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- WELCOME TO DARLINGTON
- HUNTER FAMILY TRADITION
- KERRY THARP COLUMN
- HAROLD BRASINGTON'S LEGACY
- LADY IN BLACK 2018
- TRACK IMPROVEMENTS



# Raceway intern carrying on the family tradition

By Samantha Lyles  
Staff Writer  
syles@newsandpress.net

When Jim Hunter passed away in October of 2010, NASCAR lost one of its most valued and beloved executives, an advocate for the sport who helped shepherd stock car racing into its most successful era.

Jim joined NASCAR in 1983 and became the president of Darlington Raceway ten years later, where he remained until a 2001 promotion elevated him to VP of corporate communications. This summer, his grandson Hunter McKernan has joined the Darlington Raceway staff as an intern, and he's learning the PR craft at the track where his grandfather spent many happy years.

Raised in Atlanta, Hunter spent many holidays visiting grandparents Jim and Ann Hunter at their Darlington

home, which was located just five minutes away from the track. His first memory of this raceway is pretty low-key and fun: at age five, he rode his bicycle around the track, and Grandma Ann put him in her lap and let him drive a few laps. Hunter says for the longest time, he didn't understand that Grandpa Jim was kind of a big wheel at the raceway.

"I knew growing up that he was involved with NASCAR, but I think that I took things for granted. Getting credentials and hot passes every year, I didn't realize how big of a deal that was," says Hunter.

A lifelong Atlanta Falcons fan, little Hunter's eyes opened to the popularity of NASCAR when he met Falcons running back Jerious Norwood in the pits during a race. He also noticed how busy his grandfather was during races, and just how many hats Jim had

to wear to stage a successful event.

"I would see him in the pits and get to talk to him for a little bit, but he was always all business and was constantly running around," Hunter recalls. "I think I'm coming to understand that better now that I'm meeting so many people in the racing field, many of whom he directly affected and worked with."

A public relations student at the University of South Carolina, Hunter says he is taking some cues from his grandfather when it comes to his daily intern duties, which can include composing press releases and dealing with the media.

"I'm writing press releases now and I'm trying to do the same kinds of things he did when he was coming up in the sport," he says, citing Jim's history as a reporter for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution as a source of

his strong, evocative writing style and his approachable, funny demeanor when dealing with journalists.

"He understood where the media came from and understood what they needed, and he knew how to present information to them in the easiest, best ways possible. He was a great promoter for the track as well, and he made the track look its best," says Hunter. "He did a great job keying on the greatest and most unique elements of the track... he said that Darlington is like the Wrigley Field of racing."

Hunter says his grandfather always played up Darlington Raceway's image as "The Track Too Tough to Tame" and helped frame victory at Darlington as a source of prestige for NASCAR's top drivers.

"Drivers do want to win here, but they also hate rac-



ing here, I think. It's a love-hate thing where if you can win here, you love Darlington, but if you wreck on the third lap, you hate it," Hunter says. "No turn is the same here, and that's something I'm starting to really understand by talking to drivers – just how tough of a track this is."

Under current president Kerry Tharp, Darlington Raceway is in the midst of a

\$7 million improvement project

"The stadium seating will be a game changer for the track, and we're also keeping the old traditions alive with the throwback weekend theme. Pairing those things will hopefully keep the track around for fifty more years," says Hunter, expressing a sentiment that his grandfather would surely share.

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# Welcome to the City of Darlington!

Welcome race fans to the City of Darlington and the Bojangles' Southern 500. Our city extends to all its Raceway visitors the most cordial welcome. We want you to enjoy yourselves and come back often to Darlington Raceway or just to visit.

We are proud of the Darlington Raceway and the many improvements made to enhance your experience at the track "Too Tough to Tame". The Bojangles' Southern 500 and Darlington Raceway have made the City of Darlington one of the best known small places in the United States.

Thank you for your patronage of Darlington Raceway and please drive carefully. We want you back next year to watch another exciting Bojangles' Southern 500.

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## Welcome Race Fans!

By Lisa Chalian-Rock  
DDRA Director

While you are here for the race, the Darlington Downtown Revitalization Association invites you to #ShopDarlington with our local stores, restaurants and shops. Take a photo of you at your favorite, and tag the DDRA, @ddraSC, using the hash tag #ShopDarlington. We will cross post it to our Facebook page, DarlingtonDowntown, and we will post our favorite in The News & Press.

We have a slate of events for Race Week, starting with the Car Hauler's Parade and Racefest Party on Thursday night, beginning at 6 p.m. The party continues Friday night as Radio Vibe brings downtown alive with a free concert at Liberty Lane on Pearl Street. Round out the weekend with the Southern 500 Parade at 6:15 p.m. on Pearl Street and ending at the infield of Darlington Raceway.

Find buried treasures on the Darlington Antiques Trail. Stops include B&B Variety & Antiques, 703 Pearl St.; Darlington County Historical Commission, 204 Hewitt St.; Darlington Raceway Stock Car Museum, 1301 Harry Byrd Highway; Scarlett's Antiques, 500 E. Broad St.; So-lina Auction Market Inc., 2085 Lamar Hwy.; and The Jeweler's Bench, 60 Public Square.

Getting hungry? Fill up at a meat-and- three full of Southern charm at Jewel's Deluxe on the Public Square or Joe's Grill, 306 Russell St. Stop in at Carolina Drug Store on the Public Square for a milkshake or sandwich. New flavors to try at Uncle Marshall's at 136 Cashua St. or Fahrenheit 255 at 26



Radio Vibe will be performing a free concert at Liberty Lane on Pearl Street during race weekend festivities. Photo Contributed

Public Square. Try Italian favorites at Mamma Mia's Italian Kitchen or Mexican fare at Tenampa Mexican Restaurant. All are downtown within walking distance of the Darlington Veterans Memorial and Old Darlington Mural. Try some tasty seafood at Bay Island Seafood, 1316 S. Main St., or Mayflower Seafood, 1765 Harry Byrd Hwy. For more barbecue, there's Nick's BBQ, 310 S. Main St., or Lindbergh's BBQ, 1215 S. Main St. Step back to the 1950s for American and Greek specialties for breakfast, lunch, or dinner at Taki's Diner, 609 Pearl St. Look for a race car on the roof of Raceway Grill, 1207 Harry Byrd Hwy., to check out some great racing memorabilia and tasty

American food right next to the track.

Check out unique fashions at Merle Norman, 84 Public Square; Raven's Closet, 18 Public Square; or Roses, 502 Pearl St.

Looking for something more than the average gift? Drop by Flower Baskets By Becky, 204 Russell St., or Shannon's Salon & Gifts, 1033 Pearl St.

Stop by the Liberty Lane Walk of Fame to see the Southern 500 mural and the handprints of all the Southern 500 winners from 1950 to 2000. The brick walkway connects downtown parking to Pearl Street and the Public Square.

We hope you enjoy your time in Darlington, and come back to see us!





# Experience "A Better Darlington" This Labor Day Weekend

By Kerry Tharp  
Darlington Raceway Track President

With Labor Day rapidly approaching the City of Darlington will once again have the eyes and ears of the world focused upon it.

Beginning Aug. 31 and running through Sept. 2, Darlington Raceway will host the Official Throwback Weekend of NASCAR, with the Sport Clips Haircuts VFW 200 NASCAR XFINITY Race on Saturday and the Bojangles' Southern 500 Monster Energy NASCAR Cup Series Race on Sunday. Fans from all 50 states and 14 foreign countries will descend upon our community and pack the stands for what promises to be another exciting and memorable weekend of NASCAR Racing at The Lady in Black.

Fans will have extra incentive to attend this year's event. With the recent capital improvement project that has taken place at the Track Too Tough To Tame, fans will get an up close and personal view of a "Better Darlington." New, wider and more comfortable seats have been installed in Tyler Tower, Wallace Grandstands, and Colvin Grandstands. The sight lines in Tyler Tower have been greatly improved and the seats in that section are now stadium-style chair back seats with cup holders. The stadium-style bleacher seats with backs in Wallace and Colvin offer fans in those sections more room and a more comfortable seating experience, as well.

Additionally, fans will have the opportunity to see the track's new Wall of Honor, which is a one-of-a-kind tribute to the legends that have raced at Darlington. The iconic banners will adorn both the front stretch and the back stretch and will allow fans the chance to see the names of the 49 drivers that have

won NASCAR Cup Series races at Darlington. This new feature will truly be a great addition to our historic venue.

As we embark upon the fourth year of our award-winning Throwback Weekend, Darlington will be celebrating "7 Decades of NASCAR," in recognition of the sport's 70th anniversary. NASCAR has had so many great moments over the past seven decades, many of them occurring here at Darlington, and this year's race weekend takes a walk down memory lane recognizing many of those milestones.

Along with the team's popular throwback paint schemes and retro crew uniforms, the track has incorporated several other special offerings to add to the seven decade celebration. The track will host a special "7 Decades of NASCAR Celebration" event Saturday, Sept. 1 in Hospitality Village outside Turn 3. This event features more than 18 of the sport's most recognizable names participating in individual informal question and answer sessions. Such legends as Richard Petty, Dale Earnhardt Jr., Jimmie Johnson, Bobby Allison, Chase Elliott, Leonard Wood, Ray Evernham, Ward Burton, Kurt Busch and many, many more will be on hand for what promises to be an unprecedented gathering of NASCAR folk heroes never seen before during a race weekend.

Darlington's Throwback Weekend has become a focal part of the racing season. Our legendary track is where heroes like Cale Yarborough, David Pearson, Richard Petty, Dale Earnhardt, Darrell Waltrip and Jeff Gordon have traded paint, competed, won, lost and put on great racing for nearly 70 years. Darlington is truly the home track for the state of South Carolina and the

Bojangles' Southern 500 continues to be one of our sport's crown jewels.

Darlington Raceway has proven to be a key economic contributor to the state of South Carolina. A recent economic impact study conducted by Dr. Tom Regan at the University of South Carolina revealed that the track provides an annual economic impact of more than \$64 million to the state. Of that total, more than \$58 million directly impacts the Pee Dee Region. That is some serious dollars that the racetrack helps bring into this state and community.

Your support of our Labor Day Race Weekend is vitally important. We want our stands to be full and we want the nation and the world to see just how exciting our event is, both those who attend and those who watch NBC's broadcast. We offer a variety of ticket and hospitality packages that provide you with a wide-range of options to enjoy the race weekend. To purchase



your tickets, visit [www.darlingtonraceway.com](http://www.darlingtonraceway.com) or call 866-459-7223.

It is truly an honor to be your track president and a resident of Darlington. I invite you to come out and experience our throwback weekend Aug. 31-Sept. 2. Darlington is indeed a special place and I look forward to seeing you at the race track Labor Day Weekend.

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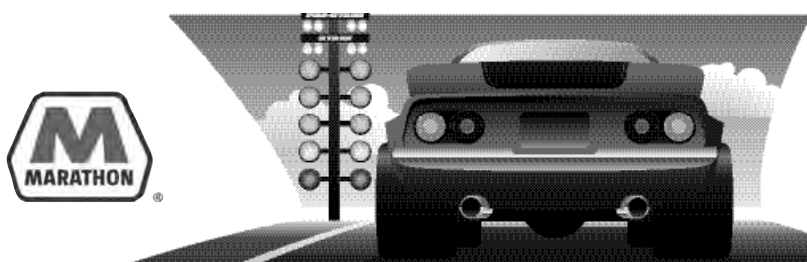
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# Darlington native named 2018 Lady in Black

Darlington Raceway named Darlington native Cydney Gandy the Lady in Black for 2018.

As the Lady in Black, Gandy serves as a key ambassador for Darlington Raceway throughout the year. She will represent the track at various community and media events as well as the 69th annual Monster Energy NASCAR Cup Series Bojangles' Southern 500 on Labor Day weekend.

"We interviewed a number of very talented candidates for our Lady in Black position. It was a very tough decision, but we're excited to have Cydney as our 2018 Lady in Black," track President Kerry Tharp said. "The Lady in Black is an integral part of our outreach efforts. Cydney, being born and raised in Darlington, understands how important the track is to the local community, state and region."

Gandy was selected from

over 30 candidates that submitted an online application for the position.

"I'm excited about this opportunity to serve as the Lady in Black," Gandy said. "I was a finalist for the position when Kaitlyn Bailey earned it in 2014 and decided to give it another try this year, which I'm glad I did."

Gandy, a native of Darlington, is a 2012 graduate of Hartsville High School. She completed her second degree from Francis Marion University in May, graduating with a bachelor's degree in nursing. She currently works in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit for the McLeod Regional Medical Center in Florence.



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# In the beginning: Harold Brasington and his peers helped put NASCAR on the map in the 1950's

Darlington Raceway is celebrating "7 Decades of NASCAR" for its Bojangles' Southern 500 Throwback Weekend on Sept. 1-2. As part of the celebration, the track Too Tough To Tame is highlighting specific moments in the sport's history, beginning with the 1950's.

With the exception of Martinsville Speedway, which opened its doors to NASCAR-sanctioned events in 1948, the 1950's were a time of rapid growth for the sport.

Many of the industry's most popular racing facilities were built in that decade and still host NASCAR events that are considered the pillars of the sport today, including Darlington Raceway (opened in 1950 and hosts the Bojangles' Southern 500), Charlotte Motor Speedway (built in 1959 and hosts the Coca-Cola 600) and Daytona International Speedway (opened in 1959 and hosts the Daytona 500).

Many people were credited with helping get the sport off the ground in that decade, none more so than NASCAR founder Bill France Sr.

But it was also other visionaries such as Darlington Raceway founder Harold Brasington, that built NASCAR facilities that have stood the test of time. In fact, following the construction of Darlington Raceway, Brasington went on to build Rockingham Speedway (then North Carolina Motor Speedway) in 1965 as well as several other tracks in the South.

He was also Curtis Turner's original partner when Charlotte Motor Speedway

was conceived in 1960, before selling his interest to Bruton Smith prior to construction beginning. Brasington was also responsible for the construction of Darlington Dragway and Rockingham Dragway.

"My grandfather loved racing and wanted to do what he could to make the sport more prevalent in the Carolinas, which he accomplished with the building of Darlington, Rockingham and the conception of Charlotte," said Brasington's grandson, Harold III. "He was truly a visionary and pioneer in the early years of NASCAR and was recognized with the NASCAR Hall of Fame's Landmark Award in 2016 for those efforts."

Kerry Tharp, Darlington Raceway Track President, says it was Harold Brasington's lofty thinking that helped spur the growth of NASCAR in the 1950s.

"Harold Brasington had the boldness and creativity that ushered in the super-speedway era for NASCAR," said Tharp.



"His development of Darlington Raceway will forever be remembered as a milestone in our sport."

Notable historic drivers and events in the 1950's include:

• Lee Petty competed in 373 events over the 10-year period, winning 47 of them, including the inaugural Daytona 500. Petty won a series-best three champi-

onships in the decade while also scoring the most top-10s and top-five finishes in the era—292 and 203.

• Herb Thomas was a 48-time winner in NASCAR's top series, scoring all his wins between 1950 and 1956, including the Bojangles' Southern

500 in 1951, 1954 and 1955.

• A 2014 NASCAR Hall of Fame Inductee, Tim Flock posted all 39 of his career victories during the '50s. His career win percentage was 22.5 percent, which is the highest among all drivers with at least 100 starts in the series. Flock earned 122 top-10s during the 1950s, and only 22 of those were not top-five finishes. Flock won the series championship in both 1952 and 1955.

• The first Daytona 500 was held at Daytona International Speedway in 1959. Lee Petty and Johnny Beauchamp battled to a side-by-side finish. Although Beauchamp was declared the unofficial winner, Petty was awarded the official victory by NASCAR three days later after reviewing photographs and newsreel footage.



Photos of Harold Brasington at Darlington Raceway courtesy of ISC Images and Archives.





# Governor cuts ribbon on new Darlington Raceway grandstands

By Samantha Lyles  
Staff Writer  
slyles@newsandpress.net

South Carolina Governor Henry McMaster and NASCAR Xfinity Series driver Elliott Sadler visited The Track Too Tough to Tame last Tuesday, August 14 to officially open the Darlington Raceway's newly renovated grandstands.

"This is a great day in the history of Darlington Raceway," said track president Kerry Tharp. "Not only are we showcasing the success of the massive renovation the track has undergone, but we also ceremoniously signed a bill that will continue to support the track and surrounding community for years and years to come."

Since January of 2018, the Raceway has invested \$7 million to renovate 60 percent of Darlington Raceway's seating along the front and back stretches. New, wider seats with cupholders have been installed in the Tyler, Wallace and Colvin Grandstands, and

the rake has been improved for better sight lines.

Gov. McMaster also conducted a ceremonial signing of SC House Bill 4009, the Motorsports Entertainment Complex Investment Act, which sets groundwork to provide incentives for future capital investments by Darlington Raceway and its parent company, the International Speedway Corporation.

McMaster was joined by SC Speaker of the House Jay Lucas (R-Hartsville), Sen. Gerald Malloy (D-Hartsville) and Rep. Robert Williams (D-Darlington) for the signing of the bill, and the legislators also helped the governor and his wife, Peggy McMaster, cut the ribbon to officially open the new grandstand seating.

"I am proud to support Darlington Raceway," said Gov. McMaster. "It is a major sporting venue that attracts thousands of fans to our great state of South Carolina every year, resulting in over



Gov. Henry McMaster was joined by SC Speaker of the House Jay Lucas (R-Hartsville), Sen. Gerald Malloy (D-Hartsville) and Rep. Robert Williams (D-Darlington) at Darlington Raceway August 14. Photos by Samantha Lyles



\$64 million worth of economic impact for our state."

Driver Elliot Sadler lauded the legislator's efforts to team up with the Raceway to invest in the future of racing.

"A 11 N A S C A R tracks that are successful in today's world have support from their local dignitaries, their politicians, their governors. It says a lot about you, what you care about, what Kerry is doing for the program here at Darlington, and what you're doing for NASCAR," said Sadler.

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# Dakota Hunter: Get Thrown Into The Fire And Just Start Doing It

By Hunter Thomas  
Contributing Writer

NASCAR racing isn't just something Dakota Hunter is passionate about. It's in his blood.

Hunter is the grandson of former Darlington Raceway President, the late Jim Hunter, and he has been visiting NASCAR races since he was a little kid. Whether it was causing childhood mischief in the driver's lot or sitting on the lap of some of the sport's Hall of Famers, Hunter has always called the life in the fast lane home.

"Growing up, I didn't have a babysitter, so I was at pretty much all of the races that I didn't have my mom or my dad home that week or weekend," Hunter said. "It's really funny. Actually, looking back, I was at Watkins Glen earlier this year, and I'm watching these young kids on their skateboards, and I was telling Kevin Harvick's coach driver Lynn - I was telling him how funny it is looking back and watching these young guys rolling around, and that was me, literally in the driver's lot."

Hunter's father, Scott who is a veteran media member of the sport, taught him early on about the passion and skillsets that are needed to succeed in the NASCAR

industry. As Dakota matured, he was more involved in the sport. He helped his father catalogue photos, and Dakota even helped him capture photos during race weekends.

"I think my first official job, where I got paid something, was my dad brought me into the NASCAR building, and he was going to give me about \$10 an hour to scan old photos," Hunter said. "He had like 20 boxes of old photos that he took back in the day. They were old, old photos, and they needed to be scanned digitally."

These days, however, Hunter helps manage some of the industry's biggest stars on and off the track while working for True Speed Communication, a public relations and marketing firm. While Hunter has worked with Kyle Busch, and Stewart-Haas Racing's Kevin Harvick, Kurt Busch, Clint Bowyer, Aric Almirola, Danica Patrick and Cole Custer, he had to pay his dues just like everyone else in the sport.

Hunter is a graduate of UNC Charlotte, where he studied communications and public relations, while minoring in journalism. College gave him the foundation, but it was being thrown into the fire and learning from real-world experiences that has set Hunter apart from others in the industry. Hunter's first break in the sport came when he earned an internship with

Charlotte Motor Speedway while he was still in college. While working for the race track, Dakota assisted with all aspects of marketing, public relations and social media. Speedway Motorsports, Inc. (SMI), which owns Charlotte Motor Speedway, has its sister tracks work closely together, so Hunter helped out during the Monster Energy NASCAR Cup Series race weekends at Atlanta Motor Speedway and Bristol Motor Speedway as well.

"I was in college for a while, and after my grandfather passed, I really wasn't too involved in racing," Hunter said. "I was valeting at a restaurant called Red Rocks in Birkdale (North Carolina), when a gentleman from Charlotte Motor Speedway had a Hard Card out, and I asked him if he had any internships. A month later, I got an interview with Charlotte Motor Speedway and started there. It kind of took off, I was an intern there and helped out at Atlanta (Motor Speedway) and Bristol (Motor Speedway)."

Following the conclusion of his internship at Charlotte Motor Speedway, Hunter had to find other opportunities in the sport. Luckily for Hunter, his past experience and exposure placed him in the sight of the industry's best, so finding other opportunities came a little easier once his foot was already in the door. Darlington Raceway President Kerry Tharp recruited Hunter during his senior year in college to assist with the track's marketing and ticket sales efforts during the Bojangles' Southern 500 weekend.

"I ran out of internship opportunities," Hunter said. "When I heard Kerry Tharp became the president of Darlington Raceway I called him a week later and asked if he needed any free work. I filled in the cracks at the racetrack, and I did PR (public relations) and marketing and ticket sales all in one week just to learn. That was probably one of the biggest opportunities for me."

Senior Vice President of True Speed Marketing, Mike Arning was at Darlington Raceway that weekend, and he had seen Hunter on several occasions throughout the season. A few months later, Arning gave Hunter a call and hired him to repre-

sent Haas F1 in Formula 1 as an intern and, two months later, hired him full-time while still in college to represent Stewart-Haas Racing in the NASCAR national series.

"Mike Arning with True Speed saw me a couple times at a couple of racetracks and finally gave me a call and asked if I wanted to help out with some Haas F1 social media before I graduated," Hunter said. "I helped out a little bit with that, and that turned into PR rep. for Cole Custer and filling in for all of our Cup drivers doing social media, flying drones and you name it."

The opportunity to work with True Speed Communication is without a doubt exciting for Hunter, but in the very beginning, he was naturally just a little nervous. After all, he was working with some of the sport's most talented individuals. However, he quickly adapted and the work became routine, especially after Hunter formed better relationships with the drivers he represented.

"I guess when I first started, you get nervous, you know, like 'wow, I'm just a young guy that's getting thrown into the fire', Hunter said. "But quite honestly, I wouldn't want to do it any other way than to get thrown into the fire and just start doing it. Now that I know the drivers better, and I've out a lot of time and effort into learning how to improve each and every week. I still have a ton to learn and I continue to learn every week. I'm surrounded by a great group at True Speed, and it's a lot of fun really to be a part of it."

During Darlington Raceway's NASCAR races on Labor Day weekend, Hunter will be representing Custer in the NASCAR XFINITY Series as well as Stewart-Haas Racing's Monster Energy NASCAR Cup Series lineup that includes Harvick, Kurt Busch, Bowyer and Almirola.



Dakota Hunter (left) and NASCAR XFINITY Series driver, Cole Custer (right) at Bristol Motor Speedway. Photo by Hunter Thomas

# Bojangles' And Derrike Cope Reunite For Darlington Throwback Scheme

By Hunter Thomas  
Contributing Writer

Bojangles' and Derrike Cope are reuniting for the 69th running of the Bojangles' Southern 500 at Darlington Raceway on Labor Day weekend. The restaurant known for its Famous Chicken n' Biscuits, will adorn the StarCom Racing No. 99 Chevrolet, throwing it back to the 1993 season.

While most drivers will be honoring others during The Official Throwback Weekend of NASCAR at Darlington Raceway, Cope will be throwing it back 25 years to his 1993 season, when he drove the No. 98 Bojangles' Ford for NASCAR Hall of Famer and Timmonsville, South Carolina native, Cale Yarborough.

"Derrike and I actually first spoke about this opportunity last year in Darlington," said Randy Poindexter, Senior VP of Marketing at Bojangles'. "The Bojangles' brand was all-in on making this partnership happen. I was with Bojangles' when we sponsored him 25 years ago, so it's going to bring back great memories seeing Derrike on track in the yellow-and-red Bojangles' car."

During the 1993 season, Cope led 30 laps of the Daytona 500. His best finish of the year came at Talladega



Photo of artist rendition by Ryan Daley contributed by Bojangles'

Superspeedway, when he crossed the finish line in eighth. Cope finished 17th in both races held at Darlington Raceway in 1993 as well.

"I am truly pleased and thankful to be back with Bojangles' 25 years later," said Derrike Cope, StarCom Racing Team Manager and Driver. "My relationship with Bojangles' and the people that were

there in 1993 is incredible. There were a lot of promotions to activate Bojangles' entry into NASCAR. Looking forward to sharing a lot of old memories with the Bojangles' family."

Cope has been racing in the Monster Energy NASCAR Cup Series for more than 30 years. His most notable victory in his 426 series starts came in the 1990 Daytona

500.

"We are honored to be partnering with Bojangles' for Darlington and are looking forward to bringing the 1993 throwback to life on the track," said William Woehleemann, StarCom Racing CFO. "It's cool seeing Derrike switch gears from team manager to driver on race weekends and we are definitely looking forward to hearing his back-in-the-day stories this upcoming throwback race!"

The one-race partnership between Bojangles' and Cope is truly a throwback that speaks volumes of the involvement of both parties throughout NASCAR's 70-year history. While not all throwback schemes have been unveiled for the 69th running of the Bojangles' Southern 500, Cope is only the third Monster Energy NASCAR Cup Series driver to be honoring one of his own rides. The other two drivers honoring their own throwback schemes so far are Kurt Busch and Jimmie Johnson.

The Monster Energy NASCAR Cup Series Bojangles' Southern 500 will broadcast live on the NBC Sports Network (NBCSN) and the Motor Racing Network (MRN) at 6 p.m. ET on Sunday, September 2.

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# NASCAR Summit Recognizes Track Services Professionals

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla.—Planning and preparation for the 2018 season reached an important milestone in early January as track services professionals from the U.S., Canada and Mexico participated in the 18th annual NASCAR Safety and Operations Summit presented by American Medical Response.

The three-day conference, held at the Concord (North Carolina) Convention Center, featured numerous presentations and small-group seminars that addressed best practices in the safety, track services, medical and security functional areas.

“The Summit is a key part of our commitment to providing world-class support to our fans and competitors,” said Jim Cassidy, NASCAR senior vice president, racing operations. “It also serves as an opportunity to recognize the dedicated professionals behind the scenes who contribute to the success of our sport.”

This year’s keynote speech was delivered by Dr. Ed Racht, chief medical officer for AMR and asso-

ciate chief medical officer of Evolution Health, who has served for more than 20 years in the medical field.

Amid the training sessions, NASCAR also presented awards to individuals and tracks for outstanding performance during the 2017 season. The 2017 honorees included:

## Track Services

- Mission Award: Tim Arfons
- Teamwork Award: Darlington Raceway
- Innovation Award: Jay Donnay and Jason Payne
- Excellence in Track Services Award: Ignatius Kosier, Atlanta Motor Speedway
- Norrie Baird NASCAR Track Services Training Award: Andrew Brandl, Road America

## Medical

- Above and Beyond Award: Chuck Willard, Chicagoland Speedway
- Medical Director Award: Dr. Douglas Swanson, Dr. William Liang
- Nursing Director Award: Connie Tompkins, Kerry Lane

· Teamwork Award: Charlotte Motor Speedway, Canadian Tire Motorsport Park

## Security

· Security Award: Chief Gary J. Gacek, Concord NC Police Department, Doug Cremer and Tom Vesey, Charlotte Motor Speedway; Alan Watson and Andy McWilliams, Talladega Superspeedway; Greg Scott and Darren Cook, Kansas Speedway; Matt Brannock, Martinsville Speedway; Bill Hindman and Brett Adams, ISM Raceway; Jay Fraioli and Al Garcia, Homestead Miami Speedway

## About NASCAR

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The NASCAR Summit Teamwork Award for 2018 went to Darlington Raceway. Photo Contributed

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# A guided tour of the history of Darlington

By Harold Brasington III

Labor Day is almost here. It's hotter than hot peppers on Carolina asphalt. The peanuts are in and the perfume of that boiled southern delicacy is in the air. And you locals know what else that means - you better get a ticket or get out of the way - the race is coming to town. Since the Labor Day race has been returned to its customary home here in Darlington, we feel that a sense of order has been restored in our lives. In anticipation of the big day I have been brushing up on my Darlington history for the occasion.

My grandfather, Harold Brasington Sr. built the Darlington Raceway, so it would be reasonable to think I am already an expert with respect to the venerable Lady in Black. Turns out, I still have a lot to learn. It's hard to remember things that happened before you were born. Fortunately, some of the people that were there from the beginning have been willing to sit down with me and share their Darlington stories. Each time I come away with a deeper sense of amazement and gratitude for what a determined group of people accomplished in a relatively short amount of time. Granddad is rightly credited as the creator of Darlington Raceway, but without the dedication and skill of the team he assembled it would never have happened. NASCAR is celebrating 70 years, and that landmark anniversary is just around the corner for Darlington next Labor Day. As we reflect on our history I thought it would be fitting to acknowledge some of the individuals that worked behind the scenes and were seldom mentioned, but no less important.

The best way to inspire a mood

of nostalgic rumination is to stand in the very place that history unfolded, and let your imagination take over . . . granddad would use just one word for all of that - daydreaming. With that in mind, allow me to guide you on a short walking tour of the Darlington Square. I'd like to introduce you to some of granddad's old friends that helped make this thing we call Darlington a reality. So come along, it's free and you will hardly break a sweat. Well, that last part is a lie but it's worth it.

1. Park on or near the Public Square. Find the vacant lot on the corner of South Main and Orange Street facing the mural of Darlington circa 1930. You are standing on the site of the old McFall Hotel. Left of the center of the mural you can see the cupola of the old Hotel. This is where Harold Brasington called a meeting in December of 1949 to announce the plan to build the first paved speedway for stock cars. Bill France had his Streamline but Harold had his McFall. The building is long gone, lost to a fire in 1968 but you all know what it wrought. Those engines roar every Labor Day.

2. Walk South on Main Street passing the old Coggs Hall's Department Store on your right. At the corner turn right on Pearl Street and walk 300 feet. Turn right onto the brick path of Liberty Lane Winston Walk of Fame and take a moment to gaze up at the raceway mural rendered by South Carolina artist Blue Sky. Make sure you take a selfie or put your hands in one of the cement handprints of the legendary drivers who have won at Darlington. Feeling the history yet? Good, now let's walk on.

3. Proceed to the corner of Pearl and Dargan Street stopping

in front of the steps of the Methodist Church. Facing Pearl Street is Tommy's Automobile lot. Close your eyes and picture the old Brasington home place where Harold Sr. grew up. Close 'em again.....When his father passed on, Harold tore the old house down and built a round, UFO shaped drive-in café called the Southernair. Richard Petty recounted stories for me once about going up there with his father Lee to visit with Granddad (he said they had good hotdogs). The Southernair provided all the food service for the track for about the first 15 years under the direction of Harold's niece-in-law, Mary Ruth Hick Brasington. A few years back, her grandson, Billy provided the track some of the menus for the throwback menu items. Mary Ruth's husband, Bill, Sr. has the distinction of attending every race at Darlington until his death in 1995 and he had the pit passes to prove it. Bill Sr. also helped out on the maintenance staff most of his life. At his funeral, the Maintenance Staff of the Racetrack were listed as honorary pallbearers. Harold's other nephew Allen was involved in the original plan and helped out with construction on the weekends. Allen never saw Darlington International Speedway grow to its potential having been killed in service in 1952.

4. Turn yourself to face the old Post Office. Looking down Dargan Street

you can see a metal building on the left side. That is owned by Todd Hardee, the Darlington County Coroner and owner of Kistler-Hardee Funeral Home. This is also the site of Drake's Garage, where Frank Drake, Sambo Ard and Bill Garland and their friend Harold Brasington helped each other build racecars between 1930 and WWII that they raced on dirt tracks. Speaking of Kistler-Hardee Funeral Home, in those days most funeral home also ran ambulance services and the Kistler family were no exception. J.H. Kistler and his son, then 25 year-old T.C. Kistler, provided the ambulances needed should an emergency arise at the track. Kistler's commercial fleet was also used in the 1960 movie filmed in Darlington, "Thunder in Carolina".

5. While you're on the square, here's a tidbit. Harold Brasington was not just a builder of a speed plant, he regularly got hauled in for driving too fast on his every day errands for his father, racing around the town square, raising you know what like any other good ol' Southern boy.

Here's the thing about

Darlington. Folks can tell you there was a fishpond. Folks can tell you that there was a peanut farmer (Oh boy, here they are wrong but we'll tell that tale another day.) and all the fans can tell you that racing's cruelest mistress is the Lady in Black. But they don't know that Darlington's storied Psillos family was integral to the design of Harold Brasington's legacy, that their engineering was priceless to creating the design of NASCAR's most storied track. They don't know that the perhaps Sherman Ramsey was duped into handing over his land (but not that pond!) and that the Ramsey family home still stands on Spring Street. The stories are endless, just like any good Southern legend. You can swing by the Darlington County Historical Commission if you want to do your own research, of course keep in mind that the building used to be the county jailhouse. Mind your manners and enjoy the race.

*The author would like to give credit to Allen Brasington for help in editing this article and to Melissa Bleier, his co-author on his biography of Harold Brasington Sr.*

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# Ann Hunter: Jim would be so proud that Darlington is continuing the tradition

At the end of June, Darlington Raceway Track President Kerry Tharp walked members of the media around the track to see the improvements being made in the \$7 million dollar 'Better Darlington' campaign. Joining Tharp was Ann Hunter, widow of the late Darlington Raceway track president Jim Hunter.

"It gives me great honor and privilege to be out here, to be the President at Darlington, to walk in the same places as a man who I respected very much, Jim Hunter," Tharp said. "He was my mentor when I worked at NASCAR and it is a real thrill to have his wife Ann join us today. Jim was the track president here when Tyler Towers were built back in 1994. I thought it would be appropriate to have her out here today. I can imagine right now that Hunter is looking down on us now saying 'What in the heck took you all so long to do this?' but we are proud of this project."

Ann echoed Tharp's statement, saying that her late husband would be excited about everything happening at the track.

"Jim would be so proud and so excited about these improvements and that Darlington is

continuing that tradition," Hunter said. "There is such a history here and he wanted it to go back to the Labor Day race, and it has. He would be so happy that Kerry is here and that Kerry is living in Darlington, thinking about the community as Jim did."

Hunter said that even though a lot has changed in the sport, Darlington has remained the iconic Track Too Tough To Tame.

"I think at Darlington, the tradition stays the same; I don't think it changes here," Hunter said. "At a lot of places it does change. Of course things with NASCAR have changed. There are a lot of younger drivers, things like that, and people talk about how the sport has changed. I think at Darlington, though, the history and everything here stays the same."

Another thing that has remained the same at Darlington, and other areas of NASCAR, is the representation of the Hunter family: for the summer of 2018, grandson Hunter McKernan served as an intern for the track.

"Hunter is at the track working as an intern and he will be a senior at Carolina this year," Ann Hunter said. "Jim would be so proud because he is in the

School of Journalism in sports marketing following in his granddaddy's footsteps. Jim always said he was an awesome writer even when he was a little boy so he's following in that. Our other grandson Dakota works in racing, too."

Tharp said that having Hunter serve as an intern has been great and continues the work that he and others are doing to generate more interest from younger generations.

"There is no question (that having youth in the sport brings in more youth to the sport); we want to get young people involved," Tharp said. "When you have young people getting involved at an early age, they carry that down year after year. So many people came to the racetrack with their granddad or their uncle. Having grown up in a NASCAR-based family Hunter, and really everyone in this community, knows that Darlington is an iconic race-track. We have to get the young people to realize that and we're making some progress."



Ann Hunter with grandson Hunter McKernan both in Jim Hunter's signature yellow hat.



Ann Hunter talks about the renovations at Darlington Raceway during a tour with Track President Kerry Tharp. Photos by Melissa Rollins

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# 1990-1992: Storms Blow Through Darlington County

By Terrance Niedziela Jr.  
Contributing Writer

*Editor's Note: We are happy to support Darlington Raceway's Throwback theme. In this piece Terrance Niedziela Jr., who was working at the Darlington County Historical Commission at the time it was written, looks back at the early 90's.*

1990-92 was an era filled with big hair and painful fashion choices; this writer has the pictures to prove it! But embarrassing pictures aside, the early 90s were filled with a series of storms that affected Darlington County.

September 21, 1989 brought Hurricane Hugo and its 135mph maximum winds to level utility lines, twist and pull up trees, and shred buildings. It caused \$6 million in damage. The sound of chainsaws was as common as buzzing mosquitos. Wood from fallen trees was piled up and given away as free firewood. Creeks were clogged with debris, causing flooding as waves of rain followed on Hugo's heels. In October 1990, the roof of the National Motorsports Press Association Stock Car Hall of Fame Joe Weatherly Museum buckled under torrential rains. None of

the stock cars were seriously damaged. FEMA stepped in to help after Hugo, but in 1992 contacted the city of Darlington and informed them they had been overpaid. Darlington was required to pay back \$8,736 given for damages and \$174.72 in administrative costs. The city was willing to pay, hoping the money would be used to help those hit by other hurricanes.

Another type of storm hit in 1990 and this one consisted of movie stars and racing. Paramount Pictures chose to film "Days of Thunder" at Darlington International Raceway. Tom Cruise, Robert Duvall, Randy Quaid, and Nicole Kidman graced Darlington with their presence as a call went out for extras for the movie. Around 3,000 people flooded to apply, including people from North Carolina and Virginia. Many Darlington County residents were chosen. Racing fever swept through the county. Tom Cruise increased his fame in Darlington by getting a speeding ticket for driving 66mph in a 35mph zone on Cashua Street. He was fined \$125 and photocopies of the ticket were scattered throughout the county. Once again Darlington County was in the national limelight.

1990-91 saw Operation Desert Storm that morphed into the Persian Gulf War. Darlington County residents, including teachers and Darlington Mayor Ronnie Ward, were shipped to Kuwait. Mayor Ward continued to remain mayor while overseas and was able to maintain his post in the 1991 election. Patriotism skyrocketed as members of Darlington County communities hung yellow ribbons and held prayer meetings to support troops. I was entering middle school at this time and I remember wondering when it would all be over.

The last storm I will talk about is the 1992 political storm. From local to national, politics was a major focus and still is today. National politics played themselves out in the Southern 500. Vice President Dan Quale walked in the rain during the Southern 500 Parade on Labor Day and was met with cheering.

Democratic presidential nominee Bill Clinton held the position of Grand Marshal for the Southern 500 Race and was met with loud boos. Despite the less than pleasant welcome, Bill Clinton carried Darlington County in the election, though not South Carolina.

Here is bit of fun trivia for you: In 1990-92, minimum wage for South Carolina was \$3.80/hr. Ribeye and New York Strip steaks were \$4.99/lb. A 5lb bag of potatoes was 99¢ and sweet potatoes was 39¢/lb. Currently, the minimum wage for South Carolina is \$7.25 and depending on where you go, a Ribeye steak is \$6.63/lb. Whether back then or today, it looks like there is still just a little bit left over after grocery shopping!



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A photo of the Wood Brothers during Darlington's Throwback Weekend in 2016 courtesy of Harrelson Photography.

## The 1960s: A time of name recognition, manufacturer growth and speed in NASCAR

In the 1960s, it was all about “Win on Sunday, Sell on Monday” as the automobile manufacturers (namely Ford, General Motors and Chrysler) were heavily investing in NASCAR as a way to showcase and sell their products. It was considered an arms race of which manufacturer could build the fastest car in the sport throughout the 60s.

Additionally, major superspeedways were being built throughout the country coinciding with the sport's popularity and growth of a fan base falling more in love with the automobile, especially muscle cars. Tracks such as Talladega Superspeedway, Michigan International Speedway and Bristol Motor Speedway were built, bringing tens of thousands of new fans into the fold. Speeds reached nearly 200 mph for the first time in the 60s.

“There's no question that the 1960s was a decade of growth not only for NASCAR but for the car culture as well,” NASCAR Hall of Famer Leonard Wood said. “It really was a time of muscle cars, speed and the love of the automobile in that decade. It was a period of tremendous success for the Wood Brothers, especially with Cale Yarborough and then David Pearson in the 70s. It was a great era of our sport.”

The 1960s also was a decade where many legends of the sport became household names and

eventual NASCAR Hall of Famers such as David Pearson, Cale Yarborough, Richard Petty, Wendell Scott, Junior Johnson and Fred Lorenzen. In fact, Scott is still the only African-American to record a victory in NASCAR's top series when he won at Jacksonville Raceway Park in 1963.

“The list of legendary drivers and owners that helped build the foundation of our sport in the 1960s is incredible,” Darlington Raceway President Kerry Tharp said. “NASCAR Hall of Famers such as Rex White, Junior Johnson, Ned Jarrett and Bud Moore, along with so many other icons, are a big reason the sport is where it is today.”

Notable historic drivers and moments in the 1960s include:

•Ned Jarrett won the 1965 Bojangles' Southern 500 by 14 laps. It is a NASCAR record that still stands today. He won the series championship in 1961 and 1965.

•Joe Weatherly won the 1962 and '63 NASCAR championship titles. Weatherly started in 230 races and won 25 of them. He was a constant competitor throughout the 1960s, especially in the early part of the decade.

•David Pearson won the NASCAR championship in 1966, '68 and '69. In his career, he started in 574 races with 105 wins and placed in the top-five 301 times.

He ranks second all-time in NASCAR history with those 105 wins, trailing only Richard Petty's 200 victories. Pearson turned out to be one of the best drivers in the late '60s, and he proved it with three NASCAR championships.

•Richard Petty won the NASCAR championship twice in the 1960s (1964 and '67). In 1967, Petty showed his dominance by winning 27 races, including his one and only Bojangles' Southern 500 at Darlington, and won the championship by more than 5,000 points. He won 10 races in a row that year, a record that still stands.

•The 1968 Southern 500 at Darlington was won by Cale Yarborough, his first of five victories in the legendary race. He also won the Daytona 500 that same year for the Wood Brothers.

•Talladega hosted its first NASCAR Cup Series event in Sept. of 1969. Richard Brickhouse took the checkered flag after many of the regular NASCAR drivers boycotted the event.

## Longtime Darlington Raceway President honored with Landmark Award

Jim Hunter, Darlington Raceway President from 1993-2001, was honored by his peers on Wednesday, May 23, by being named the Landmark Award for Outstanding Contributions to NASCAR recipient.

Hunter will be honored during the NASCAR Hall of Fame induction ceremonies in January of 2019.

Hunter, a lifelong resident of Darlington, also served as NASCAR Vice President of Communications for several years following his time at Darlington. His wife, Ann, still resides in Darlington.

“Jim Hunter was a legendary figure at Darlington and in NASCAR and is very deserving of the Landmark Award,” Darlington Raceway President Kerry Tharp said. “He oversaw great expansion projects at Darlington Raceway and helped continue to build the track's lega-

cy throughout a time of tremendous growth in NASCAR. He left an indelible and everlasting impact on the sport and for that we will be forever grateful.”

Hunter was a graduate of the University of South Carolina, where he played football for the Gamecocks. He was part of the NASCAR community for the better part of six decades, having covered the sport in newspapers, before joining the executive ranks of the sanctioning body. He also authored several books on NASCAR and Darlington Raceway in his career.

The media center at Darlington Raceway still carries his name as the Jim H. Hunter Media Center, which hosts media from around the country every Labor Day weekend for the track's annual Bojangles' Southern 500 weekend. Hunter passed away in 2010 at the age of 71.



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# The 1970s: NASCAR overcomes an early recession

As NASCAR entered the '70s, few could have predicted the major culture shifts that would soon change the sport forever. A number of key moves – and one major moment – highlighted the decade, all of which provided much needed stability and longevity to the sport for years to come.

Most notably, the addition of Winston as the series sponsor in 1971, Bill France Sr. stepping down and turning the reins over to his son, Bill Jr., in 1972, and the addition of live television coverage of the sport in 1970, were all critical factors in propelling stock car racing into the modern era and ultimately to new heights from which the sport had never seen.

Winston, with their creative marketing strategy (Winston Million in the '80s and '90s) and influx of promotional dollars (\$100,000 points fund in 1972), helped usher the sport to a bigger fan base outside the Southeast region. With the assistance of live telecasts throughout the decade, the NASCAR Winston Cup Grand

National Series was becoming a must-see sport around the country.

"Through the visionary leadership of Bill France Sr., and Bill France Jr., NASCAR experienced unprecedented growth during the 1970s," said Kerry Tharp, President of Darlington Raceway. "Their ability to bring in national sponsors and television coverage allowed the sport to explode onto the American sports scene."

As the push for more popularity was being made throughout the '70s, the decade ended with arguably the most important race in the history of NASCAR.

After negotiating with CBS to broadcast the entire 1979 Daytona 500 live flag-to-flag, NASCAR was the benefactor of a perfect storm for the second race of the season.

With a snowstorm blanketing most of the East coast, giving the race a captive television audience, the 1979 Daytona 500 was a spectacular event. Although Richard Petty snapped a 45-race winless streak that day, it was the fight between South Carolina's

own Cale Yarborough, and the Allison brothers Donnie and Bobby, that stole the ratings that day.

After battling throughout the day, Donnie Allison and Yarborough took the white flag with a half-lap lead on the rest of the field. After heavy contact on the final lap, both drivers found themselves wrecked and settled at the bottom of the track. With Bobby Allison pulling up soon after to check on his brother, the three proceeded to fight on live national television, generating some of the highest TV ratings in the sport's history. Nearly 16 million viewers tuned into the telecast, which ultimately drew a 10.5 national rating.

The race was considered one of the most important in NASCAR history due to the fact that it got millions of viewers excited about stock car racing and generated a buzz around the country that got people talking about the sport.

Maybe just as important, 1979 was also the first full-time season for rookie Dale Earnhardt, who finished eighth in the Daytona



Photo courtesy of ISC Images & Archives/Getty Images.

500 that year, won his first Cup race at Bristol, and earned Rookie of the Year honors that season despite missing four races with a broken collarbone.

He was one of many legendary drivers who began their careers in the '70s, including Darrell Waltrip, Terry Labonte and Harry

Gant, among others.

Janet Guthrie was also introduced to stock car fans in the 1970s when she competed from 1976-1980 in the Cup Series. She was the first woman to start a Daytona 500 in 1977 and finished 12th in the race after starting 39th.

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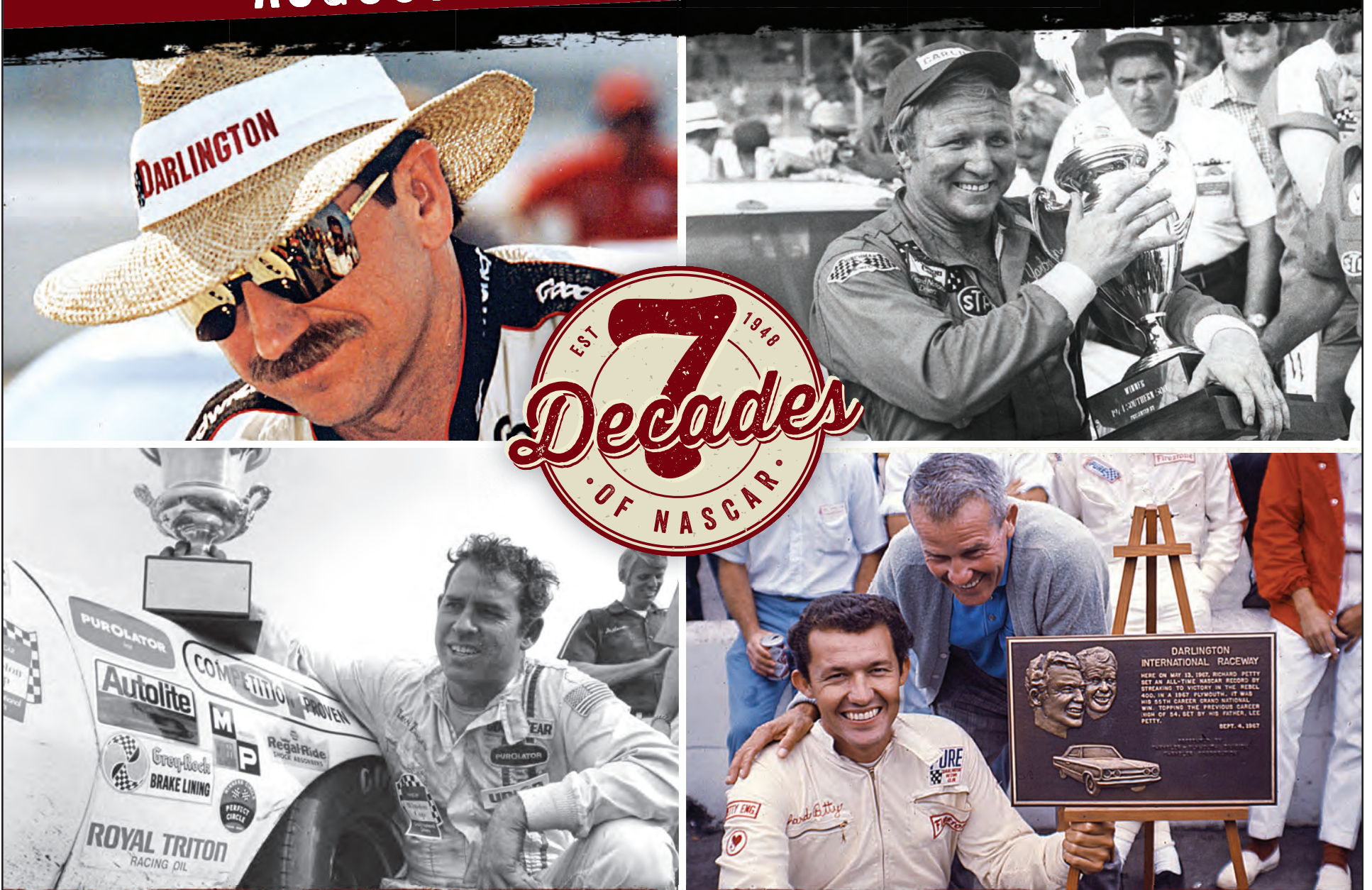
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