



[Home](#) > [Gazette magazine](#) > [Vol. 75, No. 4](#) > Youth

## Youth



The YIELD team bring a car down to the local race track every Friday for the street-legal event. *Credit: RCMP*

## On the right track

### RCMP program encourages smart choices

**By Sigrid Forberg**

Five years ago, Forest Ohneck was driving to his weekly Thursday evening pool game with friends when the course of the rest of his life changed.

Driving down a two-lane highway between two small Alberta communities, Ohneck and a friend in another car made eye contact at a red light and decided to race. Unbeknownst to them, a local sheriff witnessed their high speeds and managed to catch up with them at the next set of lights.

"We were asked by the officer over his intercom system to pull our vehicles to the side of the road," says Ohneck. "A second officer pulled up and everything just started to sink in. It was surprising, overwhelming, a little embarrassing, and a lot worrisome."

Ohneck and his friend were issued tickets and sent to the Crown prosecutor for sentencing. The Crown prosecutor at the time was considering impounding their cars and starting their fines at a minimum of \$2,600 each when Cst. Gord Buck stepped in.

## Alternative approach

Buck, a member of the Spruce Grove / Stony Plain detachment, organizes and runs a legal racing program in the community called YIELD (Youth Initiatives and Education in Lifestyles and Driving).

He travels the region, presenting to local schools and groups YIELD's message of making smart decisions, both on and off the road. Buck also goes down once a week to the local racetrack with a modified old patrol vehicle, giving other drivers the chance to race against the RCMP.

"What the car does really well is break down the barriers between police and the public," says Buck. "We're not the police out there, we're the guys with the really cool car."

Ohneck and his friend were offered the option of an alternative measures program and to carry out their community service hours with YIELD. The first time they showed up, they thought they'd be picking up garbage at the side of the highway in orange jumpsuits.

"We were informed that our community service would involve helping with the educational programs," says Ohneck. "That was, at that time, really nerve-wracking, especially being just fresh out of high school and then being judged by high school students."

## Changing perspectives

It took two years to finish their community service commitment. While his friend chose not to continue with YIELD, Ohneck asked Buck if he could stay on as a volunteer.

"I had just noticed that I was starting to really evaluate complicated decisions in my life and I was really becoming satisfied with the outcomes, especially with my involvement in the program," says Ohneck.

Buck says Ohneck is a perfect example of what YIELD is hoping to accomplish. With nearly 60 events each summer, he hopes that by appealing to youth through something they enjoy, rather than talking down to them, that they'll choose to make better, more informed decisions.

"Some of the kids come up to us and say, 'You know, we resented being told we had to wear a seatbelt because it was the law, but now we understand why we need to wear a seatbelt.'," says Buck. "And we're going, 'Holy crap, they're listening.' "

## Saving lives

Friday evenings you can find the YIELD team, consisting of Buck, Ohneck and another member from the detachment at the Castrol Raceway, ready to take on anyone who wants to race.

Carol Richardson, who works at the track, says they've always been involved in the various programs the RCMP runs. Each year, they donate a certain number of tickets members can hand out to race on the track.

Although from a business perspective they're giving their services away, Richardson says it's important to give racers a safe place to do what they love.

"I believe we're helping save people's lives," says Richardson. "Not only the driver when their car goes out of control, but the person they might hit as well."

Ohneck adds that he feels his life was saved. He says he sometimes thinks about the various things that could have happened had he not been caught that night — and he's held onto a token to remind him too.

"I kept the ticket from that night," says Ohneck. "That's something that I kind of hold close to my heart because that's what started this whole thing: A nasty pink piece of paper started this whole whirlwind of good in my life."

Date Modified: 2013-10-04