

# Ready, set, go kart!



## **Racing event raises money for people with MS.**

by James Townsend

When Josh Shipley was just 4 years old, his dad took him to the Manzanita Speedway in Phoenix, Arizona, to watch the car races there. The youngster immediately fell in love and knew that was what he wanted to do. Later, when his uncle showed his dad pictures of a quarter-midget racer, Shipley's dad told him, "I'll make you a deal. If you give 110% to your schoolwork and make good grades, I'll buy you one of those."



**Josh Shipley (left) and Bob Christie**

"I'll never forget that day," Shipley says. "It created a whole life for me. Racing became my passion." And it still is 32 years later. Today, Shipley races sprint cars, custom-built beasts with a slanted wing on top to help keep the vehicle solidly on the ground. They're powered by methanol and big engines, some of which can produce up to a whopping 700 horsepower and propel the vehicle to 120 mph.

Shipley's mother, Beth, was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis in 2006. "One day, she sent me a couple of videos of her walking with a special brace on her leg, her usual cane trailing behind," Shipley recalls. "She was thrilled. She told me, 'Nothing hurts anymore!'"

### **Turning a favorite sport into a fundraiser**

But the braces were expensive. At the time, they cost \$15,000 each and Medicare didn't cover them. "We don't come from money," Shipley says. "My dad was a bricklayer and mom worked for UPS. I knew I could take my favorite sport in the world and use it as a tool to raise money for MS, so I began to think that racing could be a good way to raise money, not just for my mom but for the National Multiple Sclerosis Society because they go to bat for everyone."

In Phoenix, people's backyards are a treasure trove of old go karts. Shipley reached out, found volunteers and created the Don Shipley Memorial Go Kart Race to honor Shipley's father, who died of cancer in 2013.

"Back in the beginning," Shipley recalls, "I was racing sprint cars when I met a great guy named Bob Christie, who ended up sponsoring a trailer for my sprint car, and we quickly became friends." Christie offered to host go kart races on land he owned. He already had five go karts for his family there and loved to race them.

"I told Bob, 'We could give some of the proceeds to the MS Society,' and Bob said, 'Why don't we give all of them to the cause?' So, I agreed."



### **The Don Shipley Memorial Go Kart Race raises money for the National MS Society.**

The event raised \$1,000 the first year, \$2,500 the next. By the sixth race, the event raised more than \$25,000, with 100 go karts and hundreds of spectators.

Christie, who owns a paving and grading company, graded the track on the company's land, where the races have been held every year. "It grew so fast," Christie says. "It's a thrill for me to have anywhere from 400 to 500 people on my property for the event. It means a lot, and it's real nice to hear people thank you for doing it."

## **Divisions for kids, women**

The races now include divisions for women and kids. “We have kids who are racing right in there with the professional drivers, and some of these kids are giving the pros a real run for their money,” Christie says.

Chris Marshall, president of the Society’s Arizona/New Mexico Chapter, says the race is “one of our very favorite Do-It-Yourself [DIY] events. It’s unique in that it gives us a chance to meet a community of people we wouldn’t normally get to interact with. We set up a tent there and talk with folks, answer their questions, even take donations. We’re always looking forward to the next race.”

Katie Million, senior manager of Emerging Events at the Society, says while the Society helps with promotion, “Josh really does the heavy lifting. He’s very hands-on and good at keeping people engaged, posting videos and constant updates about sponsors and attendees on [the event’s] Facebook page and other social media channels.”

“When I started this, I never expected it would become what it is now,” Shipley says. “We even have professional drivers who race for a living. Some of the sponsors offer cash prizes or gift cards for winners. But in all the years we’ve been doing this event, not one of the winners has taken the cash prizes. Every single one has donated the money right back to the cause.”

A happy footnote: Shipley’s mom now has the leg brace that inspired the whole event.

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