50 years of the Derby impacted countless lives

The AMSOIL World Championship Snowmobile Derby has been impacting snowmobile racing, the local economy and countless lives for half a century, now that the 50th event is in the books.

It was incredible to witness the past champions, Derby queens, fans and racing families who returned to Eagle River for the golden anniversary celebration — proof of the lives that have been touched by the oldest snowmobile racing event on the planet.

Tens of thousands of race fans returned to the famed oval, some living out a tradition among family and friends and some just curious to see what had become of the racing event they witnessed years ago. And they weren't disappointed.

The weekend started with Friday Night Thunder and the most massive fireworks display in Derby history. Fans watched a video on the big screen that featured the past champions, all the way back to young Stan Hayes of Crandon and George Gensler of Three Lakes in 1964 and 1965, respectively. Past Derby queens were introduced to a cheering crowd, and Gov. Walker offered his support.

Fans saw Malcolm Chartier of Marine City, Mich. win his first world championship. He grabbed the pole position by winning Friday Night's Sweet Sixteen event, and he dominated Sunday's title event by leading all 30 laps despite the pressure of three restarts and a hard-charging Jordan Wahl.

This incredible event was started by the Eagle River Rotary Club, which soon gave the lead reins to the larger Eagle River Lions Club. The Lions turned the event over to the Decker family in 1985, and for 27 years they have recruited sponsors that not only kept it alive, but made it possible to transform the AMSOIL Derby Track into the country's only world-class racing facility built exclusively for snowmobiles. We thank them all.

Local, state and international media coverage will again propel the historic Derby and little Eagle River into the international spotlight — which is one of the reasons this newspaper covers the event with such depth and passion. We treat it like a big deal because it is a big deal.

January is toughest time to get input on ATV?routes

As the Three Lakes Plan Commission and Town Board study plans for all-terrain vehicle (ATV) routes in varied locations, we encourage them to allow time for public input now that the map has been made public by the newly formed Three Lakes Nicolet ATV Club.

The month of January is peak for missing snowbirds and seasonal residents who might have an opinion, pro or con, on opening miles of residential streets and rural town roads to ATV users. They need to be heard lest anyone be accused of sneaking the plan through.

The routes in question are slow-traffic town roads, which should be more favorable than highways. However, those property owners who will be affected most on Town Road X, Reed Road, North Big Lake Loop Road, Col. Himes Road and Chicken in the Woods Road, need time to comment.

Behind the editorial ‘we’

Members of the Vilas County News-Review editorial board include Publisher Kurt Krueger, Editor Gary Ridderbusch and Assistant Editor Anthony Drew.__PUBLIC__