

Club puts student on fast track to success

Villages Motor Racing Fan Club sponsors young go-cart racer

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By Jessica Green

It happened quickly.

Just the way 9-year-old Nic Fernandez likes it.

"They just fell in love with him," The Villages Motor Racing Fan Club President Gerry Hafer said of members.

After learning about Nic, the group invited The Villages Charter School third-grader to a meeting. While there, he spoke to the club alongside his father about his favorite thing to do: Race his go-cart.

"He's a fascinating young kid," Hafer added.

From there, the club decided to sponsor Nic.

"We kind of feel like, because it's in our backyard, it's our home track," Hafer said of Fruitland Park's Original Speedway Park, where Nic races on weekends.

"I think it's important for people of The Villages to reach out to the surrounding local community," he added.

So in February 2009, The Villages Motor Racing Fan Club made its entry into go-cart racing by becoming Nic's sponsor with a \$175 donation.

"A lot of people think there's not much involved (with go-cart racing), but it's as technical as any other racing," said Nic's father, George Fernandez.

That's part of the reason the family has invested roughly \$15,000 in the cart since Nic began racing about three years ago, George said.

Not including tires or parts, he estimates that it costs about \$300 each time Nic races.

Bur participation from members of The Villages Motor Racing Fan Club offers young racers more than just financial fuel.

Members have also been attending races to cheer Nic on.

"That means more to a kid than you can imagine," Terry Turman, board member for the Original Leesburg Micro Racing Association, said of the encouragement fans provide the young drivers.

Nic agrees.

"It makes me have confidence in myself," he said of seeing members of The Villages Motor Racing Fan Club in the stands cheering him on.

"I think it's exciting," Nic's mother Stephanie said. "It's just nice to know that you have support from the community."

Nic, whose favorite professional driver is Jeff Gordon, enjoys The Villages Motor Racing Fan Club's participation when he's off the track, too.



Photos by Peter Travers / Daily Sun
Nic Fernandez, 9, drives his go-cart racer recently at Original Speedway Park in Fruitland Park. The Villages Motor Racing Fan Club sponsored the young driver last year and members attend races to cheer him on.



Nic Fernandez stands beside his go-cart racer at Original Speedway Park in Fruitland Park. Park board members say go-cart racing teaches young drivers important life lessons such as responsibility, discipline and good sportsmanship.

"I like talking to them because they tell me facts about racing that I didn't know," he said.

"He sees them in their yellow shirts and goes up to them and starts talking," Stephanie said. "He really gets a kick out of seeing them there," George added.

Knowing that there's a place where the family can spend quality time together and have fun while doing it is another plus for those who take part in Speedway activities.

Turman's 6-year-old son Aiden also races at the Original Speedway Park.

"It does my heart good," he said of seeing families working together to get the carts ready

and cheering for their children.

"The way the board members see it is that if the kids are out racing at the track with mom and dad – they're not getting into mischief. And if mom and dad are at the track racing with the kids, they're not getting into mischief either," Turman said half-jokingly.

Then there are the lessons learned: responsibility, discipline and good sportsmanship.

George said he and Nic begin preparing for race-day about a week in advance.

Among other things, the tires have to be prepped with solutions and warmers so they're soft enough to grip the dirt track, the engine has to be tuned and parts have to be lubricated. When they're getting ready to race, the kids have "their game faces on," Turman said.

"But when they're done, they can't get their helmets off fast enough to go play football with the kid that just beat them," he added.

"Nobody's my friend on the racetrack, but off the racetrack they're all my friends," Nic said, noting that he hopes to someday become a NASCAR driver.

