
Posted on Wed, Dec. 20, 2006

Meeting of the minds

But then again ...

By Jim Rising Special to The Weekender

The witnesses are coming! The witnesses are coming! And the Luzerne county visitors association says it's going to be great. Now most of us know very little about the Jehovah's Witness faith. You may have had a knock on your door and been greeted by some well dressed polite young persons offering you some literature, but usually contact with them is brief. Especially when you slam the door in their face, which I myself have heard happens, though I'm not saying that's the right way to handle the visits.

Next summer the Wachovia arena will be host to more than 25,000 Witnesses over four three-day events. The conventions will pump more than \$2.5 million dollars into local hotels, restaurants and other local businesses. The Visitors association has compared the invasion of the Witnesses to the race weekends, when thousands of NASCAR fans descend on our area selling out hotel rooms, clogging our highways and emptying our beer stores. Somehow I don't think it will be quite the same.

It's difficult for me to believe that the folks who hand out copies of the "Watchtower" will be in anyway shape or form like the typical NASCAR fan. I have some knowledge of NASCAR fans, being one of them myself. Anyone who has ventured into the infield at the Pocono races knows that pretty much anything goes. You can see things that will curl and uncurl your hair and would make a Jehovah's Witness lay down and die. Very few well groomed young men and women are in the stands at Pocono handing out religious tracts, and I think if they did, their life expectancy would be briefer than a green flag pit stop.

Still, the visitors association, whose motto is "Visit Pennsylvania today" is saying that the devout evangelical organization will have a large impact on the area, though the witnesses will not be drinking large quantities of beer, taking off their Dale Earnhardt T-shirts and booing Jeff Gordon. (Not that there's anything wrong with any of that.) What would be interesting is if the NASCAR fans and the Jehovah's Witnesses get a chance to mingle together. I am sure there must be some common ground there somewhere right?

The Witnesses meetings include reenactments of bible stories, lectures on the faith and baptisms. The Race weekends include a lot of beer drinking and a lot of big bellied guys yelling a lot and spilling beer. I guess there might be some sort of baptism by beer taking place in the Pocono infield. But then again ... I could be wrong.

Jim Rising plays what he wants and rants weekdays at 10 a.m. on 102.3-FM. The Mountain. Reach him by e-mail at rising@102themountain.com