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NASCAR FANS APPEASE THEIR RACING JONES WITH ANNUAL FREE EVENT IN DOWNTOWN JOLIET.

RACE FAN RALLY



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By Catherine Ann Velasco

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JOLIET — Andrew Westall may only be 3, but he's serious about racing.

After watching character Lightning McQueen in the movie "Cars," Andrew got hooked on racing and now watches the NASCAR races on TV, said his mom, Carrie Westall of Plainfield. His favorite drivers are Jeff Gordon and Tony Stewart.

And, that's why they made their first trip to the 8th annual Race Fan Rally presented by All-state on Wednesday night in downtown Joliet. The free event was organized and executed by the city of Joliet and the Joliet City Center Partnership as a prelude to the Dollar General 300 on Friday night and the LifeLock.com 400 on Saturday night.

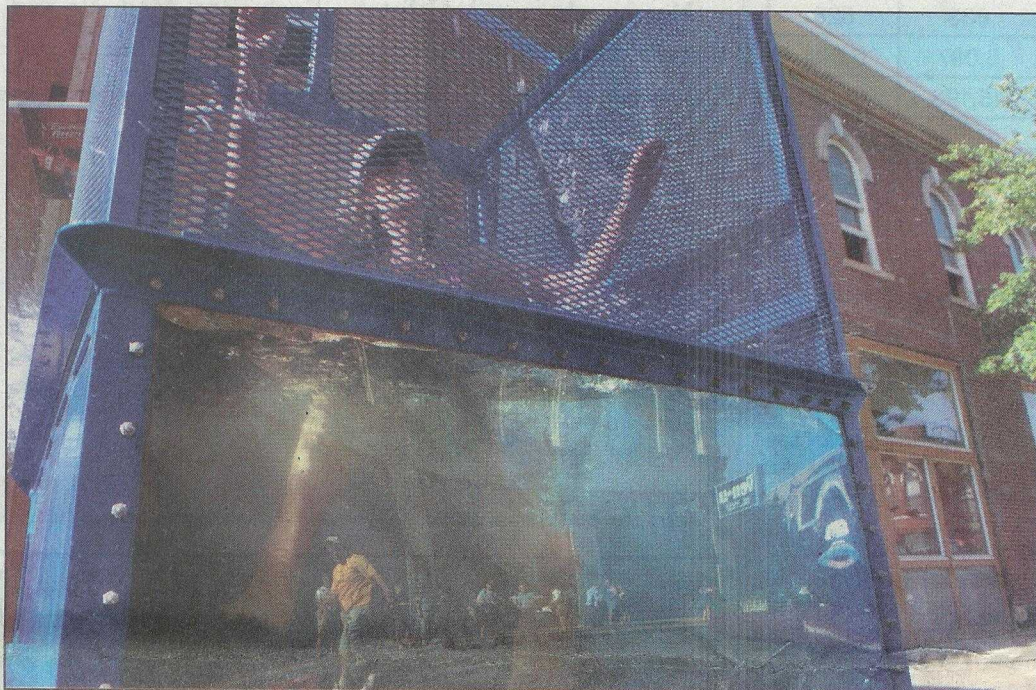
Sitting in a 1931 Dwarf pickup truck, Andrew buckled the complicated seat belt before turning the steering wheel. But because he couldn't see out the window due to his stature, he bent sideways and looked out the door before unbuckling and getting out.

"I want to go into another race car," Andrew told his mom before pulling her arm toward the cars lined up on Chicago Street.

The event offered NASCAR fans a chance to mingle and meet members of the race teams in town for the races and to get autographs from drivers, such as Stevie Campbell, who drives a car sponsored by the Chicago Wolves.

Derrick Mason, 6, of Joliet, had Campbell sign the back of

❖ Turn to **NASCAR, A2**



MICHAEL R. SCHMIDT/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER



Dani Rich (above), an employee at the Ven-U in Joliet, gets dunked Wednesday evening during the Race Fan Rally in downtown Joliet. Money raised from the dunk tank event is being donated to breast cancer organizations. Stephanie Mattera (left), 7, of Bolingbrook, sits in the driver's seat of a stock car owned by driver D.J. Werkmeister, 15, of Braceville, during the Race Fan Rally.

JOHN PATSCH/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

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NASCAR

From page A1

his shirt.

“He lives for race cars,” said his dad, Bo Morgan. “He has the movie ‘The Fast and the Furious.’ He has all three of them, and he watches them over and over.”

Morgan, who moved to Joliet

recently from Chicago, said they have been to every downtown festival.

“We like it a whole lot,” he said. “We are festival fans, and we are racing fans.”

For the Blough family of Minooka, the rally is an annual event and a chance to enjoy the NASCAR experience without paying \$1,000 to take the family of four to the races.

Each year, Michelle and

Todd Blough take the day off to take their sons, Dylan, 7, and Hunter, 4, to the fan rally to meet drivers, get autographs and win prizes.

“I had to do 10 push-ups,” Dylan said about receiving his Dale Earnhardt Jr. straw hat.

“I had to do six, so mine was easier,” Hunter said. “He has an arm ache.”

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