



SOUTHERN PENNSYLVANIA HISTORICAL AUTO RACING COMMISSION
In Conjunction With
MUSEUM of SPEED at THE BEDFORD FAIRGROUNDS
3rd Quarter 2020

The history books will someday show that very few activities or events in 2020 resembled life as we knew it prior to this year. Virtually everything was affected by either a postponement, total cancellation, or a modified agenda. Race tracks waited for the maximum restrictions to be lifted, then like many other businesses they cautiously opened with overwhelming support from the racers and the racing community for the balance of the season. However, schedules were modified and as a result some special events had to be eliminated due to the reduced length of the season.

The Southern Pennsylvania Historical Auto Racing Commission was adversely affected by missing out on several opportunities for fundraising events. The Museum organization was working in conjunction with Bedford Speedway to promote and stage a Saturday event featuring track time for our region's vintage race cars from yesteryear. Circle track hot rods from several clubs also were to be given time to showcase their skills with a class of cars from a bygone era. It was to have been a full day for these owners to relive memories and display this type of racing equipment which they are most passionate about.

The Museum Members were also planning a formal program for existing Members of the Bedford Speedway Hall of Fame, along with an Official Induction Ceremony for new Members. The Induction of two gentlemen eventually did take place before the Labor Day 55 lap event for the Super Late Models. Altoona's Tom Gill was posthumously inducted as the former team owner of the very recognizable and front running Super Late Model# 55. Tom also worked in numerous capacities for a number of years at both Bedford and Hesston Speedways. He was respected by the racing fraternity for his dedication to the sport that he and his wife Mary Ann shared together. The other honoree was the National Dirt Hall of Fame driver Gary Stuhler. The Greencastle veteran has over 350 career feature wins to his credit extending back to 1975, when he won the 3rd race he entered at Lincoln. Gary's 27 wins at Bedford positions him 4th on the all-time feature wins list, including the 2007 Labor Day 55. Stuhler continues to be one of the most popular drivers on the area's late model circuit. The MoS was honored to be part of this presentation.

The MoS Members were able to sell Museum related items during the season in their booth under the grandstand at Bedford. We sincerely appreciate the support and friendship from the fans and thank promoter Joe Padula for his cooperation. We also want to mention Advisory Board Member Bill Henderson for his many volunteer hours operating the sales table.

This month's episode of, "As The Memories Turn," will take us back to 1964/65. Never in the history of The Bedford Fairgrounds and its historic race track was there a more crucial time when auto racing, especially weekly racing, may have never materialized. In late 1964 a group of Western PA investors had an opportunity to acquire a gaming license from the State to operate a pari-mutuel horse racing facility. The group chose Bedford as the ideal location due to multiple factors, including its roads, motels, and the proximity to larger urban areas. At the time Bedford was considered a trucking town with several major companies maintaining terminals at the turnpike interchange. The developers also had a retainer on a large parcel of mountain ground adjoining the fairgrounds to the south. This area was to be developed for residential building lots, a golf course, and a ski resort on Wills Mountain. The creation of the Sports Complex was estimated to be a 6 million dollar investment by the group at the time. But everything hinged on the group's ability to race horses and offer legalized wagering. The wheels were in motion, and so was the controversy. In 1965 there was no PA Lottery, no scratch off tickets, no church bingos, and no gun raffles. So, the battle lines were soon drawn, with the urban communities like Bedford and Everett supporting the project due to the economic impact it would provide the County, plus the anticipated tax revenue it would generate. However, the rural regions of the County were led in part by Clergy Members who were outspoken and vehement about how gambling would permeate throughout our communities. As winter turned into spring the rhetoric only intensified between the two factions as the developers waited for approval to start work. They also kept reminding everyone that if horse racing was not part of the equation, they would withdraw their offer to proceed with the project. So, it was determined that the only way to settle the debate fairly and give the public a voice in the decision was to put it on the 1965 spring ballot as a referendum. So on Tuesday, May 18th, 1965, Bedford County voters went to the polls in record numbers to determine the immediate future of the region.

In part 2 in the next newsletter we will reveal the results of the vote and examine the consequence of that day and its long-term significance.