

A Racing Veteran at Age 15

By Nancy Jusky, Campaign Coordinator with Sheboygan & Plymouth Area United Way

When I received a request from a race driver to display the “Race for United Way” decal on his race car during the June Sprints at Road America on June 19 I thought that was a very nice offer to help publicize the upcoming fund raiser for United Way at Road America on June 26. But when I found out that the race driver was a 10-year racing veteran at the age of 15, I needed to find out the “rest of the story”.

Jeffrey Bartz of Plymouth is that racing veteran and he will be racing at Road America in the SCCA class at the June Sprints on Sunday. That’s quite an accomplishment for this young man who just completed his freshman year at Plymouth High School.

Jeff’s passion for racing was probably in his genes since his father, Tom, raced in the SCCA in dirt racing and in sprints. By age 5 he was racing in Kid Karts; at age 8 he moved up to the Briggs & Stratton Flathead class and finished fourth in the championship that season. At age 9 he competed in the Briggs Animal Jr. Sportsman class and was 2nd in the Tuesday night Road America championship and 1st in the weekend series. Since then he has continued his winning ways with 4 championships in 2006 and 2 in 2007. In 2008 he moved to the Komet Piston Port class in the Midwest Sprint Series and in the World Karting Association (WKA, racing against older, more experienced people. He finished the year 7th out of 22 and 8th out of 23 and moved up to Briggs Jr. finishing 3rd in the championship. In 2009 he ran the same series and finished 7th out of 15 in both classes and won the Komet Jr. Class at Road America.

Last year in 2010 he added Yamaha Jr. to his Komet Jr. series and continued his winning ways finishing 1st in the Yamaha Jr. Lite championship and took 4ths in Komet Jr. Heavy and Lite and Yamaha Jr. Heavy class. And he finished 3rd out of 40 karts in the WKA MRP National race.

The time commitment to his racing schedule is slow in winter with only the Daytona in Florida over Christmas vacation but it gets busier when mid-spring begins. The carts must be readied for the circuit which started for Bartz in March in South Carolina but the rest of his racing schedule through September is mainly in the Midwest. He did miss a few days of school for the spring races but he keeps up well with his grades. Most races allow for practice time on Fridays with races scheduled on Saturday and Sunday. The June Sprints are the exception with Thursday practice and qualifying on Friday and Saturday and the main races on Sunday.

Bartz pointed out that his cart races are in classes with his own age group but the June Sprints is a step up to competing in cars with drivers of all ages. His most satisfying experience so far was winning his first national race in a car.

Bartz talks about the importance of preparing mentally for each race: “I think about my position on the track, who’s near me. You need to know who you’re racing with – study the track, focus on the race, and drink lots of water. There is a fear of the unknown until you do it; then there is no fear. You can’t drive scared. You have to trust your car.” These observations could be made by many race veterans

but hearing them from a 15-year old is truly remarkable and so is the fact that he has had no serious crashes or broken bones so far.

Mentally preparing for the June Sprints and hitting speeds up to 130 mph on the straight away, Bartz is happy to be racing at Road America which he says is in a class of its own with class-A facilities and a world-renown track. A real plus at Road America is the many vantage points for spectators to view the race unlike many tracks throughout the world that have stationary bleachers.

But racing is not the only thing in Bartz's young life. Besides being an excellent student and thinking about college and a career in engineering, he participates in Cross Country and track in high school and his life is filled with activities with his friends and a steady diet of his favorite cheeseburgers. He is looking forward to a mission trip to New Jersey this summer to do volunteer work in a very depressed area. This confirmation class mission trip through St. John the Baptist Catholic Church in Plymouth and St. Thomas Aquinas Church in Elkhart Lake promises to be a "real eye-opener" for Bartz who was quick to point out that he feels "blessed to live here" in Sheboygan County.

That desire to volunteer and help others is apparent in his request to display the "Race for United Way" banner on his race car during the June Sprints. Bartz wants to give back to the community and his parents to thank them for "giving me so much". His experiences thus far in life have taught him self-esteem, how to talk to people, respect others and to never forget to say "thank you".

What really makes this young veteran such an accomplished racer at this point in his life? Bartz explained, "Once I got into it, I made friends at the track and I wanted to do it. It was just fun! I like being around motor sports. Racing is my hobby, not my profession. If I don't make it to the top, I won't be devastated."

With that statement, it is safe to say that Jeffrey Bartz has learned in 15 years what it takes many of us a lifetime to learn.