district, a tiny fleet of bicycle-powered rickshaws is pedaling hard to fill the gap.

Lisa Stephens was lugging a laptop, a backpack and two plastic bags to the Staten Island ferry terminal about 10 blocks from her office when a pedicab powered by Petar Timotic came to her rescue. "Necessity is the mother of invention," hollered Ms. Stephens, an examining officer in bank supervision at the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, as the pedicab rumbled over potholes and cobblestones near the New York Stock Exchange. Six minutes later she was at the ferry.

"Petar, this was great!" Ms. Stephens said as she handed him a \$10 bill, \$5 more than they had negotiated.

Immediately after the attack on the World Trade Center, regular taxicabs and passenger cars were banned from lower Manhattan. Recently, some have been allowed in, but many streets are still off limits, making driving slow and difficult. Meanwhile, the subways are often jammed at rush hour and a number of stations are still out of commission.

Bicycle taxis used to peddle their services in midtown, picking up tourists in the theater dis-

trict and around hotels. But when the tourist trade fell off in the days after the attack, the cabs moved to the financial district. Business people, many of whom had never seen a pedicab before, quickly climbed aboard, often for short rides to a ferry or subway or to catch a taxicab just outside the restricted zone. Soon tourists visiting the remains of the Twin Towers were also hopping a ride.

Pedicab drivers typically charge 50 cents to \$1 a minute, often negotiating a fare when the customer climbs aboard and then hoping for a tip at the end of the ride. Their vehicles resemble giant tricycles, with two wheels in the back supporting the carriage and several gears that enable drivers to pull up to 800 pounds.

There isn't a clear count on the number of pedicab operators in Manhattan, but Mr. Timotic's cab comes from Pedicabs of New York, also known as PoNY Cabs, which leases about 30 pedicabs for \$40 each a day.

On Sept. 11, a couple of pedicab drivers cleared more than \$500, double their typical take on a good day. PoNY's owner, George Bliss, was concerned about seeming to profiteer. He recalls saying: "You had your best day on New York's worst day." But many other drivers gave free rides to rescue workers and to pedestrians who were fleeing the area. On Sept.

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## CORPORATE FOCUS



## Taxis Pedal for Fares in New York Financial District

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12, Mr. Bliss, who teaches a class called Design in Motion at New School University's Parsons School of Design, shut down his business for a day to show respect for the attack's victims.

Pedicab drivers' budgets are often as lean as their physiques. Kevin O'Neill, 58 years old, said he earned very little the first week and was having trouble paying some of his bills. Wearing a striped shirt with a bow tie, shorts and socks with an American flag, he cheerfully carted a passenger around the financial district. "There are throngs of people coming down here" well into the evening, he said. "I think it's good for them to experience it in person, to see it as a fact, not just on TV."

A couple visiting New York from Israel flagged him down near the Brooklyn Bridge to ask where they could get their own pedicab. "We really want to do the Brooklyn Bridge, but our feet are killing us," said Irene Alvarez.

Waiting for a fare with other pedicabbers on Nassau Street near the New York Stock Exchange, Frank Bogues, a 35-year-old actor and writer, called out "bicycle

taxi!" and trilled the little bell on his handlebars. One of his passengers was Michael Lefkowitz, a 51-year-old administrative law judge who works in Brooklyn and lives in Fairview, N.J. Last Friday evening, he had gotten off a subway in Manhattan and was hoping to catch a taxicab down to the ferry terminal to get a ride across the Hudson River.

"Frank [passengers often get to be on a first-name basis with their drivers] came up to me and said 'you need a cab?' I thought he was kidding," Mr. Lefkowitz said. "Then he said it was a \$6 fare and that sounded pretty good to me."

"He got me there in six minutes flat and I'm pretty heavy," Mr. Lefkowitz added. "I don't know how he did it."

The load factor for Yves Perisse, a 33-year-old native of Lyons, France, was even more formidable. He encountered Danielle Kaplan, who was forced to evacuate her apartment in Battery Park City, when she was trying to move some of her belongings to the West Village with the help of a cousin.

"We couldn't get on the subway with all this stuff," said Ms. Kaplan, a professor of

technology and education at Columbia University Teachers College. But the two women managed to squeeze into Mr. Perisse's carriage, along with two suitcases, a duffel bag and a grocery cart stuffed with belongings. She figured the baggage alone weighed about 100 pounds.

"I'm used to it," said Mr. Perisse as he pedaled the women out of the restricted zone to find a yellow cab.

Since the bicycle taxis aren't motorized, they aren't regulated by the New York City Taxi & Limousine Commission and drivers aren't licensed. PoNY's Mr. Bliss, who carries liability insurance, said that this is the first time in six years that his business will show a profit, on revenue of about \$120,000.

In the aftermath of the Trade Center attack the city's more than 12,000 licensed taxicab drivers are hurting, but they don't begrudge the pedicabs their business. "We're vehicles. They're bikes. When it gets cold out, they're out of business," said Fernando Mateo, president of the New York State Federation of Taxi Drivers. "I give them a lot of credit," he added. "They're out there physically working out to get people around."