



The seed for a commercial-charity racing partnership lay dormant for four years as the whirlwind of life caught up with Jonathan Byrd II and his close-knit family.

The family patriarch suffered a stroke in 2005, and as they tended to his care and the operation of the namesake Jonathan Byrd Cafeteria in the intervening years racing took a back seat. Jonathan Byrd died in August, but his son seeks to advance his spirit of giving and love of racing by repotting that seed.

Recently, a meeting with a like-minded friend "flipped the switch in my brain" and Jonathan Byrd II's ideas are maturing to the point that the Greenwood, Ind., restaurateur has announced intentions to partner with an IZOD IndyCar Series team for a 2010 Indianapolis 500 entry that would kick off the Ev'ryMan Victory program.

"The coolest thing about our idea is I've taken my dad's life philosophy of bearing others burdens and in working with others refined it to the Ev'ryMan Victory brand," Byrd said. "It's really the amalgamation of a lot of things: the manifestation of bearing others burdens and my racing with a purpose idea. I truly believe there's no earthly reason for me to be racing unless it's to do something with a greater purpose, to fulfill a lot of needs."

There are multiple components to the program. Byrd envisions a house being built in each of the cities the Indy Racing League visits (during the week of the race) by partnering with Habitat for Humanity or like organization. A charitable arm is a "build-a-fund" concept in which volunteers pledge monies to the cause and assist in erecting the house. Added incentive for participants would include gathering at the racetrack to celebrate the completed work for a family and watch the Byrd car on the track, their names on the sidepod, Indy Racing Experience two-seater rides, etc.

Byrd also envisions recording the week's activities for a TV show ala "Extreme Makeover: Home Edition" on ABC and partnering with national and local charitable organizations. He's hopeful of attracting sponsorship from, among others, construction industry companies.

"It's innovative and that generates tons of exposure for sponsors," Byrd said. "By announcing our intentions of our program and how we intend to do it, hopefully we can generate interest of companies that want to stand with us and make a difference. If you're bearing others burdens, we want to partner with you (think Sarah Fisher's association with the Komen for the Cure caused-based marketing initiative in October at Homestead-Miami Speedway). We would partner with those charities and their spheres of influence and that will generate further exposure as well to justify the investment."



The ideas struck a chord with Paul Teutel Jr. of "American Choppers," who Byrd sought out for development of the brand. One of their meetings will be featured on "American Choppers" on Dec. 17 (9 p.m. EST on TLC). That's Paul Jr. and Jonathan II in photo at left.

"For seven years he built things that nobody could afford and he wants to be that everyman brand," Byrd said of Teutel, who was involved in building an ethanol IndyCar Series motorcycle that was unveiled in 2007 at Iowa Speedway.

Jonathan Byrd - a self-proclaimed "chicken cook from Greenwood" - was an everyman in racing.

"Starting off at the Indianapolis Speedrome, he championed the cause of the local sprint car and midget driver," his son said. "For six years, Dad brought the great USAC champion Rich Vogler, the very embodiment of the everyman, to the Indianapolis 500. Dad put an everyman named Stan Fox in a great car at Indy. In 1994, Dad made it possible for John Andretti to race at Indy and Charlotte on the same day, as he became the first person to ever accomplish the famed 'Double.'"

"Dad took a racer that was viewed as being at the end of his career, Arie Luyendyk, and helped him to gain the crown as the fastest man to ever race at Indy, setting qualifying speed records (in 1996) that will probably stand for all time. Dad dismissed the naysayers and won a race (September 1998 at Texas Motor Speedway) with a man who was

widely considered to be 'damaged goods' -- the incredibly talented John Paul Jr. -- making it possible for him to win his second IndyCar race, more than 15 years after he had notched his first victory.

"With drivers and stories like this, Dad blazed the trail for everyman who had the dream of competing in and winning 'The Greatest Spectacle in Racing.' "

It was in the '05 Indy 500 that the Jonathan Byrd name was on a car for the last time - a third Panther Racing entry driven by Buddy Lazier, who started ninth and finished fifth (both highs since a Byrd-sponsored car began competing in the '500' in 1985 with Vogler, who advanced 10 positions to finish 23rd).

"(Indy) is a huge part of our life," said Byrd, 33, who seeks to celebrate the family's silver anniversary of participation in the Indy 500 in May. "I can really see that not being involved in the '500' the past few years probably has affected us. People miss us. I get asked all the time, 'What are you doing for the 500?' It means so much, and I've said it for years that I want to win the Indy 500 for my dad. But upon reflecting, I also want to win it for everyman out there who's ever had the dream of competing in this race.

"I truly believe I'm supposed to be in racing. I have a special wall in my office that doesn't have a picture on it; it's reserved for my Indy 500-winning cars."

Byrd has been discussing the 2010 Indy 500 with potential partnership team principals, and upon seeing a flourishing concept the plan would be for the Ev'ryMan Victory program to participate full time again in the IZOD IndyCar Series.

"You could interview me after a tough weekend on the track and I'd say it's the best weekend we've ever had," said Byrd, projecting the future of the program. "This family has this new house and their kids' college funds are taken care of and the great community we worked with helped bear those burdens. We'll get them next week on the racetrack but this was our best weekend in racing. That's what really means more to me than anything."

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