

# Driven to Succeed

**A** very good argument can be made that Mario Andretti is the best driver in the history of motorsports. A short list of his accomplishments includes winning the Daytona 500, the Indy 500 and the 12 Hours of Sebring. He is a four-time Champ Car National Champion, a Formula 1 World Champion, a USAC National Dirt Track Champion and has won the International Race of Champions title. He was named Driver of the Century by the Associated Press (with A.J. Foyt) and by RACER magazine.

A strong case can also be made that the Andretti family is the most successful in racing history. Mario's oldest son Michael is team owner of Andretti Green Racing and has 42 Champ Car victories to his credit. Nephew John has won in Champ Cars and on NASCAR's Nextel and Busch Cup circuits. Mario's youngest son Jeff and his grandson Marco also have impressive racing resumes.

So when Mario, Michael and John get together to run a business—the newly re-opened Andretti Indoor Karting and Games facility in Roswell—you can bet that it is going to be a winner too. The 100,000 square-foot facility offers indoor go-kart racing on an oval and road course, 125 games, billiards, rock climbing and refreshments for the whole family.

The Andrettis also want to give something back to the community, so they have partnered with the Boys and Girls Clubs of Atlanta. John explains, "We wanted to get involved with somebody that we all knew of and knew the objectives. The Boys and Girls Club of Metro Atlanta became a natural. We are able to give back, but we get a lot out of it too. I'd rather go over there and watch the kids run than watch the adults."

At the facility's re-opening, we sat down with Mario, Michael and John to ask them what they learned in racing that has helped them in business.

**GL:** How has your racing experience translated to your business endeavors?

**Mario:** It totally does in every aspect. The same principles have been successful. Racing is a business and business is a competition. There's nothing mysterious about it. You have to have focus and you have to have set goals. Making a team gel is all about having the right people. Surround yourself with people more knowledgeable than you are. They are the biggest assets you have.

**Michael:** And you listen to people. Like Dad said, you try to find people who are smarter than you and better than you in what they do. The other thing is let them do their job. Don't be micro

managing. When you hire somebody and you have confidence in them, you have to let them do their job. Don't be looking over their shoulder. We're involved in the major decisions. But once you make them, you let them go and let them run the operations to get it done.

**GL:** The risks in racing are obvious. Is taking risks a part of a successful business?

**Michael:** I didn't look at it that way when driving. It's a calculated risk. When you make a move [in racing] it's calculated the way you do it. It's not just throwing yourself out there. It's that way in business. Sometimes you have to take a bigger risk to get a bigger reward, but it's still calculated.

**GL:** In 1994, the Indy Racing League (IRL) was formed as a separate organization from the existing CART organization. Did you learn anything – good or bad – from the CART / IRL split?

**Mario:** What happened there was an organization with a great product that was very much mismanaged. The product carried itself despite of that.

What had to be fixed was the political side. What happened is the product became diluted [by having two organizations] and that's why open-wheel racing has suffered over the last ten years.

**Michael:** There is one thing I did learn. Greed and misguided ego will ruin everything.

**GL:** How do you balance the demands of racing and business with family demands?

**Mario:** It's so important to have an understanding partner, someone who believes in you and is going to support you. Again, it's all sacrifice versus reward. Is it worth it? Nothing good or worthwhile comes without a sacrifice.

**John:** It's easier now than it was then. We have a motor home. Racing is like a small community. They're open to your family. With my father and my uncle, you hung on the infield fence. That's as close as you could get. They didn't even think about the family being part of it.

**GL:** What advice would you give to up and coming racers, and is it different than the advice you would give to new entrepreneurs?



**Michael:** For the driving part you would go about it a little different. If you're good continue to show it and eventually you will get noticed. Racing driving schools are the natural place to do it. They have programs that will guide you up the ladder. In business you have to learn the basics of business. But you still have to start in the lower ranks and get experience.

**Mario:** There is no easy way. When you're out there you either do it yourself or you don't. It's the same way in business. You have to find a way. People tell me, "I'd like to start this business but I need this or that." No you don't. You find a way. The fundamental part is drive and a passion for something, especially here. This is the greatest country in the world. Millions of people have experienced the American dream because they made one. I'm one of them. I had nothing when we arrived here. We came here from a refugee camp. But you want to make a life and you work for it. Nothing's ever going to be handed to you, but the results will be there if you believe in yourself.

Drive, passion, and unwavering belief have been trademarks

of the Andretti family for three generations now. The results speak for themselves.



*Glenn Boylan is an Alpharetta-based contributing writer for Georgia Lifestyles.*

## Michele Theriault

*Following her dream "to the extreme!"*

**I**f the Andretti formula for success includes drive, passion, the strength of family, an unwavering belief in yourself, and giving back to the community, then Georgia's own Michelle Theriault may be well on her way to emulating their achievements. The 19-year-old from Alpharetta started racing when she was just 6 years old and has seen success at every turn.

Her passion for racing is clear. She is the first female competitor to qualify for the USAR Hooters Pro Cup Series National Championship. She participated in the Ford Racing Driver Development program and was a cast member on *The Drive*, a reality TV series about stock car racing. To date, she has over 220 wins to her credit. She's won several track and state championships. She's taken home Rookie of the Year and Most Improved Driver awards. And in many of these endeavors she is the first, and sometimes the only, female competitor.

Her drive for success is just as obvious. She plans to work her way up the ranks through the Hooters Pro Cup, ARCA and Busch North series. Her sights are set on NASCAR's highest levels: the Busch Series and Nextel Cup.

"I think it is important to have dreams and goals," says Theriault. "Don't sell yourself short. People are always going to be negative but you need to stay positive and confident in yourself. If you really feel you have the heart and capabilities to do it, you probably can."

Her family has been an integral part of her success, and they continue to be an important part of her team. "If it wasn't for my parents, I know I wouldn't be where I am today," Michelle told us. "They have had to sacrifice so much of their time for me. I know they are proud of me or they wouldn't keep supporting such a demanding sport."

Michelle says that her parents, Dave and Denise, make sure that racing is kept in the right priority. "Racing has always made me keep my head on straight and keeps me out of trouble. But my parents told me that if I don't get good grades I couldn't race."

Being part of such a popular sport, Michelle knows that she has an opportunity to give something back to the community. She has worked with teenage driving safety programs to help her peers realize that racing belongs on the track. "As teenagers we all think we know everything there is to driving," she says. "It doesn't matter if you are the best driver out there, because there are still bad drivers out there. You always have to be a defensive driver."

With a strong drive to succeed, clearly defined goals, and the support of those she loves, look for Michelle to continue her incredible success as she climbs up the ranks of stock car racing.



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