

## **“Journey to Victory”**

by Paul Workmaster

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**December 2004:** I first learned about the Ultimate Speed Challenge sometime around November of 2004. The idea intrigued me because it looked like an opportunity to be a part of a different approach to Derby racing than the direction that the program had been moving for the last few years. I saw this as an opportunity to participate in an event where innovation was encouraged and rewarded. This is what had appealed to me as a youth, when my Dad and I built soap box racers, when I was a kid. Dad always designed our cars and I built them with encouragement and critique from him. Together we acted as a team and I liked that feeling of accomplishment. In fact it carried over into the working relationship I later developed with Rick Locklear, when we worked together to design and build the cars which he raced from 1973 to 1975.

The USC was presented as being limited to a select group of people. I think the original plan was to entice corporations or universities to enter cars and showcase their technical skills using exotic designs to arouse more interest in the SBD program. For whatever reason, no corporations or universities decided to participate and they “opened up the field” to anybody who was willing to “pony up the \$100 entry fee” before 12/31/04. Since I had never personally realized my dream of winning my local race and going to Akron as my city’s Champion, I saw this as being my opportunity to realize my dream in a more “hands on” way. Because I wanted to win, I decided to recruit the person who I believed was the most skillful and best qualified to design and build a car that could win the race. That person was Joe Remenicky.

I first became acquainted with Joe when I was about 12 years old, though I never actually met him until many years later. I remember my Dad taking me to a Soap Box Derby in Columbus, Ohio that was held on an unopened portion of the freeway in 1962. During my childhood, my Dad and I had tinkered around with all kinds of coaster cars that consisted of a flat board with a crude seat, 4 wheels on steel axles and generally some kind of rope steering, but these soap box racers which I was introduced to at this race were unbelievable! They had completely enclosed bodies with cable steering and drag brakes and I thought they were about the coolest coaster cars I had ever seen.

I distinctly remember seeing this one shiny red racer unlike any I had ever seen before. The finish on the car was so shiny that I could actually see my reflection in the paint while standing 10 feet away from the side of the car. I had never even seen an automobile with a paint finish like that before. I later found out that the racer belonged to Joe Remenicky’s son and it seemed amazing to me that anyone could build a racer that looked so fine.

Over the years, as I became too old to actually race in the Derby, I continued to follow the races by attending the local races and by going to Akron each summer to see the Nationals. The cars became more sophisticated and the rules changed each year to try to outwit those with creativity who continued to “bend the rules” to try to gain an advantage over the competition. Each year the cars began to look more and more like they were being designed by engineers, built by professionals, tested in wind tunnels and painted to look incredible. Most of them probably were built professionally.

My Dad always wanted to believe that a “boy-built” car had the ability to win the race in Akron. That was always my dream too: that we could sponsor a boy who would build a car by himself that could compete in Akron with the cars that appeared to be professionally built. Dad wanted

to sponsor the son of one of his co-workers and as we stayed active in the derby program, we began to meet others in the program to discuss ideas and compare notes.

Joe Remenicky's cars always ran fast and generally finished within the top 2 or 3 cars so we'd hang around with Joe and try to learn some of his "secrets".

Joe always struck me as being one of those people who they say is "dumb like a fox". He would always tell you just enough to let you know that he knew what he was doing but he'd always seem to stop just short of "letting the cat out of the bag". He'd always ask you what seemed like an innocent question that everybody ought to know the answer to. Then you'd have to admit you didn't have a clue what he was talking about and he'd proceed to amaze you with some bit of knowledge about wheels or alignment that made you shake your head and wonder if he was really telling you the truth or just pulling your leg. And Joe was always one of those guys who always seemed to be operating right at the edge of the rules.

My Dad and I always tried to be innovative in our designs and use the rules to our best advantage, but no matter what we did, Joe's cars always seemed to finish ahead of our own. Because of Joe's approach to derby racing, a lot of people didn't like his attitude. Frankly, I think they thought that because he was so successful, he must be cheating, though they couldn't actually ever catch him at it!

When I was about 24 years old, I decided to join the Columbus Jaycees and I volunteered to be the Columbus Area Soap Box Derby Director. That was 1974, and I think I must have been one of the youngest people in the country at that time to hold that position. In 1972, our local Champion was boy who didn't actually live in the Columbus Area and I didn't like the fact that our representative to the All-American wasn't a local boy. In fact the year he won, it became apparent that he won because of a "souped-up" set of wheels. When I became the Derby Director I wanted to do my best to make sure that we sent the best car to Akron – not the car that had the best set of wheels, so we instituted a wheel bank and a system of double elimination in an effort to make our local race as fair as possible.

As a consequence, the racers that I sponsored now became much more competitive and Joe's cars weren't the only ones winning. In fact in 1973, the racer which Rick Locklear and I built finished 3<sup>rd</sup> place in the Columbus local race. It was very simple design, but it ran well because Rick fit well in the car, he drove straight and we had the center of gravity right in the middle of the car between the two axles. Based on that experience, I honestly believed that with a better designed car and a little more attention to detail, we might have a very good shot at winning the race the next year.

Amazingly, in our effort the second year, Rick and I placed 2<sup>nd</sup> overall in the Columbus Derby. And in Rick's 3<sup>rd</sup> and final year, we had true storybook ending to our racing association together. Rick lost his very first heat in the Derby that year. That placed him in the "losers" bracket of the double elimination race. From there Rick managed to beat every other competitor in that bracket until he again faced, Mike Matarrese – the entrant who had beaten him in his first race. This time, the results were completely different: the second time they competed, Rick beat Mike. Now each racer had lost one heat, so they brought both cars back up to the top of the hill, traded wheels and changed lanes and down they raced again. The race was too close to call a winner so the judges declared it a dead heat. Once again the cars were taken back up to Topside. They flipped for lanes, traded wheels and got readied in their car for the next heat. The starting plate dropped and once again they were off. As I watched from the top of the hill, both cars were running neck and neck and when they crossed the finish line everyone held their breath while the judges looked at the picture from the photo finish. To everyone's surprise, it

was again too close to call, so the judges declared another dead heat. For a third time the racers went back up the hill, the cars were placed into the starting blocks after a flip for lane positions and a wheel swap. Once again the starting gate was dropped, the cars were underway and everyone was on their feet screaming encouragement to the drivers. When the cars crossed the finish line, there was a long, hushed pause while the judges reviewed the photo finish and conferred to determine the results.

And then it was announced that Rick Locklear was the 1975 Greater Columbus Area Soap Box Derby Champion! For Rick and me it was a dream come true! It was unbelievable, Rick had won the Derby and would realize our dream of representing Columbus at the All-American Soap Box Derby in Akron, Ohio!

Once Rick won the race I had vicariously achieved my dream through him of becoming a Champion. I sponsored another car the following year but nothing could top that mountain-top experience that Rick and I shared and shortly after that I decided to drop out of the Derby program and redirect my efforts in other directions.

Because of the cheating scandal which occurred in 1972 in Akron at the All-American, changes began to take place that began to limit the innovation concept of Derby racing. Now the emphasis was placed on attracting larger numbers of entrants and the approach was to introduce a SBD kit where every car was pretty much like every other car and you could no longer be creative in your design.

In looking back on why that took place I now better understand what precipitated Akron's decision to move the program in that direction: when I was a boy, there were very few activities for me to participate in outside of school. My Dad was the only wage earner. My Mom stayed at home and performed the motherly tasks of cooking & cleaning. In the Spring we played baseball. In the Summer, we swam at the pool. In the Fall, we played football and in the winter we ice skated outside when it was cold enough and played basketball in the gym. It was a different time and there weren't so many demands on our time as there are for children today.

Today, a stay-at-home Mom is a luxury most families can't afford. Most families have two working parents and some parents have more than one job just to make ends meet. Kids have so many more choices when it comes to extracurricular activities: not just baseball, but soccer; not just football but ballet or karate; not just swimming but all kinds of summer sports camps and traveling athletic teams. Parents don't have a lot of free time to be able to spend 6 months of evenings and weekends with their kids to build a soap box derby racer, only to experience "the thrill of the hill" in 2 thirty second trips down the soap box derby hill on a Saturday afternoon. That kind of time commitment for a project just doesn't make much sense.

So Akron came up with a better idea: they decided to sell "racer kits" which parents and children could build together in a couple of hours on a Saturday afternoon. No innovation was required. In fact it was discouraged. All of the cars looked the same and all of the cars were built the same, but each entrant would find that after assembling their car they could be competitive with everyone else "right out of the box".

That idea didn't sit well with me because it flew in the face of everything that the Soap Box Derby had meant to me as a child, so I moved on with my life and forgot all about the SBD for about 30 years. Then one night when I was 'surfing the web' I decided to do a search on Soap Box Derby. My search turned up a few websites about the Derby and as I explored, I began to get re-interested in the SBD.

I casually mentioned to my wife that I might explore the idea of getting re-involved in the SBD program locally to see if there was something that I could do to help the program locally.

I contacted Alan Howe, Columbus' local Derby Director and made some inquiries about the status of their local program. Alan invited me to attend a local meeting and I volunteered to revamp the group's website to make it more user friendly and to add more pictures to promote participation in our program. Once again I was getting excited about the Derby.

Then in November I visited the aasbd website and saw the announcement about the USC. "Wow", I thought, "they are bringing back a division where innovation and creativity are being encouraged". And they were limiting participation to the first 27 people to register. I felt that the odds of winning [1 in 27] were pretty good odds so I began to make plans to consider the possibility of entering the race.

As I began considering the possibilities, I started thinking that with the right person building the car, we had a pretty good chance of winning this thing – or at least of placing highly. Then I began to ask myself, who I knew that knew a lot about what it takes to build a winning SBD racer. The first person who came into my mind was Joe Remenicky.

I knew that Joe would be the perfect person to partner up with for several reasons:

- First, Joe is a very competitive person and he hates to lose at anything he does.
- Second, I knew that Joe was upset with what the SBD program had become. Like me, he missed the opportunity for creativity and innovation in design.
- Third, I knew that Joe is a perfectionist, a master machinist and a fabulous craftsman. Joe takes into account every detail in everything he does and he looks at every way possible to use the rules to his competitive advantage to win.
- Finally, the USC has virtually no rules – so there would be no rules for us to break in designing and building our car.

Now all I had to do was to convince Joe to help me to do this.

Around the first week of December I drove over to Joe's house. I hadn't seen him for nearly 20 years and I wasn't really sure if he was dead or alive. I parked my car in his driveway and walked to the side door where I rang his door bell. Joe opened the door and looked pretty frail to me. He opened the door and through the screen door I said "Hello!" to him and asked him if he recognized me. Joe opened the door, looked at me from head to toe and responded that "No" he didn't know who I was. I reintroduced myself and told him, "I'm Paul Workmaster". At first he couldn't believe it. We exchanged a few pleasantries and he invited me to come in. As I took off my coat, his wife, Suzy, came into the room and I said "Hello" to her.

Then I gave Joe my best "sales pitch". I told him that I needed his help because I had a dream to win a new division of the Soap Box Derby called the Ultimate Speed Challenge. Joe said he wasn't familiar with that and he began to lament about how the Derby program wasn't any good anymore because all the cars were the same and there just wasn't any room any more for any innovation. As soon as he said that, I knew that I would have his attention.

I told Joe about this new division. I said that it was new division that encouraged creativity and innovation in the design and building of the cars. I told him that the rules were very minimal and that what I wanted to do was to develop a team of people to build a car that would set what I

referred to as the "world land speed record" in gravity powered race cars. As I began to share my vision with Joe for what we could accomplish, he began to get excited. I asked him to think about my idea and to let me know if he would be interested in partnering up with me to build and race a competitive entry. *I left his house with even more excitement than when I had arrived* and began mentally preparing what steps we would need to accomplish to bring this plan to fruition.

On **12/14/04** I called Joe to get his thoughts about the project. He was excited and said he was "in". I mailed the application form to him, asked him to sign it and to send me a check for \$50.00 for his share of the entry fee. A few days later when I received the signed form and his check for \$50.00 I deposited his check and called Akron for our first rule clarification. I said didn't have driver yet, nor a car handler but I wanted to know if they would be willing to accept our application without me naming either of those people. Ken Morrow, who was heading up the project told me that would be OK so I made a copy of our entry form and sent a check for \$100 payable to the aasbd in the hope that we would be one of the first 27 cars to submit a registration form.

The Christmas holidays came and went and on January 21<sup>st</sup> Alan Howe sent me the following email message:

Paul,

It appears as if there are 9 qualified entries for the Ultimate Speed division, of which, you are one of them. The other 8 are:

Marv Gleason (on the Rally Commission)  
Mark Scuderi (Regional Director out of Rochester)  
Chris Dyer  
Thomas Schurr  
John Piscatelli and Dan Luff (sp?) (John was the Chairman of the Board of Trustees years ago)  
George Weisgerber (Regional Director from Wash. DC area)  
Peter Lapointe, Demeirs (sp?), and others from the New England area  
Ed Kent

I am not sure of a couple of the names as I didn't drive up to Akron with the snow and could barely hear on the speaker phone.

Ken Morrow will be getting in touch with you. We did decide on a couple of dates. May 1, we are requiring some type of documentation that your design is conforming to the rules. We are especially looking for safety items such as braking systems. Since there are not going to be any local qualifiers, the first test for some of these cars could be at the Akron track and we want to be sure that the cars will be safe.

If you are at that point, you could run your entry at our local as an exhibition. It would be good for the families to see it, and possibly good for you to do some testing.

You should be hearing more soon.

Alan

At this point I was feeling pretty excited at the prospect of us being involved in this project because now we only have to beat 8 other cars to win this thing! This is looking better all the time!

I reviewed the rules posted on the USC website and noted that they would allow wheels to be up to 24" in diameter, but they had to have at least  $\frac{1}{4}$ " of contact with the ground through some sort of "elastomer" tread. I've always had the opinion that a larger diameter wheel would have less rolling resistance and that at the same turning speed it would move the racer further down the hill because of its greater circumference. I decided that to be as competitive as possible we had to find a 24" wheel to use on our racer. I began to surf the internet looking for websites that carried bicycle wheels and wheels for baby carriages. After some searching I found a company that manufactured a disc type of wheel that was being touted as the most aerodynamic in design, but they were advertising a price of about \$2200 for each wheel! I sent an email to inquire about availability and I got no response. I visited local bicycle shops in our area and talked with proprietors to find out if a wheel as I was searching for was available for purchase. I made innumerable phone calls and visited several bike shops but I couldn't find anyone who had much interest in helping me to solve my problem.

Finally I spoke with the manufacturer of the Lenticular disc wheel only to be told that the sport of cycling no longer raced on 24" wheels so companies were not manufacturing them anymore. They suggested that I simply buy some spoked wheels and cover them with plastic to get the same effect. I remember thinking to myself that if that was all it took, "Why would anyone pay the prices they had been asking for the disc wheels that they had made?".

Undeterred, I kept visiting websites looking for a reasonably priced source of 24" diameter disc wheels. After some searching I located a company called Falcon Sports that was a manufacturer of bicycle racing components, including disc wheels. Because they listed a phone number on their website I called them to inquire if they still manufactured the kind of wheels that I wanted for our car. The person on the other end of the line told me that I would need to talk with the owner of the company and his name was Joel Olson. I told Joel who I was and that I was calling him from Central Ohio. I said that I was seeking to buy 4 Lenticular disc wheels for our racer with the goal of setting the "world land speed record for gravity powered racers" and I asked if he had any of those types of wheels in stock.

Joel stated that he had no such wheels in stock but that he would be willing to make me some. He said that his company which is located in Menomonie, Wisconsin built competition racing bikes and provided high strength disc wheels for velodrome racing and that he had built wheels for Lance Armstrong of 'Tour de France' fame. Joel also indicated that his company built sulky wheels and that he had an extensive background in mechanical engineering. I was intrigued by his background and I think he was intrigued about me.

I told Joel that if he could come up with a wheel that would meet our specifications, I would like to do business with him and his company. Then I boldly stated that if he would be willing to sell us the wheels at a deep discount, I would give him the benefit of being one of our prime sponsors of the car. He said he would sell me the wheels at his cost and he came on board as our wheel manufacturer.

Joel and I talked about the kind of wheel we wanted him to make. He said he would make the wheel out of aluminum and Kevlar and that it would be both very strong and very lightweight. He agreed to manufacture one wheel and said he would ship it to me so I could try it out and make sure that it would meet our requirements. I told Joel I was amazed that he would send me a wheel based on our conversations and he said he thought he was a pretty good judge of character and that he felt he could trust me. "After all", he said, "what are you gonna do with one wheel?!"

A few weeks later the wheel showed up at my house in a red, white and blue Priority Mail shipping box. I unpacked the wheel and called Joe. We met at Joe's house and examined the wheel. Joe didn't think that the wheel was as good as a set of traditional Derby wheels that he had souped up and he wasn't sure that the wheel was strong enough to carry the load that would be placed upon it during the race. My feeling was that the pneumatic tire on the wheel would be superior to the standard hard rubber tire found on traditional SBD wheels, but Joe felt that the 3/8" ID bearing in the wheel should be 1/2" in diameter and that the wheel should be made wider where it slides onto the axle in order to be more stable on the racer.

Joe and I eventually had a three way phone conversation with Joel and we came to the conclusion that the disc wheel's advantages outweighed our concerns, so we decided to move forward with the idea of having Joel build 4 wheels for us for our USC racer, with the modifications we required.

### **Finding a Driver**

Initially I decided to ask the youth pastor at my church to help me find a driver. He made a presentation to "his kids" and gave me a short list of about 6 or 7 kids who had expressed interest and who were the right age. The rules state that the driver can be between 16 and 18 years old, but that they must have SBD experience either by participating in a rally or by racing in a sanctioned SBD race. I called the parents first to discuss my program and to ask their permission to contact their children. Most of the kids were really too large to be ideal candidates for our racer. After many phone calls, I located one young fellow who appeared to be the perfect candidate. His name was Daniel Kageorge and his father said he had some familiarity with the SBD. I talked with Daniel by phone and we agreed to meet after church one morning so that I could determine if he was the right size to be our driver. We met, he looked good and upon reflection about his background and character, I offered him the role of being our driver. He agreed and I was all set to move forward on the project with one more part of the puzzle solved: we had our driver – or so I thought.

The next week I took another look at the rules and discovered a problem that I hoped we could resolve: the rules stated that the driver of an USC racer must have previous SBD racing experience. I learned that our driver could enter a rally prior to competing in the USC race and that would satisfy the requirement, but the problem that surfaced was this: to enter a rally you must be age 17 or younger. Daniel was already age 18. I sent an email to Ken Morrow at Akron who is in charge of the USC event and asked him if the rule would be enforced. He said "Yes!" and I suddenly realized that Daniel would not be eligible to race for us. I was very upset. I felt that I had made a commitment to Daniel and I do not like having to go back on my word. I called him and gave him the "bad news". His response kind of amazed me. He said that he understood and that the rules were the rules and we would have to abide by them. I remember thinking that was very mature reaction to the situation. Once again I realized why I had wanted Daniel to be our driver. This kid had tremendous character.

Once again I was faced with finding a suitable driver for the racer. Now it was the first of April and I was starting to get concerned that we were going to run out of time before we found a driver who would be qualified to race for us. Sandy and I belong to a Euchre club that meets once a month and one of the gals that we play cards with has a daughter who looked like she might be a possibility as our driver. I spoke to her mother about our project and she said I could talk with her daughter, Holly, so I did. Her daughter was interested and once again I began to get excited that we had found a solution to our problem. Then her Mom mentioned that the USC race was the same week as her daughter's high school band camp. She asked me what days her daughter would need to be at Akron for the race. After determining that the band camp was going to present too big a conflict, I made the decision that the daughter was not the best candidate to be our driver. Once again I had to reluctantly inform our newest candidate that we needed to consider a different driver.

The next week during lunch at my teaching job, I asked a couple of the real estate instructors if they knew of any kids between 16 and 18 years old who might be a candidate to be our driver. Bob Kutschbach said he had a neighbor in mind, but nothing ever came of it.

One evening a few days later when Sandy and I were coming home from dinner at a buffet, I decided to stop in at the Brice UM Church in the hopes of meeting their youth pastor there and being able to get him to recommend a youth from their church who might be a candidate to become our driver. The night I stopped in there, the church was having scout night with both Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts meeting at the church. I introduced myself to the Boy Scout troop leader and explained that I was looking for a 16 year old boy to pilot our USC racer. I asked if he knew of any boys in his troop that might fit my profile. He responded that they did have one youth who might be a possibility and he said that he expected the youth and his mother to attend the meeting that evening. I asked if I might excuse myself to go home and get some information to share with the lad and told him that I would be right back in about twenty minutes.

At that point I returned to the car to share my news with Sandy and to take her home and get my SBD stuff. When I had returned to the church I entered the Scout troop's area and I was met by a man who asked if I was looking for a driver for a SBD racer. I said, "Yes" and we introduced ourselves. His name was Len Sendek and he said that his son, Drew, might be interested. He said for me to talk with Drew and that if Drew wanted to be our driver, he would be OK with that.

I walked down to the end of the gym and asked to speak with Drew. I introduced myself and asked for the opportunity to show him my USC presentation. We chatted for about 10 minutes and I asked him what he thought. Drew said that he would like to give it a shot and so at that point I asked his father to join in our conversation. I told them both what the time commitment was and the good and the bad about our project. They said that they were "in" subject to approval from Drew's Mom and I filled them both in on the dates and the details about what they could expect in terms of activities which Drew would be expected to participate in at Akron. We agreed that we would touch base the following day to see if Mom approved.

A few weeks before meeting Drew and his Dad, I visited the pharmacy near my house to ask Wayne Leading if he had any children who might be a candidate to become our driver. I didn't know Wayne very well, but he struck me as being a quality person and because he was small framed I thought maybe his children might be of similar stature. Wayne said that his family was

from Newcomerstown and that he was very familiar with the SBD in Akron. He said he had a 16 year old son and that he would talk with his son and let me know if there was any interest on his part. Ten days passed and I had no response from him so I assumed he was not interested.

The day after I met with Len and Drew Sendek I got a phone call at work on my cellphone. The person I spoke with said they had spoken to their wife and “Yes!” the whole family was interested and excited to have their son considered for the driver’s position. He asked me some questions about the expenses of staying at Akron for race week and about the dates and I was a little puzzled because I had given that information to Len just the night before and I watched him write it down. But I reiterated it again. The caller said that he would run it by his wife again – just to make sure – and they would call me later that day with their final decision. That evening as I was pulling into the garage after a long tiring day my cellphone rang and a woman said she was calling to tell me that their family had decided to accept my offer and that their son wanted to be our driver. She told me her name was Connie Leading and I said, “Who are you?!” And then it came to me. It was her husband, Wayne who had called me earlier that day. I had just assumed that it was Len Sendek. Now I had two sets of parents and kids who were vying for the coveted position of USC driver for the WR Racing Team. And now I once again had to tell Connie “No”, that I couldn’t allow her son to be our driver because I had already named Drew to the position. I apologized and told her that her son could be our backup driver. Life was feeling pretty complicated again.

### **Working with Joe Remenicky**

**04/29/05:** As I was winding down from my day, the phone rang and it was Joe’s wife, Susie, telling me that Joe had had another ‘spell’ and that he had been admitted to Mt. Carmel East’s Heart Care unit for observation. After I spoke to Joe’s daughter, Eileen, I felt more confident that Joe was going to recover from this incident. I drove over to Mt. Carmel East that evening, got there after 8 p.m. and discovered that Joe was sleeping soundly and resting comfortably. I called his name a few times but he didn’t hear me so I drove home without speaking to him.

**04/30/05:** On the way to church, I told Sandy that after church I’d like to drop by the hospital and visit with Joe. When we arrived, Susie was there and I was able to introduce Joe, Susie and Sandy to each other. Joe and I talked about the racer and began to make some plans to begin working on the car as soon as he got home and felt more like it.

**On May 2<sup>nd</sup>,** I stopped by Joe’s hospital room to say “Hi” and to see how he was doing. He said he hoped to be going home the next day and I asked him to call me if he needed anything or to let me know when he got home. He said he was feeling better and we talked about me needing to pickup the wood for the car’s floorboard. Joe said I could use his pickup truck whenever I decided to go get the wood.

**5/04/05:** I called the hospital to find out if Joe was still there. He had been discharged the day before so I stopped by Joe’s house to see how he was feeling. During the time that Joe was in the hospital, his doctor said that his heart was wearing out and that he needed to rest and just take it easy. The doctor said that he had been headed for another heart attack but they felt they caught the problem in time.

I suggested that if he was up to it we should get together over the coming weekend and begin constructing the car. Joe concurred and said that he realized that he probably couldn’t do much of the work – that I’d have to do it – but that he’d tell me what to do and show me how to get it

done. We talked about the cost of the lumber we would need and Joe suggested that we drive to Bellefontaine so we could get it at a much less expensive price. He was appalled that I would consider spending so much money for the lumber and he showed me how by buying it from his resource we could save nearly 50% of the price I fully expected to have to pay. Before I left for home we discussed how the floorboard was to be laminated. [My original thought was to laminate it in 3 layers, each about 1" thick but Joe said it would be much stronger if we laminated it side to side [like the way a bowling alley is made] using strips about 2" wide and 1" thick. Maple would be used in the middle layers and pine would be used on the outer edges to make it easier to form the right shape for the body.

**5/05/05:** Joe called me to say that he is feeling much better today and that he is planning to drive to Bellefontaine tomorrow to get the wood we will need to build the floorboard of our car. He seemed enthusiastic about going and sounded confident that he could make the trip OK.

**5/07/05:** Joe called me to ask if I could come over today and get a floorboard down from his attic so that he could remove the mounts he wants to use for our racing setup.

I went over to Joe's house today about noon. When I arrived, Susie met me at the door and said that Joe had fallen down and hurt his leg. Joe came out and said he was OK and we sat down for a moment at his kitchen table. Joe showed me what he had spent for the wood and with the glue and everything he had bought, the total came to \$179.40. He asked me if I wanted to see the wood and suggested that we go outside to look it over.

We went out into Joe's workshop and Joe showed me the metal platforms he had made for the front and rear axle mounts. I then moved his Shop Smith planer out onto the sidewalk next to his workshop and Joe switched it on. He ran a piece through it and he looked a little less than steady so I suggested that I operate it and he said, "OK". Then Joe handed me each piece of maple that he had purchased the day before and I ran it through the planer while he periodically lowered the blade to smooth up each face and eliminate the saw marks. After about 45 minutes we had cleaned up all of the wood so it was nice and smooth. Then I carried the boards over to the picnic table in his back yard and set them one against the other until we had a laminated board about 16" wide. In all it took about 18 boards. We clamped them together with 4 pipe clamps because Joe wanted me to see how they would look and as he said, it looked very much like a section of a bowling alley. Joe said that it is important to have a solid foundation upon which to lay out your axle mounts. Susie came outside and offered me a diet soda and Joe had a beer.

Then Joe asked me to go up into his attic and bring down a floorboard from up there that he had partially assembled. The stairs up to the attic were narrow and made even narrower by stacks of magazines that lay upon the steps. The attic was warm and the board was heavy [probably about 60 lbs.]. I managed to get it down the stairs and took it around to the backyard where Joe and I loosened the screws that held the aluminum plate to the floorboard with an Allen wrench.

The plate was routed into the floorboard and held in place by about a dozen machine screws of aircraft quality that were screwed into tapped pieces that he had placed into the floorboard. Together we removed the plate and I took the axle mounts off of the aluminum plate. The axle mounts were custom machined by Joe. The front mount was built like an oarlock [an aluminum u-shaped bracket with a flathead bolt through the bottom that served as a pivot point for the front axle to steer from.] It also had a horizontal kingpin and an aluminum plate on the top to provide added strength. The rear axle mount was similar to the front, but it lacked the horizontal

kingpin hole. Instead it had a hole in the front of the mount with a set screw to hold the axle firmly in place, as well as another tapped hole through the top with another set screw to keep everything lined up.

After we had taken the mounts off the floorboard I reassembled the plate back onto the floorboard and carried it back up into the attic. It was 3 p.m. and Joe indicated that he was feeling tired -- but good -- about what we had accomplished. We decided to clean up and call it a day. Joe said he would be gluing the boards together in the coming days. I told him to take it easy and for him to call me before he tried to take the glued floorboard down to get it planed to the final thickness. He assured me that he would let me know and not attempt to do that by himself. I drove home, tired but happy that we had taken some positive steps toward construction of the racer.

As I pulled into the driveway, Drew's Dad, Len Sendek called my cellphone to ask me if we could meet tomorrow and take Drew to the Derby hill to practice driving for the rally which is to be held next weekend at Big Run Park. We agreed to meet around 11 a.m. and I said I would call him in the morning to finalize the details for the day.

**5/08/05:** I called Len after church and told him that Sandy would help me load the racer into the truck and we would swing by his house and meet him and Drew to go to the hill so Drew could practice driving for next weekend's rally. Sandy and I got home later than we planned and in the running around and trying to get everything to take to the track, I forgot to get all of the weights. The four of us drove from Len's house to Big Run Park. When we got to the back of the park, we had to push the racer down the park road, under a gate that blocked the road, and to the top of the hill. I kiddingly told Drew that the backside of the hill was what he would be racing down. We pushed the racer to the top of the hill and then walked it down toward the bottom until we were about 1/3 of the way up the hill. I handed Drew his new blue racing helmet and told him it was my birthday present to him for his 16<sup>th</sup> birthday which he had celebrated earlier that week. We put Drew into the racer and set him in the middle of the track. Then we let him go and he drove reasonably straight down the track and stopped a little past the finish line. Then we walked the car up the hill and let him go down again from about half way up the hill. Next we went all the way to the top and let Drew coast down the middle of the track. Again he did well and said he was having fun. All in all he probably went down the hill 6 or 8 times eventually driving in both Lane 1 and Lane 2. About 1:30 p.m. we pushed the racer back to the truck, loaded it up and drove back home.

While I was at the track, Rick Locklear called my cellphone and left a message saying that he was going to be in Columbus this afternoon to see his stepfather and to visit his Mom's grave. He suggested that we meet for a Coke and asked if he could bring his stepfather, Bob McNamer, along with him. I said, "Of course! Bring him.". We met at a local Steak & Shake in Pickerington and spent about an hour talking about all of the challenges we have faced with our USC project and reminiscing about old times. It was a wonderful visit with both of them and it brought back a lot of fond memories of our times together in the Derby. On the way out to the car I took the wheel out of my trunk that Joel had made for us to race on and let Rick and Bob see it for the first time. They were amazed at how light weight it was and we talked about how fast I hoped the racer would run with that special set of wheels on it. I asked them both to pray for Joe's good health so that we could finish the construction of the car and enjoy each other's company in Akron in July. Then they got into Rick's truck and we drove off in separate directions.

**5/10/05:** After calling Joe for 2 days and getting no response, I called Mt. Carmel East hospital to find out if Joe had been admitted as a patient. Great News . . . they had no record of him being a patient there! I drove over to Joe's house in the afternoon and found Joe and Susie at home. Joe came out in his stocking feet and showed me the partially completed floorboard that he had laminated. It was about half done and he said he planned to finish it tomorrow and Thursday morning and that he wanted to take it to get it planed on Thursday, so I offered to pick him up and take the board to get the surfaces of it finished.

That evening I went to the TCS store in Pickerington to pick up a few 5/16" bolts with washers and nuts in order to properly secure the weights in the racer Drew is to drive in the rally on Saturday. I vowed to work on the weight placement on Wednesday and Thursday and have the car ready to race for Saturday.

**5/12/05:** I met Joe at his house about 2:30 in the afternoon. He showed me the laminated floorboard and with his help I managed to load it into the back of his pickup truck. That board was HEAVY. It must have weighed 100 lbs.! Joe said he'd be OK driving so off we went to Emerson Lumber to see about getting the board planed down. Our first attempt to find the milling area was unsuccessful. Joe parked the truck near a loading dock and we got out and walked around the lumberyard but were unable to find the mill shop. We drove around the parking lot and asked a couple of guys where it was. It turned out to be very close to where we were originally and I was able to locate it with the help of one of the workers. I walked into the milling area but didn't see anyone there. Then I saw one fellow lying down on a workbench and I spoke to him for help. He waved his arms at me and shouted that he didn't speak English and he pointed toward the other end of the room where another small framed man was also getting up from a nap on a different saw table. I was able to explain what we wanted and he said for me to go and get the board so I walked out and found Joe and we drove around the building to an area that was closer to the mill shop. The one fellow and I unloaded the floorboard and he seemed really interested in how it was made. We carried it into the shop and he and his helper ran in through the planer several times until it was smooth on both sides and trimmed down to the 2" thickness Joe wanted it to achieve. Then the one small fellow loaded the board into the bed of our truck and I asked him what we owed him. He said "\$10.00", and Joe paid him with a \$ 5 bill and a few ones. We got into the truck to leave and Joe explained to me that the money paid was "under the table" but a great bargain for us. Joe kept asking me what I thought of his handiwork on the floorboard. As he smiled a tired smile I could see that he was really proud of his work and that he wanted my approval. When we arrived back at Joe's house, we unloaded the board on a set of low saw horses that Joe said he would work from to layout the racer. Then we called it a day and I drove home. Joe was tired from the effort.

**5/13/05:** [Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>] I spent a little time weighing the racer Drew was going to drive on Saturday to make sure that he would be reasonably close to the weight limit. As it turned out, it looked like he would be right at the 230 pound weight limit and I re-drilled a hole in one of the weights to be sure that everything would be within the rules. That night it rained cats & dogs and the forecast for Saturday was also for rain. Before going to bed I got everything together for the rally and Sandy helped me to load the racer into the truck and secure it in place for the trip to the track on Saturday morning. I set the alarm for 6:15 a.m. and planned to drive to the track after hitting the drive thru at McDonald's for some breakfast food.

**5/14/05:** The alarm went off and I looked out the window noting gray skies and light rain. As I was going out the door, Sandy suggested that I should cover the cockpit area with plastic of some kind to keep the racer dry inside on the way to the hill. She helped me to tape a plastic

trash bag to the car with duct tape. Amazingly, the tape wouldn't stick tightly to the sides of the racer, but after some working with it we got it to adhere properly and I was off to the track. As I drove to Big Run Park there was a light mist forming on the windshield. I remained optimistic that Drew would be able to race and thus qualify for the USC. At McDonald's I noted that I had a message on my cellphone. It was Len and he had tried calling me Friday evening to ask my opinion about some light weight tennis shoes he wanted to get for Drew. I returned the call and they said they were on the way to the hill and would meet me there. I arrived at the hill a little before 8 o'clock and there were already quite a few cars with trailers on the scene. I went to the Topside Area then met Drew and Len and they registered for the Rally while I wrote a check for \$35.00 for Drew's entry fee. Drew got a bye for the first round of racing. As we waited it rained off and on so we covered up the racer with a tarp. Drew's Mom, Debby, sat with us until it came time for Drew's first race. In his first heat, he lost both phases and quickly moved into the loser's bracket. Lane 2 was reasonably dry but Lane 1 was very wet toward the bottom of the hill. Some of the other kids drove around the water but I told Drew just to drive straight and to have fun because winning wasn't important to us in this race – our only goal was to have Drew participate so he could qualify to drive for us in the USC. In all, Drew drove in a total of 6 races and amazingly he earned an award for finishing in 8<sup>th</sup> place! I asked Drew if he had fun and he said that he had "very much fun" driving the car. To celebrate our "victory", we drove to Appleby's for lunch [my treat] where we talked about what we might expect in Akron for the week. Then I drove to Joe's house and they followed in their car. At Joe's house I introduced everyone and then we had Drew lay down on the floorboard so Joe could determine where to place the brake pedal and the axle mounts for the racer. Then we called it a day and went our separate ways.

**5/17/05:** I called Joel to verify the thickness of the wheels which we planned to use. He told me they are 2 and 13/16" thick so I called Joe to convey the news. Susie answered the phone and said Joe was outside working on the car so I decided to drive over to his house and see him. He showed me how he had laid out the mounts for the front and rear end and he had even routed out a portion of the floorboard in the rear to accommodate the mounting plate. Then I noticed that he had mounted it in the wrong place! Joe asked me if I was sure and we measured – just to make sure. And it was located too far forward. Joe said he could fix it and that he was "sure glad I stopped by to look things over today". As I left we shook hands and he told me how proud he was of the work he was doing on the racer. You could see the pride in his baby blue eyes and his smile.

**5/18/05:** Yesterday when I spoke to Joel, I indicated that I would ship the prototype wheel to him shortly, so today I got the box out and began to get it ready for mailing. I plan to take it to Joe one more time so we can verify the dimensions. Then I'll mail it to Joel to finish it out for the racer.

### **John Hondros – getting financial support from Hondros College**

On about February 23<sup>rd</sup> I got the wild idea to approach John Hondros about becoming a sponsor for our car. John is the President of Hondros College and I knew from talking with others that he has a financial interest in the Columbus Crew, a pro soccer team which is part of the MLS franchise. John is about my age and I felt pretty certain that I could talk with him and gain his interest in our program because he is an entrepreneur and he knows something about working hard to achieve success through the efforts of a team. I stopped in his office and asked if I could schedule a meeting with him to get his opinion on a "business idea" that I was working on. His secretary scheduled a luncheon meeting for March 2<sup>nd</sup> about noon.

I met John at his office and he suggested we go down to the "Food for Thought" deli in the college and have lunch and talk. We ate at a small round table in the corridor away from the main traffic area and John insisted on buying my lunch. After some brief small talk I set up the PowerPoint presentation that I had put together to show and tell John about the scope of our USC dream and all we hoped to accomplish. My presentation gave a brief history of the SBD program and included some mention of how the family unit has changed over the last 35 to 40 years. I mentioned how when I was a child, my Dad held a job and my Mom stayed at home and raised me. It was a much simpler time compared to this era when both parents generally work fulltime. And today there are many more single parents than ever before. John was seemingly in agreement with my assessment of how things have changed because he went and got his teenage son and daughter and one of their friends and asked me to go over the presentation with the kids one more time.

In my presentation I emphasized how Hondros College could benefit from an association with our race team as a key sponsor. I explained how the Derby's fan base was comprised of people living in all of the states which hold SBD races and send their champs to Akron. Then I pointed out that Hondros College has facilities in quite a few of those communities and that many of those people would be in Akron at the Ultimate Speed Challenge. I must have done a good job of making my case for Hondros to be our prime sponsor because John stated that he would like to participate at that "3 level" which I had discussed. I took that to mean that he wanted to be our Platinum sponsor and donate to our cause. A few days later he asked me when I needed the money and I told him that I hadn't established a business identity nor set up a bank account yet. He said that I didn't need to go to that much trouble nor the added expense of setting up a bank account. He said he was OK with simply making out the check to me.

Shortly after that I applied to the State of Ohio for a business named, WR Racing, and was granted the exclusive use of that name on April 7, 2005 for a 5 year period. I then opened a bank account and ordered checks with the USC logo on them. John made the check payable to me and I deposited it into our bank account. The next thing I knew, I received an email message from Neil Collins, the CFO at Hondros College, asking me to get in touch with Illinois Blasdel to begin planning how to utilize his firm to promote the project publicly to get the most PR value from the project for the college. I called Illinois and we discussed some ideas, including having me set up a blog site and link it to the Hondros website with a running commentary and pictures of the progress we are making in the construction of the car.

**5/15/05:** I need to contact Illinois again to see how to proceed with the blog program.

**5/22/05:** Sometime that day I decided that I needed to take a positive step toward developing the blog site that Illinois had suggested to me. Not knowing even what a 'blog' was, I did an internet search and located several companies online to learn more about their blog sites. I spent a few hours learning about blogs and eventually decided to set up a full website through one of the blog vendors. About 1:30 a.m. on May 23<sup>rd</sup>, I published our website and sent email invitations to John Hondros, Neil Collins, Illinois Blasdel and a few other key individuals announcing the presence of our website.

**5/23/05:** I had planned to meet Drew, Len and Joe at Joe's house late in the afternoon to fit Drew on the floorboard and to confirm where the brake pedal needed to be placed. We were planning to meet about 4 p.m. Sometime around 1:30 that afternoon, Joe called me to say that he wasn't feeling well and that the squad was taking him to the emergency room at Mt. Carmel East to determine what was wrong with him. He wanted to be sure that I met Drew and Len that

afternoon to get the critical measurements to continue with the construction of the racer. I told Joe that I would be able to handle that, for him not to worry about the racer and instead for him to just go to the hospital, relax and concentrate on getting well.

I met Drew and his Dad about twenty minutes before 5 o'clock after waiting nearly 45 minutes to see them. I wouldn't have had to wait so long except that I got to Joe's a little early and Len had to run an errand so he couldn't be there as we had agreed. When they arrived I explained that Joe was in the hospital again. We went into the workshop and I had Drew lay down on the floorboard so I could get a reasonably good idea of where the steering wheel needed to be placed and to determine exactly where to mount the brake pedal. About a half hour later we parted our separate ways and I drove to the hospital on my way home to see how Joe was getting along.

At the hospital I learned that Joe was still in the ER because they did not have a regular room for him. An aid gave me a visitor's pass and directed me to the room where Joe was located. He was awake and laying in bed, accompanied by his daughter, Eileen. She explained that her husband, Dale, had taken Suzie to the cafeteria to get some food. Joe was hooked to a machine that monitored his vital signs and it indicated that his blood pressure was low [like 88/52]. Joe began to talk to me and reassure me that he was going to be all right. He said that as soon as they found out what was needed for him to feel better, he would be going home and he could resume work on the racer. As we talked Joe became ever more enthusiastic about the car and I could see the passion for his work with it returning. His blood pressure even came up a little. Susie and Dale entered the room and we reminisced about cars Joe had sponsored and his disappointment that none of those entries ever won the "All-American" in Akron in spite of being favored to finish at the top. I stayed and talked for about an hour and then decided it was time for me to go home so that Joe could rest. I told him that I would stop by to see him tomorrow if he was still there.

After seeing Joe I decided to call Rick Locklear to find out if he could machine the axles we needed for the racer, for us. Joe had told me that he had obtained 2 different kinds of steel for the axles: 4030 steel for the front axle and stainless steel for the rear axle. The former would provide some flexibility and the latter would be very stiff. Rick is a master machinist and he said that he would be glad to do it if I would send him a sketch with the dimensions and tolerances needed for the axle.

**5/24/05:** After teaching a class at Hondros this afternoon, I called Joe's house to see if he had made it home. There was no answer so I drove to the hospital where I discovered that Joe had been admitted to a room. When I stepped into the room Joe's face lit up in a great big smile and he said he was glad to see me. Susie was with him and within a few minutes Eileen came into the room as well. Joe explained that his blood pressure was back to normal and that he needed to see a kidney specialist before he could be released from the hospital. We talked 'Derby' for a few minutes and Joe said he was ready to go home and couldn't wait to get back to working on the racer again. He said he felt he could get all of the mechanicals laid out within a few more days and then that he and I could begin construction of the body.

Joe's kidney specialist came into his room and Eileen and I left to give them some privacy. A few minutes later the doctor left and Joe told us that his kidneys were working fine. He reiterated that he wasn't sure how long he had left to live but that he told the doctors that he would rather have one year of high quality life than 5 years of mediocre life. [That's Joe --

always striving for the best things in life!]. I said I would see him tomorrow and asked him to call me when he got home so we could work on the car together. He said he would.

**5/25/05:** I called Joe's house. No answer. So I called the hospital and learned that he was still there. Later in the day, I called his house again. This time: no answer, again. Again I called the hospital and the staff person said he was still there so I asked to be connected to his room. Susie answered the phone and then I spoke with Joe. He sounded a little tired and said he was going home soon.

I told him that Joel Olson had called me in the afternoon to say that he was in the process of completing the wheels and that he expected to make the last of the four on Monday, May 30<sup>th</sup>. I reminded Joel that Monday was Memorial Day and that he probably had overlooked it but he said his wife had to work so they couldn't go anywhere and he planned to finish the wheel that day with the intent of shipping all 4 to me on June 1<sup>st</sup>. Joe was pleased to hear that and he said he would cut the steel for the axles tomorrow and that on Friday he would have a drawing for me of the dimensions so that Rick would know how to machine the axles for us. I told Joe to take it easy and that I would call him on Friday to meet him and get the information to send to Rick.

**5/27/05:** I made several calls to Joe to finally learn that he had been back to the ER of the hospital and sent home with a few new Rx's to be filled. Susie said I could drop by and I went over to visit him about 3:30 p.m. Joe was not feeling good at all but he wanted to try to talk with me. He said he was worried about a lot of things and that he had never felt this bad before. I told he and Susie that if either of them needed ANYTHING day or night, for them to just call me and I would be over to tend to their needs. Joe wanted to make sure that I got the axle drawings with the proper dimensions and the wheel bearing that we plan to use so I could send both to Rick. Then he wanted me to get the steel he had set aside for the axles. He was concerned that he hadn't felt like cutting them but I reassured him that I would be glad to cut them tomorrow as long as I could find the steel in his garage. He told me where it was located and I went into the garage to find it. I left shortly after that, vowing to return tomorrow to do some work on the racer. Later in the evening, Len Sendek called me to ask if I knew what the schedule of events was likely to be for race week in Akron. I told him what little I knew or suspected.

**5/28/05:** I arrived at Joe's house about 11:30 a.m. and found Joe and Suzy being cared for by Joe's grandson, Steve. Steve was called after learning from his mom, Eileen, that Suzy was having difficulty getting Joe to wake up. Joe appeared to be very weak and very groggy from the medicine he was taking. I told Joe that I was there to cut the axles to length and Steve said he would help me. We went into the garage in search of the proper band saw to use to cut the metal. The one that Joe seemed to suggest didn't have a blade and I wasn't sure we could even cut with it so we moved to another one. We managed to take it apart, remove the wood cutting blade and replace it with a metal cutting blade. About that time, Joe's son, Mike, arrived from Lexington, KY and joined us in the garage. He noted that we had the blade running the wrong way so we had to disassemble and reassemble the saw again to get the blade to run in the proper direction. Just when we were ready to cut the metal we came to the conclusion that the piece we planned to cut was too long to fit through the yoke on the bandsaw. Seeing no other alternative, we decided to take turns sawing through the metal with a hacksaw, by hand. First we cut through the 4130 steel [which we planned to use for the front axle], then we cut the stainless steel for the back axle. It was hard work and frankly I was glad that Mike and Steve were there because they did most of the cutting. I took the finished piece inside for Joe to inspect. He looked them over as I explained that we had to cut them by hand. In Joe's typical

fashion he asked, "Where is the third piece?. I responded that there was no 3<sup>rd</sup> piece, reminding him that the car only had two axles. His response was, "No. We need a third axle cut, too!". When I asked why, he said "For a backup, just in case". So off I went back to the garage with Joe shaking his head at me and restating that there was a bandsaw in the garage that would easily cut the metal. We found the little saw and put a blade on it that would fit. Then we couldn't see any rest for the work so we decided that Mike would hold one end of a 2x4 and I would rest the axle on it and cut it with the saw. It worked beautifully, just like Joe had said that it would! I took all 3 pieces into the house and got Joe's approval. Then I told him that I would mail them to Rick so that he could manufacture them for us to Joe's specifications. Susie showed me where his drawing was and I picked it up and got one of the bearings off of the couch where Joe had put it in a ziplock bag for safekeeping. Then I went out to the garage to look for a castle nut. My plan was to ship the bearing, the nut, the drawing and the 3 pieces of steel within the next few days. I told Joe that I was leaving and that I would come back tomorrow to work on the racer.

Joe didn't look good at all. He complained of blurry vision and he looked like he was in real pain. I left him feeling that his days of Soap Box Derby [not to mention his life] seemed pretty well over. When I got home I told Sandy that all I wanted to do was to lie down. Sandy asked me what was wrong and I told her that I didn't think Joe was going to live much longer and that I was feeling a lot of pressure to think that I would have to finish the car by myself. She said that I should prepare myself for the possibility that Joe might not survive to finish the car. Her suggestion was that if I didn't think I could handle it, maybe I should just give back the sponsor's money and abandon the project.

I really didn't want to do that because we had come so far. But I was worried and not sure what to do. As I often do when I get upset, I started thinking. Next thing I knew I had gone down to my basement and brought up my drafting table and a card table. Then I located my T-Square and my drawing instruments from college. I drew up a cross section for the largest bulkhead using the idea that Joe had mentioned of having the top of the car ¼" wider than the bottom. Then I cut it out and set it aside. Next I typed an email message to Rick and tried to redo Joe's drawing of the axle to clarify some things and to be able to send a copy to Rick along with the email.

Sandy and I watched a scary movie with Michael Keaton in it, called "White Noise". About 11 o'clock we went to bed. I had difficulty falling asleep because I kept thinking about Joe and praying that he was doing OK. As I lay in bed I began to formulate a plan. I started to think that "what we were talking about here, was simply building a Soap Box Derby racer, and I know that I can do that! I've done it before and I can do it again!". I remember asking myself, "Really, how hard can it be?!". So I decided that what I needed to do was to put some ideas down on paper and then go to the garage on Sunday and transfer the actual floorboard design on to paper so that I would have a drawing of the car to work from.

**5/29/05:** After going to church I was feeling very confident in my abilities and certain that God would see me through this. I drove over to Joe's house and when I arrived I noted that Susie's car was absent from the driveway. I figured that meant that Joe had gone back to the hospital. I knocked on the door with little expectation that anyone would answer. When they didn't, I decided to open up the garage and prepare to work on the car. I figured that if Joe passed away on this day, that he would want me to be there in the garage, working on the racer.

I set up my card table and make shift drawing equipment on the sidewalk just out side the east door of the workshop. Next I cleaned off the floorboard and put what appeared to be essential

components for the racer into a plastic tub for later use. After clearing off the floorboard and sweeping it clean from dust and dirt, I decided to lay out the shape of the floorboard. I located some small finishing nails and followed Joe's lead of tapping them into the floorboard strategically. Then I bent a thin furring strip around the nails until I had achieved what I thought would produce a reasonably streamlined shape for the racer's edge. I traced around it on one half of the centerline and then transferred the measurements to the other side of the centerline to make sure that the car would be symmetrical. Next I used my compass to trace 1" radius off of the centerline at the nose.

While I was working on that a car appeared in the driveway. It was Eileen, Suzy and Dale. I walked over to see them expecting to hear 'the worst' and instead they told me that Joe was back in the hospital because he was dehydrated and not taking his medicine and eating properly. Eileen said the doctor would be recommending home healthcare for Joe and Susie. I invited Dale out into the garage to see what I was doing. Steve arrived a few minutes later and announced that he was going to load up old brake linings for Joe that had accumulated in the garage and sell them on eBay for whatever he could get. [He said he had told his 'Grandpa' that he wasn't going to do it if he couldn't split the money with Joe, so Joe needed to take care of himself and get well.]

After I had traced the shape onto the floorboard I drew lines perpendicular to the centerline 4" apart. I then measured the distance from the centerline to the points on the floorboard shape and transferred all of the measurements to my drawing for reference. About 10 minutes until 4 o'clock I decided it was time to call it a day so I gathered up my tools, loaded up my car and drove home. I plan to go back to Joe's again tomorrow to take a few more critical measurements because I'll go to the airport to mail the axles to Rick in Pittsburgh. I'll pray for Joe again tonight that God will work a miracle in his life and let him live and regain his strength. It would be so wonderful for him and Susie to be there on race day to see our car compete, especially if we could get lucky enough to win !

**5/31/05:** Susie called me this morning, early, to say that Joe had called her from the hospital and he wanted me to know that he was feeling much better after getting a good night's rest. I told her that I would stop by the hospital later in the day to see Joe. I planned to get together with Drew and Len later in the day at Joe's house to measure him once more for shoulders and the location of the brake pedal. Rick called me in the morning in response to an email message which I had sent to him asking for his help in completing the racer. He called to ask how Joe was doing and to tell me that he had gotten my email with the drawing of the axles which I had sent to him yesterday. I told him Joe was doing better but that if he could come over and help me with the racer, it would be great. He said he would come over the weekend of June 10<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup>. I told him I would get with Joe in the meantime and develop a plan for us to follow to make good progress on the racer while he was here.

Later in the day when I was in Lancaster, I stopped by the mall and picked up some sugar free chocolate candy for Susie. Then I stopped at Kroger's and got Joe some red licorice sticks. I stopped by the hospital on my way to Joe's house to meet Drew and Len. Joe looked alert when I entered his room and we had a nice chat for about 25 minutes before I had to leave. I asked him about the necessity of having a horizontal hole drilled in the front axle and he said it would be a good idea. The diameter needed to be 0.249" and it needed to be in the center of the axle. I also asked about how we could drill "square holes" in the floorboard to accommodate the plunger brake and Joe said a round hole about 7/8" diameter would be just fine since it would be covered up by the brake pad.

Joe said that he felt a “hell of a lot better” and that he hoped he could go home in the next few days. I mentioned my concern about getting the racer completed and he told me not worry, that the racer would be completed in plenty of time. He said that he could complete the mechanicals on it in 3 or 4 hours, if he just felt like doing the work. I suggested that if he would coach me, we could complete it together. He said that it really isn’t all that hard. And I said that I would agree – for him – but not for me when I had difficulty translating his ideas in my own actions. Joe said that putting things down on paper were hard for him, but that his son, Mike, could help me and he once again said that Dale would be a good helper [except that he is very slow and deliberate]. But Joe said that Mike and Dale are “both geniuses” and he said that Mike held something like 20+ different patents. I think he said something like, ‘Mike is a genius and a master woodworker – even better than me, but he hasn’t got any common sense!’ I could tell from that statement just how proud he was of Mike! Joe tried to give me reassurance by saying that the only thing that would keep him from completing the racer would be if he died. [Some comfort in that, because that is my real concern, but I’m hopeful he will live to see the racer compete in Akron. We talked a little more and then I left the hospital to meet Drew and Len, but not before telling Joe that I would see him again tomorrow.

I met Drew and Len and they helped me to bring down a racer body from the attic. My plan was to have Drew get inside it but the cockpit area proved to be too tiny to fit him. We moved into the garage and I had Drew assume the driving position again while I tried to estimate the position of his heels for the location of the brake pedal and the position for his shoulders from the rear of the car. We made some markings on the floorboard and I decided that Drew should be able to fit in the racer OK if it is 14” above the floorboard. Joe reminded me that we had discussed routing out a place in the floorboard for Drew to sit in. We cleaned up and I drove off to get dinner before my evening appointment in Powell, Ohio.

On the way up the freeway, Rick called me back to ask me to clarify how I wanted him to machine the axles. I had difficulty understanding him because of the traffic noise and because I couldn’t visualize what he was asking me, so I suggested that he email me a drawing and told him I would discuss it with Joe and get back to him tomorrow. When I got home later in the evening and checked my email, Rick’s message was there --- along with a great drawing, detailing his questions for me and Joe. I’ll share it tomorrow with Joe and keep praying that he will recover enough to be helpful on the construction of the racer.

**06/01/05:** Met with Joe in his hospital room for about 15 minutes in the afternoon to clarify a few items regarding construction of the axles: 3/32” diameter holes for cotter keys to be drilled at the machinist’s discretion so long as the castle nut won’t come off. I showed Joe the drawing that Rick had sent me and Joe said it was really “excellent”. [He doesn’t give praise like that often so I knew he really meant what he said.] He told me to relay his compliment to Rick [which I did later]. Joe suggested that the nose of the racer drop down about 3” below the forward portion of the cockpit. We talked about me making a form to use to “stick” the car sides up. I asked Joe to list which materials go where like what size diameter bolts and taps are needed to complete the front and rear axle mounts. I got confused by his comments and told him that I had to leave but said I would return tomorrow when I expected to have more time. Hope he is feeling better tomorrow. He keeps holding on to the idea that he may be able to go home by the weekend and I hope he can too.

After my evening sales appointment in the office, I sat down at my drawing board and sketched out the steering mechanism. I plan to show it to Joe tomorrow to make sure that it is going to be constructed according to his ideas. I also drew a side view of the racer including a possible

windshield and then altered the templates for the bulkheads to be cut accordingly. I can see the racer taking shape in my mind and on paper.

**Friday evening, 06/03/05:** It's late and Sandy has gone to bed without me as is becoming my custom. I've got this idea that it would be really neat to get some caps made with our 'WR-Racing' logo embroidered on them. I searched the internet and found a company that looks like they could help us. They located at [www.wearables4u.com](http://www.wearables4u.com) and I sent them a copy of our logo to see if they can stitch it on the hats if we buy them.

**Saturday, 06/04/05:** I planned to go to Joe's house to begin building the body of the racer. As is often the case with me lately, I started to 'second guess' myself by wondering if the top shape was going to be streamlined enough. I got out the 'Lynchburg Manual' [which I've had for nearly 40 years] and started crunching some numbers using the floorboard models to see how wide the car would need to be at the widest point to have Drew's shoulders fit properly and to try to get a better teardrop shape to the car. After about 30 minutes I just decided to keep the design the way it is. I loaded up my car and drove to Joe's house. When I got there, Eileen met me at the door and said that Joe wasn't feeling too well.

I spoke to him and he said that he had never felt so bad before. I tried to be encouraging by telling him to just 'hang in there' and that I would be outside working on the car today and for him to just take it easy and rest.

I went out to the garage area and set up some saw horses next to the garage to give me workplace. Then I opened up the garage door attached to the main house and pulled out the 4'x8' piece of plywood we had purchased to make the body formers out of. I carried the sheet of plywood to the sawhorses and set up my drawing board on a couple of other sawhorses next to the area where I planned to work. With the extension cord, both of my electric saws and the radio I was ready to get started.

I took out my paper pattern and checked and double checked all of the top and side measurements for the bulkheads. Then I drew around the patterns and cut them out using my saber saw. After about an hour I was feeling dizzy so I got into my car and drove to the lumber store to get some packages of "L" brackets and some rivets to use to attach the sticks to the bulkheads. Next I went to Kroger's to get some apples, soda pop and some bottled water, as well as a sandwich and some chocolate so I could keep up my strength. I bought a cheap Styrofoam cooler and some ice to get everything cooled down. My running around took over an hour and I started getting concerned that at that rate I would not make much progress today. When I got back to Joe's I started in again and as I cut the formers out it occurred to me that I could make an additional former for the nose portion of the car so that the nose itself wouldn't need to be so long. In addition, I got the idea that I should and could bevel the edges of the formers to accommodate the curved sticks which will be applied to them.

I went inside and shared with Joe a little of my progress. He reiterated that I was welcome to use any of the tools in the garage and he suggested that I use the bandsaw to cut the formers. At his suggestion I decided to replace the metal cutting bandsaw blade with one that would cut wood. When I got the blade on it was rubbing loudly against the shield and Dale was kind enough to help me to adjust it to alleviate the problem. As we were working on it, Eileen came into the garage with some disturbing news. She said that her Dad had just told she and her Mom that he thought he wouldn't be here any longer than about 2 more months. In other words, he felt that he was in the last stages of his life.

I've felt that Joe has realized this for some time. I feel strongly that his life may come to an end at any time and I hope that tomorrow is not too late for me to tell him how special he is to me and how grateful I have felt to be a part of his life for these last few months. I want him to know that he is loved by me and many other people too. [I think back to the way I lost my own father, never having a chance to say 'Good bye' to him, although I'm sure he knew that I loved him deeply.

Once the bandsaw blade was adjusted, I used my protractor to estimate the angle on each bulkhead and then adjusted the saw table to the proper degree of slant prior to cutting the bulkheads out. Joe was right: that bandsaw blade cut through the wooden bulkheads "like butter"! I was amazed by how much easier the bandsaw was to use as compared to the saber saw.

One by one I cut out the beveled bulkheads and then secured a piece of the basswood Joe wants me to use to make the sticks out of. I laid it across the sawhorses and fastened each bulkhead to it on its centerline using the 'L' shaped brackets I bought. I could begin to see the car shaping up now by looking at the bulkheads, rather than just using my 'minds-eye'.

Before I left, Dale asked me what he could do to help. I asked him to sand down the square stock that Joe wants to use as a part of the dual plungers on the brake. He said he could do that for us. I asked him if he planned to be there on Sunday and he said he could not, because of church and a graduation ceremony that he planned to attend. We put a new belt on the table sander and I was able to use it to smooth up one of the bulkheads that I had cut a little too erratically. About 4:30 in the afternoon I was almost finished with attaching the formers to the temporary floorboard.

I called Sandy to tell her I would be home in about an hour. Once I wrapped that up, I took some pictures of my work and then cleaned up and left for home. I was feeling tired but satisfied that I had accomplished something positive today. I will go back tomorrow and hopefully I can figure out how to cut the sticks and then attach them to the formers.

It's now nearly 1 a.m. and I need to get some rest. I seem to draw energy from these late night writing episodes but I know that I need to get to bed because tomorrow will be here before I know it. I pray that Joe will survive tonight to live another day. I know he is dying but I feel like I've only started to get to know him and I'm not ready for him to pass on to the other side.

**06/05/05:** After attending church and weeping through the service at the thought of Joe dying, I loaded up the car and drove over to see Joe and work on the car. When I arrived, Susie was not at home so I went in when I saw the side door open. Joe was leaning against the arm of the couch and when I walked in he opened his eyes. I said 'hello!' and asked where Susie was. Joe said she had gone to the store to get him something to eat. I got down on one knee and asked him how he was feeling. "Not so good today", he said. At that point I told him how much his friendship meant to me. He said he was sorry for getting sick and I told him that it was OK, that I just wanted him to rest and to try to feel better. I told him that I cared about him and that I regretted that we didn't have more time to spend together in this lifetime. He said he didn't think he was going to live very much longer and I urged him to try to hang on until the race in July. He said he would try. Then I asked him if he was afraid to die and he said "No", but I sure hope they have Soap Box Derby in heaven". At that point, I wiped my eyes again and told him I was going outside to work on the racer and that I would be checking in with him during the afternoon from time to time.

I spent the next 4 or 5 hours cutting basswood to make strips to 'stick up' the body. The basswood was slightly thicker than 1" and about 5" to 7" in width. Basswood is a very light, strong wood that has very few knots and it is easy to work. The first thing I did was to set up the planer and run the boards through it to plane them down to a 1" thickness. Then I cut the boards in lengths of seven or eight feet and ran them through the table saw against the rip fence to a width of 3/8". After I had ripped a few rough strips I ran them through the planer to get them about 1/4" thick. Several times that afternoon, Susie brought me bottled water or a glass of ice water and invited me to come into the house to cool off in the air conditioning. It was extremely warm outside and I didn't have the luxury of being able to work in the shade. I sweat a lot anyway, but all I did was drink water, perspire, wipe my face off with a towel and repeat the process. Around 2 o'clock I went inside to share my handiwork with Joe and to get his approval.

Joe said that his brother, Al, was coming from Florida tomorrow to see him and that Al could probably do some work on the mechanical aspects of the car while he was here. He said Al was 'almost' as good at SBD as he was. Joe and I sat in the cool of the house, watched a little bit of the Memorial Tournament and chatted briefly about the car and about life. I returned to the back yard to make more sticks for the body.

The planer always does such a great job of truing the wood down to just the right size. Joe remarked that it was as accurate as a "gnat's ass"! [That's Joe for you!]. The planer started making a grinding and rubbing noise and I wasn't sure what was causing it so I went back inside and asked Joe if he had experienced that problem but he said 'No.'. After some investigation I determined that the drive pulley was rubbing on the side of the housing. I made several attempts to adjust it and finally after replacing the cover plate 3 times, I managed to solve the problem. [It's always a good feeling to be able to solve a problem like that].

Joe said that I would probably need about 50 sticks to make the body. After working all afternoon, I was only able to make 24 and one of those is probably not usable. I'll just have to get back out there again one evening this week and finish the stick production so I'll be ready when Rick comes to work with me next weekend.

I cleaned up the sawdust, swept the floor in the workshop and put everything away. I was tired and hot but feeling that the afternoon was productive. I went in to tell Joe that I was heading home and that I would try to come back to see him on Monday evening after my class. He looked at me and said, "I'm really proud of what you are doing. I would be happy to call you my son!"

Now I really started to cry but I tried to be brave and I thanked him for expressing his feelings the way he did. I told him how happy I was that we had had the last few months to build on our friendship and how I wished we would have more time together. A few minutes later I was back in my car and headed home to see Sandy.

**06/06/05:** Joe was visited by hospice today. They told him that his days of life are short: he could die at any time. I went over to his house to work on the racer tonight after teaching. All was working on the front axle mount and I redid the body formers so that I could remove them after the body was completed. [Good idea, huh?] Susie asked me if I would be a pallbearer for Joe. Wow. I said, "Yes, I'd be honored to do so". I went home about 9:30 p.m. and sent an email to Joel to thank him for the wheels and then sent one to John Hondros to ask for his help.

I picked up the wheels from the CW Post Office on my lunch hour from teaching at Hondros today. I only had an hour but I managed to get them, eat lunch in the car on the way and make it back in time for class to resume in one hour. Wow! Lots of windshield time. The wheels look absolutely fabulous and I took them over to share with Joe. He just smiled and nodded approval. We showed the wheel to Al. He said he knew someone else who wanted to enter the Speed Challenge but he didn't think he could afford to buy wheels that would be competitive, like ours. It's good to have a sponsor for these things.

Al has his own ideas about how to build the car. Joe and Susie warned me that he was 'head strong' but we've agreed that it is Joe's car and mine and we will do it 'Our Way'. Al is good about asking Joe how he wants things done. He is being very helpful to me.

I cut notches in the bottom on each former-bulkhead and made preparations to mount them on a rail that will lay flush with a 16" wide piece of plywood. The sticks will be laid over the formers and sit onto the 16" board which will ensure that the body sits flatly on the floorboard when it comes time to mount it. I plan to finish the formers tomorrow evening so that we can begin laying on the sticks very soon.

I asked Joe if he would be "up" to meet John Hondros and he said, "Sure.". So I contacted John by email and asked him if we could arrange that. Sandy suggested that it would be great to have some caps made up with our logo and that of Hondros' and to present one to Joe prior to his passing, if we can. I emailed John to ask for his help in this matter. Hopefully tomorrow will be another good day for Joe and all of us involved in the project.

**06/07/05:** Stopped by to see Joe and check on the progress of the car. Dale and Al worked most of the day and have the front end setup nearly complete. We talked about where and how we are going to build the brake, the brake pedal and the steering mechanism. Joe said that the brake pad should be 5" by 4" and be tapped with six 1/4" holes to accommodate the brake pad. He said to tap the holes, tighten the bolts enough to pull into the pad and finish it with a nut on the top of the plate. I may have to countersink the floorboard to accommodate the nuts. He has the welding done at tropical Welding on E. 5<sup>th</sup> Ave. by Dan Dever, who he says will do it for free if I tell him it's for Joe and the Soap Box Derby.

**06/09/05:** I went over to Joe's house tonight and completed fastening the forming bulkheads to the temporary floorboard. I used 2 1/2" Phillips head wood screws and screwed them up from the bottom. Dale showed me that he and Al had stabilized the router table and rigged up a jig that we can use to cut the sticks with a sort of 'tongue and groove' configuration. Earlier today, Joel Olson called me to say he had received the email I sent yesterday inviting him to come to Akron to see us run. I called him back and we chatted for a few minutes. He told me he is 39 years old with a wife and 2 children. He said his wife asked him last night where Akron was and then suggested that it might be fun to take the family there for the Derby as kind of a mini-vacation for them this summer. So it sounds like he and his family will be able to attend the race. That should be fun. I also got a reply from someone at Stitch America. I had inquired of them the possibility of having them produce some embroidered caps with our WR-racing logo on them. They can do it but there will be about a 2 week turnaround, not counting shipping. I guess I had better order these soon if we expect to have them in time for the race.

**06/10/05:** Today I was supposed to teach but when I showed up they had mistakenly asked someone to substitute for me because I had originally thought we would be going out of town for a wedding. So I had a free day. I drove to Grainger's but couldn't remember what I was

supposed to pickup. Then I called Fournier Rubber Supply and drove down to get some rubber to use for the brake pad. I asked the clerk if they sold plastic and he said not but then he suggested a business around the corner so I went there. I told the manager what I wanted and he gave me some samples. He told me to figure out the dimensions of what I wanted and he would sell me what I needed. Very nice guy, named Joe Esposito. Next I drove out to east 5<sup>th</sup> Ave to try to find Dan Dever at Tropical Welding. After driving all the way to the east end of the airport I checked the address and discovered that it was actually closer to downtown so I turned around and drove down there. Dan was an unusual character. He was leaning back in a recliner in his welding shop with giant fans blowing cool air around him. His rotweiler met me at the door. I walked in and stood there for a minute, waiting for him to acknowledge me. Then I introduced myself and told him that Joe had sent me. I asked if he could do some welding for us on the brake assembly and the steering wheel and he said, "Sure.". He said he needs about a day's notice and that Joe usually brought stuff in that was already clamped so all Dan needed to do was weld it in place. He asked how Joe was and when I told him he looked a little concerned. I told him that Joe spoke highly of him and he said that he had been doing welding for Joe for years and that Joe usually waited on him to complete the jobs rather than dropping them off and coming back at a later time.

From there I drove to Gahanna to the Sign-A-Rama store and bought 2 decals for the racer. The decals will carry our team logo and they should be really neat looking. I also inquired about having a couple of other decals made that will list the team members and their roles. The young lady who helped me at the store said I could do my own design or they could do one for me. From there I drove to Reynoldsburg to visit Dodds' Bodyworks. Dodds' had been a client of mine for many years and I know that they do excellent painting work. Also, Marv Dodd had sponsored one of my SBD racers many years ago so I thought he would probably give me a good price to paint the car. I asked for Mary and when she wasn't in I asked to see Michelle. She remembered me and I told her what I wanted them to do. She referred me to Jeff Johnson and he told me that he would paint it for \$150.00, including materials. When I asked him if that was all he needed to charge me, he asked me if I wanted to pay more. "Of course not!", I said. I asked how much lead time he would need and he said to give him about a day – that he has 4 painters now. From there I made my way to the office after stopping by Sears hardware to get some ¼" steel rod from which to form the steering wheel. From there I went to the CW hardware store and then on to Wal-Mart in CW to try to find some foam to use the mold the nose of the racer. No luck on that and it was so hot out that I just went on home. Rick sent me an email stating that all three of the axles were completed and that he would be bringing them with him when he comes over this weekend. He said to expect him in town about 7 pm Saturday.

**6/12/05:** Rick met me early in the day at Joe's. I worked on sticking up the body and he spent time fabricating the brake and tiller bar mechanisms. We showed Joe the finished axles and when we put a wheel and on end and gave it a spin it just kept rolling! It was a hot long day and we finally took a break about 4 o'clock to get a sandwich at Wendy's. We worked until about 6:30 and then Rick headed home to Pittsburgh.

**6/13/05:** I went to Joe's late in the afternoon and spent time cutting the nose pieces using the radial arm saw. Al helped me to set it up and with some practice I roughed out each one of the nose pieces.

**06/14/05:** Keeping this journal up to date is getting tough. [I need to log in everyday because I'm having trouble remembering all the daily details.] One day kind of runs into the next. I think that today I made a jig to use to cut a smooth radius for the nose of the car.

Ken Morrow confirmed for me that the nose is to have a **diameter of at least two inches** so I made a jig to use with the bandsaw to cut the pieces out uniformly. After some trial & error it worked!

Also, I finished the sticking of the body. It was laborious cutting and fitting each stick into place but when I had finished, the body looked great! I took some pictures, posted a few on the website and sent copies to everyone on the team. I heard from Akron today: they are shipping a shirt out to Joe, in case he doesn't make it to the race. Rick will be working with me on Friday so he can spend Father's Day with his son, Benjamin. I think that makes a lot of sense.

**06/15/05:** After meeting with Randy Wolfe for our weekly share group and seeing Tom Ellifritz in my office I finally decided to go over to Joe's and spend a couple of hours prior to an evening sales call that I had scheduled. Suzy came out to the garage to tell me that Joe had gotten up early in the day, eaten breakfast and had Dale take him to the auto body repair shop to buy resin and hardener.

I took the time to trim off the protruding sticks from the nose and tail portion of the cars. Then I stacked up the nose pieces and something told me that it would be a good idea to measure the car to make sure it was not going to be too long. I was SHOCKED to discover that it was actually 4" too short! How could that be!?! I checked and doubled checked everything as I went along! Unbelievable!! About that time Joe and Suzy came out to check my progress and I gave Joe the 'bad news'. We talked about it and I decided that I must have made the nose pieces 4" too short, so I would just go ahead and lengthen the pieces to get the car to the proper length. Joe had suggested lengthening the tail or reconfiguring the sticks on the nose but I think I'll just redo the nose pieces since that will be the easiest method for me. We agreed that I should remove the temporary floorboard from the body and place the body on the actual floorboard to verify that it will fit OK. I'll do that tomorrow.

**06/16/05:** I opened my email and discovered that Rick had sent me a picture of the steering wheel he had made up for Drew. It looks great! About 3 p.m. I finally made it to Joe's to work on the car. I started by taking all of the rivets out of the body. I asked Joe if the body would be strong enough for Drew to get inside of it and he suggested applying some body putty to the areas where you could still see daylight in the cracks. So I did that and then I removed the temporary floorboard and the forming bulkheads. Drew and his Dad arrived about 4 o'clock and we took the shell out into the backyard where we turned it upside down. I had Drew lay in the shell so I could see how he fit into it. He fit easily inside but I had to adjust the point at which his heels would sit on the floorboard because where he wanted to sit, his knees would be too high. Finally we put him on the floorboard and make an educated guess as to where his heels would need to be. I will design the brake pedal so that it will miss the front axle when the brake is applied. I think that will give Drew enough room to be able to push the pedal hard enough to stop the car, without interfering with the front axle. I also determined that the back of Drew's head will be positioned about 11" from the tail of the car with the front of the headrest about 15" from the tail. After Drew and Len left I gave some serious thought as to how to reconfigure the nose so that the car's length could be optimal. After eyeing the shape of the nose, I redrew the shape of the nose pieces slightly and came up with the idea of stacking the nose pieces on top of each other and then joining them to 3 vertical pieces of wood which I will attach to the front

bulkhead with screws and glue. I used the radial arm saw to cut the nose pieces at an angle of about 12 degrees from vertical. Then I lined up the pieces and carefully glued them together. I cut the 3 vertical pieces of wood on the bandsaw to approximate the shape of the first front bulkhead. With the nose pieces on the car, the overall length should be right around 95" – which is close enough for me. I felt that we could sacrifice an inch of length in deference to having a smoother nose piece because otherwise, the nose would have a kind of 'Coke bottle' shape and I didn't want to see any concave curves in the body. Prior to quitting for the evening about 8:30 p.m., I glued and clamped all of the nose pieces and they will be ready to mount in the morning. I plan to meet Rick about 8 a.m. to get an early start on our work together tomorrow. Hopefully, John Hondros will respond to my email regarding hats and buttons which I sent to him earlier today. Plus I hope to hear from the Sign-A-Rama store tomorrow regarding the decals which I ordered from them. When I checked my email this evening, Shirley from the AASBD headquarters requested my mailing address for Joe's USC shirt. Hopefully she will send it out in tomorrow's mail.

**Friday, 06/17/05:** Rick met me at Joe's house about 8 o'clock in the morning. He had gotten up about 4:30 a.m. and driven in from Pittsburgh just to spend the day with me working on the racer. One of the first things we did was to determine who would do what for the day. I decided to work on the body and let Rick concentrate on the steering and brakes. We went in the house to see Joe and to get our 'orders' for the day. After talking with Joe, we decided that the first order of business should be to mount the rear axle and check the alignment to the front axle as well. The wheelbase turned out to be 59 ¼" in length. I made four new bulkheads and after laying out the front end, I decided to only use three of them. I glued and nailed the three new bulkheads to the nose piece I had made yesterday and Rick helped me to fasten the whole assembly to the original front bulkhead with three long screws. Then we carried the body to the backroom of the garage and placed it on the floorboard to check the overall length and to make sure that the rear wheels did not extend beyond the tail. When we placed the wheels on the axles next to that body, the look was absolutely stunning! Wow! Those wheels looked huge and they seemed to spin forever! All of the measurements were just fine.

We took the body out into the backyard and Rick helped me to place it on a couple of sawhorses. Then while he worked on the turning down the steering shaft and building the mounts for the steering shaft tower, I began sanding and shaping the nose and tail of the car with a plane and a body sander. That day I learned how to use a sander and how to fill cracks in the body with Bondo body putty. I'd scoop a small blob onto a block of wood and add a ribbon of hardening agent. Then I'd mix the two ingredients together and use a putty knife to scrape it over the cracks and holes in the body. In a few minutes the hardening agent would allow the putty to set up and then I would sand it all off until the wood was smooth and the cracks were filled. There is really an art to making sure to get enough hardener in the putty without getting too much in it so that it doesn't set up too fast and become unusable. There were one or two places where I'd add putty, sand and need to add more putty because the wood was so thin there that I'd sand right through it. Rick and I worked until 6 o'clock when he drove back to Pittsburgh and I went home to spend the evening with Sandy. After dinner at TGIFriday's we drove to Ricart Ford to see the new 2006 Eclipses. Wow! They were awesome! Sandy said I should get a red one this time and suggested one with leather seats instead of cloth.

**06/18/05:** I slept in and arrived at Joe's house about 10 a.m. I planned to work until 6 o'clock and felt like 8 hours of strong effort would produce good results. On the way to Joe's house I stopped by the auto parts store and picked up another can of Bondo. My plan was to spend much of the day filling cracks and sanding the body to its proper shape. So I mixed body putty

and hardener and sanded pretty much all day long. At one point I went inside to get Joe's opinion and he was sleeping so soundly on the couch that when I spoke to him he didn't wake up. I feared we had lost him but when I touched him he awoke with a start. He told me to use the air sander to do the finish sanding on the body. Susie was kind enough to help me to figure out how to set it up and get started using it. Joe came outside and started it up. I was afraid he couldn't control it but he made it look so easy I knew I could do it, too. I moved the body around to the front of the garage and set it up where the air hose would reach from the compressor to the body where I was doing my work. I added putty and sanded, brushed off the dust and repeated the process. I added putty to the front end to try to remove the reverse curve that had appeared near the nose of the car and I added body putty to the tail to give it a sharp edge. Late in the afternoon I ran out of Bondo and went to the auto parts store to buy another can. When I returned I continued the process. Sanding and filling is a long and tedious process and when 6 o'clock came I was glad to be done for the day. I cleaned up and went inside to tell Joe that I was leaving for home and didn't expect to return until Monday.

When I got home I checked the mailbox and there were 2 packages from the aasbd. I tore open the small one first and found the 4 pulleys I had ordered for us to use in building the braking mechanism. [I managed to tear the receipt inside the envelope as well.] Then I opened the larger one and discovered the USC shirt that Akron had promised to send for Joe. I showed it to Sandy and she thought it looked great. We agreed we would take it to Joe on Sunday and I decided to give it to him as a 'Father's Day' gift.

**06/19/05:** After church Sandy and I had breakfast at Waffle House and then drove to Joe's house. When we arrived only Joe's pickup truck was in the driveway and my fear was that he had had to be taken to the hospital again. I tried the door but it was locked so I invited Sandy out to the garage to see the workshop and to see the progress I had made on the racer. I lifted the garage door and while we were admiring my handiwork, a car pulled into the driveway. It was Susie and Joe! We walked over to them and learned that they had gone out to the store. They invited us in and we talked a little bit about the progress we were making on the car. Joe said that it looked good and he voiced his opinion that it was unbeatable. He said he thinks it will be a wheel race and that we have the best wheels so we'll probably win! We'll see! Sandy took pictures of Joe and me and I gave Joe his USC shirt. He said he hoped he'd be able to wear it for the race and I assured him that he would. [I sure hope he can]. I asked him if he planned to come up to Akron for the week or just for the Race Day and he said he wasn't certain if he would be able to go at all. Sandy said we could buy a movie camera and record the events so he could see them later.

**06/20/05:** I worked at home this morning in my insurance agency making calls. After much success I decided to take the afternoon off and go to Joe's to work on the racer. On the way there I stopped at the Sign-A-Rama shop and picked up the decals which I had ordered for "WR-Racing". I got to Joe's house about 2 p.m. and worked until about 5:30 p.m. During that time, I filled in cracks in the body with Bondo and sanded the surface. I moved the racer behind the garage under the shade of the tree where I could be outside, yet not far from the resources found in the garage. Joe came outside to see how I was doing. I asked him if Susie knew he was outside and he said she was sleeping and for me not to worry about him. Joe suggested that I sand off the nose of the car to be pretty flat and then round the edges to conform with the required nose print for the car. I also put a lot of Bondo on the left front side of the nose to build it up and eliminate as much of the reverse curve as possible. The sides of the car have expanded beyond the original shape that they maintained when the sticks were still fastened to the forming bulkheads. Joe suggested that I run a string through a hole on one side of the car,

knot it and then run it across to the other side through a hole on the opposite side. I'll do that tomorrow before I remove the bulkheads just prior to applying the fiberglass cloth. When I finished and left for dinner I felt well satisfied that the body was very nearly ready for fiberglassing.

Feeling apprehensive about the process of applying the fiberglass, I decided to call Ken Garloch to ask for his help and advice in how best to go about it. Ken asked me how Joe was and then when I remarked that he was in fact dying, he launched into a description of Joe's behavior at the recent rally and said that he was 'cussing and carrying on'. I took offense to those statements and told him so. He told me in no uncertain terms that I had offended him and we abruptly ended our phone call. [Seems to me that too many people have an 'axe to grind' with Joe].

After dinner I drove back over to Joe's and as I was starting to sand off some of the remaining body filler from the racer, Joe's daughter, Terri, her husband, and her daughter, Michelle approached me to ask if I needed their help right then to fiberglass the car. I thanked them but stated that I wasn't really prepared to do it right then but that maybe tomorrow evening would be a more appropriate time. Terri said she and Susie would help me then.

I finished my sanding and decided to ask Joe to clarify how I should shape the nose. He said that tomorrow he would show me how to do it. Instead I decided to begin construction of the brake mechanism. I center punched six holes and drilled them with a number 8 tap drill. Then I threaded each hole with a ¼ 20 thread. I was pretty proud of myself for managing to accomplish that task without breaking the tap so I took my work inside for Joe's approval and he said it was all right. It was nearly 9 o'clock so I told he and Susie that I would clean and lock up the garage and plan to see them both tomorrow. It is finally looking as though the car can be finished in time.

#### **06/21/05:**

**06/23/05:** After some client calls on the west side of Columbus I drove over to Joe's to see how he was getting along. His daughter, Terri, had called me and then Joe got on the phone to tell me that he had gone out to get some pipe for the brakes. I examined the pipe and told Joe I would be back later, but I decided later that day to just stay away and not work on the car that day.

**6/24/05:** I played golf this morning with Randy Wolfe to try to relax and get rid of the stress that is building up in me over the pressure to get the racer completed in time. We finished 9 holes mid-morning and by the time I stopped by the agency and took care of a few things, it was almost 1 o'clock by the time I made it to Joe's. The first thing I did when I got to Joe's was to sand the nose to a more round shape and fill in some rough spots with body putty. After smoothing the car body and dusting it off, I removed the bulkheads and wired the sides to keep them from spreading too far and distorting the shape of the car. Next I tried [unsuccessfully] to use a high speed Dremel tool to cut away the rear bulkhead. It just wasn't powerful enough to do the job, so I looked for an alternative. I considered using a router but it was too large to cut close enough to the body in the way that I wanted to make the cuts. Then I got the idea to use a router bit in my electric drill. It didn't work very well because I couldn't control the direction of my cuts very well and I nearly burnt up the bearings in the drill because of the stress I was

putting on the motor. My next approach was to drill some 1 ¼" holes in the bulkhead and then cut between them with a handsaw. I ended up returning to the hardware store to buy a keyhole saw and while I was there I exchanged the die I had bought there 2 days before for a larger one with a different thread size, plus I got a tool to hold it as well. I returned to Joe's to finish cutting out the bulkhead. It looked rough so I mixed up some body putty and smoothed out the cutout so it looked less roughly cut. After some sanding it looked reasonably good and I opted to begin work on the brakes. I got out the die I had purchased and began working on the aluminum aircraft bolts I had found the day before, which I intended to use to attach the cable from the brake pedal to the brake. I turned the threads all the way down to the head of each bolt and then checked them with the appropriate nuts to make sure that they were correct. I then measured and cut a round pipe that Joe had picked up yesterday for us. Then I decided to drill some ¼" holes in the brake mechanism and install 2 pulleys on it. Next I elected to begin fabricating the brake pedal. When I left for home I had put in nearly 7 hours of effort and I felt like I had accomplished a great deal. I'm starting to "see" the car being finished on time and I'm feeling good.

**06/27/05:** Today was another hot one. The temperature reached 95 degrees and Rick drove over from Pittsburgh to spend the whole day with me working on the car. We started at 7:30 in the morning. Here is what we accomplished today:

- Rick reshaped the nose, rounding it off more and really making the shape less flat and more aesthetically pleasant.
- We placed the shell onto the floorboard and traced a red line onto the floorboard to mark where the outline of the floorboard needed to be cut.
- We clamped up the position for the parts on the plunger brake to make it ready for welding.
- I cut and fit a rubber pad to be placed under the front axle and a thicker rubber pad to be placed on the top of the axle, under the tiller bar. In addition, I verified the height of the axle above the floorboard to make sure there will be no cross bind in the car.
- I planed some basswood down to a thickness of ¾" and cut some strips with the table saw and the radial arm saw which will become the leading and trailing edges of our axle fairings.
- Rick assembled the dampeners on the steering system, only to discover that there is not enough compression in the springs we tried to use. Once they are compressed enough to steady the tiller bar, they lack enough reserve to make the tiller bar return to its neutral position when the steering wheel is released. We decided we will need larger springs with more compression to make this work correctly.
- Finally, we were able to cut out the floorboard to its proper shape.

The two projects that required the most time and effort were the dampener project and the process of cutting out the floorboard. As a part of assembling the spring system for the dampener, Rick broke a tap in one of the holes. It took 45 minutes to an hour and a trip to the hardware store to buy a pair of vise grips for him to remove the broken tap. He wasn't pleased, but he finished the project and then we discovered that it didn't work as well as we had hoped. We both decided that the best solution would be to find other springs to use and Joe said he would try to find some tomorrow when Susie takes him to see Dan Dever to weld up the steering pin, the brake pedal and the plunger brake assembly.

The second project to take way too much time was the cutting of the floorboard. Joe has claimed that his bandsaw blade would cut the 2" thick maple floorboard "like butter". Rick and I moved the bandsaw out into the middle of the shop and into the light so we could better see our work surface. We set up the wooden helper to hold up one end of the wooden plank and we

began to cut away. At first the blade didn't seem to be making much headway, so I got the idea to use my saber saw instead. I cut and Rick timed me. It took 3 minutes to make a 2 inch cut and the blade seemed to be burning the wood rather than cutting it easily. At that rate I felt it would take too long to complete the job, so I looked for a different solution. I made the decision to change the blade on the bandsaw to one that was more narrow and also much sharper. Just as Joe had boasted, it cut through that wood like a "hot knife in butter!". We made great progress initially but ran into a snag when the axle mount failed to clear the housing on the bandsaw. So we disassembled the kingpin to give us the clearance we needed. A few more inches of cutting and once again the floorboard could not be made to move across the saw table. Rick discovered that the bolts holding the axle mounts [which had not yet been countersunk] were hanging up and preventing us from making the cuts that we needed, so we removed the bolts and took off the axle mounts completely. That had the positive effect of lightening the load of the floorboard. A few more cuts and we then discovered that we would be better off cutting on the other side of the board so that it would fit through the yoke of the bandsaw. Now we were 'flying' when the blade came off of the wheels. So we opened up the housing and repositioned the blade and started again. The blade came off at least 3 other times and the other frustration was that the board was so heavy that its weight caused the saw table to pitch up at an angle. We were both tired and becoming more frustrated by the moment. I had told Rick that my plan was for us to quit working at 6 p.m. but we were determined to get the floorboard cut out before he had to leave for home. I think we finally finished about a quarter after 7 p.m. and we were both relieved at what we had accomplished. I told Rick that I would make it up to him by buying him a tall cold beer during Race Week in Akron. At that point we cleaned up the shop, closed the windows and turned off the lights. Then I shut up the garage and went inside to tell Joe that we were done for the day and that we would be heading for home.

It was a long, hot day but we really did accomplish quite a few things. Best of all, Joe visited us 4 times throughout the day to assess our progress and to give us encouragement. It is interesting how frustrated I can get over a problem and how easy he makes the solution seem. His advantage [of course] is that he has built so many cars over the years that he knows just what to expect and how to correct things when challenges appear. It has been great having him as our mentor on this project and I affectionately refer to him as "Yoda" when we need his wisdom to overcome one of those many challenges.

Tomorrow I have to return to the real world and my job as an insurance agent. Tuesday I'll be teaching a class in the afternoon, but I hope to be able to squeeze in some time starting on Wednesday to assemble the brake and brake pedal and finalize the inner workings so I can move on to the important job of mounting the body and fibreglassing the racer. As I reflect on what needs to be done, I'm beginning to visualize the final product and it looks GREAT!! Thanks be to God and to everyone involved in this project for helping us to make our dream come true.

**06/29/05:** Sandy had scheduled a last minute eye exam for me this morning at the OSU College of Optometry and I planned to go to Joe's house about 10:30 a.m. Things don't always go as planned but I was able to make it there by about 11:30 with the idea of fibreglassing the body with help from Joe and Susie. Sandy even opted to take off half a day from her work to help us out. Shortly before noon [at about the hottest part of the day] Joe cut a length of fibreglass cloth as long as the car was in length. Then he mixed up the resin with a few drops of hardener. Next he brushed on the resin with a paint brush and after the wood was covered with resin, he and I laid the cloth over the resin and used squeegees to smooth the air bubbles out of the fabric. For all of my anxiety about needing 4 people to do this, this turned out to be a very simple

procedure, in fact so much so that I told Sandy not to come over because we weren't going to need her help. Joe got warm and went back into the house to cool off while Susie helped me to apply the resin to the cloth so that none of the white spaces of the cloth were showing. In a few places we had to cut smaller pieces of cloth and then resin them into place while the resin began to set up. Late in the afternoon while the resin was still drying, I installed the brake pedal with some minor adjustments to my previous attempt. I also reinstalled the steering mechanism and cut out aluminum angles so that Drew would have something to push his foot against when he gets into the car. I also cut off the nose of the floorboard to better approximate the shape of the nose in the body. I went home about 8 p.m.

Tomorrow I plan to put another coat of fiberglass resin and hardener all over the car. Then I will finish assembling the brake mechanism and continue working on the axle fairings which I am building to reduce wind resistance on each axle. Drew will be home from his vacation late tomorrow and I hope he can stop by Joe's in the next two days so I can make sure that he still fits into the racer properly.

**06/30/05:** Wow ! Just 30 days until the BIG SHOW in Akron. Good news: I went over to Joe's house about 6 p.m. to work on the racer after feeling sleepy and 'out of phase' all day long. Joe suggested that I rough sand the fiberglass and apply body filler to the rough areas so I did that first. Then I spent considerable time completing the installation of the brake [well, almost]. I made two small angle braces and formed a couple of threaded adjusters to attach the brake cable to. Then I anchored them into the floorboard with 1/4" threaded screws and fastened them in place using a nylon locknut. I had to cut the angle brackets on a slant [by hand with a hacksaw] and it was hard work and took a lot longer than I had expected. But when finished, it looked good.

Before I left to go home, I cut 2 small springs to the same length as the larger springs on the dampener that Rick had built. I put one inside the other [as Joe had suggested] and reassembled the dampening system. When I tried turning the steering wheel it moved easily and when released, the steering wheel and tiller bar returned to their initial position [just like they were supposed to]. I nearly leapt for joy! Except for attaching the brake cable and fine tuning the brake operation, the chassis is complete. Wow. What a great feeling !

**07/01/05:** Joe was nice enough to help me to attach the brake cables. Then we debated about whether or not Drew would be able to fit into the racer OK. Joe wanted me to set the brake pedal back about an inch so it would have more pedal travel in reserve and I didn't think Drew would be able to get his knees under the top of the car if we did so. We couldn't come to a consensus so we let the matter drop in deference to waiting for Drew to stop by so we could see how he fits into the body. After some discussion with Len, we agreed that they would come by Saturday morning at 9:30 when we would fit Drew into the racer and determine if any major changes needed to be made in the body. I took Sandy to O'Charley's for dinner and then we went to see the movie, the 'War of the Worlds', before watching Red, White & Boom on the TV and going to bed.

**07/02/05:** This morning Drew and Len and Joe and I met at Joe's house. We put the wheels on the racer and set it on the ground. Then Drew got on the floorboard, assumed his driving position and tried out the brakes and steering on Joe's driveway. Everything seemed to work just fine! We took a lot of pictures including shots of Drew, Joe and me sitting on the floorboard. What fun!!

Drew and Len left after a couple of hours and I spent the rest of the day, as follows:

- Removed the front and rear axles.
- Sanded off the bottom of the body and attached the body to the floorboard with wood glue and body putty after locating the holes for the front and rear axles. Clamped the nose and tail to the floorboard with pipe clamps and wrapped bungee cords around the body in 3 places.
- Formed the axle tree fairings from basswood.

While the glue dried there wasn't much else I could do so I went home about 4 o'clock after deciding to return tomorrow to round the bottom of the floorboard. John Hondros called me to ask if he could stop by Joe's [kind of at the 'last minute'] around 5 o'clock to meet him, bring his kids with him and see the progress on the car. I told him that I couldn't make it then because Sandy and I had plans for the evening, but we agreed that we'd try to meet around noon on Sunday instead. Also, John replied to my email that several people would work with me on the caps I want to order for our team.

**07/03/05: [Sunday]:** After church I went over to Joe's in anticipation that John Hondros and his family would be dropping by around 2 o'clock to meet Joe and see our progress on the car. I started the afternoon by using the disk sander to sand off the edge of the floorboard to be in the same plane as the sides of the racer. It went much easier than I had expected, but it made a tremendous amount of dust, covering everything in the garage with a fine white powder. I really don't enjoy this part of the process because the dust makes my skin itch. John and Linda Hondros arrived shortly after 2 p.m. They entered the garage where I was working and I greeted them just as the air compressor decided to kick on making conversation next to impossible. Eventually the noise stopped and I was able to acknowledge John and Linda and meet their two sons, Morgan and Hobie. A few minutes later their daughter and her friend arrived. I told them what I was doing and gave them a little bit of background on what makes racers go fast. I told them that I was sorry but because I had recently glued the chassis to the body, there wasn't much to look at because the car was all "buttoned up".

Joe and Susie wandered out to the garage and I introduced everyone to them. John asked Joe a lot of questions and made some positive comments about the car and the way it was taking shape. We mentioned that since they live close by, they can feel free to drop by anytime they are in the neighborhood to check on our progress. After some chatting among ourselves Joe proudly showed John and the kids his workshop. John asked about our wheels so I went inside to retrieve one of them. Everyone was amazed at how lightweight the wheels are and I mentioned that Joel built them for us from Kevlar and aluminum. Then everyone went inside where it was cooler and Joe showed John his family room with the pictures of Annie's '76' car while Joe talked about how the car lost its last heat but probably would have won, if he had been allowed to add weight to bring the car and driver up to the 250 pound limit. Joe seemed to be "in his element" being able to reminisce about his past Derby exploits. It was nice to see him sharing with everyone especially so that he and John could get acquainted. After about an hour, John and his family decided it was time to go. I mentioned to them that Joe probably wouldn't be able to attend the race in Akron and that I was going to investigate how to get Joe internet access for the week so he could be as much a part of everything as possible. John suggested that his IT guys at the college could hook up a wireless connection and possibly be able to broadcast the race directly to Joe's house on Race Day. He told me to contact Erin in the marketing department at Hondros to get some kind of press release to showcase Joe's story with the Derby and to contact the head of the IT department regarding the ISP connection.

When they had left, I returned to the garage and we mixed up fiberglass and added a strip to the bottom sides of the racer to cover the joint between the body and the floorboard. I also used the left over fiberglass resin to recoat the rest of the racer body, smoothing it as much as possible. Finally I cut out the axle openings in the body and checked the axle fairings I had made, only to discover that I will need to remake the trailing edges for the rear axle because they are too short to extend from the body to the ends of the axles.

**Monday, 07/04/05: Independence Day.** I played 9 holes of golf at Turnberry in the morning and it took 3 hours and was hotter than hell! About 1 o'clock I decided to leave with the idea of working on the racer. I got to Joe's about 3 o'clock and started sanding off the fiberglass at the bottom of the racer's sides and then I used the grinder to sand off the sharp edges in the fiberglass and smooth up the surface of the car. That took about an hour. Joe said the next thing to do was to apply body putty all over the racer body and then sand it with the air sander. I used more than a quart of body filler and got the car about half done, not counting the floorboard area. At that point it was about 5 p.m. and I decided to quit because I was out of body putty. I'll finish tomorrow and then we can cut the cockpit opening out and make the windshield.

**Tuesday, July 5, 2005:** I worked my insurance job until noon and then went over to Joe's to work on the car. I applied body putty to the remainder of the car and then sanded off the high spots using the grinder and some 50 grit sandpaper. Joe inspected my work and suggested that I use the air sander that glides back and forth, followed by the DA [dual action, I think] sander [which spins in an out-of-round motion] using some much finer grit paper. When I had finished, the car was ready for painting. Tomorrow I plan to cut the cockpit opening, build the helmet rest and install the axles to get it ready to go to the painter. It is almost finished and in my opinion, it really looks smooth and well streamlined.

**Wednesday, July 6, 2005:** I arrived at Joe's house shortly before 11 a.m. and found him to be upset with Susie over a blown fuse [circuit breaker]. I think he must have woken up in a bad mood. With minimal help from me he managed to get the power back on while I walked out to the garage to get started on the car. My plan was to cut the cockpit hatch cover and an access hole for the front axle, but I wasn't sure how to get started because I wanted the hatch cover to be long enough for Drew to easily enter the car, and I wasn't sure how long it needed to be. A few minutes later Joe came outside and he and Susie appeared to be having a disagreement. Joe proceeded to get in Susie's new car and drive off. I heard him backup quickly, saw him swing the car in a tight arc and then heard a loud "Bang!". As I watched, I saw that Joe had backed up into a large tree by the driveway. I hustled over to see if he was OK, only to have him 'wave me off' and say that he was 'OK'. Then he floored the car and sped out of the driveway. I could see the concern in Susie's face and I tried to reassure her that he would be just fine, but my thoughts echoed her concern for his well being, too.

A couple of hours passed and Joe wasn't back yet. Susie came out to the garage to talk with me and see what progress I was making on the car. I explained that I needed Joe's approval before I'd be comfortable enough to cut out the cockpit opening. [I only wanted to make one cut and do it right the first time, so I was willing to wait until Joe came home.] I passed the time by enlarging the axle openings in the rear end so the axle would fit correctly. Then I measured and cut the axle fairings so they would be flush with the wheels on one end and even with the body on the other end.

A little later I looked up from my work and saw Dale Jones driving Susie's car, with Joe riding in the passenger's seat. As I approached the car, I learned that Joe made an error in judgment and the police stopped him for driving the wrong way on the freeway! Apparently he got confused and turned onto the exit ramp of the freeway. The police stopped him and called his daughter, Eileen, who came to get him. I later learned that Joe may lose his driving privileges but at least he didn't get a ticket today for his error in judgment.

When things settled down a little later Joe showed me how big to make the cockpit opening and I cut it out. I cut it on an angle using a saber saw blade that I had ground down to a thinner thickness using the grinding wheel and I made the cut on an angle so that the piece I cut out wouldn't fall back into the hole. I also cut an access hole above the front axle. Then I cut a strip of aluminum, drilled and tapped a  $\frac{1}{4}$  20 hole in it and drilled a  $\frac{1}{4}$ " hole in the access cover to accommodate a flathead  $\frac{3}{4}$ "  $\frac{1}{4}$  20 bolt which had a hex hole in its top. I struggled to get the access cover to fit because the cover wouldn't sit flat into the hole I had cut into the top. Joe suggested gluing two wide lathe strips at both ends of the hole to serve as a ledge to set the access cover on. I then adjusted the aluminum strip so I could remove the cover or not, as needed.

I spent the next few hours trying to build a shelf to accommodate the helmet, so it would sit at the proper angle for our driver to be able to see clearly. I made a horseshoe shaped arc but it didn't meet my scrutiny so I made another one until I got it right. Joe came outside, examined my work and suggested that he would have done it a different way. I was feeling frustrated and I must have let my feelings show because Joe suggested that I was tired and why didn't I go home and get a fresh start tomorrow.

About the same time, Drew's father, Len, called me to tell me about Drew's schedule for the next few weeks. Drew has more things to do than anybody I ever met! [He's at Boy Scout camp this week, then he returns home Friday evening and will be attending tennis camp on Saturday for a week.]. Len conceded that he could have Drew available for a fitting of the racer and to make some practice runs. We decided that we would meet Sunday morning at Joe's house at 9 a.m. and then again the following Friday evening and Saturday to make some practice runs at Big Run Park, prior to my departure for my vacation to Puerto Rico the next day.

After all of that frustration, I took a deep breath and instead I decided to press on, while Joe returned to the house.

I finished the axle fairings and secured the helmet ledge with 2 long wood screws and some glue. Then I decided that I had done enough for one day and I called it quits. Joe seems to think that we can finish the car tomorrow: there is minimal work to do on the hatch cover and we can finish the helmet ledge and build the headrest. I plan to call Jeff Johnson at Dodds' Bodyworks tomorrow to see if I can drop off the racer on Monday evening so he can have the body painted. Also, I need to contact Cyndi Donaldson tomorrow at Hondros regarding ordering the caps for all of us. [Well, it's after 11 o'clock and it is time for bed.]

**07/08/05:** I spent time this afternoon constructing the headrest out of 5 layers fiberglass cloth and resin. Susie and Dale helped me to apply it to the racer over a cardboard cone that Joe showed me how to make. We fastened the cardboard to the racer body with duct tape and taped the helmet with more duct tape to fasten it to the body on the supports which I made. Once the fiberglass was nearly set up I used a putty knife to remove the headrest from the racer body. Then I trimmed it with the bandsaw. Tomorrow I will use body putty to secure it into

place and then add more body putty to give it the proper shape. I'll also add the hinge to the hatch cover, finish sanding the body and determine where and how much weight to add to get us to the 300 lb. limit.

**07/10/05:** This Sunday I once again skipped church in favor of working to complete the racer. Len and Drew stopped by for about 2 hours [en route to a tennis camp he was to attend for the week] so we could fit him into the racer. Good news and bad news: first the good news: he fit into the car OK; now the bad news: he has grown 3 or 4 inches and we've decided we need to extend the brake pedal forward several inches. They left and I spent the rest of the day cutting down the existing pedal and fabricating a new one. Susie said she would take Joe to see Dan Dever in the morning to get everything welded together.

I spent most of the day completing the hatch cover and I had to redo the process a couple of times until I found a way to make the hatch cover fit properly. I ended up using spring-loaded hinges like the ones my folks used to have on their breakfast table. They worked fairly well and I was able to smooth the front edge so that there was no gap because of the hinge placement. The highlight of the day was when Joe came to inspect my work and he said, "You did good!". That comment really made me feel good because I had spent almost all day fitting the hatch cover into place and sanding it smooth.

**07/11/05:** I taught at Hondros until 5:15 p.m. and then changed my clothes and headed for Joe's house. The evening was spent trying to redo the ledge inside the headrest that Drew's helmet had to fit onto. It seemed like no matter what I did, it just wasn't going to workout. Finally I asked Joe for some advice and he showed me how to wrap plastic wrap around a dowel and use it to work the body putty into some tight places in the car. As I recall, I left late that evening after Joe helped me to glue the headrest to the rear of the car. We used body putty for glue and decided to let it set up really well overnight before beginning to sand it to the proper shape.

**07/12/05:** Tuesday evening and once again I went to Joe's after a long day of teaching. I spent the evening sanding and filling the body of the car with special attention given to the headrest. My greatest challenge was the fact that the more I sanded the more I had to re-putty to the point where I could see that this could be a never ending job. So I decided that it was good enough and I masked the axle holes off with some cardboard and duct tape in preparation to transport it to Dodds' Body Works for painting on Wednesday evening. I remember getting lumber from Lowe's to build a crude carrier for the car and then taking it back over to Joe's house about 11 o'clock. Sandy thought it was too late for me to do that but I told her Joe wouldn't mind and I left in spite of her protest. Joe met me in his driveway after I pulled into his dark yard and left my headlights on. When he saw what I was up to, he said to just put everything into the garage. I did and then drove home.

**07/13/05:** I called Jeff Johnson at Dodds' early that morning to see if he could wait for me to bring the racer to his place that evening about 6 o'clock to get it painted. Jeff said that would be no problem. After class I drove to Joe's and hastily loaded the racer onto Joe's pickup truck using the carrier I had made. Sandy helped me and we drove to Dodd's, only to discover that Jeff had forgotten I was coming so he wasn't there. In fact no one in authority at the shop was there. We decided to just leave the racer there and some guys helped us to put it on top of a rack which they had there. I vowed to call Jeff in the morning to make sure he knew the car was there and that he would have it painted for me in enough time to pick it up from him on Friday.]

**07/14/05:** I called Jeff that morning and he apologized for missing our meeting. He reassured me that he would be able to have the car painted and we could pick it up on Friday. I spoke to Cyndi at Hondros and made some preparations to order the decals for the racer. We also opted to order some hats with our logo and the Hondros logo and they should be ready for me to pickup when I get back from my vacation in Puerto Rico. That evening Sandy and I took our neighbor, Rico, out to dinner for pizza at Cici's and to see the Fantastic 4 at the movie theater.

**07/15/05:** Jeff had told me he had picked out a really bright and pretty yellow color for the car but I didn't know what to expect the paint job to look like and I worried all day if everything would turn out OK. I met Sandy and Rico at Dodd's around 6 p.m. to pickup the car. The racer looked GREAT and Jeff helped us to load it onto the carrier in Joe's truck. I asked him how much to make the check out for and he told me to "Just forget it." I asked again and he said since it was for a kid's soap box racer, he would just donate the paint and the labor. The he told me not to put anything on the car referring to Dodds' so I said I could do that and I thanked him for his generosity. Rico and I drove slowly to Joe's, staying off of the freeway. We quickly unloaded the racer and then I took him home. I will meet with Len and Drew tomorrow and we will see how Drew fits into the car and make sure that he can apply the brake to stop the car.

**07/16/05:** I told Len that I would meet him and Drew about 10:30 a.m. at Joe's. Around noon I had managed to put the axles into the car and Len helped me to line up the axles. We put wheels onto the car and placed the car in the driveway. I showed Drew how to open the hatch and he slid under it and assumed his racing position in the car. He seemed to have plenty of room for his feet but no matter how hard he pushed, the brake would not reach the ground.

Len took it upon himself to toil with adjusting the brake cables to make the thing work properly. In the meantime, Drew talked on his cellphone and lent a hand or two when Len would ask him for some help. They went home around 6 o'clock and at that point the brake still wouldn't work but Len guaranteed me that he would fix everything while I was on my vacation. We decided that what we needed was a larger sized pulley at the top of the brake pedal.

I went inside and talked with Joe for a few minutes. After I explained what we thought we would do, he put on his slippers and we walked out to the garage to look for some 2" pulleys. Joe found 3 of them so I called Len to tell him that I would try to fix the brake tomorrow. Joe went back into the house and I decided to stay a few minutes longer to apply the decals to the racer. The process was tedious, especially with the larger sized Hondros decals but I got all of them onto the car and it looks REALLY GOOD! I took some pictures and headed home. It's now 2 a.m. as I am finishing this entry and I am going to bed. Goodnight.

**07/17/05:** Around 2 p.m. I made it over to Joe's house for the final time before leaving for Puerto Rico. Joe was having one of those days when he just sleeps and he slept until I got ready to head home, about 5 o'clock. I took the brake pedal out and reworked the pulleys by replacing the current ones with new ones that are about twice as big. When I tried it out, it seemed to be jamming because only one of the cables was attached, and it really wasn't working any better than before. I called Len to tell him the news and to get his agreement that he would have the brakes working when I have returned and he would be responsible for getting the lead weights put into the car. Then I taped the axle fairings on the front axle, bent the forward hatch cover so it would fit a little better. Then I summoned Joe and took pictures of him and Susie beside the car. Then I told Joe "not to die" before I got back and I drove off for home to pack for my trip to Puerto Rico. It's all out of my hands for now.

**Saturday, July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 3:30 p.m.**

We landed at Port Columbus after a week in Puerto Rico where I hardly thought about the racer at all. [Yeah, right.] Now that I'm back I'm very excited that Derby Week is quickly approaching and I hope that the car is ready to go to Akron. Sandy and I drove to Hondros College in the hope of retrieving the team hats I had ordered. When I got there the office was closed and no one on the staff was around. I decided I will return early tomorrow instead with the hope of better results. I spoke to Len and we decided to meet mid-afternoon tomorrow. We still need to adjust the brakes for Drew and install the weights. I'm not very happy right now that the brake is not yet finished because Len had assured me that he would take care of it while I was in Puerto Rico and the fact is that he hasn't. Now he tells me that it works but is in an awkward position for Drew so that it hangs down under the car a couple of inches prior to Drew applying the brakes. [I'm not pleased about this at all.] Sandy and I drove home and I did laundry while she unpacked everything from our vacation and I got ready for my 'next one' in Akron.

**Sunday, July 24<sup>th</sup>:** This morning I took my car to the car wash and then drove to Hondros College to get our hats. Great News: Cindi Donaldson left them at the front desk for me. When I opened the box, they were a different color than I had expected. I thought they would be beige but they are actually white, which is OK. The logo on the front for WR Racing is pretty cool and the Hondros logo on the side looks really nice. As I was driving to Joe's I called John Hondros to tell him that I had picked the hats up and that I had left 2 of them at the front desk for him and Linda. I was surprised when he said he didn't think they would be at the race. Apparently he had a family vacation planned earlier in July but when he had his heart catherization, they decided instead to reschedule it for Derby Week. He said he didn't think they would be spending it in Ohio but he assured me that there would be some people from the 'corporate office' in attendance [probably Neil Collins, I'm guessing].

I drove to Joe's and when I got there, his daughter, Terri, met me to say that Joe hadn't yet awakened. She was fretting about some Rx for her mother, Susie, which had been misplaced. I told her that I could really empathize with her because of what I had gone through with my Dad and stepmother as they became more frail. At that point I sat down at the card table I had installed as a work station for Joe to use Sandy's computer to follow the race. I showed Terri how to navigate around the website and set up an email box for Joe using his Insight Road Runner high speed ISP. Joe came into the living room and I said "Hello" and I asked him to sit down so I could demonstrate how he can 'surf the web' and follow our racing action next Saturday. About 11:30 I left to go home to pack, with the plan to meet Len around 2 o'clock to finalize preparations for taking the racer to Akron. Dave Garberson called me while I was packing and I had to cut our conversation short because I felt so rushed to get all my stuff together so I could meet Len at 2 p.m.

Around 1:30 p.m. I had the car packed and I was ready to leave for Joe's to meet Len. I stopped at Kroger's to gas up the truck and went through Wendy's to get a bite to eat. Just then my cellphone rang and it was Len telling me that although it was 2 o'clock, he and Drew were just getting started to go pickup the trailer and head to Joe's. I wasn't thrilled but I told him I was running late too so I would see them later when they got there.

Once I got to Joe's house I decided that I would go ahead and install the lead weights that Joe had poured for us to use. My first attempt at drilling a hole in the lead was a complete disaster: the 5/16" drill broke and the piece I was trying to hold with my hand on the drill table flew out of my control and sailed into the waste basket scattering sawdust and wood shavings everywhere.

[Not a good start.] I decided to cut the 2 round weights that Joe had poured into two pieces of about the same weight and mount them on either side of the tiller bar just in front of the dampening adjustment. Next I found that my electric drill was too long to use to drill the right size hole in the floorboard. I located the battery powered drill only to discover two problems in using it: it didn't put out enough torque to drill the holes and I couldn't locate the key for the drill. Then I discovered that I could use Joe's pneumatic drill to accomplish the task. After much effort I learned how long to make the 5/16" rods so that I could screw them into the floorboard to a sufficient depth and fasten the weight securely to the floorboard. Joe and Terri came outside because he was wanting to show me how to check the alignment with the tool gauge he had made but I had to tell him that I wasn't ready for that piece of his advice just yet and he returned to the house. I checked my watch and discovered that it was after 4 o'clock and Len and Drew were nowhere in sight with the trailer so I called them. Apparently they were having difficulty getting the trailer but said they would be there as quickly as they could. Needless to say, I wasn't the least bit pleased.

I finally was able to reach Rick Locklear and learned that his plan was to leave Pittsburgh and arrive at our hotel around 7 p.m. when we planned to be there, too. Len and Drew eventually arrived and both were helpful to me in getting the weights drilled and mounted onto the floorboard plus Drew was able to get into the racer and apply enough pressure on the brake pedal to stop the racer. [Unfortunately, his feet have to be 'on the brakes' while he drives so the brake pad hangs down a couple of inches below the bottom of the floorboard instead of starting flush with the bottom, as it should. At this point, I really don't care and I told Sandy by phone that he will be going fast enough that it won't matter!

We pulled out onto the highway at 7 p.m. to LEAVE for Akron. I called Rick and he told me that he was within 30 miles of Akron so I told him to just relax and we would be there in a couple of hours. He said he planned to go to TGI Fridays to get some dinner for himself. Prior to leaving Joe's for Akron, Terri was kind enough to take a group picture of Joe, me, Drew and Len. Joe had some last minute advise for Drew, telling him to watch out for anyone who might try to tamper with our car. [Joe thinks everyone in Derby is out to get him]. We told Joe we would do our best and I said I would be contacting him each day with information about our adventures via email. I told him that I would be expecting him to follow the race results and that we would do our best to make him proud. He shouted encouragement to us as we left his house to make the trek to Akron.

The trip to Akron was uneventful. [Thankfully.] We were only able to drive about 60-65 mph because Len was pulling the trailer so I had to drive slower than I normally would have liked to so that we could stay together. We finally arrived at the hotel about 11:30 p.m. and decided to meet in the morning at 7 a.m. to head out to the track to drop off the car.

As we unloaded the car, we met some people in the parking lot who are from Rochester, NY. It turns out they have 3 entrants: one in Superstock, one in Stock and one in the USC class, too. As I carried our wheels into our room, one of the parents [I think his name may be Steve] was admiring our wheels so I made a point of telling him where we got them and how much they cost. He seemed impressed. We'll know if it was worth it once we see our car run.

I took a shower and when I came into the room Rick was already asleep. I decided to bring the diary up to date and it is now 1:38 a.m. and I am once again wrapping things up. I hope tomorrow is the start of a week of fun for all of us here in Akron. We all want to win but I'm actually just glad that we made it here to participate. I'll be pleased if we just do our best.

**Monday, July 25, 2005:** Rick, Len and I arose early and drove the racer to Topside to unload it into the tent where it will stay all week. A guy named Butch chided us when we told him we were from Columbus, Ohio and somehow he got the idea that we had gotten lost and that it took us 3 days to reach Akron.

We weighed in at 298 lbs. The car weighed 181 and Drew tipped the scales at 117 pounds. When we brought the wheels to Topside a lot of people asked us about them and we got a lot of inquisitive looks at the racer. All of the attention made us all feel very good about our chances. Our chief competition seems to be the car from Sarasota, Florida. We passed inspection just fine and Tex Finsterwald said he remembered me from many years ago when he sponsored John Fenczak from the Flint, Michigan area. We had a nice chat. I also met Ken Morrow face to face and we shook hands. He asked about Joe and I told him that Joe wasn't able to make the trip but that he would be following the race via the internet.

I told Rick about my idea to build a fairing around the brake to better deflect ground air and reduce the drag. We decided to buy some Styrofoam in the form of a 5" diameter cone and our plan is to cut the cone lengthwise and mount one section in front of the brake with the other section trailing to the rear. We plan to fasten it to the bottom of the floorboard using black colored duct tape. Hopefully we can still make ground clearance and this will work for us. We'll know for sure tomorrow morning when we go back to the hill.

We talked with Joe by phone a couple of times today so Rick could better understand how to zero out the dial indicator on the alignment gauge in preparation to check our axle spindles for trueness. Joe said to make the toe-in 0.001 and to set the camber for 0.001 downward, also. I called Joe when we learned that we are one of only two teams that have decided to run on the larger sized wheels. The other one is the 'carbon-fiber' car and a casual look at their wheels seemed to indicate that they are made differently from ours: they appear to be spokes covered with a black Mylar, but from a distance they look remarkably like ours.

I became concerned when I could not locate the covers for the wheels which will cover up the access holes for inflating the tires. I looked in my camera bag where I thought I had remembered stowing them, but they were not there. Then I looked in the truck, located them on the console near the front seat, and breathed a deep sigh of relief.

Joe seems to think that our wheels will be enough of an advantage for us to finish 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup>. We'll see. I'm still a little concerned about Drew's ability to hold a line on the track, go fast, and stop the car once he passes the finish line.

While Rick lightly sanded the axle spindles with Emory cloth, removed the wheels and prepared the car to be put 'to bed', Drew and I walked down the hill to the starting ramp. I sense that Drew is excited about running the car but hopefully he will feel confident and in control as he makes his practice run on Wednesday. I think we are all starting to imagine the possibility that we *might be good enough to win this thing* if we don't make any mistakes and if we get a little bit of luck on our side.

Monday evening all of us [including Rick, me, Drew, Len and Debbie] drove to Canal Park in downtown Akron to watch a baseball game in which the Akron Aeros lost by one run to a team from Harrisburg, Pa. It was muggy night but I think we all had a good time. Len decided to stay to the end of the game so he wouldn't miss anything. We drove back to the hotel to go to bed and here it is nearly 12:30 p.m. and I'm making the final entries in this diary. Time to turn in.

Tomorrow I will probably need my strength and my wits about me. Today was really fun day for all of us. Goodnight!

**Tuesday, July 26<sup>th</sup>:** We got up early and drove to Panera Bread which is about 7 miles down the highway, in attempt to use their Wi-Fi service. The wireless internet connection promised by our hotel is terrible. We have to go to the lobby to access it and even then, the connection is not strong enough to surf the web, plus I can't send any emails.

On the way to the track we stopped to get some Gatorade and pop and finally rolled into Derby Downs about 11 a.m. We went to the bottom of the hill to get Drew's name badge replaced [they had his last name spelled incorrectly] plus I wanted to get our tickets to the race on Saturday. As we left the Derby office, we noticed a group of people under a tent where a meeting seemed to be going on. We drove to Topside, parked the truck and walked over to check out our racer. Rick wanted to attend the alignment clinic which was scheduled for noon so we asked some people where it was being held and we learned that it was being held in the tent we had seen --- at the bottom of the hill! So we strolled down to the bottom of the track and listened to the speakers talking about cross bind and proper alignment. It was interesting to me, but Drew sat in the back and appeared to be bored.

After the clinic was over, we walked back up to Topside to begin the laborious process of adjusting the brake cables so that Drew could apply enough pressure to the pedal to stop the car. Rick was relentless in his mission to replace the original brake cables with two new spliced pieces. [If I ever build another car for this, the top will be completely removable so we can get to the controls a lot easier. The access hole I had put in the top was way too small to easily make the needed repairs.] We soon discovered that we needed extra cable clamps so I asked one of the officials where I could get a few of them. He directed me to the parts counter and the volunteers there were just great about helping me to get what we needed. [The only downside was that each cable clamp cost a dollar and I felt like I had purchased the equivalent of 5 peas for \$5.00. Those were awfully expensive cable clamps in my opinion.] After about 4 hours of laboring under the Topside tent, Rick was able to get the brake to work. Next we tried to check the alignment of our axle's spindles only to discover that the right rear wheel bearing was permanently stuck to the axle spindle and no amount of coaxing nor prying with a screw driver could get it to budge. Rick finally decided just to leave it in place rather than risk damaging the bearing and still not being able to get it off of the shaft. He sprayed the spindles with WD-40 and sanded each spindle with Emory cloth to remove the surface corrosion that had appeared.

We soon discovered that with the bearing affixed to the spindle, there was no accurate way to check our caster or camber. Our gauge was too wide to fit between the bearing and the shoulder of the axle so Rick decided to file it to a thinner profile in the hope that we could make the gauge work with the bearing still on the spindle. He checked the spindles for up and down alignment and we decided that the axle trees would prevent us from checking the toe-in. Rick said that he knew what we would need to do to bring our axles into horizontal alignment, but we couldn't bend the axle without modifying a bending tool that Joe had made for us. What was needed was to bore out the barrel of the bending tool to a 5/8" diameter hole. We needed a 5/8" drill bit to get the job done.

Accurately measuring the alignment required us to put either the front or the back 2 wheels on the spindles and place the other axle onto a jig. We checked both axles and then I announced that I wanted to lay the racer on its side to attach the brake fairing to the bottom of the floorboard. We set the body on some milk cartons and removed all of the wheels. I think I was

the first person to notice that the right rear wheel bearing had come off the spindle when the wheel was removed. We couldn't believe it and Rick and I 'high fived' to express our joy.

Next we rolled the racer over on its side so I could attach the brake fairings to the bottom side of the floorboard. I made the fairings out of two slices from a Styrofoam cone and used black duct tape to fasten it to the car. We think that we'll have the required 3" of ground clearance and the fairings should make the brake pad a little more streamlined. Without the fairings, the brake would act like a big scoop on the bottom of the car.

The schedule calls for us to make a practice run tomorrow afternoon and then to take our first timed run at 8 a.m. on Thursday morning. When we finally finished the repairs it was every bit of 6 p.m. and except for the security guard, we were about the only people there. Sweaty and exhausted, we grabbed the wheels and returned to our hotel to freshen up for the evening. That evening, Drew, Len, Rick and I all had dinner at Friday's. Our original plan was to go to Damon's where we could get the benefit of a 10% discount because of the hotel where we were staying but Damon's proved to be "CLOSED".

After dinner Rick and I talked about our strategy and some of my fears regarding how the car might perform. We'll know tomorrow if our racer has what it takes to be competitive with the others.

**Wednesday, July 27th:** We agreed to meet at 8:30 a.m. for breakfast since our trial run wasn't scheduled until 2 p.m. but when we opened the draperies, it was drizzling outside. We figured they wouldn't let anyone run if it was raining so we decided to hang around the hotel during the morning and work on our wheels. Rick cleaned each of the bearings with WD-40, blew them dry with a can of compressed air and re-lubed them with a little bit of WD-40. I put the valve covers on the air access holes and then I balanced each wheel using large paperclips and black duct tape.

After the attention we were getting on our wheels I decided to call Joel Olson to ask him I could sell a few sets of wheels for him and his brother. I explained that people were asking about them and asked him if he would pay me a commission for each set I sold. I also asked him what his asking price would be. He said, 'Sure. We can work something out.' Then Joel said he needed to check with his brother and that they would call me.

I called Ken Morrow, our division's director for his assessment of the likelihood we would take trial runs today. He made the call that we would take our trial run on Thursday morning instead.

Rick, Drew and I went back over to Topside to fine tune our car and Ken met with all of the teams to tell us some great news! He said we could practice on the hill Thursday morning between 8 and 11 and that our timed runs would all be held on Saturday, throughout the day. The weather remained drizzly so we walked down to the Heisman Lodge to check out the display of former SBD World Champions' cars. Rick and I reveled in the moment of remembering our own Derby experiences and correlating them with the cars on display. Drew seemed a little distant but hung with us to look the cars over. The upstairs portion of the lodge housed racers from the first 30 years of the SBD. It was temporarily closed because some people from ESPN were taking photographs and taping for a program.

Sometime during the afternoon, Rick fastened our car number [904] to the top of our racer [right in front of the cockpit cover]. Then he placed an SBD decal on the front of Drew's helmet [for 'luck']. He and Drew waxed and polished the racer with some waterless wax and I took our

blankets and covers to the trailer to store them. Ken requested that each racer have its racing wheels mounted on the axles prior to the public viewing of the cars that evening at the 'Topside Show'. We decided to take our wheels with us and bring them back just before the show began.

At 6 o'clock the Topside Area was packed and it appeared for a moment that they were not going to let us in. I persisted and the gatekeeper relented and admitted us to the Topside Area so we could get to our car. We put on the wheels and positioned ourselves next to the rope around our cars where I talked with many people about our racer and how it was built. It was a lot of fun for me to be on the 'other side of the ropes' to tell our story and to let people know about all of the hard work that went into the successful completion of our entry.

After the Topside Show had drawn to a close, Len drove us back to the hotel area and we went to Benigan's for dinner, getting back to the room about 10:30 p.m. Our plan for tomorrow is to arrive at the hill about an hour before practice begins so Rick can install the extra weights we purchased yesterday at a scrap yard in Akron.

Hopefully, we can start Drew about 2/3 of the way down the track on his first run and build his confidence with each successive run. Well, it's nearly 1 p.m. and we have to get up in 5 hours so it's time for me to get in bed. Goodnight!

**Thursday, July 28, 2005:** We got our wakeup call at 6 a.m. with the idea of meeting Drew at 6:30 to get to the track by 7 o'clock. Neither Rick nor I was ready to get up when the alarm went off, but we got up anyway. We knocked on Drew's door and told him we were going downstairs to grab some breakfast. He surprised me by saying, "I already had breakfast. I got up at 5:30!". We all went down to breakfast anyway and I ate my usual fare of sweet rolls and orange juice. Then we stopped by the room to get our wheels and head for the track to practice.

We arrived at Topside a little after 7 a.m. and I stood around while Drew and Rick put the wheels on the axles and inserted the cotter pins. I was nervous about how Drew's practice run would turn out because we had never had the car on any track prior to this morning. We stepped outside the tent for a moment after Ken told us what the plan was for today so we could see the trailer setup for returning the cars to the top of the hill. Our wheelbase was too short to put our car on the trailer without removing the wheels so we opted to carry 2 milk cartons up and down the track so we would have a place to set the car down and remove the wheels.

We began to push the car across the Topside area and toward the brink of the hill. Drew walked alongside. Rick walked backwards and supported the nose and I "hooked" the rear axles and walked the car down the hill. As we lowered the car something disturbing began to happen. The car started arcing to the left and we had to repeatedly lift the nose to bring the car back to the straight ahead position. We stopped the car above the starting gate and I sent Drew to the top of the hill to retrieve a tape measure. Then we measured both sides of the wheelbase and surprisingly, the distance was the same. This just wasn't making any sense. As a few other cars took their place in the starting blocks we pondered what to do. If the distance on both sides were the same, the car should track in a straight line, although it was possible that the body was not being presented directly into the wind. Rick and I decided to put Drew in the car and send him down the hill, but we opted to start him about 2/3 of the way down the hill in the center lane of the track to give him room if the steering failed to hold a straight-line or became uncontrollable.

Rick held the car in place and I lifted the cockpit cover so that Drew could get into the racer. He slid into the car just like we had practiced many times over the last few days. I checked his

helmet to be sure that it fit into the headrest properly, asked him if he was ready and told him to relax and make only minor adjustments in the steering if the car began to drift to the left side of the lane. Then Rick released the nose of the car, stepped to the side to allow it to pass and we yelled encouragement to Drew as he began to silently roll toward the finish line.

Rick looked at me and asked, "Is your heart beating as fast as mine is?". "Yeah", I said expressing my fear and hope that the trial run would turn out OK. We focused our attention on Drew as he piloted the car and stayed very close to the centerline most of the way down the track. Then we saw him cross the finish line and apply the brakes. The car stopped within about 30 feet of the finish line and both of us were beaming with joy! Our fear about whether or not the brake would hold was dissipated by his solid performance.

Rick began to sprint down the track toward Drew at the bottom of the hill while I returned to Topside to await the return of our racer. Rick and I spoke briefly on the walkie-talkie and he told me that Drew was smiling from ear to ear. He then said that the speed for our car was clocked by radar at 18 mph and we both agreed that that was pretty good for as low on the hill as he had begun his descent.

A few minutes passed and there was no sign of my teammates or the car. I paged Rick on the walkie-talkie and he said they had returned the cars to the pavilion at the starting line, rather than to the Topside area. I walked toward them and Drew was still grinning. He described his first run as both smooth and quiet. He said he was so focused that he didn't remember much else about the run except that it was a "lot of fun!". We asked him if he felt confident enough to make another trial run for practice and he said that he would like to start from the top of the hill so we pushed the racer over to the top of the hill and prepared to settle it into the starting block.

He and I lined up the left track of the wheels on a line parallel to the centerline of the track. I lifted the cockpit cover and held it as he slid into his driving position. We snapped his helmet into the headrest and I reached up under the car's bottom to be sure that the brake would clear to starting gate as it left the line. It was in fine position so I asked Drew if he was ready and he said, "Yes."

The starter said, "We go on the count of three. Ready, one, two, three. Then the starting gate fell into a pit with a metallic thud and the racer began to roll silently away again. From my vantage point at the rear of the tent behind the starting line he appeared to be driving very straight and holding a good line. This time he waited a few seconds before applying the brake yet he still stopped safely well before the end of the runout area. Rick and I exchanged positive comments over the walkie-talkie regarding Drew's driving. Only his 2<sup>nd</sup> time down any hill with this car and already he was driving like a veteran.

This time I walked down to the bottom of the hill and Drew and I rode back up to the pavilion area together. Rick decided to walk. He said the exercise was good for him.

For Drew's 3<sup>rd</sup> trial run we sent him down once again in lane 2 and once again he drove as straight as an arrow. When he and Rick returned to the pavilion area we had nearly decided to take the car back up to the Topside area and stow it away until race day. One of the officials commented that there was only an hour and 15 minutes left to practice and I suggested that we let Drew go down one more time in Lane One since that was the first lane he would be driving in on Saturday. My thought was to give him the experience of a different lane so he could judge if there was any significant difference between them.

On his last practice run in Lane 1 he stayed right on the line all the way down the track. It was his very best run of the day. At the Pavilion area we talked about what was different and he said the car pulled a little to one side but he was able to correct it without any problem.

The transport crew shuttled our car to the Topside area and Rick began to check the spindles for caster and camber to see how true he could make the wheels track. After about an hour of tweaking he was able to get the measurements within the tolerances he wanted. Thomas Shurr of Sarasota, Florida was kind enough to lend us an open end wrench to make the adjustments go that much easier. Rick's original thought was to apply the same amount of pressure to the front and rear spindles, but he discovered that the front axle had more flex than the rear axle so he had to redo the rear ones again. Finally after a couple of hours the measurements met his standards and we retaped the axle fairings to eliminate the depressions made in the tape by the adjustment tool. Rick also checked the toe-in as best he could and stated that he felt it was within acceptable tolerances.

Lastly, we applied black tape to the front hatch cover to make it more streamlined and applied a smidgeon of tape to the leading edges of the cockpit cover with the same goal in mind. We removed the wheels, put the car to bed, gathered all of our tools and returned them to the trailer. Then we walked to the truck and headed for the hotel.

I was extremely tired but we headed for Chili's to get some lunch. On the way when we got to the restaurant I stopped and called Joe to tell him about our results for the day. He was enthusiastic and he sounded really happy to hear how well things had gone. I put Rick on the phone to discuss the axle spindle tolerances and after they talked, Rick said he felt even more confident about the way we have the car set up. Joe then told me for us to have a good time and I said I would contact him after each heat so he could follow our progress.

After lunch I was still very tired but I told Rick that I was going to go back over to the hill to erect our tent in a good spot for our fans to watch from on Race Day. We decided that we could get over there and back in about an hour and still have a little time for a nap. Rick said he would go with me and I was very grateful for his company.

We drove over to the hill, and set up the tent on the east side of the track about midway between the top and the bottom. Then we drove back to the hotel and I took a quick shower while Rick took a 20 minute 'power-nap'.

At six o'clock we were expected downtown at a social function for all 9 of the entrants in our division, as well as teammates and supporters. Len drove and the five of us took a wrong turn but finally arrived at the Spaghetti Warehouse for dinner and discussion. After the dinner, Ken Morrow, thanked us all for participating in this year's event and discussed the format for us of Saturday's competition. We will race with the same 3 cars in each of our heats and we are the only ones with the 24" wheels in our group.

I was initially confused by the heat sheets they passed out but when one of the other team's members explained it to me, it made much more sense. We will have our first heat following the first round of rally stock champs. Because of our number, we will race in heats 902, 905 and 908. The first trip down the hill we will be in lane 1. For the 2<sup>nd</sup> trip we'll be in lane 3 and in the 3<sup>rd</sup> heat we will race in lane 2. After all cars have completed their runs [27 in all] the car who posts the fastest time in ANY ONE lane will be declared the 1<sup>st</sup> place winner. That car is then removed and the remaining car with the next fastest time will be awarded 2<sup>nd</sup> place. Finally from the remaining 7 cars, the 3<sup>rd</sup> place finisher will be the car with the next fastest time.

I asked Ken Morrow if I could have another name badge for Len because we wanted him to take Joe's place on Saturday and serve as a handler with Rick at the bottom of the hill. He said he would have another badge made up for Len. My plan is to take Joe's badge to him on Friday afternoon when I drive home to pickup Sandy and bring her back to Akron for the race.

I called Sandy from the restaurant to ask if she was OK with that and said, "Sure!". Then I called Joe's house, talked with his daughter, Eileen, and asked her if she would make sure that Joe was at home tomorrow around noon so I could stop by and share some pictures with him. She said he would be excited to see me.

After everyone had finished their meals, Ken invited the crew chiefs from each of the 9 teams to speak to the group. Their backgrounds and associations with the Derby were all pretty similar. Most of them had sponsored kids who either placed highly at the All-American, or else won it and a few of them sponsored cars that had won multiple times. We were the only 'rookie' team that had never had a winner at the All-American. When it came my turn to speak I told everyone about my background and Joe's and I gave credit to Rick and to Drew. I also introduced Len and said that he would be taking Joe's place on Saturday because Joe's failing health would not allow him to see the race in person. Rick said that I had presented our story very well.

When we came back from dinner, both Rick and I were 'fried'. My plan was to work on this journal and Rick wanted to take one last look at the wheel bearings to make sure they were clean and smoothly working. He picked up a wheel, gave the bearing a spin and it immediately ground to a halt without spinning very much at all. All of the wheel bearings seemed to have the same affliction. Tired though he was, Rick decided to go to the local Wal-Mart to get some lacquer thinner to clean out the bearings. I suggested that we lube the bearings with a tiny drop of fishing reel oil, as we used to do in my Soap Box Derby racing days, as a kid. He came back to the room and asked me which of two solvents I felt that we should use. I opted for the one that was NOT lacquer thinner. He proceeded downstairs to the parking lot to clean out the bearings. When he brought them up to the room one at a time, the bearings spun much more freely. I told Rick that we shouldn't say anything to Drew and just let him judge if the cleaner bearings make any difference in his elapsed times. We both think that our car should have run much faster than the cars with 12" wheels and that the gunky bearings make be the reason. Wouldn't it be great if this change was the difference between average performance and top-notch blazing speed?

I called Drew's room to ask if Debbie had located Joe's name badge. After some discussion in the background at the other end of the phone, Debbie said she had it and Len would bring it down. Len also brought two handwritten notes: one from Debbie and one from Drew, which I had suggested that Drew write to tell Joe of his appreciation and his feeling today of racing at Derby Downs.

When Rick had cleaned all of the wheel bearings we discussed what effect this change might make in our performance on Saturday. I said it would be great if we picked up 5 seconds and Rick brought me back to reality by noting that if we could shave just ONE second off our time, we would be the fastest based on the reported times given out today.

Well, that's about it for tonight but I must mention that my nephew Tim Dehnart is planning to attend the race on Saturday and videotape our performance. Goodnight. It's 11:54 p.m.

**Friday, July 29<sup>th</sup>:** Today is kind of a “free day”. There is nothing on the schedule that requires our presence at the track so I am driving back to Columbus to bring Sandy back with me to Akron and Rick is going back to Pittsburgh to get his fiancé, Susan, for the same reason. I drove past the track to make sure our car was still OK, to drop off some Emory cloth at the trailer and to be sure that the canopy Rick and I put up yesterday hadn’t been moved. Everything was A-OK.

I took the scenic route home [Rt. 62 through the rolling hills and fields of Amish Country] and it was a pleasant trip, although not as quick as driving on the interstate highways. I stopped at Joe’s house around noon to chat with him about the ‘gunky’ wheel bearings and to get some last minute advice.

Joe said that we need to run the bearings ‘dry’ without any form of lubrication. [He said that he had previously told me this, but I didn’t remember him saying so]. Joe thinks that the dry bearing may lower our times by as much as 4 to 5 seconds. Wow! This is sounding better and better all of the time. Joe then asked me, “hasn’t everything that I predicted about the car happened?”. I said, ‘Yes’. And he said, “Then why don’t you believe me when I tell you that running the bearings dry is what we ought to do?”. Then he told me about a bearing on a satellite that was orbiting in space at 100,000 rpm’s and he said that if it could run dry without burning up, certainly the bearings in our Derby wheels would be just fine, as well. I said, “OK! Then that’s what we’ll do.”.

I tried to engage Joe in some conversation about the race tomorrow but when I’d think about him leaving for Flint, Michigan on Sunday all I could do was get choked up and start to cry. Joe’s daughter, Eileen, asked me if I had allergies that were making my eyes water, and I said “No”. The more I thought about not being able to see Joe after today, the sadder I got. Finally, I told them both that I needed to go outside for a few minutes and I walked out to the garage.

Everything in the garage brought back memories of all of the time spent working with Joe on the car. Truth be known, Joe was a great mentor to me and he had become a close personal friend and I wasn’t ready to think that I wasn’t going to be able to talk with or go to visit him because he had moved away or because he was dying. So I started to acknowledge my grief by crying. After I had been gone from the house for a few minutes, Joe must have started to worry about me because he sent Eileen outside to find me to see if I was all right. I told her about my feelings and she said she understood – that all of Joe’s friends and family members were feeling the same way.

I pulled myself together [barely] and went back inside to say ‘Goodbye’ to Joe. As I did so, I once again started to cry and Joe motioned for me to sit beside him on the couch, so I did. As I did so I broke down crying and I reached across and we hugged each other. I told him how much our friendship had meant to me and that I regretted that we didn’t have more time to spend with each other. Joe told me reassuringly that everything was going to be OK and that he would “be around” yet for a little while. He said that it was his opinion that this was going to be ‘his year’ and that something big was going to happen for him. After a few minutes I was able to compose myself and I told Joe that I would leave to go get Sandy to take her back to Akron with me. I promised that I would call him the next day after each heat and tell him of our progress. He wished me good luck and told me to have fun!

As I walked through the kitchen to get into my car, Eileen turned to me and thanked me for ‘caring about her Daddy’. I told her it was easy to care about him because he was a great person, once you got to know him.

Sandy was nearly packed when I finally got home. We loaded everything into the truck and drove to Akron to meet up with the rest of our team. When we got to the hotel, I called everyone and we agreed we would meet later that evening at Bennigan's for drinks and appetizers. I wanted to meet Rick's fiancée, Susan, and I wanted Rick and Susan to meet Sandy. We did meet about 9 p.m. and then returned to the hotel to get a good night's rest prior to leaving for the track early the next morning.

### **Saturday, July 30<sup>th</sup>: Race Day at last !**

Our plan was for Len, Drew, Rick and me to ride to the track together, and take the lawn chairs and cooler down to our tent alongside the track. The girls planned to bring themselves and a few other things and come to watch the race. We arrived about 7:30 a.m. and made preparations for the race. Of the 3 of us, I was probably the most uptight and Len kept teasing me unmercifully. I had a lot of things on my mind, though in reflecting on the morning, I can't think of anything right now that I should have been concerned about. Drew was probably the loosest of us all. And Rick was steady and confident, telling me to relax and let's just have fun today.

We opened up the trailer and took the folding chairs and cooler down to the tent. Then we made our way to the Topside Area where there were hundreds of people milling around. I managed to get someone to let us into that area and we carried our wheels with us to our car. Once there, Drew and Rick polished the axle spindles and secured the wheels in place with cotter keys. I just stood around and tried to stay out of the way.

Eventually Ken Morrow came to talk with all of the teams and he said that they would be moving our racers down to the Pavilion Area, next to the starting ramps. We managed to load our racer into the back of a pickup truck having decided that we would leave the wheels on the racer all day long, instead of taking them on and off after each heat as we had done on Thursday during the practice rounds. The rule was that once we got to the Pavilion there would be no changes done to wheels, except for repairs in case of an accident.

Once the racers were in the Pavilion, each team was asked to have their car and driver weighed. The CIX car was 5 pounds heavy and they were asked to remove their weight, which they did. When it came time for us to weigh, we came in right at 300 pounds. I thought this was an advantage because some of the teams combined weights were 298. We set our racer on some milk cartons and Drew and I waited for our heat to be called. Rick and Len went to the bottom of the hill to await Drew's trip down the hill.

Len had given us walkie-talkies to communicate with but all day long I had difficulty getting Rick or Len to use them and that increased my frustration level in not knowing what was going on.

After the Rally division's first round it was our turn to race. We raced in the second heat in our division and Drew's first heat had him driving in Lane 1. I was tremendously excited but I tried not to show it to Drew. All night long I kept thinking about the secret that Rick and I shared about the wheels: Joe said that we'd shave between 1 and 5 seconds off of our times and the prospect of setting the track record on Drew's first trip down the hill seemed very possible.

As I held the cockpit cover for Drew I reassured him to take his time, relax and have a good ride. I snapped his helmet into place, closed the cockpit cover, smoothed the tape over the cover and checked to make sure that the brake was in its 'up' position and even with the bottom

of the floorboard. Then I asked Drew if he was ready. When he said, 'Yes', I patted the top of the car, wished him good luck and stepped to the rear of the starting ramp. The official said, "We start on 3. One, two, three" . . . and then the starting plate fell into the pit with a dull metallic thud. The racers were off . . . neck and neck for about half way down the hill. Then it began to happen. Drew's racer began to fall behind the other two cars. He stayed right on the line and drove an excellent race but clearly he finished quite a bit behind the other two cars. Our time for the heat was 28.183 seconds while the winning time in our heat was 27.087 seconds.

I was floored. How could this happen? We were supposed to win this thing hands down. Aren't big wheels supposed to be faster than standard Soap Box Derby wheels? Isn't a short wheelbase supposed to be faster than a long one?

I conferred with Rick and we both were flabbergasted. Neither one of us could figure out what had happened. I tried to be positive and rationalized that we had 2 more tries and maybe they would go better for us. I called Joe and he didn't know what to say either. I told him we would just have to try again and hope for better results.

We checked our times and learned that we were not very competitive. There really wasn't anything that I could think to do to affect our speed. Joe called me to tell us to be sure to wipe off the tires before our next heat and suggested that we rebalance the tires with wheel weights on both sides of the wheel.

Later in the day, Drew had another opportunity to go for the record. This time we set him up in Lane 3. As before, Drew drove a great race and his time for the heat was 28.065 but we still finished third in this heat, too. The other two times for our heat were 27.085 and 27.540 and both of those cars were running 12" wheels.

In our third and final heat of the day, Drew once again drove as straight as an arrow but once again finished a distant 3<sup>rd</sup> with a time of 28.241 seconds.

The winning cars of the Ultimate Speed Division both had the same German pneumatic tires that had garnered first place last year at the inaugural event. They were 12" wheels and rumor had it that they were running on liquid nitrogen. Whatever they were doing, they had the fastest wheels out there that day.

The winning team was from Texas and known as the Last Timers. Their winning time was 26.953 seconds. The car that finished in 2<sup>nd</sup> place was known as the DC Derbaticians and they were from Maryland. Their winning time was 27.085 seconds. The car that came in third was the Talon Racing team which was the carbon fiber car that also sported the 24" bicycle tires much like ours. They were from Florida and their winning time was 27.320 seconds.

When the Ultimate Speed racing was done we met at our tent and watched the last few heats of the All-American. Then we packed up our stuff and headed back to the hotel. Before returning to the hotel I suggested that we pick up the racer in the trailer and haul it back with us so we wouldn't need to come back by the track in the morning to get the car. Unfortunately there was a car parked right in front of the trailer and without moving it there was no way to get the racer into the trailer. We searched for the driver in vain. Then I got the 'great idea' to honk the horn on the car to attract attention so that the driver would return and move his car. About all I succeeded in doing was to anger and embarrass Rick and Len so I sauntered off in search of the driver.

When I finally returned a few minutes later, the driver had already returned and moved the car. Len and Rick managed to hook the trailer to Len's SUV so we could haul everything back to the hotel.

There was an awards banquet downtown but none of us felt much like attending so instead we just decided to go out to dinner together. We were all tired but being together that last night was a really good bonding experience for all of us and I felt kind of like we were one big family.

Tomorrow our adventure will be all over and we'll all get up early and go our separate ways.

**July 31<sup>st</sup>, 2005:** It is Sunday morning and I've gotten up early and gone down to the lobby for some breakfast and to read the Akron Beacon-Journal for news of the race. It occurred to me that pictures of the heats would be available at Derby Downs and I decided that I would like to head over there to see if I could get overhead pictures of our heats so I could better determine our finishing positions relative to the other cars we raced. I told Sandy where I was going and that I would be back before it was time for us to leave to go home. Then I drove over to Derby Downs where I went to the track office at the finish line.

Someone there told me that photos would be available at Topside all day so I drove to the top of the track and parked my car. In the Topside Area they had hung posters containing hundreds of pictures of the previous day's racing action. I took a note pad, searched for photos of our car and made some notes as to which photos I might like to order. Then I stopped by an area where they were selling Soap Box Derby caps and shirts and I bought a couple of red caps at a discount. I kept one for myself and gave the other to Drew.

Then I returned to our hotel, packed our stuff for the trip home and we left with Len driving the trailer and Sandy and I following in our pickup truck. The plan was for Len to meet us at Joe's house where we would store the racer for a few days, until I would either take it to Hondros College for display or else disassemble it and store it in my basement until next year.

**August 2, 2005:** I met Drew and Len at Joe's house around 5 p.m. with the idea of taking some pictures of the racer with Drew in it. Surprisingly, Drew seems to have grown a little because he was having some difficulty squeezing into the racer easily. I wanted to see how Drew's knees fit under the cowling and I can see that if we were to extend his feet further forward, we could make the frontal section of the racer smaller and I think that would improve the performance of our car.

**August 6, 2005:** I'm sitting in front of my computer finishing this diary and reflecting about the experience of it all. In retrospect, I can see that my dream of winning the Ultimate Speed Challenge was a lofty one and that it may not have been realistically accessible this year. Nevertheless, it was fun to try! And while we didn't win, we didn't finish last, either. We ended up being able to say that we built and drove the 8<sup>th</sup> fastest gravity powered racer in the world in the 2005 Ultimate Speed Challenge. No one else can make that claim. And our performance was far greater than those other people who never even managed to try!

The value of this experience to me was the ability to develop stronger friendships with all of us who were involved in this 'great adventure'. I feel as though I've gotten to know everyone on our team a whole lot better. I've learned that I am capable of more than I thought. I've learned that teams with a common goal can accomplish much more than individuals by working together.

It is often said that there is no "I" in team and that certainly applied to our team. Without Joe Remenicky's engineering abilities and tremendous knowledge of what makes a Derby car fast, we wouldn't have even entered the Ultimate Speed Challenge because I believed from 'day one' that few people alive today know more about the winning ingredients for a soap box racer than Joe. I approach Joe because I felt he had the knowledge [properly applied] to put a first place entry on the track. And even today, I still believe that to be true.

Rick Locklear's commitment to drive several times from Pittsburgh to Columbus since the first part of June to provide technical support and construction help to us proved invaluable to me, and I can honestly say that without his active role and focused determination, I would have had a much harder time finishing the car. He always seemed to be there at just the right time for me. There were several days when he left the Pittsburgh area at 4:30 a.m., spent 12 hours with me working on the car in Joe's garage [whose temperature was probably over 100 degrees] and then drove home again in the same day. The day we cut our floorboard out of a 90 pound slab of rock maple nearly 2" thick with a bandsaw made me really appreciate his physical strength and professional attitude to work through a challenge and get the job done the right way. Rick's quiet persona and inner strength helped me to get through quite a few stressful times last week as we worked fervently to make the car 'race ready' and safe for Drew to drive in preparation for the main event on Saturday.

Our driver, Drew Sendek, performed his role flawlessly. Prior to our unpacking the racer at Derby Downs in Akron, he had never even made a test run in the racer. In fact [to be perfectly honest] Rick and I weren't totally positive that the brake would be able to stop the car once it got going. Drew had 4 practice runs on the Thursday before the race. And he drove as straight as an arrow in all 4 runs! Then on Saturday he continued to drive 'right on the line' in the 3 timed heats which we ran. In Rick's opinion and mine, we couldn't have chosen a better, more focused driver than Drew. He performed exactly as we had hoped.

Drew's father, Len, was great about filling in as a car handler on race day and with his effort to obtain a trailer from the Brice UMC Boy Scout troop, the process of transporting and housing the racer and all of our tools was made much, much easier.

I also want to give credit to many other people, who helped make this dream of mine a reality. One is my wife, Sandy, who encouraged me to do whatever was necessary to complete the car. Her belief in me and in the importance of me doing whatever was necessary to get the job done helped me keep my focus on our goal whenever I began to doubt the wisdom of my decision to take on this project.

Another is Joe's wife, Susie, who helped me to fiberglass the racer on a scorchingly hot afternoon in the backyard of their home. Her enthusiasm for the project and dedication to helping to ensure the completion of the car helped me to maintain my focus on our goal of building a competitive entry.

I also want to thank my nephew, Tim Dehnart and his brother, Andy, for attending the race in Akron on Saturday and agreeing to videotape our participation in the Ultimate Speed Challenge so that Joe could have the opportunity to view the race, even though he wasn't able to be with us to see it live. Tim, thanks so much!

Another key individual is John Hondros. When I presented John with the opportunity for Hondros College to sponsor our racer, he was intrigued enough to say 'yes'. And because he believed in us enough to finance our dream, his belief helped me stay true to my commitment to finish the project through to the end.

What you might not realize is that when I went to John to ask him for sponsorship of our racer, my plan was to have Joe build the car --- not me ! All I wanted to do was to arrange the funding, handle the promotion and be there in the winner's circle at the finish line with Joe and the rest of the team to get our first place award.

But as God would orchestrate our story, that was not to happen. Instead, through no fault of his own, Joe's history of heart problems caused him to be in and out of the hospital several times since April 29th. So his lack of physical stamina prevented him from spending much time on the construction of our racer, even though I built it at his house. But the good news was that Joe was able to coach me so that I could complete the construction process with his guidance. That wasn't my initial plan, and the car would have been much more professional in appearance had Joe been healthy, but we had to accept the situation and work through it.

I now realize that the real benefit to me was that through it all I was able to develop a wonderful friendship with Joe Remenicky. And in taking time to get to know Joe as a friend [not just an 80 year old guy who built fast Derby cars] I discovered that under that crusty old military persona there is a caring, kind and generous man with a heart of gold for those that he cares about. I'm extremely grateful to have gotten to know him and I consider it a real privilege to be one of his friends !

Finally let me say that I learned a lot from the whole experience and if I were to sum it up in one phrase, it would be this: **The journey was much more important to all of us than the final destination.** It would have been nice to win but even though we didn't win the race, we'll all still cherish the memories of the good times we had as members of the WR-Racing Team!