

FOOD, FUN AND FAST CARS

Members of Motor Racing Fan Club gather at Colony Cottage to watch Coke Zero 400

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By Jill Winters

When it came to watching NASCAR's Coke Zero 400 on Saturday, some members of The Villages Motor Racing Fan Club decided the best way to watch the race was in front of a big screen television at Colony Cottage Recreation Center.

About 20 residents gathered to watch the race, which took place at Daytona International Speedway, while another 30 club members headed by bus to see the race in person.

"This is a good turnout for the middle of summer, considering we also had members take advantage of the bus trip, too," said Wendy Touchette, a special events coordinator for the club.

Touchette said the club aims to provide a comfortable atmosphere for members and potential members.

"We try to set up a place for those who can't afford to venture out to the races, Touchette said. Touchette said the club just eclipsed the 150-member mark and might top off at 190.

Patti and Leo Larsen and Mary and Vince Misia, all residents of the Village of Piedmont, came out to learn more about the club.

"I feel like I've known these people all my life and we just met," Patti said.

The Larsens and Misias are from Wisconsin, and said they were pulling for Wisconsin native Matt Kenseth to win the race.

Club president Gerry Hafer said he hopes the watch party gives potential members, such as the Larsens and Misias, a better idea of what the club has to offer.

"I hope they get a sense of what our club is about and what we do," the Village of Summerhill resident said.

Jackie Bird, a resident of the Village of Buttonwood, has enjoyed being a new member of the club.

"I'm a huge NASCAR fan and I love being around other people that like racing," Bird said wearing her Jimmie Johnson T-shirt.

Bird's son introduced her to NASCAR and she believes Johnson has the smarts to win at Daytona.

With only nine races left until the 2012 NASCAR Sprint Cup Chase for the Championship, each race becomes more important. One Villager at the party was definitely aware of how important winning the Coke Zero 400 is for his favorite driver.



Tina Russell / Daily Sun

Villages Motor Racing Fan Club members Janine and Bob Woodsford of the Village of Bonnybrook watch the Coke Zero 400 on a big screen television Saturday evening at Colony Cottage Recreation Center.



Wendy Touchette of the Village of Sunset Pointe laughs as she talks to Mike Anderson of the Village of Tamarind Grove before watching the Coke Zero 400 Saturday at Colony Cottage Recreation Center.

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Fred Coenen of the Village of Polo Ridge has been a club member for four years and was pulling for Carl Edwards.

"If he doesn't win, he can kiss the Chase goodbye," Coenen said.

The club provided snacks and drinks and encouraged residents to bring a dish to share, their own drinks and a chair to watch the race among friends.

"I love the camaraderie among this group," said Jack Wilbur of the Village of Tamarind Gove, who has been to the Daytona 500 21 times and looked forward to watching this race with fellow fans.