

NASCAR Driver with Ties to Late Villager Achieves Huge Milestone

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By Larry D. Croom

December has proven to be quite a month for a NASCAR driver with ties to The Villages.

Corey LaJoie, whose late grandfather, Ernie Battee, was a beloved member of The Villages Motor Racing Fan Club, achieved a longtime goal by becoming a full-time driver at the highest level of stock car racing.

Last week, the 27-year-old LaJoie agreed to drive the No. 32 Go Fas Racing Ford Mustang in the NASCAR Cup Series. He's competed in parts of three different Cup seasons, but 2019 will mark his first with a full-time ride.



Corey LaJoie and his late grandfather, Villager Ernie Battee

LaJoie's father, Randy, is a two-time Busch Series champion and owns a company that makes custom race seats. Brother Casey is a graduate of the Connecticut School of Broadcasting and enjoys doing on-air racing reports. And his mother, Lisa, is a member of The Villages Motor Racing Fan Club's 2015 Hall of Fame class and was in attendance at the annual banquet to speak about being a racing wife and mother.

Lisa's father, Battee, was a longtime member of the racing club. The former Army chief warrant officer was severely injured in a 2012 automobile crash that left him a quadriplegic. He spent the last years of his life at Lake Harris Health Center in Leesburg before passing away on Oct. 8, 2016. He was considered an inspiration to the staff of the healthcare facility for his constant smiles and positive outlook on life.

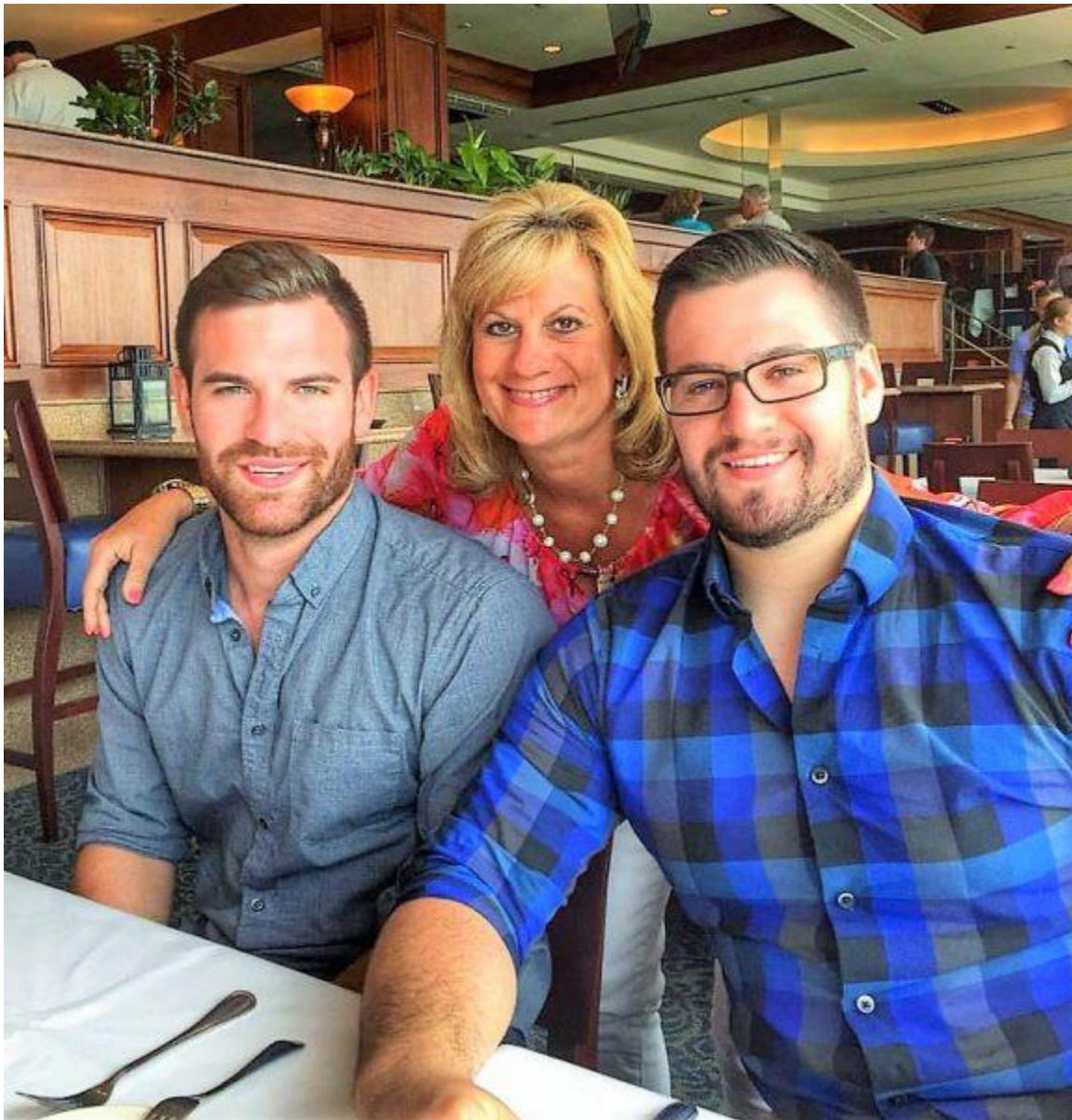


Lisa LaJoie, center, poses with members of The Villages Motor Racing Fan Club on Oct. 15, 2016, at a celebration of life ceremony for her father, Ernie Battee. Sons Casey and Corey, and husband Randy are in the back row.

But Battee, an avid racing fan, was in the audience the night Lisa joined the group's Hall of Fame. In fact, he received a standing ovation when he left near the end of the event. And Lisa thanked the racing club's members for continuing to visit, spend time and "brighten the days" for Battee at the Leesburg facility.

In addition to the racing club, Battee was a member of the Novia Scotia Club and the Bridge Club, whose members would visit him on a weekly basis so he could continue to play the game that he loved.

For Corey, the mere mention of Battee has been known to bring tears to his eyes. He's even said in the past how much he misses his grandfather and how he wishes he could have been at Daytona International Speedway to see him compete.



Corey LaJoie, left, with mom Lisa and brother Casey