

S. James Broman, President



Since 1984, ROP has been working with youth. Over these thirty years, our profession has evolved by focusing on research and a continuum of care. As a company, ROP has developed new programs along the continuum, instituted best practices and has become a learning organization focused on doing what's best for youth. We have not been afraid of change and innovation; we have relished it – while remaining true to the core tenets on which we began.

Our founder, Dave Maguire, believed that exercise and physical well-being could have positive effects on mental health, and indeed, recent research is validating this perspective. Our staff taught youth to ski, guided them across the country on bicycles, and encouraged them up some of the highest mountains in the Sierras. We were there alongside them – climbing with them, challenging ourselves while encouraging them, and staying with them when they felt like giving up.

And, we watched amazing things happen. Some of them overcame insecurities. Some felt their strength for the first time while others finally admitted their vulnerabilities – and learned that it's OK to do so. Young people smiled with pride and watched how family and friends celebrated their accomplishments.

Youth realized that they could reach the highest peaks, both literally and metaphorically, and see new perspectives for their lives at the top.

The recent article by *Bicycling Magazine* exemplifies these accomplishments, as it followed a team of nine students who cycled to the Grand Canyon. The team was led by Greg Townsend, a dedicated staff member who has shared his love of cycling with youth for two decades. In this article, and every day in the ROP program, we continue to witness the positive benefits youth receive from cycling and experiential sports. We believe these activities, as with any challenging endeavor, can give youth access to a level of commitment and endurance that is necessary as they transform their lives. Furthermore, the unique developmental experiences we want for our own children, are what we should deliver for the at-risk youth in our care.

As other programs cut athletics and experiential activities, we at ROP advocate for youth by ensuring they continue to have these experiences – in addition to the most effective evidence-based practices. There is room for both.

When I have an opportunity to speak to one of our graduates, I ask them what they took away from the program. They mention that they learned discipline and left with a feeling of accomplishment, often for the first time. In addition, time and time again, what they cherish most is a unique experiential event and the person whose passion and dedication created it. It validates what I think we all know: it's the people and the experiences that connect us that matter most.

Greg Townsend



Racing Team

Ridge View's racing team continues ROP's 30 years of cycling traditions, winning the Colorado junior championship three times.



Females Enter the Race

The female cycling program launches with participation in the Death Ride and other venues.



Benefits of Sports

Founder Dave Maguire prepares for the first Mexico to Canada Tour in 1984.



Two-Time Champs

Students successfully compete in the Colorado High School Mountain Bike League.

Join Us on the Tour Across America

Rite of Passage is celebrating 30 years of improving the lives of youth, and is launching its third Tour Across America. Led by cycling coach Greg Townsend, the mission of this trek is to empower youth and raise awareness for local, community-based youth organizations.

To learn more about this event, including how to join us, volunteer time, or to make a donation, please visit us at www.riteofpassage.com.



Street Kids

EXCERPTS FROM "STREET KIDS" WRITTEN BY TRACY ROSS.
IMAGES BY SAM ADAMS

At midnight last night, they pulled into the town campground and ate cold turkey sandwiches while shivering in their matching gray-and-maroon sweat suits. While some slept soundly in the cool, damp grass, others tossed fitfully. And now they are creeping up Highway 160, 428 miles from the Grand Canyon. This is their first big day: 101 miles with an elevation gain of 9,072 feet. They ride past creeks shimmering like tinfoil, trailheads beckoning hikers, and oily black cliffs cut through with waterfalls.

There are nine boys total, all from Ridge View Academy in Watkins, Colorado. Some battle addiction, others belong to

gangs—but they are also members of the school's remarkably successful cycling team, and despite their troubles, they still have hopes, dreams, and longings. [For these nine students], there is more at stake than simply pedaling to the Grand Canyon. For some students, the ride is a chance at reformation. If they can commit to pedaling up to 100 miles per day for 11 days, says their head coach, Greg Townsend, this can become a catalyst that helps them move past the pain, confusion, and mistakes that led them to Ridge View.

[At Ridge View Academy]...there are no fences, isolation rooms, or cells. Academically, it has all the offerings of

a traditional school...its robotics team had been regionally ranked; in its shop students are currently framing walls for a Habitat for Humanity project. These opportunities, says former Colorado governor Bill Ritter, give "kids in the system, whose lives have seen a series of difficult turns, a chance at victory."

The Cycling Team

Predictably, most kids choose ball sports [when joining one of Ridge View's many sports teams]. But every year, a few join cycling. Some do because they think it will let them escape their problems, while others remember the fun they had riding Huffy's as children. Few are prepared for



how hard they'll work, because Ridge View cycling is grueling. The weekly schedule, long miles and Townsend's coaching get results—since 2009, the team has won the Bicycle Racing Association of Colorado series title three times. And since it joined the Colorado High School Mountain Bike League in 2010, racers have twice stood on the podium.

A number of Ridge View boys report having...epiphanies. Austin [one of the nine students cycling through the Grand Canyon] says that it's the hardest thing he's ever done but that it helps him make better choices.... There's another factor to the program's success in reshaping these kids' lives, one that science alone can't explain: It's the white-haired, wiry, 48-year-old Townsend, who began coaching in the Minden, Nevada, Rite of Passage team in 1986. ROP has...other bike teams, but none have a coach like Townsend. Since joining ROP, he has led the Grand Canyon trip 19 times and cross-country trips several other times.

The Final Journey

[On the last day,] we pedal 51 miles to the town of Tusayan, gateway to the Grand Canyon...At some point the wind dies down and I [journalist, Tracy Ross] can sense something both beautiful and terrifying—the Grand Canyon.

At the top of the pass, everyone stops, waiting for the final riders...They come, eventually, and I survey the boys from our perch on the pass that will soon drop to the chasm. Alexis straddles his bike, calm again but eager to keep riding. Aaron's here, too, finally, with full certainty that he can "accomplish something." Allen huffs up the pass looking proud... Austin is singing. James stares into the distance. Colton says, "Can you believe it? I'm happy. But I don't want it to be over." Duncan gazes out over the vast, sage-covered landscape and says, "I'm here. I made it. I'm not stopping."

I don't think he means that he will ride forever. But that he has come this far in his life, and that he will keep pushing forward. He has a plan to get his GED, finish his sentence, join the Marines, find his daughter.

This, I see, is the point of riding to the Grand Canyon: It gives these kids something concrete to strive for. You encounter a hill and you have to pedal hard to reach the summit. But there will be another hill, and another—it's an ongoing struggle. To keep reaching the top takes self-awareness and owning your own actions in spite of innumerable and unknowable obstacles. So close to the Grand Canyon, I witness the power of cycling to provide these kids a way to unhitch from the weight of their past. ■

