

Guidance Counselors Fight Boring Image by Ghost-Riding Their Whips

by Con Chapman

NEEDHAM, Massachusetts. Bob Branson has been a high school guidance counselor for nearly twenty years, but a comment by a member of last spring's graduating class made him rethink his approach.



"You kids can do anything you set your minds to. Assuming you have minds."

"I was talking to kid who hadn't applied to college, and I asked him why," Branson says in his cluttered office. "He rolled his eyes and said 'Why go to college if I'm just gonna end up as a tool like you?' I knew then that I wasn't getting across to some of the kids who need help the most."

"College? Why bother?"

So Branson and colleagues at other high schools in the suburbs west of Boston formed an ad hoc group to reach out to marginal students on their own terms. They take their cars—"whips" in hip-hop slang—out on Saturday night and participate in high-risk

“ghost-riding” sessions in which they stand or even dance on their vehicles as they roll at slow speeds down deserted streets.

Ghost-riding the whip.

“It's been a real breakthrough,” says Brad Hairston, assistant guidance counselor at Newton West High School. “From Monday to Friday we're drumming the message of work and study into these kids' heads, then on weekends we show them we're just as stupid as they are.”

“Ghost-riding” has been cited as the cause of several serious and even fatal accidents, leading police to form night patrols in isolated areas to discourage the fad. “I don't know why the guidance counselors would want to undermine our efforts to keep our roads and children safe,” says Needham Chief of Police Edward O'Herlihy. “On the other hand, I suppose if any of those guys was really smart he wouldn't have ended up as guidance counselor.”

The use of dorky helmets deters teens from ghost-riding.

Branson takes exception to the police chief's criticism, saying the presence of adult supervision insures that the teens will behave responsibly. "We insist that they wear helmets when riding," he says, "so that when they crack their heads on the concrete it doesn't leave a sticky mess."

Mattress racing: The safe alternative.

O'Herlihy says he will sponsor a youth basketball league and other activities to create alternatives to the fast-growing but stupid pastime of ghost-riding, including one he thinks may eventually become as popular. "Mattress-racing gives you the same low-speed thrills," he says, "with a softer ride and an upper-body workout for the 'mules' who lug the mattress."

Available in Kindle format on amazon.com as part of the collection "Our Friends, the Rappers."

