



Charles Page with Big Oh Balloons prepares to take a camper on a hot air balloon ride.





**VICTORY
JUNCTION
GANG**

Feel Your Heart Race

a visit with the
VICTORY JUNCTION GANG

by Lynne Brandon

with photos by Chris Fletcher



Amber, a frequent camper at Victory Junction, enjoys fishing with a camp counselor.

From the heart

As Kyle and Pattie Petty will attest, dreams really do come true. In June 2004, they opened the Victory Junction Gang Camp in honor of their son, Adam. In May 2000, Adam died tragically while doing what he loved best – racing. It was Adam's vision of building a camp for chronically ill children, a place where they could have fun and play like normal children, that inspired Kyle and Pattie to open a camp in North Carolina.

In 1999, the Pettys experienced Boggy Creek Gang Camp in Florida, one of Paul Newman's Hole in the Wall Gang Camps. Adam had asked where the money was going to help the children and suggested that they needed to build a camp in North Carolina, Pattie recalls. Soon after, in 2000, Kyle and Pattie decided to make the camp a reality in honor of Adam's memory. Today, Adam's vision is alive and well at the Victory Junction Gang Camp in Randleman.

Building their dream

Once the Pettys decided to build a children's camp, their first challenge was finding a location. The problem was solved when Richard and Lynda Petty generously donated 72 acres. Surrounded by a beautiful hardwood forest, the colorful state-of-the-art facility has a racing theme that captures the look and feel of a race track using bright primary colors and checkered patterns.

The second obstacle to making the camp a reality was funding. With support from the racing community, corporations and individual donations, the Pettys vision became reality. "Kyle encouraged race drivers to use their fame for a good cause. They wanted to make something positive out of Adam's death and with their help and others, we have built this place on \$45 checks, one check at a time," smiles Pattie. The camp needed a lot of checks since the original budget was

set at \$2.5 million. The current budget is estimated at \$6 million annually.

A spirit of giving

The camp is a not-for-profit organization and operates solely on the donations of corporate sponsors, fundraisers and individuals. Despite their medical needs, children are able to attend Victory Junction Gang Camp; the cost for one child to attend is \$2,500. Each weeklong stay is absolutely free, including any medicines or treatments the child might need.

The camp is comprised of 36 buildings, including Goody's Body Shop Medical Center, Hedrick Motor Sports Fuel Stop Dining Hall, the Silver Theater, Jesse's Horse Power Garage, Kyle Petty Charity Ride Across America Water Park... and more. Expansion continues offering more programs for campers including the Tony Stewart Maze, Home Depot Tree House and the Davis Love Miniature Golf Course. More plans are



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Campers have fun and share smiles with Kyle Petty.

on the drawing board but one thing is for sure – fun is a priority at the camp, but top quality care always comes first. Protective measures are in place like at The Bass Pro Shop Catch, Kiss and Release Marina – where children swim – the dock is made from special wood that will not splinter, preventing trauma to an already challenged child.

The spirit of caring for others is evident at Victory Junction and Kyle is recognized as a pioneer in the motor sports industry for his tireless philanthropic spirit, dedicating much of his time away from the track to helping others. His annual Chick-fil-A Kyle Petty Charity Ride Across America has donated more than \$7 million to worthy organizations since its inception in 1994.

Faith – a Petty tradition

From their youth, a family foundation and upbringing that exemplified a “can-do” spirit have guided both Kyle and Pattie. Pattie hails from High Point and says that both her parents had strong work ethics and high standards. Her mother, a teacher, was a strong influence on her life-long interest in children, education and her compassion for others. Faith also played a major role in Pattie’s development. Her faith was partly responsible for

her introduction to Kyle, her husband of 27 years. Kyle’s family was on the road more often than not; their strong belief in family and faith was the glue that kept this racing clan together.

Pattie knew Kyle first as a friend with a mutual love of horses. She wasn’t looking for romance but was drawn to his character. Their friendship grew as they attended Bible studies together and in 1979 they were married. Pattie, with an undergraduate degree in early childhood education and a masters in child developmental psychology, was already teaching in Davidson County while Kyle was taking his first drive around the racetrack in a Winston Cup car in Daytona. He had worked on cars his entire life but had never driven one. Richard Petty, Kyle’s famous father, told him to “get in the car and drive fast,” says Pattie. No help, no encouragement, just drive. Call it tough love on Richard’s part and determination on Kyle’s, but drive he did.

Looking back, it seems a blur since that first drive around the track. Kyle has been a continual fixture on the NASCAR circuit for more than 25 years, and currently drives the #45 Wells Fargo Dodge in the NASCAR Nextel Cup Series. Kyle is one of the few third generation athletes competing in professional

VICTORY JUNCTION GANG

The mission of the Victory Junction Gang Camp is to enrich the lives of children with chronic medical conditions or serious illnesses by providing life-changing camping experiences that are exciting, fun, and empowering, in a safe and medically sound environment. Founded by NASCAR driver Kyle Petty and his wife Pattie in honor of their late son Adam, the Victory Junction Gang Camp is a year-round facility serving children, age 7 to 15.

Each summer, children suffering from similar medical conditions including heart, lung and kidney disease, spina bifida, HIV, cancer, burn survivors, neurological disorders, and others, gather to relax and have some fun. The camp offers traditional activities, including horseback riding, boating and fishing, arts and crafts and others, as well as NASCAR related programs.

HOW YOU CAN HELP?

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For more information contact:
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4500 Adam’s Way
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www.victoryjunction.org

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Charles Grant Johnson is a contemporary Renaissance man. Charles is always on the go – whether jetting from city to city as a captain with AirTran – or shopping for the latest addition to his extensive watch collection.

Charles, a native of Roxboro, now calls Kernersville home but don't let his home address fool you. Charles is a graduate of the Manhattan School of Music at Juilliard and is a former opera star, performing in a variety of venues including the Eastern Music Festival. His ability to entertain extends to the piano (he's been playing since age five) as well as the kitchen (a former chef).

Be on the lookout . . . Charles is an individual for the Piedmont to Watch.

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sports, following in the footsteps of his father Richard and grandfather Lee. Like Kyle, Adam was the first fourth generation professional athlete in the United States.

On or off the track, the Pettys have always faced challenges head on. Pattie recalls the lean times during the early days of marriage – she was raising three children while Kyle was driving all over the country. “Money was not in racing then like it is now. Kyle worked on his own cars and worked a lot of hours away from home. It was not easy,” says Pattie. “He made \$88 a week when we first got married.”

Strong family values have been passed down to the Petty children: Adam, (who would be 25); Austin, 24; and Montgomery Lee, 20. Montgomery Lee continues the tradition of bringing children's dreams to life at camp. She plays an important role by training all horses, goats and donkeys to be

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*A camper celebrates
a birthday at Victory
Junction Gang camp.*

“friendly” to children with handicaps, children who often have ventilators or other hospital equipment in tow. Montgomery Lee, a former North Carolina Rookie of the Year, has been in the top five of world championship riders for the last seven years.

The training of animals might seem like a small thing but it speaks volumes about the attention to detail and top notch equipment, care and service that children and their families receive at the Victory Junction Gang Camp.

*Their smiles are
worth a thousand words*

A dream that started with Adam Petty continues to live on thanks to the tireless efforts of a committed family and community with a big heart for children. Pattie Petty sums it up best, “The greatest reward is watching a child with spina bifida climb on a horse or a child with sickle cell get in the water for the first time, and sharing in their joy.” ■

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