



Mutually beneficial relationship

Tourism officials tout emotional, historical ties during meeting with Smith

By Josh McCann

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Local and state tourism officials met with Bruton Smith Wednesday to emphasize the mutually beneficial relationship between Lowe's Motor Speedway and the region.

By defining the county as a cradle of motorsports, business and tourism leaders here have helped to provide the track with substantial marketing momentum, said DeSales Wagster, president and CEO of the Cabarrus County Convention & Visitors Bureau.

Should Smith carry out his threat to rebuild the complex elsewhere in the Charlotte region, it would likely be harder to market the track without as much established infrastructure or as many enticing emotional and historical ties, Wagster said.

Wagster's agency devotes much of its nearly \$2 million budget to promoting the county under the slogan "The Racing Side of Charlotte," and many race teams and hospitality businesses have gravitated to the track's current location.

"It would take years to have that really come to life" elsewhere, said Wagster, whose agency has spent about \$20,000 on a multimedia advertising campaign to "save our speedway."

Smith, CEO of Speedway Motorsports, has voiced concerns that the community may have taken his business for granted after Concord leaders blocked his plan to build a drag strip on SMI property near residents' houses.

Two days before City Council is scheduled to revisit that decision, Smith told Wagster and state tourism chief Lynn Minges that Cabarrus still has competition for his investment.

During an hour-long presentation, Wagster discussed the possibility of creating a welcome center near the track that could help capitalize on the corridor's growth as a hub of tourism and economic development.

Tourism officials have previously discussed that concept, but Wagster said she is now looking for land that could accommodate such a facility and a possible adjoining museum.

She also:

- Showed Smith a binder full of examples of local leaders' efforts to bolster the speedway.
- Played four minutes of video footage featuring testimonials of local workers who benefit from and support the track.
- Delivered about 3,000 of the 11,000 postcards her agency has collected from local residents and race fans around the country.

In the future, further marketing efforts will increasingly focus on boosting attendance at pole night and Busch Series events, which draw more local traffic than the track's NASCAR races, Wagster said.

Both Wagster and Minges said Smith was genuinely interested in hearing them out.

Neither got a sense of whether Smith was leaning toward staying or moving, but Minges said the county's array of nearby attractions and related businesses likely makes for an attractive overall destination.

"It's a combined product," Minges said. "I see it as a total package and a part of what makes the entire offering in Cabarrus County a success."

Smith could not be reached for comment.

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