

## Charlie Mitchell



Charlie Mitchell and his popular auto racing column "Around the Speedway" makes one of its biggest pit stops tonight to get honored by the Norwalk Old Timers Athletic Association.

Mitchell has been one of the leading auto racing columnists and writers in the Northeast for over three decades. But the native Norwalker's association in local sports began long before that.

Growing up in South Norwalk, Mitchell attended St. Joseph School and later Fairfield Prep and Norwalk High School. During the winter of 1949-50, he played guard for the Hellcats basketball team that won the 'B' League championship with teammates such as Fred Simmons, Mario Salomone, Ralph Fuller, Roger Romanelli and Mike Safranek.

It was right around that same time, as a 14-year-old working at a local garage after school, that he began to develop a keen interest in cars and the sport of auto racing. Not quite old enough to work on cars, his main job was cleaning off the wrenches at the end of the day.

From that, however, a new passion was born and a writing career would soon follow.

After graduating from Norwalk High in 1955, Mitchell went to work for the Darien Review newspaper, and from 1959-69 he was a photo engraver at Advertisers Engraving on Leonard Street.

Then in 1969, Mitchell joined the news staff at The Norwalk Hour where he covered the police and fire beat as well as report on some high school sports. He represented the third generation of the Mitchell family to work at the local newspaper, following in the footsteps of his grandfather and father. His son, Chuck Mitchell, currently works at the paper, giving the family a fourth generation to be associated with The Hour.

Charlie Mitchell would eventually move to the sports department fulltime in 1971 and worked his way up to assistant sports editor in the early 1980s and eventually sports editor in 1996, becoming only the third sports editor in the paper's long history.

He retired in 2001 and during his 30 years of covering local sports, Mitchell saw all three local high schools – Norwalk High, Brien McMahon and Central Catholic – win conference and state championships. He also followed and wrote about the college and professional careers of many standout local athletes from Calvin Murphy to Mo Vaughn.

It was also in 1971 that Mitchell began a weekly column on auto racing, "Around the Speedway," that dealt primarily with the exploits of local drivers at the Danbury Racearea and other area tracks. He also wrote about NASCAR stock car racing, which at the time was in its infancy and would grow to be one of the top spectator sports in the country. Even in retirement, Mitchell's popular seasonal column still appears in The Hour every Sunday.

Over the years, Mitchell has shared his knowledge and expertise in auto racing beyond this area. He has served as a board member of the National Motorsports Press Association and as Northeast Vice President of the Eastern Motorsports Press Association. For 30 years, he was also a member of the Unocal Racing Panel of Experts, which consisted of a select group of writers from across the country chosen to pick the winners of major racing events each season.

Mitchell is still a member of the nomination and selection committee for the Auto Racing Hall of Fame at Talladega Speedway. In addition, he is a voting member of the National Motorsports Press Association that chooses inductees into its hall of fame at Darlington Raceway, and a media voting member for the New England Antique Racers Hall of Fame.

Among the numerous honors Mitchell has earned was a first-place award from the Eastern Motorsports Press Association in the "breaking news" category for a story on the closing of Newman-Sharp Racing. And one of his biggest honors came in 2001 when he was named the Grand Marshal of the Fall Final NASCAR Modified event at Stafford Springs.

While his first love was auto racing, Mitchell always remained close to local sports. As his three sons – Chuck, Jimmy and Dennis – were growing up, he coached The Hour baseball team in the Cranbury League, guiding the team to a pair of division titles. Then in 2001, he received the Media Service Award for high school football presented by the Ralph DeSantis Fairfield County Chapter of the National Football Foundation and College Hall of Fame.

He and his wife, the former Amelia (Mimi) Renzulli, still reside in Norwalk where they enjoy their four grandchildren.