

# Press Release



## Battle Ground Public Schools

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Sept. 28, 2011

### Bob Mortimer to students: *'I'm not handicapped'*



For starters, Bob Mortimer, who lost both legs and one arm after coming in contact with a high-voltage line following an auto wreck years ago, told Maple Grove Middle School students not to avert their eyes when he looks at them, and that he isn't handicapped.

In a Sept. 27 all-school assembly punctuated with plenty of humor, the straight-talking, harmonica-playing, bike-riding Mortimer, of Gig Harbor, Wash., told his attentive audience about *real* handicaps.



“This is the only handicap I have,” he said as he placed on his head a baseball cap with the word **HANDY** across the front. The real handicaps, he said, include low self esteem, prejudice, failure to show respect and dignity to others and approving or even just looking the other way when witnessing bullying or teasing.

It is not the principal’s or teachers’ job to discover and stop teasing and bullying, Mortimer said. “You have to take ownership of this” by not laughing or approving when someone teases another person, or by watching without comment. “Get a little courage and stand up against it. You don’t need 10 counseling sessions to figure this out.”

Mortimer repeatedly urged the students to be all that they can be and not try to be like other kids or do something just because other kids are doing it. He looked at the eighth graders and told them that in high school they eventually will hear about opportunities to use alcohol or drugs.

“That’s a road that will never spiral up,” he said. “It only spirals down.” To underscore that point, Mortimer revealed that he lost his three limbs as a result of an auto wreck after a teen-age party.

Even some advertisements, especially beauty ads aimed at girls, elicit from Mortimer this advice: Ignore them.

“You do not need to be like somebody else,” whether a model in a commercial or a classmate in school. “How about accepting the things that make you different from everybody else,” he said. “I like the way I am on the inside.”

Mortimer had another recommendation: Get plenty of exercise. Thanks to computers and automation, “You spend more hours sitting on your seat than any generation before you. You need to do extreme exercise.”

He wasn’t just blowing smoke. Mortimer and his family this year completed their second bicycle trip across the United States, him riding a special hand-powered bike. (See Mortimer’s “**Hope and Courage across America**” website at [www.hcjourney.org](http://www.hcjourney.org).)

Mortimer spent the day at Maple Grove Middle School. After the assembly he dropped in on several classes and visited with students in the cafeteria. He also met with student leaders and the older students who are mentors to younger students.

**Wait! Wait!** Did we mention the harmonica playing? Yup, he does that, too. And he had the kids help out on the chorus. His song was “The one-armed blues.”

“The kids really received it well,” said Principal Bill Penrose, who brought Mortimer to Maple Grove Middle in 2007 and to other schools where he has been principal. “I have yet to have him not just blow people away.”



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