

Motor Racing Club Celebrates 10 Years of Fun, Fellowship at Special Meeting

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By Larry D. Croom

I'll never forget that phone call in October 2006.

"My name is Glen Carter and I'd like to start a racing fan club here in The Villages. Can you help me out?"

From that day forward, I've watched as Carter and company put together The Villages Motor Racing Fan Club and operated it as a first-class operation. And now, 10 years later, the group was kind enough to include me in the celebration of its many accomplishments during a night at Colony Cottage Recreation Center that included a trip down memory lane of the adventures members have shared. Again, I watched in amazement as the special story of this group played out in front of me.

"Being part of something that has grown to be recognized as a solid part of the Florida racing community has been an absolute pleasure," said Gerry Hafer, who has served as president, vice president, coordinator of speaker recruitment and newsletter editor. "I treasure the many personal relationships the club has helped create, both within The Villages and across the state and beyond."

Mike Touchette, of the Village of Sunset Pointe, said it's been fun to watch the club grow with racing enthusiasts from a variety of different backgrounds.

"It's been a thrill to be involved with some of the people that we've met over the years, some of the racers that have been here and the knowledge they've shared with us," said the former vice president who now serves as a board member at large.

One of the more interesting facets of the club is its Hall of Fame, which includes those who have taken the time to be guest speakers at club meetings. The list of 124 inductees, which includes the likes of legendary racers Dick Anderson, Buster Burt, Buzzie Reutimann, Buddy Pearce, Betty Skelton Erde, Marvin Panch, Geoff Bodine and Bobby Brack, to name a few, is quite impressive.

"We really have met some wonderful people," said Wendy Touchette, the club's current vice president who also served as the longtime special events coordinator. "We've attended some great races, we've been to Daytona and done ride-alongs and I even golfed with Geoff Bodine (a legendary Modified driver who also won 18 Cup races, including the 1986 Daytona 500). It's really been pretty cool."

For Carter, the club's founder and former president, the celebration was particularly special.



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Founder and past president Glen Carter, of the Village of Summerhill, and Daily Sun Ombudsman Larry Croom pose for a photo Wednesday.

"It means all the world to me," said the Village of Summerhill resident, who realized his racing dream in 1970 when he competed at Montgomery Motor Speedway after spending \$500 on a red 1957 Chevrolet sporting the number 3. "I really believe the club has helped sustain my life, adding a few years to it because of the friendships I've made. I just really enjoy it."

Hafer, also of the Village of Summerhill, said the club's success is a huge testament to Carter and his vision.

"His leadership in our start-up years helped pave the way for what we'd be able to achieve," he said. "I've enjoyed working with him to share our love of motorsports with a great group of people."

Mike Touchette, who drag raced his 1968 Dodge Charger R/T 440 in Colchester, Connecticut, in the 1970s, agreed.

"Glen had the enthusiasm and some pretty good knowledge of the many different aspects of racing," he said. "So for him to share that with everybody and have this idea of getting this club going is a pretty cool thing."

Wendy, who spent her second date with Mike at the dragstrip, said there's something else that's very special about the club's membership.

"As hard as it was years ago for a woman to be involved in racing, when I went to the meetings and was interested, those guys were so good to me," said the die-hard Tony Stewart fan, who oftentimes can be found sporting a variety of garments supporting her soon-to-be retired favorite driver.

Mike, a longtime Dale Earnhardt Jr. fan, added that Wendy's immense knowledge of racing goes back to those days on the Connecticut drag strip.

"In one race, we had put in a new shifter – an automatic with a reverse pattern – and she didn't like the way it was bolted in," he said. "She said, 'I guarantee you're going to pull that off the floor.' I said, 'Baloney, that's not going to happen.'"

Mike said he'll never forget the moment when Wendy hopped in the car for the ride back after his quarter-mile run.

"Here I am, holding onto the shifter with my hand," he said, "She's never let me forget that."

As an inaugural Hall of Fame member of this wonderful club – they were kind enough to listen to me babble about covering racing since the mid-1990s – I offer congratulations to every member for a job well done. The past 10 years have flown by and I can only imagine what the next 10 will bring for this hard-working group that sports bright yellow club shirts and wears the title of "motorhead" with pride.



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