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'Planking' fans say fad is silly, but harmless fun

By A.Jay Wagner Sun-Times Media June 22, 2011 5:16PM

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Under the watchful eye of Chris Gortowski (left), Kyle Raddatz gets in position to "plank" Wednesday, June 8, 2011 at a park in Evergreen Park, Illinois. | Art Vassy-Sun-Times Media

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Kyle Raddatz scaled the orange-and-white barrier with a large "Do Not Enter" sign on the front.

Once on top, he lay down and balanced precariously on the thin edge of the barrier. He rested there prostrate, stiff as a board, as pictures were snapped and friends Julius Fassel and Chris Gortowski chuckled.

Raddatz nimbly dismounted.

Welcome to the world of planking, a silly trend in which the participants do little more than lay face down in odd or unlikely places, finding humor in the outright absurdity of it all.

"You have to be lying down flat, arms at your side, with absolutely no facial expression," Gortowski explained.

"The more awkward the place, the better, and the spot can't have been used before."

"And point your toes," Raddatz added. "You've got to point your toes. That's very important. It's an art form, really."

Legend has it the stunt began in England back in 1997, when it was less creatively called the "Lying Down Game." Two lads had been lying down in improbable places to amuse themselves for years, then they started posting pictures online in 2007.

The joke went viral from there. The Internet fad made major news and came to pop culture consciousness when a 20-year-old Australian plunged to his death while trying to plank a seventh-story balcony in Brisbane in May.

Though the fatal accident was what brought planking to the trio's attention, they remain cautious and more interested in the ridiculousness of it.

"We're just looking for some fun," Fassel said. "It's just another stupid thing to do among the other stupid things we do."

After circulating some planking photos among friends, the three 2009 graduates of Evergreen Park High School decided to start a Planking Chicago Facebook page, where they began posting their pictures for all to see.

Since the launch of the Facebook page, they've seen citywide interest spike. They're occasionally noticed at work or around Evergreen Park and have seen fellow planksters from all corners of the Chicago area post their own pictures to the page.

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Though security guards at times have posed a challenge, the plankers say they've encountered little trouble.

"It's not as if we're breaking the law. We're just lying there," Raddatz said. "We generally just run off or leave if we're asked."

Asked about the newfound attention and their future planking ambitions, they were noncommittal.

"It hasn't been some new wave of awesomeness. It's just something funny to do, no matter how stupid it gets," Gortowski said.

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