By Rob Brockmeyer
Sports Editor

The racing season at Susanville's High Desert Speedway starts Saturday, April 7 with a changing of the guard. Long-time promoter Larry Jackson has handed duties over to the team of Sam Evans and Paul Blacka. The two assume the duties after assisting Jackson for several years when the season starts Saturday, April 7 at the Lassen County Fairgrounds.

"Sam and Paul will do just fine. I'm honored to have them take over for me," said Jackson, who is moving to South Carolina later this year. "Sam has been in charge of the pit gate and Paul has been grooming the track. He's largely responsible for building one of the most highly-regarded track in the state."

Jackson has two years left on his promotion contract with the fairgrounds. He will remain responsible for the operation of the track.

"The word is that we'll have more drivers this year. Our go-cart class is going to be more organized and take up less time each night," Evans said. "It's important that we give our kids a chance to get started in racing. They are the future of High Desert Speedway."

Two-time track champion Chris Olexiewicz will not be back to defend his modified title. Olexiewicz, who won by 85 points last year with the help of 10 top-three finishes, reportedly has moved to Arizona to pursue a career in racing.

D.J. Short, a former strictly stock champion and last raced modifieds in 1998, is back behind the wheel of a new modified. He will be joined by Terry Kennemore (1998 stock car champion), John Ward, Jeff Chew, Will Zinn, Ken Richards and John Sloan among others.

Last year's mini stock champion Erica Harmon will continue her young racing career by jumping behind the wheel of a hobby stock. The rest of the field will include Robert McGowan, Pat Lunsford and Herbie Williams.

Mini stock drivers include the Costa family, Joshua Richards and Paul Blacka Jr.

A 10-race modified series will be held in conjunction with the track in Fernley, Nev. Drivers will amass points in each race for a purse worth at least $3,000.

"The purse will grow throughout the year. The series should make for a good field of drivers on those nights," Evans said.

The series starts on the second race of the season in Susanville and ends in Fernley on the season's final night.

Racing returns to the Lassen County Fair with a 40-lap, double-point race which will force drivers to make a pit stop.

"It should be something. I don't think can make it the entire race without pitting," Blacka said.

The modifieds and hobby stocks will race on July 4.

Admission costs $8 for adults, $6 for seniors and $5 for children.

Food, beer and souvenirs will be sold through the year. Races start at 7 p.m. each night.