

region, and more than one thousand spectators now line Main Street to enjoy the competition and festivities.

Mr. Iman notes the soap box derby event is primarily for kids and that many sponsors graciously assist. “We appreciate the sponsors and volunteers who mentor our children. This is a family event intended to bring children together with parents by having them work on a fun project.” The Elks national organization recognized the tremendous success of the program when it awarded Frostburg Lodge 470 its Best Community Service Project award; quite an honor considering the thousands of lodges across the country.

“Armstrong Insurance has sponsored a car in the Elks Derby Day race since its inception, and of course we love having Car Number One,” says Barb Armstrong. “What better way to give back to the community than supporting the event that has provided 4th of July Frostburg fun for many, many years. Even more fun than watching the cars run is watching the Derby Day morning unfold. Families set their pop-up tents early so that they can get their pictures taken, cars weighed, racing tires on, and food and coolers ready for the day. They polish, tighten, and adjust the cars—take family pictures, dole out advice, and cheer their drivers onward to victory. It’s small town red, white, and blue Frostburg at its best.”

No one is sure when the old style jitneys of the 1950s and 1960s lost favor. Perhaps parental concerns about safety were a major cause of their demise. Perhaps kids lost interest and no longer want to bang around with hand tools anymore. Or perhaps the times passed by jitneys just as Teslas silently streak by Chevy Impalas today. The end just happened and no one thought much about it.

There is much to be said for the organized racing events. Even the All American Soap Box Derby has evolved into Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) programs and categories for young adults. Yes, 20 year old kids may race in sanctioned soap box derby events. Fortunately, Allegany County residents may combine the legacy of jitneys with the excitement and festive atmosphere of the Frostburg Elks Derby Days—the best of both worlds.

The Frostburg Derby Days event has been cancelled for 2020 due to COVID-19 Virus — returning July 4, 2021!

Author’s Note: Neil Jones graciously provided information on his soap box derby experiences during interviews in 2004 and 2015. Allen Haines, Cumberland Maryland resident, generously provided his time and memories to Historical Research Methods students at Allegany High School for their volume on the 1950s, “Primetime.”

Glen Shaffer puts his heart and soul into building Soap Box Derby cars!

Written by: **Dan Whetzel**

“Building soap box derby cars is a passion with me.”

Glen Shaffer’s thirty four years of dedication to building soap box derby cars for youngsters is an ongoing story that continues to excite drivers and spectators at the Elks Derby Day in Frostburg, MD, where his cars are prominently displayed. While Glen’s introduction to the hobby was by chance, there has been nothing random about Glen’s dedication and passion to building cars over the decades.

As Glen remembers, “Around 1986, I was riding my motorcycle and stopped at the Frostburg 7-Eleven store to watch the soap box derby races. A friend’s son was competing and I wanted to see him. I began to look at the cars and decided that I could build better ones. Until that time I never had any association with soap box derby races or cars.”

As promised Glen and his friend, Ed Strickler, set out to build a car for Ed’s son, Matthew. The car building process intrigued young Matthew and he frequently visited Glen’s shop as the second car was being built. “As Ed and I built the car, Matthew would stop by to take photographs. He would always remark, ‘This car is awesome.’ Matthew’s “awesome” comments became the manufacturing name associated with all cars built by Glen.

Awesome #15 arrived with the assistance of Jim Stemple, Frostburg resident and friend, who wanted a car for his daughter. According to Glen, “We worked every Wednesday night for three or four months. Jim took notes, and then edited the notations into a manual that is available for others interested in building a soap box derby racer.”

Glen also created a safety inspection check list that officials use to monitor entries prior to race day. Instructions and lists presented in the binder are not affiliated with the All American Soap Box Derby, but do present similar rules.

An estimated time for building a car is three months, although the time depends on particular requests and circumstances. Using ¾ inch plywood for a base and ¼ inch lauan paneling for the covering, each car is hand crafted. The unique features incorporated into the cars, like the steering mechanism and braking assembly, were derived from inspiration. “I never had formal training. Building cars is God’s way of allowing me to be helpful,” explains Glen.



Glen Shaffer in his Cresaptown workshop with his most recent soapbox derby car, Awesome #20.

Below: Glen with last minute instructions, encouragement and advice to young driver, Kycin Waites.

The craftsmanship displayed in Glen's Cresaptown shop does not include the use of plastics, fiberglass, or purchased kits. Sometimes he does partner with local experts for painting — Jenkin's Collision Center, Eric Broadwater's Autobody Repair, and Murray Signs have completed the decorative phases of cars over the years. Growden's Upholstery in Bedford also contributed by making custom interiors in recent years.

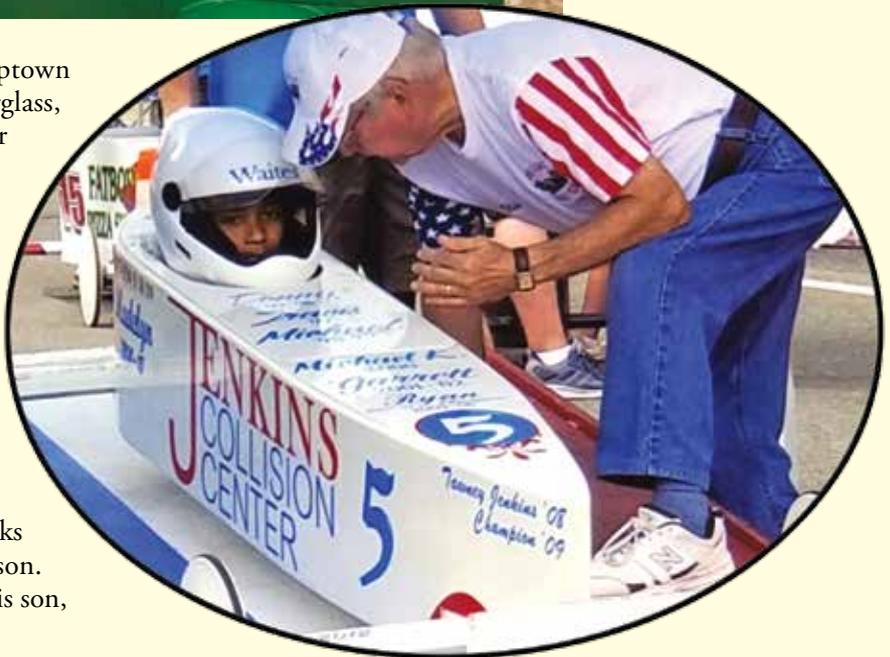
The goodwill and legacy created by the vehicles make them even more valuable as time passes.

Diedre Waites, first winner of the Frostburg Elks Derby in 1977, mentored her son and grandson. In 1997 Travis raced in Awesome 14, as did his son, Kycin, in more recent years.

The 1988 Awesome car, built for Allegany County resident Seth Wharton, became a legacy vehicle after it was raced by both his son and daughter, making it a three-time Wharton entry. Seth won the championship in 1990, while his son, Isaiah, followed with a championship in the 2017 derby.

One of Glen's more emotional stories occurred when Jim Stemple's daughter, Melissa, graciously allowed a cousin to race her car. "It was quite a sacrifice for Melissa to make and it showed great compassion," recalls Glen.

While not the only local builder, Glen's cars are particularly well known and respected. Evidence of his success



can be found in the nineteen first place finishes Awesome cars have enjoyed in the Elk's racing series between 1989-2019.

It is possible that Glen will no longer build soap box derby cars, but he intends to maintain and improve the cars if requested. "God has given me the skills, so the cars are my gift to the drivers. When I pass, people will remember me for the soap box derby cars. 'He used to build soap box derby racers,' is what people will say. I really do put my heart and soul into each car."