



**TONY STEIN**  
RANDOM RAMBLES

## NO DRAGSTER, CART RACE AT TCC OPENING

I hate to accuse champion drag racer Bobby Martin of being chicken but, hey, facts are facts.

Rewind back to last Monday when Tidewater Community College unveiled its new and technically terrific Regional Automotive Center off Clearfield Avenue in Chesapeake.

One of the prime attractions was Martin's alcohol funny car, with wheels that can spin up to 259 mph in a quarter-mile run. Whoosh!

All around Martin and the dragster was a cluster of young men, gazing fondly at the car like it was a page of the Sports Illustrated swimsuit issue.

I was riding a mobility cart, top speed 4½ mph, but all those metallic muscles under the car's frame just stirred my competitive juices to a fast boil.

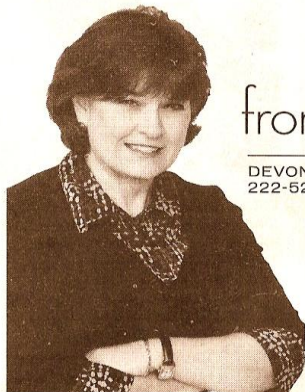
"Yo, Mr. Martin, drag for a beer?"

He laughed. The young men laughed. But he never answered my challenge. Chicken!

Actually, it's just as well. I don't drink beer and, somehow, "Drag for a Dr. Pepper?"

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# citypage



## from the editor

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When we heard from a reader about a 107-year-old man who climbs on a ladder and cleans out his gutters, well, we had to check him out.

Finton Faulk took time out of his busy day to talk with reporter James Thomas Jr. and even drive him to visit Faulk's 90-year-old

## Age: It's only a number, a really big number

"baby" brother, who lives in Portsmouth and cuts Faulk's hair.

Thomas's story, on Page One, gives us a peek into the life of a man who lives by a simple creed of doing well unto others ... and a daily dose of oatmeal.

Columnist Tony Stein, no young rooster himself, checked out the new Regional Automotive Center at the Chesapeake campus of Tidewater Community College.

Imagine, if you will, the venerable Mr. Stein, hat brim pulled low upon his

brow, staging his 4½ mph power chair – pimped out with wheel spinners and streamers – against Bobby Martin's alcohol-fueled Funny Car that has a top-speed of 259 mph.

Now that would be a drag race I'd pay to watch.

To find out how Martin handled Tony's challenge and what top TCC official drove a car into the building, read his report, also on Page One, about the grand opening of the new center.

# STEIN

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doesn't have quite the right sound.

And while I'm leveling accusations, there was Deborah DiCroce, president of Tidewater Community College, driving a car into the building.

Well, almost. Usually, big projects like this one feature a ribbon-cutting with bigwigs waggling oversize scissors while they jockey for photo space.

What they did Monday was have DiCroce edge a car through the ribbon. She stopped short of the door but, just to be sure, I asked a state trooper in the crowd to overlook the infraction. Don't bother to thank me, Dr. DiCroce. Always glad to support education.

Up until the early 1980s, people who fixed cars were



BRADLEY SMITH/TCC COMMUNITY COLLEGE

**Deborah DiCroce, president of Tidewater Community College, had the key to opening the new Regional Automotive Center.**

"mechanics" or even "grease monkeys." Then everything but the Virginia Tech stickers on the rear windows got computerized.

Now car-fixers are technicians. And the new automotive center looks to me like technician hog heaven.

Check it out. Fifteen service bays, including one that will hold a tractor-trailer, good buddy.

If Martha Stewart ever wanted a place to serve lunch in an automotive mechanic's shop, she could do it on one of the immaculate bay floors.

Another good thing was the center's version of a TV reality show. The bay area has ceiling-mounted cameras that zoom in on demonstrations of service techniques, so students can watch on classroom video screens.

Given the automobile industry is aching like a super-sized hangover, I wondered what the future is for students who train at the center.

Scott Smith, president of the Hampton Roads Automotive Dealers Association, looked at the bright side. In the past, he told the crowd, car dealers figured parts and service departments would break even while sales made the big money.

But now the brake shoe is on the other foot. Car sales tread water while parts and



COURTESY PHOTO

**Tony Stein, in his mobility cart, challenged champion dragster Bobby Martin to a race. Martin smiled but did not answer.**

service departments are busy keeping older cars running.

People are big on service and maintenance these days, he said, so maybe 40,000 or 50,000 technicians will be needed to ply their trade.

He's probably right. After all, a great Truth is the day after your warranty expires, the car malfunctions.

It is written.

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