

RACING.....

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Formerly known as Gateway International Raceway, the facility became World Wide Technology Raceway when World Wide acquired the corporate naming rights in 2019.

With the latest announcement the track will be the only one in the U.S. to host the premier series for each of the three top racing organizations: NASCAR, INDYCAR and NHRA.

Francois credits years of relationship building. In particular, he mentions Madison Mayor John Hamm and the cooperation of city government in getting established. He also mentions state representative Hoffman and St. Clair County Board Chairman Mark Kern for state and county assistance that over time have made the venue attractive. More recently, Dave Steward, founder and chairman of World Wide Technology, and John Bommarito, of a major sponsor, Bommarito Auto Group, have championed the facility's potential.

"It was just a seamless effort to show a cohesive group that wanted to work together and ultimately bring a Cup race to the Metro East," Francois said. He said there was not really one pivotal moment that made the difference, more like efforts over several years.

He added: "This is the perfect example of a public-private partnership that came together over a decade. The Cup Series is the pre-eminent racing series in North America."

Francois said the track's success at being able to stage INDYCAR, NHRA drag races and the NASCAR Camping Truck Word Series was a major factor. Adding the NASCAR

Cup Series makes the track unique.

"The fact that we're able to put lots of fans in the stands and create a vibrant atmosphere really makes a difference. We really were attracting more fans each year and I think that caught the attention of the people in Daytona," Francois said.

Few entertainment options are attracting more fans these days than professional racing, he said.

A recent survey showed more than 500,000 "avid NASCAR fans in the market. Another reason they chose to come here," Francois said.

An economic development study done by The Rawlings Sports Business Management Department at Maryville University projects a \$60 million impact from the NASCAR event. That number include 34,000 room nights for guests and teams, \$12 million in meals, and an additional 700 jobs for World Wide event staff.

"It's like having a World Series in Illinois every year," Hoffman said.

"All the NASCAR employees alone account for over 2,000 people (at the event)," Francois said. "This is a transformational opportunity for the Metro East. We can leverage this elite event to make great changes for the first time in a generation for this community."

He added: "Done right, it will be repeated annually."

National support is already starting to take shape, but the key is local support, Francois said. He'll be working within the community to educate people on just how significant the event will be.

The Cup Series is supported by "deep relationships with Ford, Chevrolet and Toyota." And next year, the "next genera-



World Wide Technology Raceway.

tion of NASCAR vehicles will be making their debut, adding to the interest.

NASCAR fans are exceptionally loyal and traveled among venues, spending multiple days at each.

"The eyes of the country will be on us," Francois said.

Between now and next summer, several "fan facing" issues are being addressed, including new camping and new parking areas, some infrastructure work and safety upgrades, some part of an overall, \$15 million, ongoing plan, some of which is being done because of the new level of attention.

"We're in good shape because we've been making improvements all along," he said.

Meanwhile, the state of Illinois has long-range plans to build a new road exiting the Stan Musial Veterans Memorial Bridge onto Illinois Route 203 that can serve the raceway traffic, Hoffman said. The road is funded and in the five-year plan of the Illinois Department of Transportation, which could open the surrounding area to future development.

The road project was proposed long before the recent NASCAR announcement, Hoffman said.

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