

Mario Andretti saluted for his charity work: 'I love positives'

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Motorsportstalk.nbcsports.com

Apr 14, 2015, 3:50 PM EDT



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He no longer races at 200 mph, but Mario Andretti finds as much reward and wonder in riding at a more leisurely pace these days.

The four-time IndyCar champion has been accompanying Meals on Wheels deliveries near his home in the Lehigh Valley area of Pennsylvania.

"The guy who drives me around, every day he's trying to bring a smile, or some comfort to someone," Andretti told Motorsports Talk. "That's what they call an everyday hero who focuses on the positive. That's a beautiful thing, especially today in the world we live. Good does indeed triumph over evil."

Andretti was welcomed Tuesday into the Superman Hall of Heroes, an online initiative aimed at honoring those who make a positive impact on the lives of others. Last year's inaugural celebrity class included former NBA star Shaquille O'Neal, the late actor Christopher Reeve and Major League Baseball Hall of Famer and pioneer Jackie Robinson.

Andretti was inducted with TV personality John Walsh ("America's Most Wanted"), Medal of Honor recipient Kyle Carpenter and teacher of the year Sean McComb. The program also salutes those from all walks of life.

"These are the people they want to recognize," Andretti said. "It doesn't have to be a celebrity. It doesn't have to be something super someone has done, but some of the small things that make a difference. It certainly makes you feel good when you think about all these things. I love positives, and this is certainly one of them. It makes you reflect on the small things in life

"You feel good if you're in a position to make a difference with somebody, however small it is. It brightens your day. In many ways, it's like winning. Once you start experiencing that, you want to do it over and over because it just feels right."

Andretti scored 111 major victories in his career and is the only driver to have won the Indianapolis 500, Daytona 500, Formula One title and Pikes Peak Hill Climb. Since retiring after the 1994 Indy 500, he has focused on playing ambassadorial and philanthropic roles, such as raising awareness of the need for volunteers at Meals on Wheels, which delivers prepared food to homebound seniors and those with disabilities.

“What I get out of it is just hugging and smooching some of the ladies and making them smile,” Andretti said. “I come away feeling much better than they do. Some of these individuals, it’s probably the only person they see all day. So you’d like to think I brought a smile there somewhere. Small things like that can make a difference.”

Andretti, 75, also is active in local children’s charities with his wife, Dee Ann. “You try to channel it in areas where you know it’s going to make a difference,” he said. “You try to do those things as the opportunity comes along. These are all the things that at the end of the day, it makes you feel good that I made a little bit of a difference, and that’s meaningful.”

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