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Rockers catcher enjoying time in Green Bay, Hawaiian style  
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## Area stock car driver still racing after six decades

BY JANELLE FISHER  
INTERN

GREEN BAY – What started as a trip to the races with a friend more than 60 years ago has turned into a decades-long stock car racing career for Jerry Muenster.

At 81 years young, he is still racing – and winning – at Shawano Speedway.

Muenster said he entered the world of stock car racing after attending a race with a friend in 1960.

“A friend of mine and I

went to the stock car racing in De Pere, and we enjoyed the race so we thought, ‘We gotta try this someday,’ he said. ‘So we joined our money and got \$200 together and bought a race car.’

Muenster said he originally started out as the mechanic, while his friend drove the car in races.

“We started racing and he was the driver, his name was Doug Nelson,” he said. “I had always been the mechanic, and so we started doing that. We were having a really good time with it.”

Muenster said after Nelson was involved in an accident and couldn't race, he got his first opportunity to get behind the wheel.

“He got injured in a truck accident so he was laid up,” he said. “I came up to see him in the hospital and he said, ‘Well, I can't drive for a while, we've got all this money in the car, so you're going to have to drive and win some money back.’ So that was it. That got me going. That following weekend

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Jerry Muenster, 81, celebrates after winning the modified stock car race at Shawano Speedway last month – his first win in quite a while. Photo courtesy of Make It You Photography



### The show must go on

Despite a little battle with Mother Nature, the Festival Foods' Fire over the Fox fireworks lit up the downtown Green Bay skies Monday, July 4. The event was delayed slightly by the rain, but got back on track a couple hours later. Submitted Photo

## De Pere's Thompson settling into superintendent role

BY HEATHER GRAVES  
EDITOR

DE PERE – De Pere's new top guy, Christopher Thompson, has one week under his belt and said he's excited to build on what retiring Superintendent Ben Villarruel built – “strong schools providing a quality education.”

“I have a lot of respect for Ben,” he said. “Ben did an amazing job with the De Pere School District. What I am looking for is how can I

continue to support the endeavors that Ben has been championing this entire time? Then looking to continue his legacy, but continue to grow in new ways where I think it would help the district to do so.”

### Background

Thompson grew up in South Milwaukee, a suburb in the lower part of Milwaukee County.

After high school, he attended St. Norbert College (SNC) where he majored in



Christopher Thompson

music, vocal and general music education, history and broadfield social science.

“I was able to teach all of those,” he said.

While attending SNC, Thompson said he became very involved in the De Pere community.

He started his education career as the high school choir director and music department chairperson for the Oak Creek-Franklin

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## NWTC bilingual cohort program provides new opportunity for Latinx students

BY HEATHER GRAVES  
EDITOR

GREEN BAY – Having the opportunity to attend college is an accomplishment many strive for to help broaden career options.

However, attending college isn't always in the cards for everyone.

“As bilingual, we speak some English, but sometimes not much, so sometimes you think maybe you won't be able to do anything after high school,” Lucio Prieto, a recent graduate of Northeast Wisconsin Technical College's (NWTC) bilingual cohort.

Prieto, along with 10 others students, recently graduated from NWTC's newest approach to educating its Latinx students – a bilingual cohort program.

“We were looking for ways to increase our Latinx population student body,” Joe Barker, NWTC electro-

mechanical instructor and one of the instructors of the bilingual cohort, said. “So,

we had a roundtable discussion with former students

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Lucio Prieto, left, and classmate Manuel Martinez both graduated from NWTC's first bilingual cohort, both earning their industrial maintenance certificate. Submitted Photo



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**DRIVER**  
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I was racing.”  
Muenster said it wasn't long that he realized he preferred driving over being a mechanic.

“Once I drove, I liked that a whole lot better,” he said. “But I still like the mechanical end of it. I still built the cars and put motors together and all that stuff for myself and my son.”

As he got further into the world of racing, Muenster said he was fortunate enough to have a mentor, Earl Ness, to help show him the ropes.

“He kind of took me under his wing and showed me what to do and how to act,” Muenster said. “After I passed him up for the first time he said ‘Well, you're on your own,’ and he just laughed, but he still helped me.”

He said he's enjoyed the opportunity to serve as a mentor to younger racers over the years as well.

“(There were) several through the years that I helped out because they're nice kids,” he said. “I like to help the youngsters.”

**A race to remember**  
Muenster said one of the most memorable experiences in his racing career happened in 1994, when he qualified for the Super National Race.

“We went to the Super National Race, down in Boone, Iowa,” he said. “We had like 300 modified cars trying to qualify for a 33-car field, and I qualified.”

After 50 laps, Muenster said he finished in fourth place – the best he's placed at a Super National Race.

“They started the race three cars wide and I finished fourth in that race,” he said. “That was my best shot at the Super National. That's a big deal for IMC (International Motor Contest Association) modified.”



Jerry Muenster and his friend Doug Nelson pooled together \$200 in 1960 to buy a stock car. Submitted Photos

**Still racing**

After more than 60 years of racing, Muenster said he still enjoys the thrill of racing – still hitting the track in Shawano every Saturday night during the summer.

went wild helping him celebrate his win.

“I thought the crowd was gonna tear the roof off the grandstand,” he said. “My family was all there, and they were all excited.”

It's the support of the racing community – both fans and other racers alike – that Muenster said is a big part of what's kept him coming back for more.

“It's mostly the camaraderie among all the people in the pits and the fans,” he said. “The fans come down after the race and we talk, and I've met more nice, interesting people there than anywhere. I really enjoy that part of it. And I love the competition, and the speed and racing overall.”



Jerry Muenster said he started out as a mechanic, but once behind the wheel, he realized he enjoyed driving stock cars more than he liked working on them.

He even won a race last month – his first win in a while.

“I finished first and that qualified me for the main event and got me a good starting spot,” he said. “So that was fun. It's been a while since I won.”

Muenster said the cheering race crowd that night

Muenster said even off the track, he has acquired quite a few fans that love to show their support, which keeps racing fun.

“The fans get so involved,” he said. “I've got fans now that are contacting me on Facebook and they're getting so excited over the races, too. Some of them I never knew before, and it's just really fun.”

Even as a seasoned veteran, Muenster said races can sometimes be a bit daunting.



Currently, Jerry Muenster races an IMC (International Motor Contest Association) modified car at Shawano Speedway.

“It's a little nerve-racking sometimes making sure you've got all your ducks in a row, because once you're on the track, it's too late to fix anything” he said. “It's still enjoyable, no matter what, and my grandkids come and help me get prepared – getting in the car and the helmet and all the safety equipment.”

granddaughter that races, Lauren Muenster, and she races in Beaver Dam and at 141 Speedway.”

Muenster said one of the things he loves about racing is that it is a great family activity.

“Racing in general is just good for family,” he said. “It keeps the families all stuck together and it's good for young people.”

Muenster said it isn't just race day that pulls families together – but rather all the work leading up to them that makes those races possible.

“The kids are in the garage working on the cars on the weekends and during the week,” he said, “and they've got their little buddies that come over, and it's a really nice group of people overall. I think it's good for family relations.”

Now 81 years old, Muenster said he has no plans of stopping anytime soon.

“I plan on (continuing racing) as long as the guy upstairs lets me,” he said. “I'm happy I can still do it. People think I'm crazy at this age, but I'm only 79, plus two. 79 is my race car number.”

**A family affair**

Though holding the title of the oldest racer in his family, Muenster can't say he's the only one anymore.

He said he has family members that race at venues all over the state, carrying on the legacy he started six decades ago.

“My son also races at WIR (Wisconsin International Raceway) and with me at Shawano,” he said. “I've got two grandsons, JJ and Jerry Vanderloop, and they're both racing the modifieds, plus JJ races a late-model in Kaukauna at WIR. They both race at the Outagamie Speedway and sometimes at Luxemborg. Their dad, Jay Vanderloop, he's really got both feet in it. I also have a



Jerry Muenster said he loves the competition, speed and camaraderie the racing world offers.

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