

# Pen Argyl man fulfills dying wish to see Daytona Speedway, but won't see Sunday's race

By [Kathryn Brenzel | The Express-Times](#)

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In a motor home outside the Daytona International Speedway, a [Pen Argyl](#) man died in the homestretch of his dream.

Mitchell R. Zanette, 50, died Thursday, just three days short of seeing the Daytona 500, the goal of a bucket-list inspired trip with family and friends. He'd been battling cancer for 16 months, and after it went into remission and returned, Zanette took action, said longtime friend, Ralph Cianci.

"When they told him this is it, you're going to punch out, he said, 'This is what I'm going to do,'" Cianci said. "He just wasn't going to sit still."

Zanette left an Allentown hospice about a week before the trip and made his own funeral arrangements, said his brother Joe Zanette. Doctors gave him three days to a week to live about three weeks ago, Joe Zanette, said but his brother was determined to follow the NASCAR tour, his first stop being Daytona.

They acquired a few weeks' worth of pain medicine, rented a motor home and set out Feb. 14 with his son Mitchell Anthony Zanette, his companion Tammy Bloodworth and friends to see the race.

"He was just so strong and determined to fight this," he said. "He wanted to follow the whole NASCAR circuit, unfortunately that got cut short."

Though he didn't get to see the race, Zanette got to see a lot of practice at the racetrack, his brother said. They also brought the motor home to the beach, where Zanette grilled and drank Budweisers with his friends and family near.

Those who knew Zanette describe him as a dedicated volunteer, a loyal friend and a longtime racing fan. He was a fixture at the Pocono Raceway for more than 20 years and a big fan of the late Dale Earnhardt Sr., friends said.

Friends said they were trying to get Dale Earnhardt Jr. to put the Zanette's name on his dashboard for Sunday's race.

For more than 20 years, he was a volunteer firefighter with the [Lookout Fire Co.](#) in Pen Argyl, which is where Cianci met him in 1994, while he volunteered for the Wind Gap Fire Department. He said Zanette also was captain of a local billiards team.

Zanette worked as a union laborer for TWK Construction for 15 years, said his boss, Toby Klump, who has known Zanette for 42 years, since they grew up together in Pen Argyl. He said that before Zanette volunteered at the Pen Argyl department, he worked as a junior firefighter with the Plainfield Township Fire Department.

"He was a great, fun guy, who would give anybody the shirt off his back," he said.

Zanette was first diagnosed with throat cancer, an illness that befell his father, his brother said. After treatment and remission, doctors found that the cancer had spread to his bones. His brother said that Zanette decided not to allow the cancer to keep him from living as he liked -- he even went hunting in October.

His family and friends will fulfill the top wish on his bucket list on his behalf Sunday by remaining in Daytona for the race. Zanette wouldn't have wanted them to turn back, his brother said.

"My brother has the best seat in the house," he said. "He's up there with his buddy Dale Earnhardt Sr."