

John Chisholm

The Man Who Made Riverside International Speedway

Little may they know it but Maritime motorsports fans are fortunate John Chisholm prefers stock car racing over golf.

"If I loved golf I probably would have built a golf course," once said Chisholm, the creator and owner of Riverside International Speedway.

One can conclude he surely must love racing for he has built Riverside not once, but twice.

On the day President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in 1963 John Chisholm left school; he was in grade 11 and had a dream of building the best race track in the region. Six years later, in 1969, he opened Riverside Speedway which quickly gained the reputation its owner had desired attracting the biggest and best names in stock car racing from all over North America.

In 1989 the track was sold but when it fell into a state of disrepair in the early 2000's it was John Chisholm who stepped in to save the day by first repurchasing and then renewing his vow to make it a premier attraction.

Between January and August of 2006 crews worked to rebuild the entire facility under the watchful eye and guidance of John Chisholm. Only the starters stand remained as original on August 19, 2006 when a capacity crowd witnessed the grand re-opening of the rebranded Riverside International Speedway.

Riverside was back, and better than ever, a motorsports facility comparable to the best short tracks in North America.

But Riverside is more than a passion for John Chisholm, it is a way to give back to his community, or perhaps better put, another way. His personal roots are deep in Antigonish and he is profoundly dedicated to its economic development - to which the track and his other business interests contribute immeasurably.

His father established Nova Construction in 1963; John joined the company the next year. Under his guidance it expanded to become one of the most successful of its type, heavily involved in roadwork, mining and remediation, hydro and dam construction, production of granite aggregate, and builders/owners of the Antigonish Mall.

In keeping its headquarters in Antigonish the Nova Construction group of companies provides hundreds of jobs and considerable opportunity for locals and, in the case of Riverside International Speedway, infuses hundreds of thousands of dollars in the region every year when tens of thousands fans visit the facility and surrounding area.



Top: John Chisholm Bottom: Aerial view showing rebuild of Riverside (2006).

John Chisholm has generously shared his business acumen in volunteer service having served as a Director of the Coady International Institute at St. Francis Xavier University, and in co-chairing fundraising efforts to build it; he has been Vice President, President, and a Director of the Nova Scotia Road Builders Association; President of the Antigonish Seniors Care Van Society; President of the Eastern Nova Scotia Exhibition; and has served as Director with both the Festival of Antigonish Summer Theatre Foundation and the St. Martha's Regional Hospital Foundation.

His undertakings have been recognized as a recipient of the Mining Society of Nova Scotia Medal, Canadian Institute of Mining Metallurgy Petroleum Selwyn G. Blaylock Medal, the Nova Scotia Chapter of Fundraising Professionals Outstanding Individual Philanthropist Award; he holds an Honorary Degree from St. Francis Xavier, an Honorary Degree from Dalhousie University, and is an Honorary Member of the Nova Scotia Road Builders Association.

He has supported his community and his province immeasurably through his business ventures and he has contributed generously through volunteer service. He sees opportunity where others see dilemma. He solves unsolvable problems. He is a visionary. He is an inventor and a builder. He is a business leader and a philanthropist.

Thankfully, for race fans, John Chisholm's passion and leadership role has extended to the racing community.

As a racer he set a torrid pace in the 70s at tracks throughout the Maritimes winning over and over again including one weekend in 1973 when he won five of six races; three of three at Riverside on Saturday and two of three to clinch the Atlantic Speedway mid-season championship on Sunday.

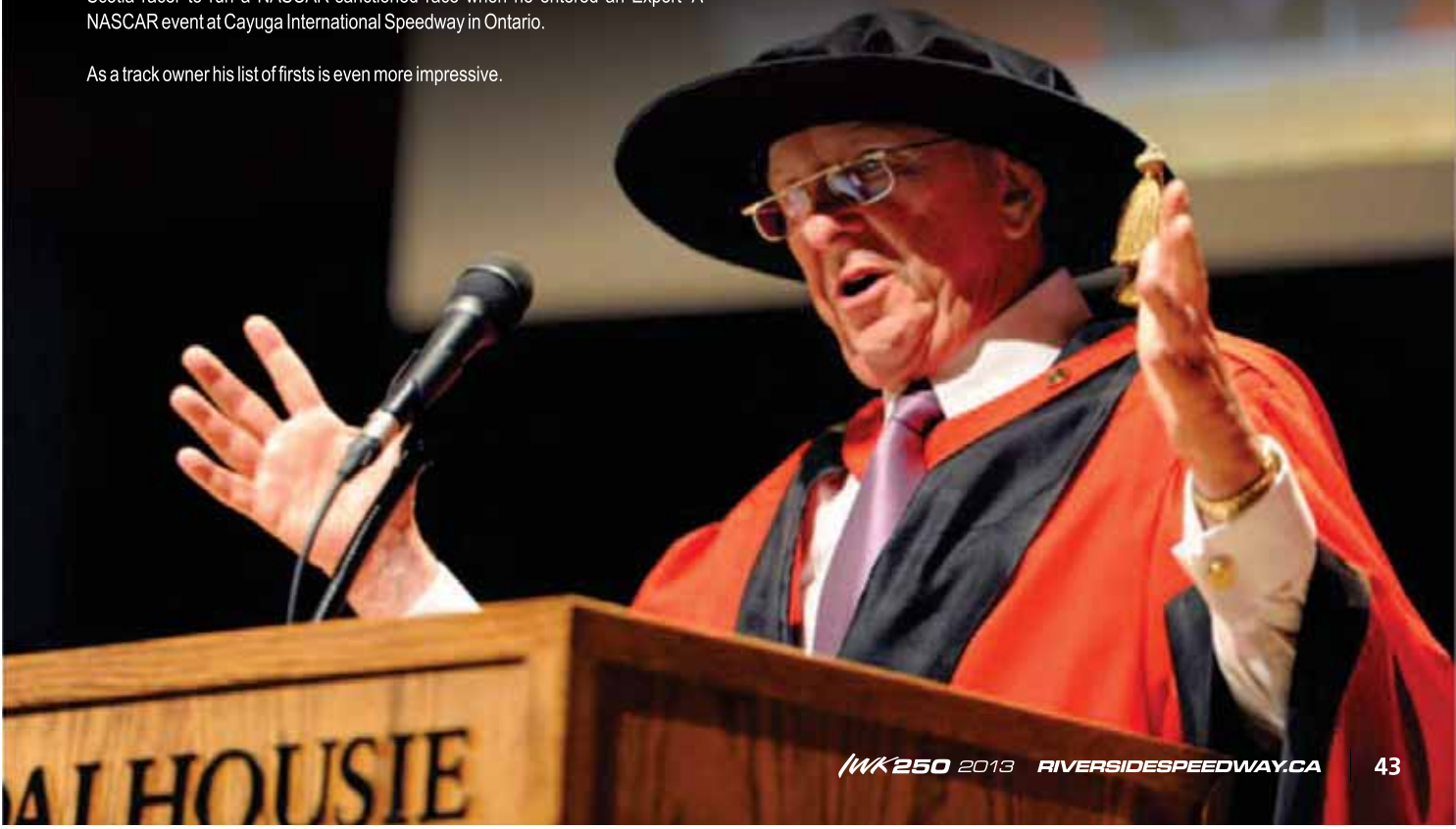
It was during this era he made an indelible mark on the memory of many a veteran race fan - not just through his on track presence, because we knew he was there - when his helicopter landed in the infield.

He was the first racer to import built racecars from outside the region driving chassis' built by Holman Moody, Bobby Allison, and Ed Howe. And he was the first Nova Scotia racer to run a NASCAR-sanctioned race when he entered an Export 'A' NASCAR event at Cayuga International Speedway in Ontario.

As a track owner his list of firsts is even more impressive.



Top: A charitable donation in Antigonish by the N.S. Road Builders with John and Donald Chisholm (photo, May 2013 - courtesy of The Casket). **Middle:** John Chisholm's Ed Howe Camaro (1977). **Bottom:** John Chisholm's Holman Moody Mustang (1971).





In 1975 he hosted the NASCAR Canada series at Riverside - NASCAR's first foray to the Maritimes. To add to the excitement he brought reigning Daytona 500 champion Benny Parsons to compete in the race - the first time a major stock car racing star came to the region, and the first of a long list of NASCAR celebrities to visit Riverside since then. The winner's purse for that race was \$7,500 - the first time such a large amount had been offered in the region. In 1981 and 1985 he hosted NASCAR North at Riverside - another first for the Maritimes.

Through the rebuilding of Riverside International Speedway in 2006 he has continued to attract top NASCAR names to thrill race fans including this year's guest driver Brad Keselowski, a reigning NASCAR Sprint Cup Series champion - another first for the Maritimes.

Besides NASCAR - with which he has the longest standing affiliation of any active track in Canada, John Chisholm has provided a venue that has brought countless laps of entertainment and excitement to fans in hosting top touring series and top names from Canada and the United States, along with providing a top notch training ground where many a weekly racer could hone their talent.

In 2007 he found a way to integrate his philanthropic spirit with racing. Together with Steve Lewis they founded the IWK 250 which through 2012 has raised awareness and more than \$130,000 for the IWK Health Centre Foundation.

In 2008 his contributions to racing were recognized when he was inducted to the Maritime Motorsports Hall of Fame.

He has put Maritime motorsports on the map throughout North America in his ongoing effort to make Riverside International Speedway a premier facility; race fans have been the benefactors of his passion and dedication.

If you look up the definition of champion in the dictionary you will find two uses for the word: one that finishes first in a competition, and one that is an ardent defender or supporter of a cause.

John Chisholm finished first on and off the track and he has been an ardent supporter of Maritime motorsports for more than 40 years. He has been involved in racing as a fan, a driver, a car owner, and a track builder and owner - and enormously successful in every aspect.

He is a champion of Maritime motorsports.

Above: Inaugural NASCAR event at the rebuilt Riverside Int'l Speedway (2007). **Below - top to bottom:** Steve Lewis (left) with John Chisholm; being inducted to the Maritime Motorsports Hall of Fame (2008); Victory Lane at the grand reopening in August 2006.

