



Everything Jersey

## High roller motor club \$100K

by Chandra M. Hayslett

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Like most boys, Bill McMichael of Franklin Lakes grew up with an affinity for cars. But his weren't the Matchbox kind.

His father was a car dealer.

"He always came home with new cars, and they were always the fanciest cars," he said. Now, after years in the health-care industry, he's getting a chance to return to his childhood affection for cars -- especially race cars.

McMichael leads a group that plans in July to open the Monticello Motor Club, an invitation-only race resort in the Catskills. The development is aimed at Fortune 500 executives, Wall Street financiers and anybody else in the region with a taste for speed -- and a wallet deep enough to afford the \$100,000 membership fee and a \$7,500 annual payment.

For that, members will get a chance to drive automobiles ranging from Ferraris and Porsches to a Formula One race car as fast as their personal skills will allow, McMichael said. The Monticello development is one of several that have sprouted across the country aimed at people, mostly men, who would rather hit the gas pedal than a five-iron.

"We're taking an area that has a big need and demographic and we're raising awareness of the lifestyle," said Lee Brahin, owner of NJ Motorsports Park in Millville, which features two tracks. "(Racers) want to learn how to race in a safe environment, and there's a tremendous marketplace for that."

McMichael said the passion for cars "is born to you."

"I grew up in a one-bedroom apartment in Pearl River (New York), but I've always dreamed of owning fancy cars," said the 40-year old, whose first car as a teen was a Datsun 280Z.

When his pharmacy company, Trinity HomeCare, was sold in 2006, McMichael, 40, wasn't sure of his next move except for one thing: "I didn't want to retire."

The success of his business and the proceeds from the sale allowed him to foster an interest in racing.

In 2001, he started attending racing schools, and that same year, McMichael bought his first high-performance vehicle -- a 360 Ferrai Spider. Three years later, he added a Ferrai Stradale, and in 2005, he bought a Ferrari 575 M.

By talking with other race enthusiasts, McMichael said he realized there was a void for drivers looking for an exclusive motor club.

The racetrack, 90 miles outside New York City, sits on 175 acres. The 4.1 mile track was designed by Brian Redmond, winner of 77 races in 12 countries, and Bruce Hawkins, an architect of "next-generation" racetracks. McMichael declined to say how much the track will cost to develop.

There will be a five-star clubhouse -- complete with restaurant, bar, locker room and conference rooms -- and a fleet of vintage and high-performance cars, including a Formula 1 car for members to drive. McMichael said Monticello is the only track in the world that will offer a Formula 1 race car.

McMichael said he's hoping members feel what he does when racing -- challenged, but exhilarated.

"I feel the competitive juices boiling away. It's the sound of the car, the ability to maneuver the car and chasing the perfect circle around the track, and you never really get to it," said McMichael, who's been married 11 years to his wife, Laura, with whom he has three girls, Emily, 10, Olivia, 9, and Abby, 6.

Slightly more than 200 miles south sits NJ Motorsports Park, which will feature two tracks: The Lightning Raceway, at 1.9 miles, is also expected to open in July, and the Thunderbolt Raceway, at 2.3 miles, opens in August. Membership starts at \$10,000.

Neither Brahin nor McMichael say they are in direct competition with one another, specifically because their business models are different. "We wanted to do something different from other tracks, which are rental driven. They sell time on their tracks, which is a good model, but it's not what we wanted. We wanted an exclusive feel, a Four Seasons experience," McMichael said.

Brahin seconded that assessment.

"They're a country club that relies on their membership, and we have an assortment of spectator events," he said.

Monticello members will have access to their track a minimum 200 days a year, while NJ Motorsports members will start with 20 days this year and increase to 30 days next year.

In addition to track access, McMichael said his track caters to residents in New York and the northern part of New Jersey, while the Motorsports' clients will probably come from southern New Jersey and the Philadelphia area.

There's room for 500 members at Monticello. McMichael would not say how many members have already been accepted, but said, "There's superior demand, and we've had hundreds of inquiries and applications processed."

Members so far are men between 35 and 55 years old. No women have applied, but they are welcome, McMichael said.

Anyone is welcome to fill out an application to become a member, but ultimately membership is by invitation only.

"The dream is to provide our members with the feeling that they are on their own racetrack," he said, adding all drivers will be rated by senior instructors. "They can jump in their race car or street car and get right on the track."