

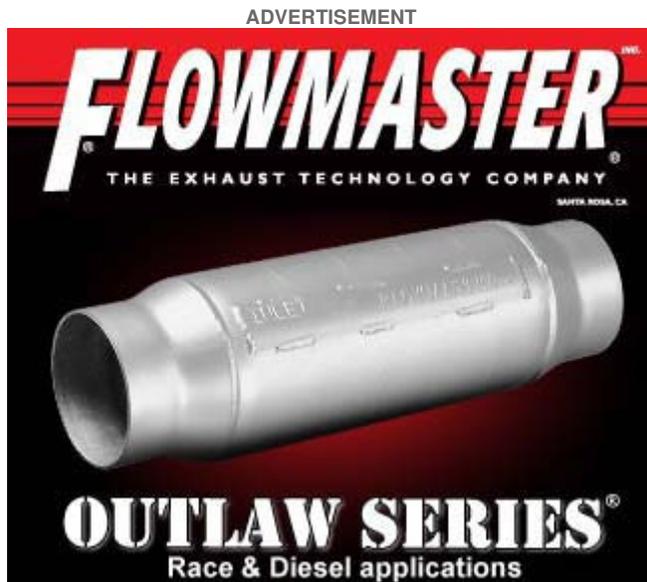


They had to appreciate his contagious sense of humor as he shared that his son, Jason Russell, is just learning to walk and that at age 41, he still is a kid at heart himself. He said he's enthusiastic about teaching and sharing with children because "as I understand it, I was once one!"

But his message of inspiration usually will be geared to Racers Who Care's core goal: to combat juvenile delinquency and drug and alcohol abuse among young people through educational and recreational activities.

"I can't say anything to change anybody's life," Beckman said. "I can wheel the toolbox up to your car, but you have to use the tools inside it."

As he prepared to make a special appearance Dec. 21 at the Los Angeles Shriners Hospital for Children, he said, "I realize that I'm never going to be Mother Teresa, but there were a lot of people who were very beneficial and inspirational to me when I was going through the cancer. And to be able to be in that position for somebody else can be very humbling.



"I'm looking forward to it," he said of the chances to wheel that toolbox of life skills and advice around the area. "It'll help me out, too."

One of the co-founders of Racers Who Care is Russell Pottenger, whose motorsports achievements include NHRA Super Gas competition and being active for several years with the Mean, Lean and Clean Youth Program. Chairman of the Board Scott Horner is a former Pro Stock Motorcycle racer who is founder and president of the American Motorsport Safety

Association, a program similar to RWC.

Since the organization began in March 1993, other drag racers have participated. Among them is Pro Stock Motorcycle leader Steve Johnson.

According to Gregg Nielson, of Topeka's Lawrence Gardner High School, Johnson definitely made an impact when he spoke with the students at the full-lockdown correctional institution for young men.

"When Steve rolled in his bike and began to talk about the racing profession, students began to think that dreams can come true with a little common sense and effort," Nielson said. "The presentation leaves our students with hope and thoughts that they can succeed in life if they don't give up on themselves."

RWC said its representatives have credibility because they have succeeded in an environment that is perceived as ruthless, dangerous, and often unforgiving. Race drivers, RWC contended, "fill a void in youngsters' general education between what they learn in school and what they need to know as they approach adulthood" and enter the workforce.

Beckman didn't have an unfortunate childhood at all, but he has had to battle one of life's toughest enemies: cancer.

In 2004, he was diagnosed with lymphoma.

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