

Local fans come together for Great American Race

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By Katie Bachman

The roaring NASCAR engines could be heard throughout Colony Cottage Recreation Center on Sunday afternoon. Even though the rumbling didn't match the noise level at Daytona International Speedway, Villages residents still enjoyed the race.

About 30 Villages residents spent Sunday afternoon at Colony Cottage Recreation Center watching the 43 NASCAR racers zip around the track during the Daytona 500 race. Many of the residents were members of The Villages Motor Racing Fan Club.

"The race was better than I expected," said Gerry Hafer, president of the club. "It's been fun today because we all take an interest in racing and have debated about it throughout the day."

The club has about 200 members and about 50 of them were actually in Daytona for the race, he added. Club members who didn't go still wanted to enjoy the race in a group setting, Hafer said.



Mark DiOrio / Daily Sun
Gerry Greim of the Village of Woodbury, left, and Village of Sabal Chase resident Janet Ott watch the Daytona 500 on Sunday at Colony Cottage Recreation Center in The Villages.

Six hours of excitement

The residents filled the tables with snacks and desserts, then gathered near the big screen in their lawn chairs to be comfortable for the nearly six-hour event.

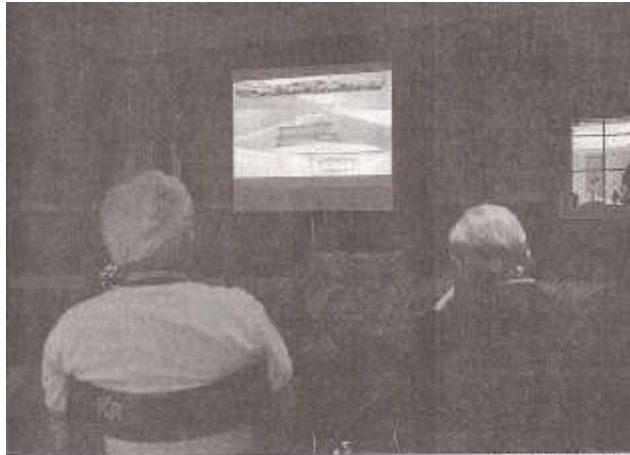
For Hafer and many other club members, NASCAR racing's appeal is in the nature of the competition, the speed and the strategy, he said.

Joe Stefano and Rudy Abt were visiting Stefano's aunt in the Village of Santo Domingo and they also were able to make it to some of the races in Daytona earlier in the week. When Stefano found out about the watch party at the recreation center, he knew he wanted to be there.

"I'm a huge NASCAR fan and it was amazing to be in Daytona," Stefano said. "We had to watch the 500 and thought it'd be fun to watch it with other NASCAR fans."

Michael and Wendy Touchette, members of the club, also watched the race in the comfort of the recreation center. Like Hafer, they too enjoy the competition, high speeds and the overall nature of the sport.

"It's fun watching the race on TV, but being at Daytona and hearing 43 NASCAR (racers) drive by you going about 200 miles per hour is just amazing," Wendy said. "I've been looking forward to this day all week."



Members of The Villages Motor Racing Fan Club watch the Daytona 500 on Sunday at Colony Cottage Recreation Center.

Wendy sported her red NASCAR jacket for Tony Stewart No. 14. She chuckled as she said some people might have made fun of her because the jacket might not have gone with her outfit, but as a true NASCAR fan that's what she had to do.

"Racing is like no other sport. It's not like basketball or football because there's just so much more energy," Wendy said. "Just watching 43 cars racing around the track at the same time, it's just awesome. I love this sport."