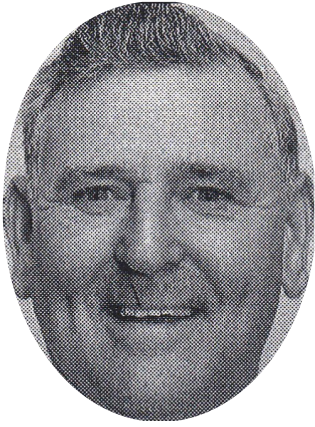


## *Don LaJoie*



**B**orn and raised in Norwalk, **Don LaJoie** made his mark in sports with outstanding success as a race car driver in a career that spanned four decades.

The 57 year old honoree began his career in 1953 when he and his brother, Roger, built a dragster. Although only 15, Don drove the car at dragstrips across the Northeast.

It wasn't until 1959 that Don sat behind the wheel of a stock car. He took his initial ride at Waterford Speedbowl in a 1937 Dodge owned by Norwalker Larry Hamilton. His first ride was almost his last. Don destroyed the car in a wild accident that saw it flip five times. "There wasn't much left of the car. I did learn something though — never take your hands off the steering wheel," recalled Don.

Racing took a back seat to business when Don joined the family business, LaJoie's Auto Wrecking on Meadow Street. The desire to race a stock car again burned deep, and in 1962, Don, with the help of the late Charlie Hyatt, got a Southern New York Racing Association license. The SNYRA competed weekly at the Danbury Race Arena. Hyatt, who, with his partner Braswell Wood, operated Hyatt & Wood on Cross Street, told officials Don was going to drive his car.

As they say, the rest is history. Over the next 18 years Don won five-point championships in his famed red and white 7-11 cars. When the race arena closed in 1981, Don was the record holder for most feature wins with 58.

The record was achieved despite missing two years when he raced at Stafford Motor Speedway. While most of his success came at Danbury, Don raced at Charlotte Motor Speedway, Trenton, Pocono, and several other tracks. One of his biggest thrills was his induction into the Race of Champions Hall of Fame before a crowd of 20,000 at Pocono Raceway in 1990.

Many Norwalk residents were associated with Don over his career. Paul Hammond and the late Angelo Ferrente shared ownership with Don on his first Danbury car. Others who Don — a graduate of St. Joseph's School in South Norwalk and Wright Tech in Stamford — owes thanks to for helping him attain success are the late Art Hornick, Carm Sarosi, Rit Whitney, Pete LaJoie, and John Leezo.

Don and his wife of 37 years, Kathleen (Kathy) Brady LaJoie, have three children. Daughter Melissa (Missy) resides in Fairfield with her husband Jim Murphy and their children Erin and Ryan. Daughter Linda lives in Norwalk and son Randy resides in North Carolina with his wife Lisa (Battee) and their children Corey and Casey. A son, Ronnie, died in 1976. Don and Kathy spend much of their time watching Randy race on the NASCAR circuit.