



# Meadowdale International Raceways Preservation Association Newsletter

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September 2011 Volume 2, Issue 2

## Motorsports & Memories 2011



We are all deeply saddened to learn of the untimely passing of Leonard Besinger Jr on August 14th. Leonard captured the vision of the Meadowdale International Raceways project, driving the design and execution to conclusion in record time. Leonard was just 23 years old when he graduated from MIT in 1957, the year he designed the track, one of many architectural accomplishments in his career. In the design of Meadowdale International Raceways, Leonard Jr traveled to the top race tracks in Europe, and brought elements of each of those designs to Meadowdale. Leonard Jr helped his father put the town of Carpentersville Illinois on the map in the 1950s, with MIR as a destination for many race fans and world class road racing competitors while the track was active from 1958 to 1969.

Leonard Besinger Jr was actively developing his Winery in New Mexico and raising Texas Long Horn cattle at the time of his passing. Leonard remained active in the Meadowdale preservation efforts over the past several years, and was a recent guest at the MIRPA Winter banquet in February, 2011. We will all greatly miss Leonard's contribution to our group, especially in linking the history of the track to events in the community, and the memorable motorsports events of the 1960s. "He was very passionate about everything he did, but his greatest accomplishment was his five children and six grandchildren," his son, Leonard Besinger III said.



The Purple People Eater is the featured race car of the 2011 Motorsports & Memories car show that will be held at the Meadowdale International Raceways site located at Raceway Woods in Carpentersville Illinois on September 17th. Driver James Jeffords, Crew Chief Ronnie Kaplan. Team Manager Lindy Lindheimer, and members of the Jack Stephani Nickey Chevrolet race team will also be featured in the "after the show" dinner that will be held at Randall Oaks Golf Club in West Dundee, Illinois on the same day. There is additional information in this newsletter about both events. The 2011 event artwork, designed by local artist Paul Turnbaugh features the Purple People Eater, an unbeatable National Championship winning 1959 Corvette that was developed in the Nickey Chevrolet Race Shop in Chicago.

The MIRPA team has been quite busy this Summer, attending car shows and motorsport events in the Chicago metro area. A special thank you and welcome to the two newest MIRPA Trustees, Melissa Hitzke and Chris Moncado of Huntley, Illinois. Both Melissa and Chris have been managing the MIRPA social networking connections through the website ([www.mirpa.org](http://www.mirpa.org)) and the Facebook presence. Melissa teamed up with MIRPA member, Jay Busse to create a distinctive banner for use at events. The banner features the Silo graphics and an accurate track map. Be sure to look for the MIRPA team at the next car show.



Speaking of Car shows, the Motorsports & Memories Car Show will be held at MIR (now called Raceway Woods) in Carpentersville on September 17th. With only a few weeks left, it's time to get your registration in, and set your plans for the event.

Linda Daro

# James Jeffords & The Purple People Eater Return

The 1959 Corvette Purple People Eater MK III was the third evolution in a series of unbeatable cars that dominated SCCA B-Production racing class during the late 1950s. The Purple People Eater was developed by the competition team at Nickey Chevrolet in Chicago. Driver James "Jim" Jeffords was a two-time National Champion that raced the car to a nearly flawless record during the 1959 racing season, winning all but one event. The success of the 1959 season was the result of a great car, great driver and great preparation coming together. MIRPA Board Member, Ronnie Kaplan was responsible for the Chief Mechanic duties, and for delivering the innovations that helped to reinforce the Corvette's dominance in that B-Production Championship.

Tom Stephani, MIRPA Board Member and Nickey Chevrolet historian recounted that his Father, Jack Stephani, Nickey Chevrolet's Secretary/Treasurer supported the racing effort as part of the family business, and really got the Dealership involved in the sport. Tom's Grandfather, Edward Stephani acquired the Nickey Chevrolet Dealership in 1933 in exchange for a mortgage on Mr. Nickey's home in Chicago. Projects like the Purple People Eater positioned Nickey as the Super Car Headquarters, producing many notable race cars and dominant street machines during the 60's and 70's.



The Purple People Eater was raced successfully for several years following the '59 Championship, before being parked. The race car resurfaced at the Carlisle Collector Car Swap Meet in Carlisle, Pennsylvania in 1974. Purchased by Chip Miller and Ken Heckert, the car was subsequently restored to its period correct racing configuration by Kevin Mackay at Corvette Repair in Valley Stream, NY.

The Purple People Eater and Corvette Hall of Famer, Jim Jeffords are synonymous. Jim was a two-time National Driving Champion, recognized for his exciting racing mark in legendary race cars and automobiles such as the Purple People Eater, and Chevrolet powered specials like Jerry Earl's SR-2, the Scarab, and the Maserrati Birdcage. He appeared in the very first Road America race at Elkhart Lake in September 1955, and finished 2nd in C production in a Jaguar. His spectacular early success earned him his first ride in a Corvette in May of 1956 at Road America. Over the next 5 years, Jim maintained a close association with Corvette, competing first in the World Championship race in Caracas, Venezuela and then ending the season at Nassau Speed Week in December of 1956. Jim began the 1957 season at Sebring, Florida, as a driver on the Chevrolet Corvette Racing Team. Due mainly to a very successful season driving both factory modified and production Corvettes, Jeffords was virtually unbeatable as he easily took the titles in 1958 and 1959 in the Nickey Chevrolet Purple People Eater Corvette. In February of 1960, Jefford's driving skill and reputation landed him behind the wheel in the first race ever for the Camoradi Corvette, the World Sports Car Championship - Camoradi USA. Jeffords drove it to a 1st place in the Grand Premio de la Habana in February of 1960, and followed it with an 8th overall (1st GT) in the Grand Premio de la Cuba on February 27th, in the only sports car meet open to other nations ever allowed in Cuba under Castro's rule. Jeffords pioneered the use of the fuel-injected and RPO 684 as bulletproof racing machines. He was among a handful of race car drivers to have successfully campaigned and dominated the early SCCA "B" Production Class. Since 1958, Jeffords has served on the Board of Directors at Road America. Jim and the Purple People return to Meadowdale on September 17th.

*Source: Wikipedia and Members Photo: Chris Moncado*

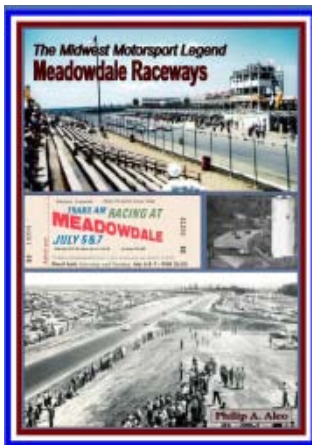
## ***The Monza Wall Newsletter - About Us***

"The Monza Wall" is the official newsletter publication of The Meadowdale International Raceways Preservation Association (MIRPA). The almost quarterly publication is provided to the members of the MIRPA organization. Material published herein may not be reprinted without permission from the MIRPA Organization. The opinions and information presented in this newsletter are the best-effort results of our collective minds. We welcome your input and clarity on topics that you feel may need additional background. We request the opportunity to preserve your stories of Meadowdale. Please take a few moments and send us some of your favorite memories/photos.

Article submission is encouraged and accepted in MS Word format or as plain text format via eMail. When submitting photos or artwork, please request the material to be returned if that is desired.

Contents including text, artwork and photographs Copyright 2011, The Monza Wall. Questions and comments should be directed to the Editor, The Monza Wall - MIRPA, 300 Jandus Rd. #109 Cary, IL 60013. All inquiries will receive a prompt response.

# Meadowdale Raceways Book Arrives On Schedule



The Meadowdale Raceway book will have an official release at Meadowdale, during the Motorsports & Memories Car show on September 17th and is available for purchase through MIRPA and Driveable Dreams.

For a preview, start your engine and head over to the Dundee Library as local historian and author Phil Aleo introduces his latest book, *The Midwest Motorsport Legend – Meadowdale Raceways* on Wednesday, Sept. 7 at 7 p.m. The library is located at 555 Barrington Ave. (Rt. 68) in East Dundee.

This coffee table-sized, 208 page, hard cover book details Meadowdale Raceway's written history and features hundreds of photos never before seen by the public. Aleo will present a slide show with highlights from his book, followed by a book release and signing.

The library program is free. Space is limited, so a reservation is recommended. To register, visit the "Events & Registration" page at [www.dundee.library.info](http://www.dundee.library.info), stop by the Information Services desk on the main level, or call (847) 428-3661, ext. 308.



The Annual Motorsports & Memories Car show presented by MIRPA at Meadowdale International Raceways has attracted a wide range of competition and street cars over the past several years.

Carrie Ann and Mark Fisher's 1954 Mercury Capri (at Left) is a rare car that was typical of those that competed in the LaCarrera Panamericana race that utilized the Panamerican Highway through Mexico in 1950 - 1954. The event was a 9 stage 5 day event that covered about 2,100 miles.

The history of motorsports will unfold at MIR on Saturday, September 17th. Pre-Registration for those interested in displaying their car on the old straight-away is available now. Set your calendar for September 17th and come out and enjoy this special event.

Registration forms for the Car Show and the "After Show" dinner are available now on the MIRPA web site: [www.mirpa.org](http://www.mirpa.org) or for more information, please call us at 847-421-2891. See you there!

## Meadowdale International Raceways Preservation Association Individual Membership Application Fee: \$35 Club or Organization Membership Application Fee: \$100 Membership Period: June 2011 to June 2012

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Organization Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Make check payable to MIRPA, and Mail to:

**Meadowdale International Raceways Preservation Association**  
300 Jandus Rd. #109  
Cary, IL 60013

**Questions and Assistance: 847-421-2891**

## 2011 Meadowdale Event Schedule

### Wednesday, September 7th: Meadowdale Book Signing

Phil Aleo's Book, "The Midwest Motorsports Legend - Meadowdale Raceways" will be introduced at the Dundee Library on September 7th. Reserve your spot at this event. Info at [www.dundeelibrary.info](http://www.dundeelibrary.info) or 847-428-3661, ext. 308

### Saturday, September 17th: Motorsports & Memories Car Show

Plans are being made for the 3rd annual Meadowdale Motorsports & Memories Car show. The event will be held at MIR, Raceway Woods in Carpentersville, Illinois. We are currently seeking volunteers, vendors, car clubs and community groups to help ensure the success of the event. If you are interested, contact Linda Daro at [ld1enterprise@aol.com](mailto:ld1enterprise@aol.com) or at 847-421-2891.

### Saturday, September 17th: After the Show Banquet

MIRPA will present a panel discussion with Driver Jim Jeffords and the winning team of team of the 1959 BP National Championship. Along with Jim Jeffords, Ronnie Kaplan, Lindy Lindheimer, and Nickey Historian Tom Stephani will present at the Randall Oaks Golf Club. More info: [www.mirpa.org](http://www.mirpa.org)

### First Saturday of Every Month - Join us for Coffee & Cars

Join MIRPA members and guests in sharing a donut and discussion at Driveable Dreams in Cary, Illinois between 8:00 and 12:00 noon. Meadowdale memorabilia, photos, and motorsports bench racing is featured. Please check our website for up-to-date information: [www.mirpa.org](http://www.mirpa.org)

## Support Our MIRPA Sponsors



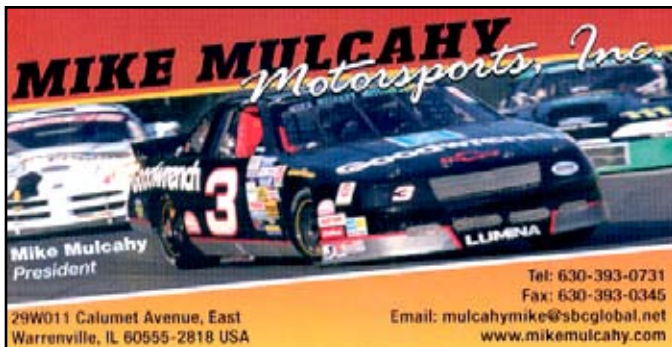
Web: [www.mecum.com](http://www.mecum.com)

Info: 815-568-8888



Web: [www.nickeychicago.net](http://www.nickeychicago.net)

Info: 630-377-1222



### First Saturday of the Month



Coffee & Cars 8:00 am - Noon  
300 Jandus #109  
Cary, IL 60013  
Info: [www.driveabledreams.net](http://www.driveabledreams.net)  
Phone: 847-421-2891

## MIRPA Leadership

### Board of Directors:

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