

# Driving for a dream

Slippery Rock resident Coffaro behind wheel of race car at long last

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Slippery Rock resident Rob Coffaro, 48, is in his second year of racing a RUSH Late Model. He has never raced in any other division. John Enrietto/Butler Eagle

BUFFALO TWP — “Just do it or shut up.”

The words don't sound motivational, but they were enough to get Rob Coffaro into dirt track racing.

The Slippery Rock resident and owner of a pizza shop there wondered for years what it would be like to climb into a race car and compete on local tracks.

“I've been going to local races since I was a kid,” Coffaro, 48, said. “It's always been a bit of a dream to get out there and compete. Honestly, I never thought it would happen.”

But he never stopped talking about it. And his wife, Kim, was getting weary of hearing about it.

"Rob's always been a competitive person," she said. "When he quit playing baseball, he began talking about racing. Finally, I did tell him, 'just shut up or do it.' He decided to do it."

Coffaro played baseball in a Pittsburgh adult league until he was 42. Once he ended his playing career, the competitive juices never dried up.

"I had to get into something ... and this was it," he said, pointing to his RUSH Late Model in the pits at Lernerville Speedway.

Coffaro is in his second season of racing. He bought an old Crate Late Model from Boom Briggs and Chub Frank updated it for him this year. Briggs and Frank are longtime Late Model racers and friends of Coffaro.

"Three years ago, I approached them and told them I want to race," Coffaro said. "They got me set up from there. They've been incredibly helpful. I wouldn't be doing this if not for them."

Success on the track has been slow in coming. Coffaro has no feature wins to his credit and has one top-five finish. He has no sponsors and his race team consists of himself and his wife.

"I'm the crew chief," Kim said, laughing.

Coffaro races in the RUSH late Model series when it comes to Lernerville Speedway. He races occasionally at Dog Hollow in Erie as well.

The Coffaros have three daughters — Gina (19), Julia (17) and Sophia (14) — the latter dealing with multiple disabilities.

"Finances are always an issue for us when it comes to racing," Coffaro said. "We get to the track when we can."

His daughters have seen him race. His wife never misses.

"This is one of his passions and I support him all the way with it," Kim said.

A RUSH Late Model motor costs roughly \$6,000 to \$7,000. The motor in a Super Late Model can cost between \$60,000 and \$70,000.

"That's why we are where we are," Coffaro said, smiling.

While his race set-up is low budget, Coffaro can be victimized on the track like any other driver. Competing in a B-Main — trying to qualify for the Bill Emig Memorial last weekend at Lernerville — his racing night was cut short when another car slammed into the right side of his No. 24.

The damage was enough to knock him out for the evening.

“The same thing happened to me in this event last year,” Coffaro sighed. “Yeah, I guess it’s part of the game.”

A game he keeps showing up for.

Working on the car at night, Coffaro said “I lay in bed and cramp up a lot. I put the time in.”

Kim hands him his tools while he’s working on the car.

“I feel like I’m the assistant surgeon ... he says scalpel and I give it to him,” she said.

While Coffaro has realized his dream of racing, his ultimate dream is still out there.

“Every racer dreams about that moment in victory lane,” he said. “I’m no exception. I mean, that’s the goal of everybody here.”