

# Regional Group #24 – The Early Years

By: Wayne Deitrich

Part one, “The Beginning Story of Regional Group #24”, focused on how RG #24 received its charter as a member of the Early Ford Club of America, the founding members and the election of S.R. Jones in 1970 as the first local club president. This installment, part two, covers the period from 1971 – 1997. Burns Cox wrote a history of the club covering this period, and it was published in a 1997 issue of the “Running Board”. Following is a rewrite and summary of Burns’ article.

Joe Smith was elected president for 1971. Several years later Joe was elected to the national club board as a director and treasurer and began writing articles for the club magazine, “The V-8 Times”, under the heading, “The Shade Tree Mechanic” which offered helpful mechanical fix-it hints to early V-8 owners. Joe continues to be an active member of the club and runs a successful old Ford and hot rod parts business in Atlanta. Following Joe Smith as president were Joe Plaxico in 1972 and Ed Bellinger in 1973. Club membership had risen to 64. In 1974 the club elected Clarence Haven as fifth president and embarked on an active year with its first car show and first regional tour to FDR’s “Little White House” in Warm Springs, GA. Membership increased to 76.

In 1975 Jerry Grayson was elected president. The club began holding an annual Spring car show at North DeKalb Mall and submitted a bid to host the 1977 Eastern National Meet. In 1976 Clarence Haven returned to office serving as the seventh president. John Davis was elected in 1977 and along with Joe Pruitt, Chairman of the 1977 Eastern National Meet, led RG#24 as host of its first very successful national meet, “V-8 Heaven in ‘77”, held at the Atlanta Century Center Hotel Complex.

John Lischke was elected president for 1978. The club sponsored its first invitational car show involving other Metro-Atlanta car clubs, and the first multi-region Early Ford V-8 meet was held with North Carolina Piedmont, RG#52 at Unicoi Park in Helen, GA. Waymon Brownlee was elected president for 1979 and re-elected in 1980. Waymon was elected to the national club board as director in 1996 and was the second RG#24 member to serve in this capacity.

During the 1980’s, the club received excellent leadership from the eleventh president Lawson Cox (1981), Ralph Rivers (1982), Randall Malone (1983) and Cox again in 1984. In 1985, Les Fisher was elected the fifteenth president and with Lawson Cox serving as meet chairman as RG#24 hosted its second successful Eastern National Meet, “Give ‘Em A Drive in ‘85”. Fisher was reelected in 1986, a year that featured a Spring tour to Ashville, NC and the Biltmore Estate. Dan Orten was elected president and served for the first half of 1987. Orten was replaced by Burns Cox as the seventeenth president with Cox being reelected twice in 1988 and 1989.

Bob Butler was the eighteenth president serving three terms, 1990–1992. During this time the club rebuilt and raffled a 1940 flathead V-8 engine, with the guidance of Harold “Putt” Smith. Les Fisher was elected to a second stint as president in 1993. During this term a 1939 Ford standard coupe was purchased and restored as a replica of car No. 22, the first car to win a sanctioned NASCAR race at the Daytona Beach–Road Course on February 15, 1948 and driven by Red Byron.



Red Byron with No. 22, a 1939 Ford Standard Coupe

Don Collier was elected the twentieth president and served two terms in 1994–95. The club celebrated its Twenty-fifth Anniversary in 1994 and hosted an all Ford car show at Clayton State College in Morrow, GA. During 1995, Jerry Grayson organized and led a two-night weekend tour to Chattanooga, featuring a riverboat ride on the Tennessee River.

Roy Watson was elected the twenty-first president in 1996 and reelected in 1997. In 1996 RG#24 submitted a bid which was accepted to host the 1997 Eastern National Meet. Don Collier was appointed meet chairman. Also in 1996, the club held a Spring weekend tour to Ocala, Florida to meet with the Florida regional groups and tour the Don Garlits’ Museum and in the Fall a tour through middle-Georgia to an antebellum plantation. In 1997, RG#24 hosted its third successful Eastern National Meet where the restored replica of car #22 was displayed. The meet theme was “Early V-8 Heaven in ‘97”. Club membership had grown to 110 very active members!

Thank you to Harold Thompson for sharing the Burns Cox article.