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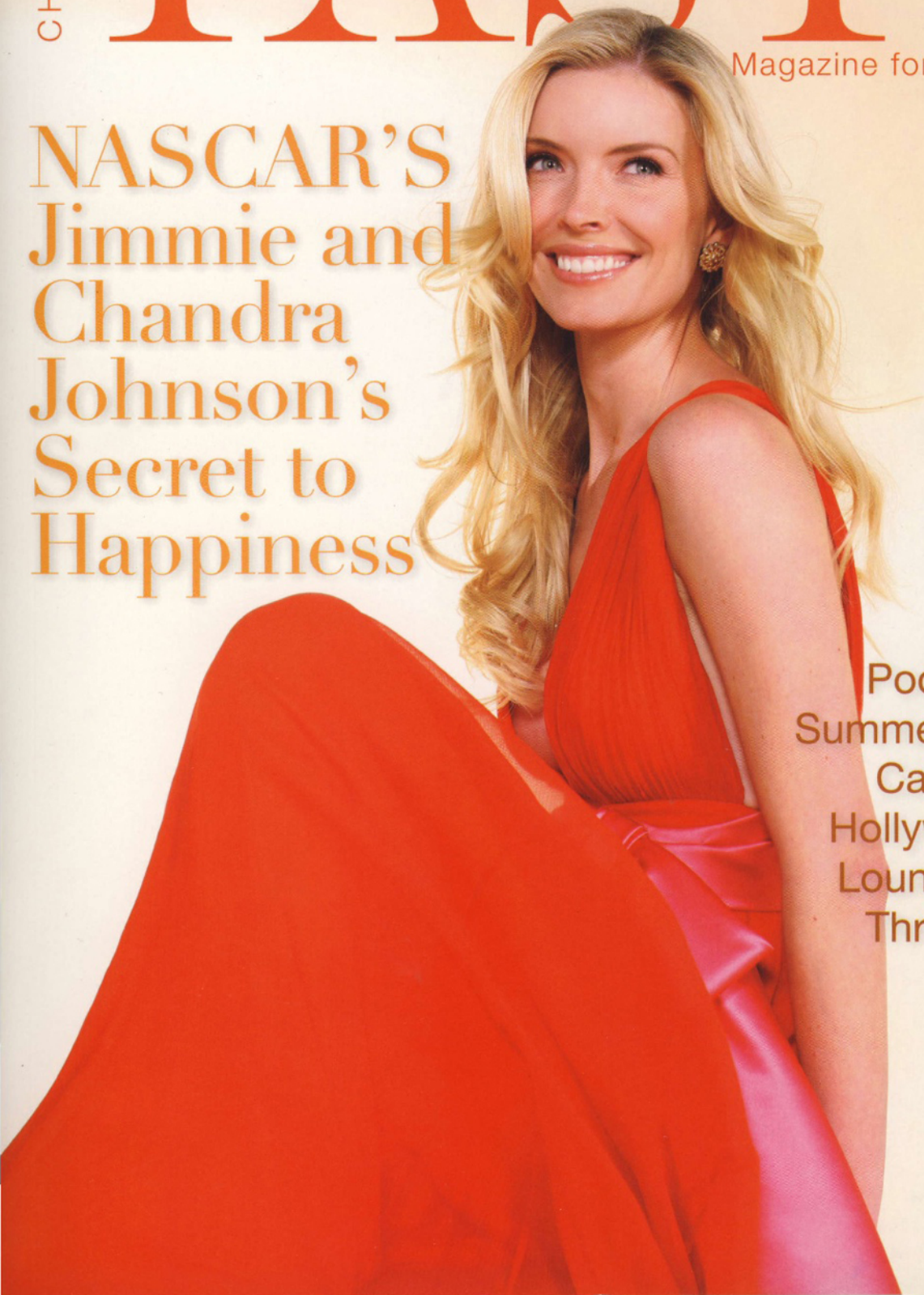
CHARLOTTE

# TASTE

Magazine for Tasteful Living

NASCAR'S  
Jimmie and  
Chandra  
Johnson's  
Secret to  
Happiness

Poolside Drinks  
Summer Swimwear  
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# Pursuing Dreams

## Chandra and Jimmie Johnson's Secret to Happiness

What do an international model and a champion NASCAR driver have in common?

A great deal these days.

Oklahoma native Chandra Johnson has honored Charlotte by giving us a moment of her time and an inside glimpse into the busy and fulfilling life of a very public NASCAR marriage. Chandra and Jimmie's fairy tale romance began when they met at a NASCAR all-star event through mutual friends a half dozen years ago. "It was only briefly – I had a chance to get to know him better later in New York, where I was living at the time," shares Chandra in a phone interview just days before Charlotte's Nextel cup race at Lowe's Motor Speedway. Jimmie and Chandra have always held a common interest – and one which is also shared by nearly every family in NASCAR. This common interest has developed into a driving force in their life and work on a daily basis since the two fell in love.

What is the secret behind Chandra's giant smile, dancing blue eyes and her husband's stellar NASCAR success? Simply put: giving back. "Chandra and I have been very blessed," Jimmie states publicly. "We get to do what we enjoy in life, and that is something we don't take for granted. We have incredibly supportive friends and family, and we feel that I have the best fans in our sport."

Chandra has been involved in charitable work since her college days at University of Oklahoma, where she did philanthropic work for her sorority. She attributes her interest in helping others to good solid values. "I think growing up in Oklahoma in a good family helped me keep my head on straight." Not an easy feat in the world of modeling, big city living and NASCAR celebrity.

Jimmie's charitable work goes back to his earliest days in NASCAR. The sheer volume of opportunities to help and his desire to make the most impact inspired the couple to launch a charitable foundation with a clear mission and implementation strategy. The Jimmie Johnson Foundation was launched shortly after the two were married. Its mission: the Foundation is dedicated to assisting children, families and communities in need throughout the United States, and strives to help everyone, particularly children, pursue their dreams. It comes as no surprise that this dynamic duo who live their dream every day would hope to encourage others to do the same. They have a mutual desire to help children especially.

"It's been amazing. Jimmie has always wanted to do something. He wanted to start something charitable that he could focus on, and we have had so much fun doing it." The passion and enthusiasm in Chandra's voice is authentic, and it sounds as if the

words cannot even express all she is trying to convey. "We are really drawn to children – both of us. Jimmie is also very involved in the American Red Cross and Habitat for Humanity through Lowe's, his sponsor, as well as Make a Wish Foundation and Victory Junction. "We serve on the board for Make a Wish and are going to build a house through Habitat for Humanity. The family selected will be determined through the needs of the children. We try to put most of our energy and efforts in concentrated places. I cannot believe how much support we have gotten from Jimmie's fans, our friends, and our families. It's amazing what you can do when you put your mind to it," Chandra excitably shares.

Just a year after announcing the formation of the Foundation, the Johnsons embarked on their first major initiative and teamed up with another NASCAR couple, Kyle and Pattie Petty, to build a bowling alley for special needs children through The Victory Junction Gang Camp. In less than a year, the project came to fruition and celebrated its grand opening just this spring with both the Pettys and Johnsons present to bowl the inaugural frames. "I am excited to let people know that this exists here near Charlotte. I just assumed people know about it because they are here. [The Victory Junction Gang Camp] is a wonderful camp the Pettys started, in honor of their son Adam," explains Chandra. Adam Petty was killed in a race car accident in May of 2000 at only 20 years of age in a practice for the Busch race at New Hampshire International Speedway when his car hit the turn three wall.

NASCAR fans stand out among all other professional sports fans as the largest fan base in the world, and with good reason. Their heroes don't go on strike and constantly battle with team owners for more money. They are real. They are human, and they are reachable. Perhaps it is the very nature of the sport, where the reality of how fleeting life is bonds drivers, team owners and their fans at a level unseen in the sporting world.

"The NASCAR drivers and the community are some of the most philanthropic people in the world," says Chandra. "So many drivers have their own foundation. It is huge. I believe that the foundation of NASCAR is very family oriented. It makes a big difference. People are always involved. If we need anything from anyone, all of the drivers and teams are always there." Clearly it is that human connection and respect for life that bonds these heroes and their fans together and brings happiness to those that embrace it. *For more information visit [jimmiejohnsonfoundation.org](http://jimmiejohnsonfoundation.org) and [victoryjunction.org](http://victoryjunction.org).* ■

By Katherine Stefan, Photo by Brooke Thomas



