



## Speedway Evangelism

by Brandon Pickett, Director of Media Services for the SBC of Virginia and the Vice President of Innovative Faith Resources

*There may have been a celebration inside the track when Lee Pulliam won the FinditHere.com NASCAR Whelen Late Model 200, but there was also rejoicing going on in heaven when three teenage girls were led to Christ that same night.*

The SBC of Virginia (SBCV) sponsored the Friday night, July 1st, race at South Boston Speedway. The North American Mission Board teamed with SBCV to help defray some of the cost of sponsorship. The annual Fourth of July holiday weekend event is a fan favorite and actually features three different races (Pure Stock 50, Limited 100, Whelen Late Model 200) and fireworks afterwards.

The desire was for this to be more than a community outreach event for the convention. The vision was to provide area churches a unique tool to share Christ with the thousands of race fans in attendance and continue the “God’s Plan for Sharing” (GPS) evangelistic effort that was started in 2010.

Jack Noble, SBCV church health strategist for the ministry region, developed a plan where churches would not just come for one race night but for a number of races throughout the season. According to Noble, “Good evangelistic opportunities are not just one-day events. Good evangelistic events take days of preparation and follow-up. That is what we did by distributing FinditHere.com logo items at the four races that preceded the big day. Our newly ‘logo-ed’ trailer was a magnet that drew hundreds of people who wondered what FinditHere.com was all about. Then we enthusiastically shared the truth.”

More than sixty volunteers from eleven churches stood just inside the gates to the speedway before the race and personally welcomed thousands to the track. They asked attendees if they wanted to register to win a free flat-screen TV. Upon registering, the person would hear a three-minute Gospel presentation. Pastor Jackie Carver from Palestine Baptist Church in Moneta trained his volunteers personally—and then personally led three girls to Christ.

Pastor Carver noted the simplicity of the event in allowing him to be present as the girls prayed. He shared, “I’m not special in that, but because of faithful service, God used me to be a light in someone’s life that otherwise I would never meet. This calling is bigger than the life we see. I pray that others find their opportunity through our obedience.”

Pastor David Rathel of Fork Baptist Church in Scottsburg saw two main benefits through his church’s involvement in the race. “First, it gave [SBCV] churches a chance to show the people in the community that we love them and that we are interested in ministering to them. I think many who came to the race were surprised that we were willing to spend our time serving them on a July 4th weekend. Second, it gave people in our churches opportunities to share the Gospel. This was the first time that many of the people in my church have ever participated in an Gospel-sharing event like this. I was impressed by their willingness to boldly approach people and share. I’m excited that they’ve now had an opportunity to get experience in personal evangelism, and I hope their boldness infects all of our church family.”

Pastor Jack Stewart of Grace Southern Baptist Church in Virgilina gave the opening invocation. He was one of a number of SBCV church volunteers who took part in many different aspects of the night: waving the green flag, presenting the winning trophies, riding in the pace car, manning the children’s area, and preparing delicious the FinditHere.com funnel cakes.

According to Noble, “The preparation of working four races before the big event and the commitment to follow up set the tone for a great day of evangelism. The spiritual tone was also increased when volunteers arrived the day of the event and were each asked to take a prayer lap around the facility.”

Brandon Pickett, Director of Media Services for the SBC of Virginia worked with the track and area media on coverage of the race. “It was amazing how the track and community embraced this race and the theme of “FinditHere.com. Between the track announcer and the drivers, the name “FinditHere.com” was spoken about every 10 minutes. On top of that, I was invited to talk about the website on the radio on and off throughout all three races totaling about 30 minutes of air time.”

Cathy Rice, general manager of South Boston Speedway and a member of an SBCV church, was thrilled with not just the turnout but how the community embraced the theme of the race. “So many people came to me and said that this was a true blessing. God was with us all night and we are looking forward to next year’s FinditHere.com [race] already!”



See photos on Flickr.