

Villages Motor Racing Fan Club joins together to cheer on Daytona drivers

Villages-News.com

Sunday, February 22, 2015

By Meta Minton

It was an exciting Daytona 500 and about 50 members of The Villages Motor Racing Fan Club joined to watch the race and enjoy a potluck buffet.



Members of The Villages Motor Racing Fan Club gathered to watch the Daytona race.

Lights were dim in the double-meeting room as the race was shown on a large overhead screen. The group was relaxed, enjoying food and friendly conversation early in the race, as cheers occasionally went up. Later, as things got more tense, their faces became more intent, and the cheering got louder, as the race wound down to the last twenty-or-so laps.

It was no secret whom most members were rooting for – their tee-shirts told the tale. Club president, Rio Ponderosa Villager Jerry Conkle wanted Jeff Gordon to win, and club VP, Wendy Touchette, was disappointed when her driver, Tony Stewart, was involved in an incident mid-race.

Jim and Barbara Pappas, who reside in the Village of St. James, were there with Pamela, their youngest of eight children. They have been Jeff Gordon fans since 1994, since they saw him in the first Brickyard 400. The Pappas and Gordon are all from Indiana.

"It was Jim's birthday, or close to it; we picked Gordon – he won that day – and we have been his fans ever since," Barbara Pappas said.

Barbara got her husband into racing in the small town of Benton, Indiana.

"Every Saturday night, we were at the dirt track there – it's in our blood," Jim smiled. "We hate to see accidents – we don't even look at them. We just like to see good competitive racing," Jim continued. "We were at Daytona when Dale Earnhardt was killed. That was horrible."

"This is Gordon's last race – he is retiring from full time racing, so that makes today very special, too," Barbara added.

Sitting with the Pappas was Springfield Villager, Janine Woodsford, who is originally from Las Vegas. Her husband, Bob, raced, and she was his pit crew.

"We love the Busch boys, because we used to race with them at the Bull Ring in Las Vegas. We hadn't seen them since they were 13. It's sad they



Wendy Touchette with friends Barbara & Jim Pappas and their daughter, Pamela.

aren't in the race." Kyle Busch was sidelined with a compound leg fracture suffered in a recent crash, and his brother, Kurt, was out of the race as well.

"We love the camaraderie, and some trash talking among friendly competitors in this club," Janine said.

"Racing is great – it gets your adrenaline up," Bob Woodsford said. "I always liked the start of the race best, when you jockey or push your way for track position."

"This is a great way to throw a party, and not have to clean up the house afterward," Barbara Pappas added.

Club president, Jerry Conkle, said several club members went over to Daytona this year, but most like to escape the crowds and inflated hotel prices by watching the race closer to home. "This gives our members the opportunity to experience this race, and others during the year, with like-minded friends and a lot of spirit," he said. The Jeff Gordon fans, including Caroline Villager, Alan Stone, all joked they felt sorry for members who sported Tony Stewart and other driver shirts.



Joey Logan was the winner of the Daytona 500.

Joey Logano, #22, driving a bright yellow and red Penske Ford won – his first career win at the Daytona 500. Logano, thrilled with his first big win, said "This is incredible. I'm in awe. I don't even know what I'm feeling right now." Kevin Harvick, #4, driving a Chevrolet, took second place and #88 Dale Earnhardt, Jr., also in a Chevrolet, came in third. Logano's win came after the race was re-started after a delay of several minutes. A track cleanup was needed after #51, Justin Allgaier's Chevy, blew a tire.

Jeff Gordon entered the race hopeful as usual, but was foiled far back from the finish line. After leading for 87 of the race's 200 total laps, he was pulled into a multi-vehicle wreck at the end of

the race.

The Villages Motor Racing Fan Club meets the first Wednesday of every month at 7 p.m. at Colony Cottage Regional Recreation Center, and welcomes all Villagers who are interested in racing.

"We have a very friendly club," Conkle said. "There are a lot of NASCAR fans among our over 150 members, but we cover other types of racing as well – anything with wheels – plus even vintage boat racing."

The club has had famous racing stars as speakers, including former Daytona 500 winners, Marvin Panch and Geoffrey Bodine, and famous racer, Betty Skelton-Erdy.

Conkle is proud of the club's donations to worthy charities – like Operation Shoebox, Camp Boggy Creek and Villages Honor Flight – and scholarships given to high school students whose career plans even remotely involve racing – like engineering, sports and journalism.