

Nazareth Speedway rebirth continues to move at slow pace

By **Pamela Sroka-Holzmann** | **The Express-Times**
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Mario Andretti of Nazareth poses in the pits at Nazareth Speedway. *Express-Times File Photo*

The rebirth of the **Nazareth Speedway** continues to roll slowly along.

It's been eight years since auto racers lapped around the track, which was home to such racing greats as **Mario Andretti**, who won the 1969 U.S. Auto Club dirt champ car race there.

It's been **seven years since the property went on the sales block**, currently listed for \$18.8 million.

“My fans ask me all the time what is happening to the Nazareth Speedway,” Andretti said in an interview last week. “Every time I drive by it, it brings back quite pleasant memories. It’s a shame honestly.”

The 157-acre site at Routes 191 and 248 is owned by Daytona-based International Speedway Corp., also known as ISC, which owns or operates about 13 motorsports facilities.

Both Charles Talbert -- director, investor and corporate communications spokesman for International Speedway Corp -- and Glenn Fritts, senior vice president and broker of record at Weichert Commercial Brokerage, say little about the interest they have seen in the property.

“The owners are still considering several opportunities -- each has its own benefits and issues,” Fritts said in an email.

“Really the status hasn’t changed,” Talbert said. “The property still remains for sale. We definitely have interest in it.”

Township Manager Timm Tenges said it’s been years since anyone has come before the township with plans to revive the property. He did confirm ISC has filed a real-estate tax appeal of the property assessment.

The land is zoned general commercial, meaning large housing development proposals would need zoning reclassification, which was pitched by a developer in 2006. Another speedway wouldn’t be allowed by ISC, Tenges said.



Ashley Development Corp. of Bethlehem, Lewis Ronca of Wind-Drift Real Estate, and Norton Herrick of Herrick Development Co. in Morrisville, N.J., had proposed 1,400 homes in a mixed-use development in February 2006. The deal fell through that fall when municipal officials and developers couldn't agree on the zoning. In May 2005, **Abraham Atiyeh** wanted to build an 8,000-seat professional hockey arena. Atiyeh was unable to solidify his deal and time ran out on his agreement to buy it.

"We always hear there's interest," Tenges said.

Distant memory

The chanting of roughly 30,000 spectators at Nazareth Speedway races remain distant for International racing superstar Andretti, who launched his career there. The track was home to him and his son, Michael Andretti.

Mario Andretti said there has been a following on social media by people trying to save the Nazareth Speedway. The "Save Nazareth Speedway" Facebook page has 1,928 people endorsing it the site and the Twitter page has 731 followers.

The founders of those social media sites, Joey Shimoskie of Macungie and Justin Petschauer of Las Vegas, want to see the historic racetrack return to its former glory with dirt track racing, United States Auto Club, CART, IRL/INDYCAR as well as the NASCAR Busch & Craftsman Truck series -- all that had taken place at the Nazareth Speedway before it closed in 2004.

"It's wishful thinking and I would support it 300 percent," Andretti said, but noted a revival is unlikely. "People are passionate about it. There's an effort to try to get people energized through a lobby for it and maybe people want it, but that's a stretch.

“I wish it could be meaningful to some degree, where it would get some results. But, it takes more than that,” Andretti said.

Speedway's demise

Andretti attributes lack of attendance to the track's closure in 2004, noting the spectators that had once traveled from various states stopped coming. He previously said once International Speedway Corp. took ownership, the organization already had several other tracks nationally and, he believes, there was little interest in promoting the local track.

Andretti also blames what he described as “derogatory stories” written about Indy racing for the track's demise.

He noted Indy car racing is coming back to the Pocono Race Track following years of an absence. He will be attending the track's first event July 7.

When asked what he would like to see become of the Nazareth property, Andretti said something that would benefit the Nazareth area.

“It's a waste. It's a nice piece of land,” he said.

http://www.lehighvalleylive.com/nazareth/index.ssf/2012/12/nazareth_speedway_rebirth_cont.html