

Then & Now

Spotted easily by their signature yellow polo shirts, The Villages Motor Racing Fan Club members gather for love of all motor racing.

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By Ethan Palmer

Some call it their weekend entertainment; others call it a lifestyle.

NASCAR enthusiasts are known for being some of the most passionate and loyal fans in all of sports, especially in The Villages.

"In the early 1960s I used to listen to the races on the radio, and I was just captivated hearing all the big names," said Gerry Hafer, of the Village of Summerhill.

Hafer is a current "pit crew" board member and past president of The Villages Motor Racing Fan Club, where there is no shortage of high-speed fanatics.

The group meets at 7 p.m. the first Wednesday of each month at Colony Cottage Recreation Center, 510 Colony Blvd.

When they're not occupying the recreation center or local racetracks, chances are the group is gathered somewhere else, with members wearing their iconic yellow polo shirts, all eyes glued to a race on the television screen.

"The crew that we have now has really blossomed," said Glen Carter, also of the Village of Summerhill.

Carter, the club's first acting president, is credited with founding the Motor Racing Fan Club.

Around 57 years ago, he packed up and made the trip from his home in Alabama to Daytona Beach for the first 500-mile NASCAR International Sweepstakes at Daytona.

Since then, his passion for the sport hasn't diminished a bit.

Over the years, Carter said he has attended and watched hundreds of races.

And he has the memories to prove it.

"I was a big fan of the Allison brothers, and watching that fight in '79 was quite a deal," Carter said.

Ironically, the moment that will live forever in NASCAR infamy is also credited with being the moment that put NASCAR on the map for thousands across the country.

On the final lap, Cale Yarborough unsuccessfully attempted to pass Donnie Allison.

Yarborough lost control and clipped Allison's car, sending both of them into the infield before Allison's brother, Bobby, pulled up shortly after the wreck.

The crash sparked perhaps the most well-known physical altercation ever to happen between NASCAR drivers.

Richard Petty went on to win the race.



"The ending was fantastic," Carter said. "And that was the first race on live national television. I remember I got all dressed up for it just like I would if I were going to the race."

Founded in October 2006, The Villages Motor Racing Fan Club has attracted hundreds of men and women with a need for speed.

While many members are die-hard NASCAR fans, the group supports all types of motor racing sports and athletes, frequently carpooling to races at nearby tracks in the area and surrounding communities.



This group of Villagers also has contributed in excess of \$13,000 in sponsorships to the racing community, and even launched a scholarship program in support of young local racers.

"We have people come from all different kinds of racing," said Jerry Conkle, current president of the club. "It has been very educational, and our members have gotten to meet a lot of the most well-known people in the racing community. It really does mean a lot to me."