

# GOOOD!

Tap into this teen driving program  
and rev up community relations.







By Kim Fernandez

In 2008, National Hot Rod Association drag racing star Doug Herbert experienced a family tragedy that put his career on a different course. Herbert's sons, new driver Jon, 17, and James, 12, were driving to a fast-food restaurant when their car slammed into the back of a large SUV, destroying the vehicle and killing both boys.

Herbert's life changed forever, and he soon took action so fewer families would face the same kind of tragedy. He learned that car accidents are the leading killer of teens ages 15 to 19—worse than the next four causes combined—and it was an easy decision to put his unique driving knowledge and skills to use to teach kids how to drive in ways they don't learn through traditional driver's education programs. It wasn't long before Be Responsible and Keep Everyone Safe (B.R.A.K.E.S.) was founded as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit to teach teens and their parents how to drive proactively and safely, even in (especially in) crisis situations. Since then, more than 20,000 teens have been trained to drive safer, and more than 20,000 parents have been coached to monitor and help their kids develop excellent driving skills.

This year, 45 weekends of B.R.A.K.E.S. training will be presented in 25 cities across the U.S. The nonprofit has plans to grow its successful program to more of the country but needs help—and that's where the parking industry comes in.

### The Program

The B.R.A.K.E.S. program is presented to teen drivers and their parents at no charge, and there's frequently a wait list. "This is not a learn-to-drive school," says Scott McKee, strategic counsel to the organization. "People sometimes misconstrue what we do for driver's ed. It's definitely not

that. It's a AAA-certified advanced driver training. We put kids behind the wheel and teach them to get out of the situations that cause the greatest number of crashes and fatalities for new drivers: controlling a skid, dealing with a wheel dropping off the side of the pavement, using ABS braking in a panic situation, emergency lane changes and avoidance, distracted driving, and some ancillary lessons depending on location."

The class starts with Doug Herbert's personal experience. "He had the world by the tail," says McKee. "Eight years ago, his two sons were killed in a car







crash a mile and a half from his house while going to McDonald's. The problem was inexperience—a new driver who didn't have the skills to recognize the danger of what he was doing and get himself out of the situation."

After an introductory talk, B.R.A.K.E.S. students get behind the wheel with trained and experienced instructors to face common situations that require more advanced driving skills. Twenty-one instructors are onsite each weekend of the program, offering a student-to-teacher ratio of three to one, so each student gets lots of time driving and practicing. Many are former professional race car drivers, some teach race car drivers, and some are driving instructors from the FBI, CIA, U.S. State Department, and armed services.

"Doug started by training James and Jon's classmates," says McKee. "He trained 50 kids the first year. He's a racer, and he has contacts and friends who make a living being good drivers, and by the end of that year, he had another 300 parents lined up so he could train their kids." All students must be accompanied by a parent or guardian, and many bring both. "At the end of this year," says McKee, "including parents, we'll be knocking on the door of 50,000 safer drivers on the road because of B.R.A.K.E.S."

Teens in the program aren't just starting out. They must have their learner's permits and at least 30 hours behind the wheel themselves. Many students are older teens but because new drivers are trending older than they used to, haven't been driving very long when they arrive at B.R.A.K.E.S.

The program has proven extraordinarily popular. "In Charlotte where we are based and where we do a school once a month, we have

500 to 1,000 people on the wait list at any time," says McKee. "There's a whole big country out there. We've gone to 18 different states and have had students from 40 states and three countries. People get on planes so their kids can do this."

Once word gets out about the program in a city, he says, the wait list starts growing. "If we can go to a city three or four times a year, word of mouth takes over," he says. "We then have a situation where we have a nonstop wait list." And while that seems like a good thing to most businesses, for B.R.A.K.E.S., it means more kids need training in less time. "It's a huge program," says McKee. "Massive."

What's preventing the scheduling of more classes to meet demand? A shortage of parking facilities, for one thing. That's why, B.R.A.K.E.S. and IPI are forming a collaborative effort to help spread the program and do good in individual communities, which is a win-win for everyone.

### Parking and B.R.A.K.E.S.

The first thing that's needed for a B.R.A.K.E.S. weekend is a large, empty parking lot. A lot of about 400,000 to 500,000 square feet of open space is ideal for advanced driving maneuvers. B.R.A.K.E.S. trucks in its own vehicles and provides instructors, but there are other things they need to make the program happen:



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- Tent or building for classroom instruction.
- Restrooms or four port-a-potties.
- Available hotel rooms for instructors close to the instruction site.
- Snacks and drinks, which can be donated by restaurants or grocery stores, along with lunch for instructors and volunteers on Saturday and Sunday.
- Volunteers: The program requires five to six for each weekend.
- Close proximity to an airport.
- Permits: Many sites require permits from local fire departments or municipalities.
- Tables and chairs for classroom work.

B.R.A.K.E.S. provides insurance and registration for each program.

“The goal for 2017 is to have 50 weekends of programs in 38 cities that want us to come,” says Mimi Sabates, executive vice president. “We need financial and other support on the ground, which means donating money or a facility, and we need feet on the ground, meaning a team of people to get the word out locally.” She says it’s helpful to have a local sponsor who can help offset costs, including transporting vehicles and instructors to accommodate more teens in each class. Local media frequently cover the program, she says, which is nice publicity for parking facilities that are able to host it.



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## The Difference

McKee says B.R.A.K.E.S.’s program is proven and that parents and teens say it may be the best thing they ever did to help kids become better, safer drivers. “There’s this light-bulb moment and transformation when kids realize how little they know and how much more they can learn,” he says. “Some of the kids are really annoyed when they show up. You can tell who’s had a fight in the car on the way there. But by the end of the class, the parents and teens have had this bonding, common experience, they’re all smiles, and they realize how much they didn’t know before and that their parents brought them there out of genuine love and concern.”

B.R.A.K.E.S. is eager to talk with parking organizations that are interested in partnering to present teaching weekends in communities around the U.S. To learn more and get involved, visit [PutOnTheBrakes.org](http://PutOnTheBrakes.org). **P**



## My Son and B.R.A.K.E.S.

By Larry Cohen, CAPP

**L**ike many millennials, my son didn’t see a need to drive (as long as Mom or Dad drove him around). But with an impending full-time summer job, he needed to get his license.

My training with him was very difficult at times, with too much screaming and yelling; overall, it was not a very good experience for either of us. I knew there had to be a better way to learn the traits of good driving. My son needed some confidence and advanced driving experience but more

than a typical driver school would offer.

I wanted to find a program that teaches new drivers how to deal with emergency situations. I did research and found the B.R.A.K.E.S. program. Formed by drag racer Doug Herbert, it has a very tragic but powerful story in its beginning, but I knew this was the right program for my son, taught by the right people.

Luckily, the program was coming to my area, and as you learn when you attend

the class with your child, the program is as much for the parents as it is for the kids. Overconfident or timid kids are brought into balance after going through this program. And the behind-the-wheel experiences and simulations with trained professionals are first class.

I don’t just recommend this program for anyone new to driving; I would require it.

**LARRY J. COHEN, CAPP**, is executive director of the Lancaster Parking Authority.