

In search of a storage building for his family's assorted racing equipment and trailers, Al stalked a vacant building for about a year before the opportunity to purchase it ironically came about. Measuring a healthy 4,000-square feet, and situated in a commercial neighborhood, the building provided exactly what he and his family were looking for in a storage facility.

"It was owned by Gil Horstman, who had passed away some time before," said Al. "Mr. Horstman was well known for his go kart parts manufacturing, especially his clutches, and I knew of him right away. When we met with Mrs. Horstman and her agent about purchasing the building, I showed her a picture of one of my daughters racing in her kart, and in the background, on the fence, was a banner with the Horstman name and logo on it. Until that day I hadn't even seen the banner."

Through the conversation, Mrs. Horstman determined that Al and his family needed the building, and a deal was struck. Al and his friends, Mark Pittman and Greg Watkins, quickly went to work refurbishing the building, which had deteriorated over the years. During the renovation, they added two offices, a screening room, and a 400-amp electrical service box; they replaced every switch, wire and outlet, and gave the plumbing the same attention, and even built on an additional 1,000-square foot of building.

"They even added the tiles in the detail-wash area," Al said. "It got a little out of control, but the end result is great. Those guys deserve all the credit for making Dalcop/AREA 51 the place it is today."



A Betty Boop awaits a dance in the drag cafe.

Having four children, three girls and a boy, Al and his wife, Debbie, enjoyed entertaining family events at the garage, hosting Christmas parties for the church, church board meetings, anniversaries and birthdays for friends and family, and just enjoying the garage as an extension of the home. It didn't take long for people to begin asking about renting the garage for private events, something Al wasn't quickly in tune with.

"One day, Debbie asked why don't we give it a try and see how it works out, so we did, and it worked," said Al. "In 2008, we did 30-plus events, everything from milestone birthday parties to fundraisers to some corporate events, even election parties. It's also a regular meeting place for one of our primary sponsors, PetroSpecs/BG Oil Products. If you're in the automotive business, this is a great place to meet."

AREA 51 came about as a name for the DBA, as it was part of the garage's nickname during renovations. People would enquire as to what was going on inside the building and Greg and Mark would say that it was top secret, that it was a project for AREA 51, Hangar 18. Dalcop became the name of the racing arm of the family's corporation; the "D" for Debbie, and Al put together with Corp. Their attorney came up with the idea. Upon entering AREA 51, visitors are struck by the amount of eye candy looming about. Everything from a fleet of 1960's HEMI and Max Wedge Mopars to a life size plastic statue of the cartoon family *The Simpsons*, record albums and photographs autographed from Jan and Dean, The Beach Boys, and a flurry of actors and actresses, a Coca-Cola diner, oodles of original soda company crates, vintage radios, and, of course, lots of racing items. Dead center is the Good Neighbor Pharmacy 2005 Chevrolet Cobalt drag car with nearly 900-horsepower, driven by one of Al's daughters, Erica, which helped bring worldwide attention to the Cobalt as a true contender in the motorsports world.

"We'd been involved in racing and off-road sports for a long time," he said. "As a family, it's something we all enjoy. But when the opportunity came along for me to drive a friend's super comp dragster I decided to get back into drag racing.



More eye candy anchored with old racing tires and a vintage jacket.