

# HARTSELLE

*living*

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Not letting his disease stop him

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# ARM Alabama Raceway Ministries



## A mission field in Talladega

Ministering to thousands while at the race

STORY & PHOTOS BY RANDY GARRISON

For most, Talladega brings to mind cars going around a track at over 200 miles per hour, lots of beer drinking and maybe even a few other unsavory activities. But to others, the opportunity to share Jesus with race fans is what first comes to mind.

Alabama Raceway Ministries, sponsored by the Southern Baptist Association, will set up eight different campsites at each Talladega Super Speedway in May and October. The mission is to serve the fans

and workers and tell people about Jesus.

The Morgan Baptist Association sponsors a group from North Alabama. This group is assigned to the infield at the speedway. Three associations make up one campsite, and the infield site includes Morgan, Madison and Franklin counties. Approximately 30 members of the Morgan group go to different races, including Mike and Virginia Alexander, who have been working with this group for more than 12 years.

Virginia got started with

Raceway Ministries while serving with Baptist Student Ministries at Calhoun Community College. The group was looking for a spring mission trip and became involved with the race ministry. Some of the students who were involved then now have families of their own and are still involved with this ministry.

Virginia serves as church and community ministries director for the Morgan Baptist Association, and Mike is the associate director.

When they go to Tal-

ladega twice each year, there are more than 250,000 people on race weekends – more people than in some cities.

The group arrives on Friday and sets up the campsite. Group members begin their work by handing out packets to the campers and workers, which have freebies inside, including soap and shampoo. They also offer free firewood to those spending the weekend in the infield. They hand out race guides provided by NASCAR to the fans. The group also cooks at the site



for their workers.

The group will minister to thousands over the three-day weekend.

The Raceway Ministry group also holds activities during the weekend for children and adults attending the races, like a pine-wood derby race, corn hole tournament and crafts.

Virginia said her group witnesses to the fans and workers when they come to the tents or activities, sharing the gospel as often as the opportunity arises. Twelve people were saved in 2015 during the two weekends. Three were saved at the children's activities, and one was saved at the corn hole tournament. The groups work regardless of the weather, be it rain, sun, cold or heat.

The group holds a worship service Sunday for the race fans, as well. A couple from Louisiana will bring the message at the spring race. The service includes prayer, music, drama, the message and a benediction.

Virginia offered a few examples of how this ministry has shared the gospel with those attending the race. For instance, there was a group of military race fans along with a chaplain camping in a tent. Their firewood had gotten wet, and they did not have dry wood. The Raceway group unloaded dry wood at the tent and left a brochure. The chaplain later sent a letter thanking the ministry group for the wood. He

explained in the letter that he had been witnessing to his group, telling them God would provide for them. When Raceway provided the dry wood, they all knew God had provided for them in a big way.

Another success story included a race fan family that was camping on the infield that came to a corn hole tournament and won first place. The couple was invited to the worship service, but only one person came. At the next race six months later, the entire family came to the worship service and also participated in other activities sponsored by the ministry. By the third race weekend, they were helping out and even brought other camping friends. The family has now joined Raceway Ministries and even stays with the ministry group at Shocco Baptist Lodge during race weekends. They are faithful in church attendance at their home, as well. "We water the seeds the Holy Spirit plants," Virginia said.

Another success story involved a child with special needs who saw the trophies for the winners and wanted one. A camping neighbor told the child he would win a trophy for him. As the tournament wound down to just four teams, the man who promised the child a trophy challenged the other teams to give the child the trophy if they won. The competition heated up, and the first place winner was



ABOVE: Raceway Ministries volunteers hand out race information, and lead music during the worship service.



the man who promised the child a trophy. The second place winner also gave up his trophy to the child as well. The child's family always attends the worship services.

"Many of the race fans have been attending the

worship services and other activities for many years and have become like family," Virginia said.

This might not be what you would expect to find at the infield of Talladega on race weekend. But true to His word: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am with them." Matthew 18:20.







A Cornhole Tournament is always one of the high points of the race weekend. Winners show off trophies they won during recent tournaments. The young man pictured below was honored to receive both the first and second place trophies after being promised by his camping neighbor that a trophy would be one for him. The competition is pretty heated during each race weekend. Bragging rights and trophies are at stake.

