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Woodward Dream Cruise founder Nelson House dies at 69

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The Detroit News

Ferndale -- Less than two weeks before the 15th anniversary of the Woodward Dream Cruise, its founder, Nelson House, has died. He was 69.

Mr. House likened cruising Woodward on weekends in 1962 in his green and white Chevy to the plot of "American Graffiti," with its young drivers. In 1995, he bet his fondness for driving on Michigan's famous roadway would rub off on others and planned the first Cruise.

Today, the car-loving event has grown to become a nationwide draw.

It its first year, Mr. House envisioned a line of classic cars on Woodward for the weekend, with the owners driving their vintage autos that Sunday along a short stretch of the boulevard. It was a fund-raising effort to benefit civic endeavors in Ferndale, Pleasant Ridge, Huntington Woods, Royal Oak, Berkley and Birmingham. The inaugural classic cars event drew 250,000 people -- nearly 10 times the number expected.

Now, the Cruise is billed as the world's largest one-day automotive event, drawing 1.5 million people and 40,000 classic cars each year from around the globe, from places as far away as Australia and Japan.

Mr. House, who died Thursday at his home in Ferndale, was born Aug. 24, 1940, in Northville to Nelson and Evelyn House and later served in the U.S. Navy.

Mr. House was dedicated to his Ferndale community, serving as chairman of three bond issues, on the Ferndale High School Band Boosters, the Elks Youth Government Program and the Kids Dream Field Foundation. He was a mayoral candidate in 1996.

Mr. House is survived by his wife, Venetta; children Sean, Derek, Sandra; grandchildren Ava, Mariella, Jessica and Jimmy; siblings Lawrence, Elaine Mitchell, Alan, Carol Lowther, Maryanne, Michael and Stephen. He was predeceased by a sister, Cheryl Gowienczyk.

Visitation is 5-9 p.m. Saturday and 2-9 p.m. Sunday at Spaulding & Curtin Funeral Directors, 500 W. Nine Mile in Ferndale and at 9:30 a.m. Monday before 10 a.m. Mass is celebrated at St. James Catholic Church in Ferndale.

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