

## Randy LaJoie



**R**andy LaJoie was born to be a race driver. That was pretty clear early in his childhood when he began racing go karts in the parking lot at Calf Pasture Beach on Saturday mornings as part of the Norwalk Karting Association.

“I was a seasoned veteran by 16,” LaJoie, now 57, says with a laugh.

All kidding aside, though, the Norwalk native was on a fast track to becoming a champion stock car race driver. Inspired by his legendary Hall of Fame father, Don LaJoie, a 1995 Norwalk Old Timers honoree, young Randy had definitely found his passion early in life.

In fact, he’s been around cars most of his life. He was only five years old when he started working at LaJoie’s Auto Wrecking, his dad’s successful business on Meadow Street in South Norwalk. That’s also where

the red and white 711 Ford Coupe the elder LaJoie made famous at race tracks like Danbury Fair Speedway Racearena was housed and worked on during the week. A young Randy LaJoie was no doubt paying attention.

But he did have other sports interests back then. He played baseball in the Norwalk American Little League for Greenberg’s and manager “Babe” Spinola.

“A wonderful man and family,” LaJoie said.

When his Little League days were over, however, the only sport LaJoie wanted to compete in involved a steering wheel instead of a bat and ball.

LaJoie, who attended St. Joseph School in South Norwalk and then J.M. Wright Tech in Stamford, began racing full-bodied race cars in 1980. One year later, at the age of 20, he won the Modified Sportsmen Division championship at Danbury, the same title his father won five times.

When Danbury closed after that season, LaJoie took his talents to the Waterford Speedbowl and was named the Modified Division Rookie of the Year in 1982.

Then in ’83, he stepped up to the NASCAR North Tour and earned Rookie of the Year honors in that series as well.

But it was in 1985 when Norwalk’s Randy LaJoie had his breakthrough year as he scored five North Tour victories and won the series championship. Also in ’85, he made his NASCAR Winston Cup debut at Atlanta Motor Speedway and won the Daytona 500 consolation race. Ten years later, LaJoie qualified for the 1995 Daytona 500 and finished in 29th place against the best race drivers in the world.

LaJoie also enjoyed success driving in the NASCAR Busch Grand National Series (now called the Xfinity Series), where he was behind the wheel in 350 races in 19 years. He finished first 15 times, recorded 118 top-10 finishes, and won back-to-back Busch Series championships in 1996 and ’97.

His impressive career also included 44 races over 12 years in the NASCAR Sprint Cup Series with three top-10 finishes.

LaJoie, who retired from racing in 2006, was inducted into the New England Auto Racers Hall of Fame in 2016, while last year he was enshrined into the Fairfield County Sports Hall of Fame.

A resident of North Carolina the last 31 years, LaJoie still has close ties to the sport of racing. After retiring, he hosted NASCAR radio shows from 2009-’15, and was an ESPN analyst for NASCAR races and shows from 2007-’10.

LaJoie has also been an activist in auto racing safety and since 2007 he has run a nonprofit organization known as “Safer Racer” whose mission is to improve auto racing safety at all levels. It has been to 150 tracks across the U.S. and Canada educating racers on all new and current safety trends.

He and his wife Lisa are also co-owners of The Joie of Seating, their successful business which produces custom fitted high performance aluminum racing seats.

And just as Randy followed in his father’s footsteps, so, too, did his two sons. Corey, 27, has competed in over 50 races on the premier Monster Energy NASCAR Cup series and NASCAR Xfinity series, while Casey, 24, is a former racer who now works as a racing announcer.