

Classics rev up summer

More than a few heads turned to catch a glimpse of Roger Ratkowski's gleaming, light green 1932 Plymouth P.B., a street rod parked behind the Pasta Stop one day recently.

Ratkowski, who owns the Italian fast food restaurant in downtown Farmington, can only fantasize about having the entire parking lot filled with classic cars, all prompting "oohs," "aahs" and second glances. He won't have to dream for too long if everything goes his way.

The very first "Cruise the Grand" classic car display is scheduled for the evening of Monday, June 1, kicking off what Ratkowski and co-sponsor Dennis Page (of Page's Food & Spirits) are confident will become a summer happening, a weekly ritual for folks who remember when the name Motor City carried some oomph.

"We'd like to have 25 or 30 cars on the first night and that's not unrealistic," Ratkowski said. "Get the word of mouth out and it'll grow on its own."

Also co-sponsoring the endeavor

or is Roush Racing Museum in Livonia, which Ratkowski said is the largest racing organization in the world.

"Who knows," said Ratkowski. "Maybe (museum owner) Jack Roush himself will pop up. He's still an enthusiast for classic cars."

Having such big-name support certainly helps the cause. But another reason Ratkowski is boldly predicting "Cruise the Grand" will become an annual Farmington fixture is the fact that people enjoy looking at cool, sometimes spectacular, cars, the kind their grandfather might have driven.

"You have older people (at cruise nights) who reminisce about it," Ratkowski continued. "Their first car might have been like that. And then there are the wannabes, the wish-to-haves. They (like cars) are attention getters, no doubt about it."

"It doesn't take much to turn a person's head when they're driving down the road."

Another plus is lazy summer-time fun and camaraderie, he

mixed in with cold drinks or grilled Italian sausages. A patio will be open behind the Pasta Stop and music will be played from across the parking lot to present an almost backyard picnic feel.

"Part of the camaraderie is you don't have a clock to punch," said Ratkowski, who is a member of several classic car clubs and a NASCAR buff. "...You're here to see your friends and neighbors and see what's new."

Or, to see what's old. On each Monday until September, there will be a so-called "static display" of pristine antiques, at least a quarter-century old, and street rods, pre-1948 vehicles described as "hopped up antiques" by Ratkowski, compared to fenderless hot rods. The featured attractions will be driven to the site from classic car clubs such as the Cow Town Cruisers or Spark Plugs Car Club.

Perhaps among them will be the Ratkowski's classic, with its modified drive train and 318 eight-cylinder engine. It served as an appetizer for the meal to come on that recent day when it was parked behind the Pasta Stop. Ratkowski's street rod looked ancient, but spiffy, amid the Probes, Escorts and Neons.

And it's usefulness hasn't faded, either. "It drives as nice as my Town Car," said Ratkowski, who lives in Livonia.

Those throwbacks to another era will be parked a few hours while classic car lovers mingle and enjoy. Then, everybody will leave the city until the following Monday and repeat the cycle, so to speak.

Ratkowski promised that "Cruise the Grand" won't veer out of control. The idea is for car lovers to come and go without disrupting nearby businesses



Car buffs: Classic automobile fans of all ages will get a kick out of some of the top-of-the-line roadsters and rods on display starting Monday, June 1, in downtown Farmington's city parking lot behind Page's Food & Spirits and The Pasta Stop. Those shops will sponsor the Monday night "cruises," featuring food, music and, of course, cars. At left, Susan Roush of Roush Racing Museum in Livonia and Roger Ratkowski of The Pasta Stop, who both own classics, pose near a couple exquisite models including his 1932 Plymouth P.B.

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and residents; Ratkowski is working with Farmington Public Safety Director Gary Goss to ensure the events will go smoothly.

So far, Ratkowski has received

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fun," said Ural, 42, who started her business when she was only 23. "Now people realize it's a profession, it's a needed profession."

Subsequently, she pared her business to a five-member crew. That way she's more involved in the day-to-day decisions.

As a chamber member, Ural has served on many committees and was a past chairman. She is

credited with starting the highly-popular "Taste of Farmington" where people sample cuisine from area restaurants, while sharing business tidbits with others from the community.

Dara Gaucher, Athena Award chairperson, marvels at how much Ural is involved in business promotion and other community events.

"If you're going to do anything in Farmington Hills, you're going to bump into her," said Gaucher, who works with Hills-based

Michigan National Corporation. The Athena Award only reaffirms Ural's chosen career path that grew from being a painter of water colors and acrylic works.

"That award means that other people respect me as a business person," she said.



By design: Nurten Ural's eye for interior design, business and people win her acclaim.

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