

Fall 2008

# WESTWOOD WHEELER News

The Westwood  
Wheelers are a  
Christian  
organization with  
an interest in  
things automotive

## Upcoming Wheeler events:

Get Together at  
Chanhassen  
Motorplex  
Feb

Cruise to Jimmy's  
April

BBQ st Tony Theis  
May

Drag Racing  
June

For more information  
on the Wheelers or  
upcoming events  
contact Jim Theis at  
[jim.theis@westwoodcc.org](mailto:jim.theis@westwoodcc.org)  
952 224 7300

Our web site is up and  
running! Check it out  
through the Westwood  
home page:

<http://www.westwoodcc.org/>

## A Story of Love Lost & Rekindled Passion

-A car story by Jimmy Gaboury

### *The story that opened the door*

In 2006 I wrote "My Memories of Flathead's Revenge," about the Model A Sedan D/A drag car of the Indian, Mike Struzinski. The Revenge, as we call it today, is in the collection in Harrisburg, South Dakota, where Joe Floyd has 1936 Fords and other great flathead cars.

We see it regularly, as it just made an appearance at the "CRUZE to Jimmy's" Car Show in Belle Plaine, Minnesota, on June 7, 2008. It will also be at Thunder Valley Raceways in Marion, South Dakota, where our car club, the Nostalgia SuperChargers, will be at the track, with Craig Floyd driving for drag events. We should also see it again at Brainerd International Raceway this summer. By the way, The Revenge ran a 13 flat with a little nitro in the mix. The Indian would be dancing!  
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*If you have an interesting car  
story or antidote please forward  
to*

[jim.theis@westwoodcc.org](mailto:jim.theis@westwoodcc.org)

952 224 7378

## Wheelers Continue Partnership with New Beginnings



The Westwood Wheelers hosted an "Oil Change Saturday" for the students at New Beginnings in Chaska. Wheeler volunteers performed a safety inspection on each vehicle and changed oil and filters. This event allows the girls to learn routine maintenance, ask questions and have their car inspected for safety concerns without having to get dirty. The event was a huge success! Not only was the weather beautiful, but  
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## Wheelers Continue Partnership with New Beginnings

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three cars needed major repairs to make it through the upcoming winter. Wheelers replaced a wheel bearing, a lower ball joint, and flushed a clogged cooling system. Afterwards the girls reciprocated with a dinner at the school. Puerto Rican and Mexican food was served and a good time was had by all. New Beginnings is a full-time academic program for pregnant and parenting teens, ages 12 to 19 that leads to a high school diploma.



*Theis Repair*



## Tech Tip – Storing the car for winter

By Tony Theis

Since it is already late fall it is time to store the Hot Rod. It is very important to store your vehicle properly. First, one should always fill your fuel tank and add a winter additive. Secondly, it is a good idea to take off your street tires or lift your car and place on jack stands. Thirdly, take out the battery and store it in a warm place such as your basement or a heated garage. Do not let your battery freeze. Next clean your car inside and out and cover with a car cover. Do not let your cover touch the ground. Place mouse pellets around your car. Lastly and most important, hug your car, say so long ...but not goodbye, tell her you love her and will see her in six months.

***Lastly and most important,  
hug your car, say so long  
....but not goodbye***

## Wheelers Match Car With Need

After saving and finally getting that new car, what do you do with your old one? If you're Zach Pirolli you think of giving that car to someone in the community in need of transportation. So when Zach contacted the Wheelers about his used but still reliable Ford Thunderbird we matched him with Anais, a student in the New Beginnings program. Anais is a young mother who recently got her license and struggled with getting to and from work and running the errands needed when raising a child as a single mom. After a little elbow grease by the Wheelers we were able to match Anais with her new wheels. Zach's Thunderbird was a blessing for Anais. It has given her the freedom and independence we all take for granted. Thank you Zach.



## A Look Under The Hood - A Faith Story By Brian Ratalasky

I grew up in Richfield MN during the height of the baby boom generation. It wasn't unusual to have 34-36 kids in one classroom, so a kid didn't get much individual attention. I think it's because of that environment I learned to be independent, self-sufficient and persistent. I believed I was in control of my world. God and religion were, as our ex-governor said, for the weak minded. Growing up Catholic, religion to me was just a bunch of rules and regulations I didn't understand. None of it made sense and I didn't need it. I was in control.

Then, during a family crisis, this mindset fell apart; I couldn't control what was happening. I felt lost. My daughter suggested I attend Westwood. I hadn't been to church in years. I went anyway. Amazingly, many times during the service I thought Pastor Joel was talking directly to me. This was the beginning of my personal relationship with God.

Life was improving. My marriage went from being on the brink of divorce to a God centered union. I prayed that God would show me my next step toward Him – but don't be subtle about it. I don't do subtle well.

Soon afterward I got a headache that wouldn't quit and developed some weird black growth behind my ear. I hadn't been to a doctor in 30 years, but I guess it was time.

By the time of my appointment the headache had subsided and the black lump was almost gone, but since I'd promised my wife, I went anyway. The doc said I was in good health, but could stand to lose a few pounds. *Duh!* He took some blood for routine tests.

A few days later I got a call from the doctors' office - my psa was a little high. Samples were taken from my prostate. A week later the phone rang at work. I had cancer.

There are no words to describe the feeling when you hear those words, "...you have cancer". I assumed it was a death sentence. The Doctor said I was a

perfect candidate for surgery – don't worry. He was going on vacation and would talk to me in two weeks. This two week period allowed me time to explore all my options.

I couldn't see it then, but God had His hand on me and was preparing me all along. A few years back, I interviewed for a position for a man who was going on medical leave. It turned out the person I was filling in for, Russ, was going out to California to receive something called "proton treatment" for prostate cancer. During the next few weeks Russ and I spent hours talking about his cancer. I learned that proton treatment was a form of radiation that is able to focus its energy at a tumor and have minimal effect on surrounding tissue; as a result there are very few side effects.

But God was still preparing me. About a month before I got my own diagnosis I ran into Russ at a trade show. He raved about this Loma Linda place where he'd gone for treatment. It had been six years and his cancer was gone; he felt great.

I made appointments in both Loma Linda, CA, and in Bloomington, IN. Since I haven't been away from the family for more than a week at a time, I thought the Indiana facility was for me. I could drive home on weekends!

My first consultation was at the Midwest Proton Radiotherapy Institute at Indiana University. They felt the best course of treatment for me was a combination of hormone treatment and proton beam. I didn't feel comfortable with hormones, but the idea of being able to come home on weekends was appealing, so I signed up. I started the first portion down there, but was to get the main hormone shot a week later at the U of M.

When I went to my appointment at the U of M, the doctor said he didn't think hormones were necessary with protons. He called the Indiana doctor. My anxiety level was growing. When he

came back he said he would give me the hormones, but first I must talk to the social worker. She explained that I would be like a woman in menopause – hot flashes, fatigue, forgetfulness, weight gain and depression. I said no thank you and bolted from the building.

I hadn't cancelled my consultation at Loma Linda Medical University (LLMU). I decide to get a second opinion. My wife, Mary, and I flew out to Loma Linda.

From the time we got off the plane it was as if all of California was there to serve us. The rental agent said they would substitute a bright yellow Crossfire convertible for our compact at no extra charge. The rest of the weekend was more of the same. We were invited to a Dodgers game. We had VIP seats.

As for my consultation with Loma Linda, it couldn't have gone better. It was if as if my doctor knew what I wanted to hear. I pressed him hard about hormones; he felt I didn't need them. When I pressed him further he quoted scripture (I can't remember what it was however). Right then I knew this was where I belonged, so I signed up.

Though I had a camping trip followed by the Wheeler's car show coming up, Mary and I thought it best to leave the scheduling of treatment in God's hand. I was able to go camping and I left for Loma Linda the day after the car show. Perfect!

I found it amazing that there was a definite feeling of a higher presence at Loma Linda. The patients are from all economic, educational and religious backgrounds, believers and non-believers. Religion is not mentioned, but Gods presence and mercy is felt by all.

God knew Loma Linda would heal me physically, and He would provide emotional healing there, too. I now know God is with me always and that He loves me. A simple lesson, but one I never truly believed. Now I get it! My cancer journey has shaped my faith, how I think, and how I act.

## A Story of Lost Love & Rekindled Passion

-A car story by Jimmy Gaboury  
(continued)

### *The First Big Block "Rat" in a 55 Chevy, maybe?*

In that article, I wrote about where Flathead's Revenge was built, The Grease Pit Lounge. The Grease Pit was a place with rows of old rental garages on the east side of St. Paul where my brother Jerry Gaboury and the car club the "Dualateers of St. Paul" built their hot cars and threw back some beers. "We cruised through the Grease Pit parking lot in Jerry's hot yellow 55 Chevy post," I wrote, "which we believe was one of or *may* be the first *big block* 55's in the Twin Cities, or perhaps on the planet, circa 1959."



Along with a four speed it had a built 348 with 3 deuces. The 348 was a bone yard purchase that came from a brand new rolled 1958 Impala convertible. The machine work on that 348 Rat was done at Kelley's Automotive on University Avenue, who, by the way, is still in business, building motors on South Robert Street in St. Paul.

With a 30 over 348, Jahns pistons, Isky 505 cam, and some head work, the first Rat ran 13's at Twin City and Minnesota Dragways and won a mess of trophies that I've had on display at my shop forever. Needless to say, my big brother Jerry, the first Rat 55, and the Dualateers all fueled my love of hot cars, drag racing, and classic car restoration. Jerry, whom many know as "Bones," sold the first Rat yellow 55 in 1962 and went on to other great cars, his latest being Bad to the

Bone, a nostalgia front engine dragster with (of course) a blown Big Block Chevy. His latest Rat runs 7:40's.

### *"Back to the 50's, 2007"*

For the past five or six years I have been a vendor at "Back to the 50's," the Minnesota Street Rod Association's biggest and best car event, promoting my auto restoration and sales company, Jimmy's Custom Rods and Classics, or Jimmy's CRC. (You can check us out at [www.jimmysrc.com](http://www.jimmysrc.com)). Last year at our booth next to the MSRA t-shirt shack, we were displaying our cars and handing out brochures when two east side St. Paul gentlemen came up to me and asked if I were "Jimmy," and if I were the one that wrote the article on "Flathead's Revenge." When I replied "that be me," one of the two brothers said that he was the one that purchased that hot yellow 55 from my brother in 1962. He went on to say that he still has the car and thought that "we needed to own it". My first thought was "yeah, right," but as we talked on, I became filled with excitement. He really knew the car, and all the right names and places, as well. I assumed that since we were at the Minnesota State Fair Grounds in St. Paul, the car was here on the east side somewhere, but where? When I asked where and when we could see it, he took one of my brochures and said that he would contact me. That comment was a little mysterious, yet exciting, just the same. Could it be true? I sure hoped so! When would he call? What condition was it in? Wouldn't it be cool if it were true?

### *The Secret*

It seemed like an eternity, but just after "50's" he called and said that he was willing to have us take a look at the car. I wanted to make a big production and bring some kind of film team, but he asked us to please keep it simple. He didn't want all kinds of people knowing where the car was. On July 10, 2007, my son Justin and I headed for east St. Paul. As we cruised through the east side, little did we realize that the car had been five minutes from my folks' house where my siblings and I grew up. Think about it! All these years, 45 years, it was just down the road in somebody's back yard! Remember, my brother Jerry sold this car in 1962. I was twelve years old in '62 and hadn't seen it since. I decided to keep this all a secret from Jerry, although it was very hard not to let the "Rat" out of the bag, so to speak. I did give in and told a few people, and then became worried because I heard back from others

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(continued)

that it was so cool that I had found my brother's car! I thought it was out, over - the surprise that is - but no.

*"I guess you were just saving it for us"*

It was about 11:00 am on a beautiful sunny day when the brothers Jim and Jerry met us in their driveway. Jim had bought the car from my brother Jerry in 1962. I think it's ironic that these brothers had the same names as my brother and me, Jim and Jerry. The car was covered with a silvery grey car cover, where it sat between their garage and a fence behind their typical east side St. Paul 1950's style neighborhood home. The excitement built as we started taking the cover off. Justin had our video camera going, because this was an important moment. We peeled the car cover from front to back, and I couldn't believe my eyes. Wow!

The color - what remained of it - was definitely yellow, and the horizontal grille bars had been removed. It was definitely Jerry's car; I recognized it immediately. Jim shuffled through some keys to get the door to open. We opened the driver's door and the green Delray interior was in surprisingly good shape. It had Stewart Warner gauges, Hurst four speed, and I recognized some little feet on the dash (that's a whole nutha story). I got in and I was in awe. I was in "car guy heaven." What a find, what a moment! I couldn't wait to surprise my brother. Jim asked me whether I told Jerry about it and I told him I wanted it to be a surprise for later.

We pulled the rest of the cover off, and Jim explained that they had purchased the cover a few years ago, as the old cover had rotted over the years. The old one was actually glued stuck to the windows. Next we discovered the stickers on the windows, it was awesome. It had stickers for Isky cam, Hurst shifter, Offenhauser, Spaulding Super Flame-Thrower ignition, some hot rod shop out of Milwaukee, the oldest Minnesota Drag ways sticker I ever saw, and a National Hot Rod Association sticker...so cool!

My dad, Jed Gaboury, owned and operated Gaboury's Body Shop and Service Station on Minnehaha and Hazelwood in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Jerry, my brother Dick, and I all worked with Jed in some capacity in those early 1960's. I about died as I spotted in the driver's door jamb a Gaboury's Body Shop and Pure Oil Station oil change sticker dated June 4, 1962. I got goose bumps a mile high about that - still do!

Next, we opened the hood. It took a little bit of effort to get the latch to loosen. Who knows how long it had been since it was opened? I was amazed that nothing had been touched or altered on the car, as far as I could see, since Jerry owned it. I asked Jim why he had not done something with it, but he just shrugged his shoulders and didn't really reply. I said, "I guess you were just saving it for us." "You and God," was what I was thinking to myself.

*So we popped the hood...*

I have a picture of Jerry's first RAT 55 parked next to our dad's body shop and Pure Oil gas station that Jerry gave me from his photo album. I scanned it on to my computer years ago, as it is the only picture that exists of Jed's shop. I don't think Jerry ever took any photos of the 55s engine compartment which was so impressive to his little brother.

How impressed was I? I remember seeing his name painted on the gold firewall in red, it said **JERRY**. Even after all these years I remembered the stripper's name was John Babler. I remember that there had been beer and pizza involved in the payment for John's services; well pizza anyway, for sure. Jerry and I have had many discussions on what it said on the firewall. Jerry has been called a lot of things over the years, nickname-wise that is. His real name is Gerald; at home he was called Jerry; some of the Dualateers called him Stomper or Stomp, but most called him "Jed," since he was our father's first-born. All that, is to explain that Jerry and I had always disagreed about what was written on the firewall of his 55. He thought it said "Jed," but I said "Jerry." So we popped the hood ...and right there in red - behind the big block Rat 348 with the 3 Deuces with all the pin striping and the gold background - it said **"JERRY."**



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(continued)

“AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!” I screamed. After 45 years of neglect it didn’t look quite as nice as it did in 1962, or 1959 for that matter, but it looked awesome to me! I told Jim, “You own me man, ‘cause this is the car; and you know that whatever price you say, I’ll have to pay.” He knew he had me, but I want to let you know right off that Jim treated me right. I made him what I thought was a fair offer and he accepted. Praise the Lord! What a cool guy! I think he just wanted us to have it. As things worked out Justin and I picked up the car in spring of 2008, after we made the big move to our new facilities in the lovely town of Belle Plaine, Minnesota.

### ***Cruze to Jimmy’s, 2008***

It felt like the old days working on the “First Rat 55” at home in the garage. Justin and I decided to work on it out of sight and away from the commotion of our new state-of-the-art shop. We only worked on it early in the morning before work and after hours, wanting to keep it top secret.

The first thing we did was to get the pressure washer out and remove forty-five years of grunge, spider webs, and other debris from the bottom of the car. We jacked it up in the driveway to do the initial cleaning. We also emptied the trunk and vacuumed the interior along with cleaning the windows of the old car cover material. The glass was in exceptional shape and we were very careful not to harm the decals. The initial plan was to clean it up and display it somehow in our show room at Jimmy’s CRC. Then we would later unveil it with Jerry and any Dualateers that were in the area who were invited to our first annual “Cruze to Jimmy’s” car show and grand opening in Belle Plaine.

We put it up on jack stands in our garage and removed the tires. It had two of the original front wide whites, so we cleaned them up and “quickie” blacked out the very rusty rims. I had some other larger wide white tires in our collection, so Justin painted a couple of rims for the back. Under the car, it still had “Smitty” mufflers that looked like they were found under the sea, and it still had cutouts/lakes plugs that were capped. The bottom of the car was in decent shape for being outside for over thirty years. We’ve restored worse!

### ***After 46 years the First<sup>t</sup> Rat 348 started!***

I pulled the valve covers that at one time were chrome, but now had this forty-six year patina that actually looked kind of cool. They matched the former chrome air cleaners on

top of the three carbs. We pulled the plugs and loaded the valve train and the cylinders with Marvel Mystery oil. After a few patient days of turning the engine a little each day with a breaker bar, when I decided to go for it, I heard a snap. I didn’t know if something broke, or if it freed up. I couldn’t believe it! It freed up, and as I turned it over, compression forced the oil out of the spark plug holes. We had compression!

I then pulled the distributor and carbs and hooked up a battery. No ignition key came with the set we received with the car, but Justin found an ignition key in the glove box. (I expected to hear the *Twilight Zone* theme song at this point.) The engine turned over with the key and that forty-six-year-old starter! Amazing! The lights also turned on.

When I looked at the odometer, it read 13,345 miles. On our oil change sticker (Gaboury’s Pure Oil), the mileage read 5700 miles, so we figured that Jerry put on 5700 miles since the motor was built, and Jim had put on the remainder, about 7600 miles. This Rat has only 13,345 miles on it, 13,345 miles and forty-six years.

I had a 348 engine at the shop that donated its carbs and linkage to the project. The car was now up on jack stands and we pulled the fuel tank and old electric fuel pump, which was a Bendix Aviation electric fuel pump. I had decided to do the brakes also. We turned the drums, bought new shoes, replaced the master cylinder and wheel cylinders, and we had brakes. I had the tank cleaned out and serviced and replaced the fuel pump with a blue holly and a regulator. We now had fuel to the carbs. Hmm... combustion, fuel, so far so good. Somewhere along the line it had lost the “Flame-Thrower” dual point distributor, but it had a stock GM distributor, so we replaced the points and plugs, cleaned the cap, checked out the wiring, and found spark.

“Let’s try it Justin.” With a great cloud of smoke and after forty-six years, the First Rat 348 started and then cleared out. It was just plain unbelievable! After forty-six years, it was sitting in my driveway, loping as if it were ready to make a pass down the track. Again, unbelievable! We had the tires and brakes on already, and I had noticed that the clutch worked just from pushing it into the garage. I tried it, and it had

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(continued)

had no problem moving back and forth in the driveway. I was so excited that I now shifted our plans to driving it up to our car show with Jerry and the guys standing there waiting. It would be outrageous! It may not run great, but there was hope that it would drive well enough to pull right up to our booth and blow everybody away. Wow! The show was coming up fast.

### ***"Where were you in '62?"***

On the Friday before the big "Cruze to Jimmy's" grand opening car show, I drove the First Rat 55 up the driveway and into the trailer. It was the first time the big block 55 had moved under its own power in forty-six years; we then hauled the car to Belle Plaine. Our new neighbors, the "Fahey Auctioneers," were gracious enough to let us hide the car in their garage, which was in a very convenient place in the alleyway just behind our shop. Our secret would be safe there.

"Where were you in '62?" was the name of the set time in our car show that we would drive the car around the block to surprise Jerry with our find. This was because we have a Polaroid picture of Jerry under the hood of the 55 dated June '62. Justin and I fired up First Rat 55, pulled around the corner, and headed right down the middle of the blocked off street, right for Jerry. My wife Kimi said that Jerry noticed the car as it came around the corner, and made a comment like, "I had a 55 Chevy one time that had the horizontal bars removed from the grille, and it was yell..." before halting in mid-sentence. He realized that this was *his yellow 55 Chevy* actually rumbling slowly towards him.

As Justin and I hopped out of the car, we knew by the look on his face that we had him. He was surprised and elated. Emotions were running high with tears of joy and surprise all around. "How in the...? Where did you find...? I'll never be able to top this one!" were just some of the comments from Jerry. I opened the hood, and he said "You were right! It says 'Jerry!'" At that admission, I was so giddy I danced around the car. We hugged and we cried and then I told the story of how we acquired the car. We all reveled and enjoyed each other's stories of the First Rat 55. Jerry asked me if he could have a ride, so we hopped in and literally drove off into the sunset, right down the main street of downtown Belle Plaine.

### ***Back to the 50's, 2008***

Back to the 50's is a 3 day event. The "First Rat" performed well enough to cruise the 100 mile round trips all three days. We enjoyed telling the story everywhere we stopped and as we rumbled through the State Fair Grounds people made comments like "don't ever paint it" or "what's that doing here"? Jerry cruised with me on Sunday and joined right in with the telling of.....**"The Coolest Car Guy Story Ever".....for me.**



# WESTWOOD WHEELER News

**Westwood Community Church**  
3121 Westwood Drive  
Excelsior, MN 55331  
952.224.7300

