Raceway Ministries Shares Christ’s Love By Caring for Fans

The roar of the engines, the smell of motor oil, and the potential for live-action wrecks draw over 70,000 people twice a year to the Richmond International Raceway (RIR). For 15 years, Central Virginia Baptist Ministries has brought a host of chaplains and volunteers to help with many aspects of the races.

This year’s most recent race, on the last weekend of April, presented a unique challenge because Saturday’s events were postponed until Sunday due to rain. “We had to scramble on Sunday for volunteers because most pastors cannot adjust their Sunday work schedules,” explained Rev. Todd Combee, pastor at New Bethesda Baptist Church and one of the ministry’s coordinators. “However, we were still able to make it work for the 1 p.m. start time.”

According to Debbie Carter, chaplain coordinator, there is never a dull moment in this ministry. Carter, who has worked with it since 2003, said that volunteers are trained prior to the race to be able to handle quick responses such as in trauma situations or consoling children and parents if they become separated. Some chaplains have been called to help with fans and their families when people have experienced heart attacks or even sudden deaths. Chaplains are stationed in many places where fans come and go throughout the races.
Carter said her favorite part of each weekend is hosting the children's carnival on Saturday afternoon. The kids are entertained, and communication with the parents is easy. She said it is wonderful to watch the children's reactions to winning the prizes—such as their own Bibles—and they are motivated to win prizes for their friends too.

Other volunteers serve alongside Disaster Relief stations, serving food to EMS workers, chaplains, and other volunteers. An RV is set aside as a chapel space for people who need a place to relay spiritual needs or to talk with someone who will listen and care about them.

The volunteers are what make the ministry a success every year. “My vision,” said Carter, is to try and incorporate a relational ministry. We try not to be too forward with the visitors but just to be available. People will share as they are led.”

For more information about outreach ideas for your church, contact:
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