

## 2020 National Sprint Car Hall of Fame Inductee

# DON LAMBERTI

## Businessman

by Eric Arnold



Photo: James R. Cobb

**D**on Lamberti was born in 1937 and grew up in Des Moines, Iowa. A successful businessman and also a race fan, Lamberti changed the Sprint Car racing landscape of the Midwest.

In 1959, he leased his father's grocery-and-gasoline business and remodeled it into a convenience store. In 1967, Lamberti also founded a company, Casey's General Store, with his gas supplier, Kurvin C. Fish, also known as "K.C.". As local service stations in small towns across the Midwest were going out of business, Lamberti saw a need for small, convenience stores in these same small towns. Casey's began with one store in Boone, Iowa, and has grown into more than 2,000 convenience stores across the country today.

Lamberti was introduced to motorsports at the Iowa State Fairgrounds and IMCA Big Car and Stock Car races. Before long, he was hooked for life. Central Iowa tracks were mostly hosting Jalopy and Stock Car events, while Don's childhood friend, Gil Sonner was getting involved in Supermodified and Sprint Car racing as an owner/mechanic. With the financial success of Casey's General Stores, the loyal Lamberti invested in friend Gilly's team as a major sponsor.

The team won the Knoxville Raceway track championship in 1994 with driver Danny Lasoski. Two years later, the number 47 team competed full-time with the World of Outlaws with driver Johnny Herrera. In 1996, the team earned its biggest win, the famed King's Royal at Eldora Speedway.

Lamberti began sponsoring other Sprint Car teams along the way, such as the Lonnie Parsons-owned #6 on the World of Outlaws tour in the early 2000s with drivers Brian Brown, Tim Shaffer and Lasoski. Don was also a partner with the United Sprint Association (USA) in 1988-1989 and would later help purchase the National Sprint Tour (NST) following Fred Brownfield's untimely death in 2006.

Casey's became a key sponsor for Brian Brown Racing in 2010 and still is to this day. Other drivers and teams benefitting from Don's generosity are Matt Moro, McKenna Haase, and the Troy Renfro-owned 2KS Motorsports, all of whom compete at Knoxville Raceway.

Casey's General Store also became a key partner for venues across the Midwest, including Knoxville Raceway, Jackson Motorplex, Eldora Speedway and Iowa Speedway. The still-growing chain also signed on as a partner of the United States Modified Touring Series (USMTS).

In 2003, after 35 years at the helm of Casey's General Stores, Lamberti retired. The Ankeny-based company has stayed loyal to grass-roots motorsports, thanks to racing-oriented leaders.



On top of his sponsorship involvement in motorsports, Lamberti also was a founding member and past treasurer of the National Sprint Car Hall of Fame & Museum, a facility he envisioned and was greatly instrumental in seeing to fruition with generous monetary gifts and personal involvement.

Lamberti's original investment in the 501(c)(3) non-profit museum foundation helped initiate construction in 1989. It was also Lamberti who had the vision for its current location on turn two of the half-mile dirt track in Knoxville, which allowed for suite space that continues to generate valuable income for the foundation.

"Don Lamberti has been the single biggest individual supporter, moral and financial, of the National Sprint Car Hall of Fame & Museum Foundation since Day One," said Tom Schmech. "Those seventeen words say everything you need to know."

"We began construction of the museum in late 1989, with Don Lamberti personally co-signing our \$1.7-million bank loan. That signature declaring his support for the project was HUGE. The defining moment for me though was in 1990, when he called me to say that he needed to get out

from under that loan guarantee. He was re-structuring Casey's General Stores for the 1990s and beyond. Local banks were struggling with the farm crisis. But Don gave his word that once things were squared away, he would be back involved with the museum project in a bigger way than ever before."

"As executive director, with red-iron already up outside of turn two of Knoxville Raceway and construction halted, I didn't sleep for three straight days," said Schmeb. "But, after a phone call to board president C.K. Spurlock, Jr., and a renewed commitment from the Marion County Fair Association and many others, we were able to get a new bank loan. Construction resumed and we completed the four-story structure in late 1991. Looking back, Don's phone call that day forced us to get a broader base of support, from around the country, and to reflect back on that now, it was the best thing that could have ever happened to us."

Schmeb concluded, "And, you know what? He came back and got involved in a bigger way than ever before. And to this day in 2020, he is still that involved. Don Lamberti's word is his absolute bond."

As a successful businessman and motorsports fan, Don Lamberti has changed the Sprint Car racing landscape, regionally in the Midwest and, indeed, nationally. His leadership and investment in the Hall of Fame continues stronger than ever. A recent contribution will also aid in the completion of the Bryan Clauson Suite Tower, which allows for more suite space and thus more revenue.

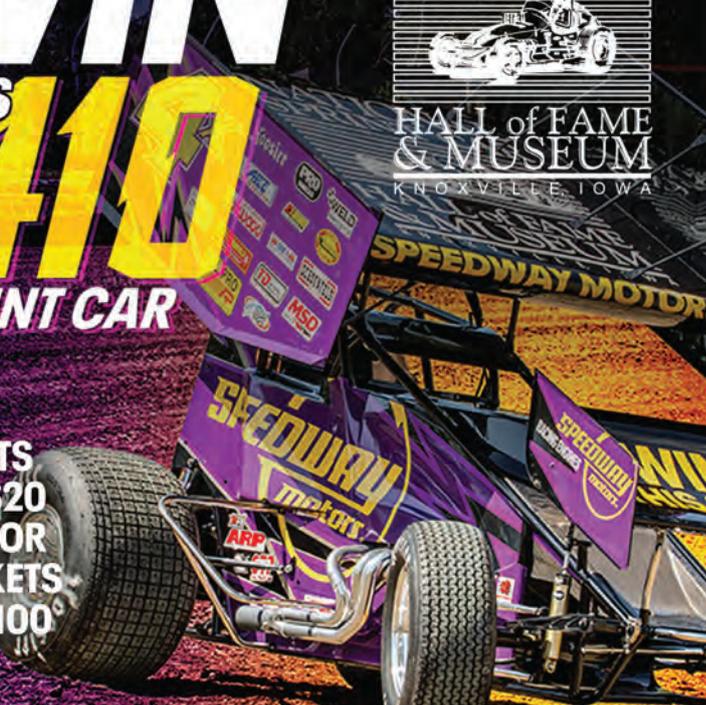
Lamberti was inducted into the Iowa Business Hall of Fame in 1998 and into the Knoxville Raceway Hall of Fame in 2005. 🏆



Photo: Bredesky Collection

Lamberti poses with Gil Sonner's 47 outside a Casey's in 1988 while Scott Ritchhart was the driver.

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