

# Facing Budget Cuts, Schools Hire Samurai Crossing Guards

*by* Con Chapman

SHAWNEE MISSION, Kansas. Ed Rehnert thought he'd found his dream job when he signed on as a school crossing guard at Jim Ryun Middle School after retiring from his job at a local Ford plant. "I loved seeing those kids every morning," he says as tears well up in his eyes and a lump forms in his throat. "I thought I'd be a crossing guard until I keeled over and died," he tells this reporter. "I figured I was immune from foreign competition."



*Ed Rehnert: His next-to-next-to-next-to last day at work*

But Ed will find himself out of job next Monday morning, replaced by a *ronin*, a wandering samurai displaced by the defeat of his *daimyo*, or master, in a battle with a rival. "Out-of-work samurai have a choice," says Bobby Ito, a specialist on Japanese-American cultural differences. "They can either terrorize local peasants at county fairs, or underbid low-skilled workers for menial jobs such as school crossing guard."



*"Stay on the curb until I say it's okay."*

So when Tokugawa Ieyasu offered to man the corner of Third and Lamine Streets here on a twenty-four hour a day basis, school superintendent Morris Blyrum jumped at the offer. "School crossing guards aren't covered by the collective bargaining agreement," he notes. "We hired Tokugawa—or is Ieyasu the first name?—for a handful of rice and a cents-off coupon at Sushi Express," a new Japanese restaurant in town.



*"You kids should wear yellow in the rain!"*

*Samurai* were members of the Japanese military class of Japan during the period beginning in 792 and ending with the issuance of the Closed Country Edict by the Tokugawa Shogunate in 1639. Most became bored and aimless following the passage of a law in 1650 that banned them from dueling, and took jobs as Walmart greeters or grocery store baggers.



*School crossing guards, Alf Landon Middle School*

But over time, *samurai* came to scorn such indoor jobs as too tame for former mercenaries, and turned to the more dangerous work of protecting school children from the threat of passing cars, often throwing themselves in front of speeding Toyotas to save a student's life.



*"You in the freaking Prius—slow down!"*

"If I fail in my duty to protect the children of Alf Landon Middle School," says Kosaka Danjo Masanobu, "I will perform *seppuku*," or ritual suicide, "right after I turn in my bright green school crossing guard belt."



*"Timmy Salmon threw a snowball at a car—I must die!"*

Parents say they appreciate the commitment of the new cadre of crossing guards, even if they find the language barrier daunting. "I asked Hattori Hanzo to take my daughter the goldfish she forgot for her school science project," says Kimberly Weston, a perky blond mother of two. "He threw some soy sauce on it and that was the last we saw of Skipper."

