

NATIONAL SPRINT CAR HALL of FAME & MUSEUM

Norm Witte

by Newton "Buzz" Rose

The Central States Racing Association (CSRA) or, as they were known east of Pittsburgh, the Consolidated States Racing Association, and the name of Norman Witte were synonymous from 1935 until his death in 1966. His tenure as managing secretary of the CSRA was the longest in point of service to any of the nation's major sanctioning bodies.



"Buzz" Rose Collection

Norm was born on October 16, 1902, and tried driving race cars in the 1920's in the Dayton, Ohio, area. He soon realized that his expertise and love of racing would serve him better if he became a race publicist.

Writing a weekly column for the National Auto Racing News (National Speed Sport News), called "Witte's Word," gave his name recognition on a national basis. In April of 1934, he joined the Ralph Hankinson publicity staff. His efforts boosted the Hankinson circuit to record attendance at Brockton, Massachusetts, and both Hamburg and Rhinebeck, New York. In mid-season '34, he joined the great New York promoter Ira Vail. Vail was a shirt-tail relative of Witte's. Then he met Dr. J.K. Bailey, an avid racing enthusiast, who had moved to Dayton from the east coast. Dr. Bailey opened up a medical practice and had purchased a controlling interest in the Dayton Speedway.

Research of the 1932-1935 National Auto Racing News revealed no organized racing in the Ohio/Indiana area. Events were all listed as independent with just a few sanctioned under the American Automobile Association (AAA) banner. AAA required promoters to put up bigger purses with all the money on top finishing positions, not paying back too far. The August 8, 1935, National Auto Racing News Witte's Weekly Word column says, "A new racing association is about to be formed named the Central States, and it is strong both financially and in its constitution."

The original 1935 contest board of the CSRA consisted of the following racing men: Frank Funk-promoter-Jungle Park, Ft. Wayne and Winchester Speedways; Melvin Moore-promoter-Detroit; Henry Miller-promoter-Sharon Speedway; John Vance-car owner-Dayton; Everett Saylor-driver-Dayton; Clay Corbitt-driver-Columbus; Foster Schultz-promoter-Greenville Motor Speedway; Dr. J.K. Bailey-president-Dayton Speedway; Robert Martindale-chairman-Dayton; Irvin Snyder-Dayton Speedway-treasurer; and Norman Witte-

managing secretary. The Association opened an office on Brown Street in Dayton, close to Dr. Bailey's office.

Because of its affiliation with the Dayton, Winchester, Ft. Wayne and Greenville tracks, the CSRA drivers received the nickname of the "Rim Riders." By 1936, the club was referred to as "The Fastest Racing Circuit in the World." Witte would use this claim in all their advertising for many years to come.

Norm Witte guided the CSRA through the turbulent pre-war years and by 1939, the big car organization was the nation's largest. Witte also formed an Eastern CSRA midget circuit with over 100 feature events on the east coast in 1939. Virtually, every popular midget facility came under CSRA sanction. Ralph "Pappy" Hankinson's famous Eastern 'big car' fair circuit dropped its AAA affiliation in 1941 and brought such Indianapolis stars as Ted Horn, Joie Chitwood, Bob Sall, and Tom Hinnershitz into the CSRA fold. IMCA star Emory Collins switched to CSRA for the 1941 season.

Among the many 'big car' stars that won CSRA championships include "Bud" Henderson (1935); Sherman "Red" Campbell (1936); Everett Saylor (1937); Jimmy Wilburn (1938, '39, '40, '47, '50); Ted Horn (1941, '45); Joie Chitwood (1942); Carl Scarborough (1946); Wally Stokes (1948); "Pee Wee" Northern (1949); Sid Bufkin (1951, '52); "Bud" Randall (1953); Homer Claytor (1954); Ken Gottschalk (1955); and Don Carr (1956). Other drivers who starred on Witte's circuit were Bobby Grim, Emory Collins, Tommy Hinnershitz, Frank Luptow, Deb Snyder, Travis "Spider" Webb, Carlisle "Duke" Dinsmore, Johnny McDowell, Hank Schlosser, Johnny Wohlfiel, Clay Corbitt, Harold Shaw, Les Adair, Morris Musick, Pete Albert, Ed Zalucki, Charlie Engle, "Buddy" Rusch, John DeCamp, Elbert "Pappy" Booker, Mike Salay, Jimmy Daywalt, Cliff Griffith, Bob Carpenter, Jim McWithey, and Marv Pifer.

The All American Racing Club stock-block organization of Tom Cherry made in-roads during 1956, and Witte dropped his gold crown Offenhauser 'big car' circuit after the '56 season. Norm Witte continued to sanction midget and an occasional sprint car event until he quietly passed away on May 6, 1966. It was his 31st year as the head of CSRA. With his death, all activity of the CSRA withered away.