Special kids get “Ride of a Lifetime”

Houston Motorsports Park (HMP) and Texas Motorsports Experience (TME) are in the business of making racing dreams come true. For many Houstonians that dream may be winning a stock car race or driving a Nextel Cup race car on a high banked asphalt oval. For many disabled or critically ill children with precious little time the dream is to ride in a real race car and hang out with drivers and pit crews. That dream came true on Saturday, December 30 for ten special children and their families from across the United States when the first of seven United Special Sports Alliance (USSA) Ride-Along Experiences were held at Houston Motorsports Park.

The United Special Sportsman Alliance was created in 2000 as a non-profit corporation with a mission to provide children with a disability or life threatening illness the opportunity to live their ultimate dream by experiencing an unforgettable outdoor adventure. Based in Wisconsin, USSA has provided “adventures” mostly in the form of hunting, fishing, camping and canoeing experiences to over 3,500 children from across North America including Texas.

The lifeblood of USSA is a group of volunteers from across the United States who donate time, services, and funding support. One of those volunteers is Micah Slaughter an accomplished outdoor enthusiast from Huntsville, Texas. Slaughter got involved with USSA in 2004 by taking children on hunting and camping expeditions to hunting preserves of friends. Besides loving the great Texas outdoors, he had a passion for stock cars.

“When Micah came to us late this summer with an idea about integrating race car ride-along experiences into a 2-3 day format of providing USSA sponsored hunting, fishing and camping adventures we were very excited because as a racing family we know how much children enjoy being around stock cars”, said TME President Cheri Bumbera. “He told us about his previous experience of taking USSA sponsored children for rides at Atlanta Motor Speedway and his desire to do the same thing right here in his own backyard. He had heard about TME and HMP and wondered if my husband Kenny and I could put together a car and a ride-along program for USSA and that’s what we did with the help of Graham Baker from HMP. In fact as far as we know it’s the only program of its kind in the United States. We’re hoping the racing community and the general public will join in our efforts with contributions for car maintenance expenses and travel costs for USSA families that come to Houston.

The daylong event started at 11:00 a.m. and continued throughout the day. USSA President and Founder Brigid O’Donoghue and son Kenneth Allington from Pittsville were on hand as well as USSA Advisory Board members Micah Slaughter and Pam Dore. Pam’s son Dalton was the first USSA sponsored child to get a ride in a Nextel Cup car at HMP in October.