

**NE Georgia Motorsports Park  
Lavonia, Georgia**

**An Overview**

**By**

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The Atlanta Dragway in Commerce (Banks County) closed last fall, giving us an unprecedented opportunity to bring millions of dollars annually into Franklin County in general, and the Cities of Lavonia and Toccoa in particular.

I currently produce The NE GA Swap Meet, an automotive swap meet held the first Saturday of every month, with two 3-day Spring and Fall shows. This event was started 17 years ago, first at Lanier Speedway (now RacePlex) in Braselton, and for the last ten years at the Atlanta Dragway. With the dragway property being sold and shuttered, we are currently (and temporarily) back at Lanier RacePlex. My plan is to build an events grounds, focusing but not limited to automotive events and motorsports in Lavonia. I have located a property on New Franklin Church Road (Hwy 327) with over 100 acres, two warehouses and an office, that will be perfect for this. (Currently, it is Joey's Auto Salvage, and is across the street from Lance Auto Salvage.)

Phase One would consist of an area for the swap meets and car shows and other static events such as arts and music festivals; a large paved parking area would also be utilized for drifting and autocross events; a small flat dirt track for go cart and flat-track motorcycle racing events (held in conjunction with a motorcycle show, swap meet and auction), and large spectator parking area.

Phase One would conclude within a year with renovating the 11,000 square foot warehouse and using it in conjunction with the swap meet and car shows for enthusiast vehicle auctions, indoor displays, and other stand-alone events such as a local weekly Wednesday Night auction, gun shows and the like.

Within two years, Phase Two would be to add a 1/8-mile drag strip to take over most of the events that were held at the Atlanta Dragway, add many more events to the schedule than Atlanta Dragway ran, and renovate the 9,000 square foot warehouse into a second Exhibition Hall.

The NE Georgia Motorsports Park will easily bring over 250,000-300,000 people annually into Toccoa, Lavonia and Franklin County; currently, my NE GA Swap Meet alone brings over 30,000 people annually into Jackson County with just 10 monthly 1-day events and two annual 3-day events—and the 1-day events only last 6 hours. According to numbers from the Georgia Department of Economic Development, tourist dollars left in local communities are \$77 per person per day, and \$195 per person per day for overnight stays: Bringing in 250,000 participants translates to \$20M-\$48.75M annually into the local economy.

Currently, there are no facilities like this anywhere in the region. Our inspiration comes from Carlisle Events in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, an event promotion company that specializes in automotive swap meets and car shows, putting on 11 automotive events between April and October, including two large swap meets and three car auctions; According to the Carlisle Chamber of Commerce, these events bring over \$90 million into the local economy. Their facility is not utilized for anything other than static automotive events (car shows and swap meets—no racing).

# Executive Summary

## History

After working my way through college and graduating with a Bachelor's degree and zero student debt in December of 1995, I went to work in the Automotive Enthusiast publishing industry in the winter of '96, starting at Mopar Muscle Magazine. Within four years I had risen to Editor, becoming the youngest editor, and the second-fastest rise to editor, in the company's 65-year history. Under my management, Mopar Muscle Magazine expanded its package size from 86 pages a month to over 100, and became the Number One magazine in its niche. In 2001, I changed companies and went to work for Buckaroo Communications, a start-up that changed the face of the enthusiast automotive publishing business. After several years there I moved to doing PR work for Year One, a national supplier for muscle car restoration parts in Braselton, GA. After three years, I left and went to work for myself as a full-time freelance writer, doing this for a decade until the publishing industry crashed with the recession.

While still at Buckaroo, I launched The NE GA Swap Meet, incorporating Driven Events in 2004 as a side business, or Plan B in case writing (Plan A) went away. The swap meet is a monthly automotive flea market for car enthusiasts, though we promote it as having "anything you'd find in a guy's shop, basement or garage." The decision was made from Day One that it was to be focused as such, after watching many once-good swap meets around the country slowly go away after diluting the offerings with sun glasses, antiques, purses, jewelry, knick-knacks and the like.

When I started the swap meet, there was a lot of competition: Clarksville, GA had two 2-day annual swap meets at their fairgrounds; JR Miller Park in Marietta had two 1-day annual swap meets; the Moonshine Festival in Dawsonville had a big annual 1-day swap meet; the annual Super Chevy Show at the Atlanta Dragway had a huge 3-day swap meet; The Perry Autofest was a twice a year 2-day meet in Perry, Georgia; Moultrie, Georgia has two huge 3-day swap meets per year and attempted to add a third in the last two years; the Charlotte Auto Fair at Charlotte Motor Speedway has two huge 3-day swap meets, The Turkey Run in Daytona, Florida is a huge 4-day swap meet, and Maggie Valley, NC had two large 3-day swap meets each year. There were other, smaller one-day swap meets through the region.

Since launching the NE GA Swap Meet, we have killed-off most of our competition: Clarksville, the Super Chevy swap meet, Maggie Valley and the JR Miller Park shows have gone away, and The Perry Auto Fest announced earlier this year it was ceasing operation. The Moonshine festival is off-and-on. Moultrie launched a third show but it died, and their bi-annual multi-day shows are also shrinking, with many vendors saying our shows are better. There have also been at least four swap meets that started up and went away over the last several years, unable to compete with us—including a couple that copied our frequency and pricing exactly. Today, only the Charlotte Auto Fairs, The Turkey Run, and Moultrie's Spring and Fall shows are larger than ours,

though we are big enough that our show's turnout is no longer hurt at all if they land on the same dates as those larger shows.

Our first venue rented was Lanier National Speedway, and we held swap meets nine months per year—March through November, taking December, January and February off as the turnout didn't come close to justifying the costs.

In the first few years, we made changes and continued evolving the swap meet, until we were as good as our smaller competition. Typical swap meets sell limited-size spaces, forcing larger vendors to buy multiple spaces to set up; we not only made our spaces cheaper than everyone else's, we give our vendors as much space as they need for the price.

Ten years ago we moved the show to The Atlanta Dragway in Commerce, Georgia. Our first March show at the Atlanta Dragway had 35 vendors (our all-time high at that point was 75 vendors), and a couple hundred spectators. Today, the swap meet runs year-round, averages 275-300 vendors per month, over 1,200 paid spectators, plus children and un-paid helpers with our vendors. When the bottom fell out of the magazine business about six years ago, I transitioned from full-time freelance writing to running Driven Events full time.

In the last five years, we have also launched The Gear Jam Vintage Drags, a nostalgia drag race held at the Atlanta Dragway and have grown it, and we also helped the City of Commerce launch Cruisn' Commerce.

As we've grown over the years, our operating costs have also risen: we've added staffers for day-of-show operations, built two websites (for the Swap Meet and the Gear Jam), advertising, signage and more, while rent at the drag strip grew to \$50,000 per year for the 10 1-day shows and two 3-day shows.

## Opportunity

There are over 10 million people within a 200 mile radius, which is just a 100 miles drive or less to our location from anywhere in that radius. That's our target market, and our plan is to offer events that appeal to as many segments of that population as possible. We currently pull spectators and vendors to the swap meet from Tennessee, Alabama and Florida, as well as the Carolinas; drawing participants from 150 miles away is well within the distance people will travel for enthusiast events.

Because of Atlanta Dragway's schedule with other events, from April thru November (eight months of the year—the largest shows of the year), we were often unable to re-schedule rain-dates for the following weekend, so if we get rained out, that's it—no show (and no income) those months. Our business plan must, literally, incorporate saving for a rainy day! It should be noted that not only for business costs, but also for personal income for me, having no event that month means no paycheck that month—yet we have never missed any monthly payments, personal or business. While it's widely reported the average American household lives paycheck-to-paycheck and is often one or two paychecks from defaulting on their commitments, our “record” for canceled shows is three months in a row—and we missed no bills, and didn't have to sell assets to cover them.

Ideally, the swap meet is the first Saturday of every month; consistency and repetition is one of the things that helps our business, because participants KNOW the swap meet is the first Saturday of every month, and they build their schedules around it; they aren't relying on advertising or other promotions to know about it. But because of the track's other commitments, several times a year we have to move our event to the second Saturday of the month, which hurts our turn-out and revenue—people are creatures of habit: The swap meet is known as The First Saturday Of The Month, and people just plan on being there. No matter how much advertising and promotion I do, on every event that is scheduled on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday, I get phone calls starting at 7am on the first Saturday asking where I am because they've come to the track for the swap meet. Having our own facility to run the swap meet would increase revenue because it would give me the ability to run the swap meet The First Saturday every month regardless of other events, and would give us the ability to have rain dates year-round.

## **Economic Impact To The Surrounding Community**

Right now, we bring approximately 15,200 visitors per year for the NE GA Swap Meet; according to the Georgia Department of Economic Development, out-of-town visitors leave between \$77 and \$195 dollars each in the local economy; that's \$1.1-2.9 million dollars into the local economy, with only the 1-day and 3-day NE GA Swap Meets.

If we wanted to simply move to a new spot to run only our swap meet, that'd be an easy proposition: 30 flat acres with basic utilities and a couple buildings would do it, and the revenue the swap meet currently generates would easily support the financing to get that done.

But the Atlanta Dragway being sold is leaving an enormous hole in the racing and hot-rodding community, and I can't let that stand without a fight. We will produce, in-house, a wide variety of automotive and motorcycle events, as well as other non-automotive events:

- Weekly Bracket racing series, with NHRA or IHRA

- Two-and three-day special drag races, like a Big Money Bracket Race with \$100,000-to-win purses.

- Swap Meets

- Large Marquis-Specific car shows: Ford, GM and Mopar

- Autocross events with SCCA, NASA and other car clubs.

- Drifting events with iTrack (We have a Letter of Intent from them to do at least a dozen events per year with us when we build the facility)

- Motorcycle swap meet

- Go Cart Flat Track racing

- Motorcycle Flat Track racing.

- Truck tug-of-war

- Antique truck and tractor show

- Music festivals

- Art vestivals

It'd be easy to just find some land and continue doing the swap meet... But it'd be a lot more fun all the way around to do something much bigger--something that creates more jobs, benefits the local economy in a much larger way, and most importantly helps support and grow the automotive hobby and motorsports.

## **Benefits To The Local Community**

Until last year, Driven Events rented the Atlanta Dragway for all of our events; 10 1-day automotive swap meets, two 3-day swap meets, and two 2-day nostalgia drag races. Combined, these 14 events brought 15,000-20,000 visitors to Banks Crossing annually. Perhaps most impressive is the swap meet, held approximately the first Saturday of every month, is only 5 hours with gates opening at 7am and the event wrapping up around noon.

The NE GA swap meet alone brought approximately 15,000 visitors per year, who leave between (according to the Georgia Department of Tourism) \$77 and \$195 dollars each in the local economy, for an economic benefit of \$1.1 -2.9 million dollars into their economy.

Atlanta Dragway, with attendance from their limited number of events, brought approximately \$15-19 million dollars into the local economy.

Obviously, having control of our own facility will allow us to run many more events throughout the year, bringing tens of thousands more visitors to the local economy.

The “trickle-down” effect of this will be seen in more hotel rooms rented (which also directly benefits Franklin County through the Hotel Tax), more restaurants being visited (and opened, with the new demand), more sales at gas stations, and more foot traffic in local shops. Restaurants, gas stations and shops see increased traffic now from our one-day, 5-hour shows, and hotels are selling rooms to vendors and spectators.

With a full schedule of events catering to a wide variety of enthusiast niche markets, we anticipate bringing upwards of 200,000 visitors per year to the area—they’ll need places to stay, and they’ll need places to eat.

## **Fundraising for Franklin County Non-Profits and Charitable Organizations.**

One of the things I strongly believe in is giving back to the community. While the NE GA Swap Meet was at the Atlanta Dragway in Commerce, I started a project called “Change For A Dollar.” The goal was simple: I encouraged my event participants to throw whatever loose change they had in their pockets, or maybe a single dollar, into the collection bucket at a booth set up at the Spectator entry gate, and staffed by people from local non-profits, on a rotating monthly basis. The idea was that our participants wouldn’t miss a dollar, but their dollar combined with everyone else’s single dollar, could be used by the non-profits to affect some real change for those in need. (“Change for a dollar.”)

Our first group was a local women’s shelter in Jackson County, the next month we helped a veteran’s group, and then COVID hit, putting an end to the program. With the drag strip closing and the challenges involved in getting set up at a new venue, I haven’t

been able to re-ignite Change For a Dollar, but it will be a priority. We will work to find a pool of charities and out-reach non-profits in Franklin County directly, or groups that service Franklin County as part of their regional coverage, and will have them at our monthly automotive swap meet and other events on a rotating monthly schedule. Plans are already in the works for collecting can goods for the holiday season at the December swap meet (with the donations most likely going to the North East Georgia Food Bank, or Ninth District Opportunities); Vendor entry fee will be two cases of canned goods per vendor, spectator entry will be two cans per person.

As our shows grow, both individually in size, and in the number of actual shows we put on over the course of a year, we will be able to raise tens of thousands of dollars annually for local charities and outreach organizations.

This charitable work to give back to the community is a priority for us, and we will have staff specifically tasked with making it happen.

## **Leisure, Hobbies and Disposable Income During Recessions and Depressions**

It's no secret we are moving into an economic slowdown. As such, the obvious question is "Will people come spend money and support the investment in a motorsports park, and attend car shows when discretionary money is tight?"

My unbiased answer is "Yes," because even in tough economic times, people will continue to spend money on Alcohol, Tobacco and Entertainment/Hobbies. I have seen this myself in the automotive hobby, as during the recession under President Obama, the NE GA Swap Meet grew and thrived, and auto sports such as drag races, drifting and auto cross events grew and thrived.

According to a New York Times story from May, 1975: "Despite the recession, and sometimes because of it, many Americans seem to be continuing to devote part of their incomes to the pursuit of a good time. As a result, many of the businesses that cater to leisure activities are holding their own in the middle of the prolonged economic slump, and some are doing better than ever. More Americans are discovering the joys of free or inexpensive entertainment..." while "attendance appears to be up at many professional sports attractions," citing sold-out games and attendance numbers up over the year before. "Crowds are also bigger at race tracks." Broadway and Off-Broadway shows were doing well, with one producer saying the "theater business is the best we've had in six or seven years," adding "In The Depression, the entertainment industry didn't do badly. People wanted to get out of the house and forget their troubles." (Leisure Activities Thrive Across Nation in Recession, By Philip Shabecoff, May 11, 1975)

As it turns out, according to PBS, during The Great Depression of the 1930s, over 65-percent of the nation went to the movies every week, while horse racing saw a 70-percent increase in the number of tracks built across the country. (<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/seabiscuit-racing-depression/>)

The Great Depression also saw the rebirth of racing in America, until the outbreak of WWII, according to the book "American Road Racing; The 1930s" by Joel E. Finn, After the war, NASCAR was born in 1948, and not only thrived but grew through the recessions of 1949 and '53-'54, while racing on the Dry Lakes of California and Utah's great salt flats in Bonneville exploded in popularity, and the NHRA, formed in '51, helped usher in a boom in organized drag strips across the whole country through the '53-'54 recession and beyond.

So for these reasons, and my own experience running automotive events during a recession, I feel we are on solid financial ground for launching the NE Georgia Motorsports Park.

## **Competition**

Along the whole length of the I-85 Corridor from metro-Atlanta through to South and North Carolina, there are over 12.5 million people within 200 mile radius (100 miles in each direction), and 7.5 million people to draw from within a 100 mile radius (We currently pull swap meet attendees and regular vendors from the Carolinas, Alabama, Tennessee and Florida).

We will have areas that can be multi-purposed for Auto Cross events, automotive swap meets and car shows, motorcycle dirt track and go cart racing, drifting, and of course drag racing. We will also have events that aren't automotive-related, such as a Bluegrass Music Festival, Equestrian Swap Meets, auctions and more.

Right now, there are no drag strips closer than a 2.5 hour drive from the former Atlanta Dragway in Commerce.

## **ADVERTISING/MARKETING**

The NEGA Swap Meet lost money, albeit not a lot, every month for the first several years, as we printed fliers and criss-crossed the state handing them out at car shows, businesses and other swap meets. In ten years, I personally handed out over 110,000 fliers promoting the swap meet.

At the time, "Bargain Shopper" and newspaper classified ads were the norm, and we were in several of those. Craigslist came into being, and I transitioned to utilizing that platform to promote the swap meet as print went away.

Since then, Social Media has exploded and we have done a lot of even promotion on Face Book, and are branching into Twitter and Instagram.

We have also done radio spots with WDUN radio, and for a while advertised with a commercial on cable tv when it was more cost-effective.

Our marketing plan for the Motorsports Park includes regular radio commercials for individual events, spots on cable tv where it fits, and billboards, as well as upping our Social Media presence. Obviously, we'll have a website as well. (We currently have one for the swap meet, and an e-commerce site for the 3-day shows so we can do pre-registered tickets). We have a commitment to bring a former editor of Hot Rod Magazine to do full-time promotion of all our events on social media.

We will also work to build direct-to-customer email lists, copying what we do now with almost 10,000 names for our swap meet and drag race lists.

## **II. Mission Statement**

The NE GA Motorsports Park will be a multi-use venue that will host and produce a broad variety of events, bringing hundreds of thousands of visitors to Franklin County, eventually becoming the premier venue for enthusiast and hobby events in the South East.

### **Company philosophy and vision**

Driven Events has built our business on offering events by and for enthusiasts, giving them a better event for a better price than our competitors. We exist for the fun of it—if we aren't having fun, and if our customers aren't having fun, we're doing something wrong. Our target markets are automotive enthusiasts for racing, car shows and swap meets, music and festival fans, auction attendees, and equestrians.

Short-term goals are opening the Motorsports Park to immediately host the NE GA Swap Meet, Auto Cross events and drifting events, and over the next two years expand the facility's infrastructure and staff to host weekly drag races, big-money bracket races, and more. Our goal is to expand our event offerings to bring in over 200,000 visitors annually.

As an example of what sets us apart from our competitors, our monthly swap meet gets almost 300 vendors into the facility and set up in neat, orderly rows, ready to vend, in under an hour: At other events, getting that many vendors set up takes most of a full day.

In five years, the Gear Jam Vintage Drags grew from a single one-day nostalgia drag race, to two 2-day nostalgia drag races, and we added a bracket-race component to the event that we are growing and will spin off into its own separate event in two years, called King Of The South, a 3-day bracket race with \$50,000-\$100,000-\$50,000 winners purses for the event.

A large part of Driven Events' success is that we are enthusiasts, putting on events for enthusiasts. We would bring this same energy and business outlook to the NE GA Motorsports Park; in the end, the "Enthusiast Mindset" isn't dictated by the particular niche event (classic cars, drag race, autocross, etc.); it is dictated by understanding the mindset of enthusiasts and understanding we all want the same things, regardless of our particular niche: Quality events, held at quality venues, professionally and efficiently run by the promoters, for a fair price. That's what we do at the NE GA Swap Meet and The Gear Jam Vintage Drags, and that's what we'll bring to the NE GA Motorsports Park.

## **III Marketing Plan**

Driven Events has produced successful swap meets for 18 years, and drag races for five years. The templates for producing other enthusiast-centered events are largely the same as what we do now. A 100-mile radius of Franklin (50-mile drive in any direction) encompasses just shy of 2 million people, while a 200 mile radius (100 mile drive) encompasses over 10 million people, while a 300 mile radius (150 mile drive, or just about three hours) gives us 17 million people. Most of those people have hobbies, and it's our goal to tap into that and bring them to our motorsports park.

We will capitalize on our knowledge of the markets, and that of our management team; looking at what other events are doing right and more importantly what they're doing wrong, and we'll advertise in publications and periodicals, on social media, the radio, and enthusiast-tv shows, and in person at other events.

### **Barriers to Entry**

Space—a physical location, and the infrastructure on it

The NE GA Swap Meet is doing very well, and has grown to the point where it would support the purchase of 20-40 acres of land with what I was paying the Atlanta Dragway in monthly rent, and allow me to put the infrastructure on it I'd need to run the swap meet: gravel driveway/rows for vendors, permanent bathrooms, a small maintenance building to store groundskeeping equipment, garbage collection points, and a small main office and PA equipment to use during the event. With those things I could comfortably keep growing the NE GA Swap Meet and make a comfortable living.

I am not interested in keeping my organization small: my goal is to grow the company with several dozen events per year, employ several full-time people, and bring hundreds of thousands of visitors annually to the local economy.

Annually there are 52 weekends in the year: I fully expect to book events on 60 weekends, as well as weekly Thursday and Friday Night Test and Tune at the drag strip, a Wednesday Night local auction in one of the warehouse/exhibition halls, as well as renting out the tracks to individuals and private groups for testing during the week.

## **Recycling and Green Energy**

The NE Georgia Motorsports Park will incorporate a recycling program for our events, with participant-use collection points on the show field next to every garbage can, and a dedicated area at our garbage collection point to process recyclables. All beverages sold on the property will be aluminum cans or plastic water bottles only, no paper cups (as used food paper is rarely recyclable). Food concessions sold on the property will be specifically chosen in part based on their packaging impact on landfills—for instance, no individual serving chip bags, as they don't biodegrade.

We are also working with LA Renewables to look at the feasibility of powering part of our complex with solar. LA Renewables installs solar arrays for residential and commercial applications, as well as for entire communities. Our discussions are centered around supplementing our electricity needs to power outside lights on the property, as well as supplement the energy use on our bathroom buildings and two Exhibition Halls.

## **Employment**

### **Full-time Office and Management Staff**

Car Shows and Swap Meet Manager (Brad)

PR/Media Relations/Social Media (Rob Kinnan, former editor of Hot Rod Magazine)

Grounds Keeping/Facilities Manager

Ad and sponsorship sales person

Secretary for Brad

Human Resources Director

Art/website Director

Accountant/Book Keeper

General secretary/receptionist

Two full-time ground maintenance crew

Building cleaning crew (outside contractor)

### **Phase 2**

Events Manager (other than car shows and swap meets)

Drag Strip Manager

Concessions manager

### **Part Time**

6 drag strip workers

4 concession staff

3-8 ticket booth staff depending on event size

Parking staff for large events

Extra garbage collection for large events.

MC/Hype Man/Announcer

Safety Crew (required by Georgia Law)

5 Auction Staff for Wednesday Night auction.

Driven Events is an S-Corp, founded and wholly owned by Brad Ocock in 2004 to produce the NE GA Swap Meet, and later the Gear Jam Vintage Drags. The company was launched while discussing the lack of good local swap meets for the automotive enthusiast market, when a friend made an off-the-cuff statement: "Well, start one." The NE GA Swap Meet was a side business for several years while I worked full-time in the automotive magazine industry, both on-staff and as a full-time freelance writer. In 2013 the magazine industry crashed, taking my income as a freelancer from \$65,000 per year to less than \$24,000, so I made the move to promote the swap meet full-time, which coincided with moving it to The Atlanta Dragway in Commerce (from Lanier National Speedway in Braselton, when that track also ceased regular operation). The first show there had 37 vendors and 150 spectators. We now have between 250-300 vendors each month, and 1,000-1,200 paid spectators (children 12-under come in free, and each of the vendors gets a helper in for free, so the actual number of participants is most likely 100-250 more each month).