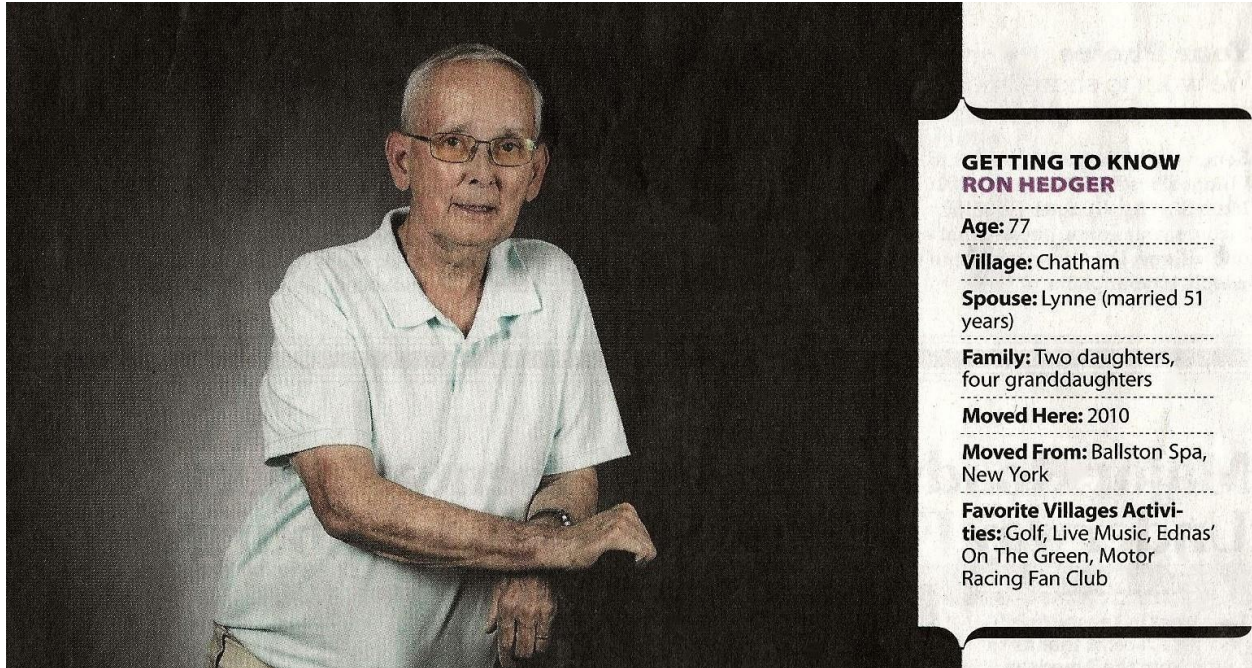


# Villager Backstory

You may know Ron Hedger as a frequent visitor of The Villages' nightly town square entertainment, but you might not know he has written about motorsports for more than 45 years, appearing in several publications.



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By Cody Hills

When Ron Hedger tells people he's into motor racing, the response from those capable of putting two-and-two together is: "Well, of course he is."

It makes sense when you factor everything into the equation – a brother working in NASCAR, a father who raced, and his own three-decade career as an auto mechanics teacher.

But the depths to which Hedger, of the Village of Chatham, follows motor racing goes beyond a casual fan or observer of the sport.

The New York native is enjoying his 45th year as a writer for Speed Sport, compiling weekly race reports, feature stories and personality profiles for the longtime racing hub's website and print magazine.

"Racing has always been special to me and my family, so writing about it has also been really special for me," Hedger said. "It's like having another full-time job, only you've got more passion for it."

Hedger grew up around the local short tracks throughout New York and the northeastern United States. His father, Hugh, entered cars and the whole family got involved.

But a pair of 1978 fatalities to two well-known drivers in Hedger's racing realm – plus a serious injury to his own brother – spurred him to write an opinion piece on auto racing safety. He submitted it into then-National Speed Sport News, where iconic motorsports reporter Chris Economacki served as the

prestigious publication's chief editor and publisher at the time, and the duo struck up a professional relationship.

"He took one look at it, said I hit on all the points, and I've been there ever since," Hedger said. "It was only about a year after that when I started doing just about everything I ever wanted."

Hedger traveled all across the Northeast's racing circuit, making his name as a journalist who told stories ranging from driver profiles to full race recaps. His presence around the pits also afforded him an in-depth look into the lives of those dedicated to the sport, which he felt privileged to share with readership.

"I've always liked the technical part of racing, but I'm really drawn to the personalities in racing," Hedger said. "Each kind of racing has a different type of driver and you get to realizing that, and you start to come to know those guys."

And getting to know the drivers, crew members and car owners is a big part – maybe the biggest – to Hedger finding success in writing about the sport.

"My wife doesn't like going to the races with me," Hedger said with a laugh. "I'll walk six feet, talk to somebody, walk another six feet, talk to somebody else, and so on and so forth.

"But that's how you get to know everybody and earn their trust to tell their stories."

Hedger's ability to relate to drivers and their crews, stemming from his own roots growing up around the sport, also helps him tell a better story, too.

"A lot of people see a crash and say, 'Wow, that was exciting,'" Hedger said. "But when I see it, I feel bad because I know how much work is now ahead of them. I know how many hours that'll take to fix in the shop and how many hopes just got crushed."

Hedger's works also have appeared in Stock Car Racing magazine, Open Wheel magazine, Speedway Illustrated and AutoWeek. He served as the motorsports writer for the Daily Gazette in Schenectady, New York, while also fulfilling duties as president of the Eastern Motorsport Press Association.

Hedger plans to continue covering racing as long as he can, making seasonal trips back to New York and to tracks throughout the Northeast as long as he's able.

"I still feel good and I still enjoy it, and that's what is most important," Hedger said. "I can slow down, sure, but it'll probably be a little while before I stop. There's a lot of pride involved and I enjoy what I get to do."