



## Frederick Leonard Wetzel

January 18, 1956 - July 28, 2019

Rick “Champ” Wetzel, age 63, passed away peacefully on Sunday, July 28, 2019 at his home in Mooresville.

Rick was born on January 18, 1956 in South Bend, IN, to the late, Fred and Loretta (Lane) Wetzel. He married his wife Lori on July 4, 1992 in Charleston, South Carolina, she survives along with his sisters, Mary Gaye Wetzel and Cyndy (Ralph) Andrews of South Bend.

Rick spent his entire working career in motor racing, the beginning in Indy car and the last 20 plus years at Hendrick Motorsports. Rick could be best described as the racer’s racer. He lived every day to race and during his incredible career as an engine builder whatever team or racing series that he was associated with was elevated due to his passion and commitment. With names like Andretti, Johncock, Jarrett, Labonte, and Gordon all winning America’s most prestigious races with engines he built.

He is responsible for mentoring and guiding the careers of some of today’s most successful NASCAR engine suppliers and executives. Recognized and documented by Chevrolet Racing executives as the only individual to build the engines that won the most prestigious races in America, the Indianapolis 500, the Daytona 500, the Brickyard 400, and the Charlotte 600.

He was twice awarded the NASCAR Engine Builder of the Year award. At the height of his career, he claimed the NASCAR Winston Cup Championship with driver Jeff Gordon in 2001 as the engine builder only to learn in the months afterwards that he had been stricken with the disease that would eventually take his life some 18 years later. Rick enjoyed spending time at Sprint car races, elk hunting in Wyoming, and spoiling his dogs, Champ and Sister.

The family would like to thank Crystal Albery, his wonderful caregiver and Hospice of Iredell for all their amazing care and support during this long illness.

A Memorial service will be held at 4:00 pm on Thursday, August 29 at Hendrick Motorsports Team Center.

Memorial contributions may be sent to Hospice & Palliative Care of Iredell County, 2347 Simonton Rd, Statesville, NC 28625.

# Tribute Wall



“ *Frederick Leonard Wetzel*

February 14, 2021 at 11:24 AM



“ *Frederick Leonard Wetzel*

February 14, 2021 at 11:04 AM



“ *Frederick Leonard Wetzel*

February 14, 2021 at 11:03 AM



“ *I was introduced to Champ many years ago at IMs by Jackie Howerton. Over the years we would we would see him occasionally at Indy or Charlotte or out here at home on trips he made home with Jeff Andrews ,son of a close friend of ours. We offer our sincere sympathy to the family of a talented funny guy who made friends everywhere he went. May he rest I Peace. John , Patti Carey Fresno Calif.*

**John Carey** - August 31, 2019 at 09:18 PM



“ *Met Champ in 96. My first year at HMS. I was on the 25 car and he was the engine builder for us. He always seemed at peace. He will be missed by everyone who knew him.*

**ron bates** - August 27, 2019 at 10:16 PM

JA

“ Janet Anderson lit a candle in memory of  
Frederick Leonard Wetzel



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Janet Anderson - August 15, 2019 at 07:22 PM

JA

*Rest in peace my friend. I will always remember you.*

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Janet Anderson - August 15, 2019 at 07:23 PM

DS

“ I can't believe Rick is gone. We were best friends in high school. Rick played goalie on our hockey team starting our sophomore year thru senior year. Then on to senior league for a couple of summers, when came home for summer from Ferris State University where he also played goalie while enrolled in their auto technology program. All through high school we used to go every Friday to the races where we would spend most of the time on the pits helping whoever needed it. Rick was all about racing pushing cars handing wrenches whatever he could. My uncle Vince Salay used to be a chief mechanic in Indy and had a speed shop here in South Bend, My dad and two partners took it over. Rick worked with us a couple of summers. That is were he met Charlie Szcendy who also was a chief mechanic in Indy. Charlie hooked Rick up with McNamara Racing and that was the beginning of his great career. I will always cherish my great memories with you Rick.

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David R Sayer - August 07, 2019 at 12:33 AM



“ *Full Of Love Bouquet was purchased for the family of Frederick Leonard Wetzel.*



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August 03, 2019 at 11:16 AM



“ *Jody Jordan-Rhodes lit a candle in memory of Frederick Leonard Wetzel*



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**Jody Jordan-Rhodes** - August 02, 2019 at 11:11 PM



“ *While working for Chevrolet, I met Champ 30 years ago at HMS. Even though I was somewhat of an outsider, he was always made me feel welcome. Whenever I visited HMS, I made it a point to see Champ and listen to his words of wisdom. He was extremely knowledgeable and always had great insights of how to make engines better. I considered him a good friend and mentor. Champ made everyone that he met a better person just by knowing him. I consider myself very lucky to have know him for as long as I have. He was a great guy and I will miss him a great deal. My sincere condolences to Lori and his entire family. You all have my deepest sympathy. Sincerely, Jim Covey*

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**Jim Covey** - August 02, 2019 at 10:21 PM