

Dave Wall on coming full circle

The Canadian Hall of Famer started out with John Campbell in Ontario in the 1970s and said he is honoured to be part of Campbell's last career drive to take place on July 30 on Legends Day at Clinton Raceway.

Hall of Fame harness drivers Dave Wall and John Campbell started out in the business together in the early 1970s. So, Wall said it's fitting he will be part of Campbell's last career drive back in Ontario where it all started.

At Legends Day on July 30 at Clinton Raceway, Wall, Campbell and six other Hall of Famers will contest the \$15,000 Legends Day Trot. It will be the final career drive for Campbell, the sport's richest driver with some \$300 million in career earnings.

Before the legends reconvene at Clinton, Wall will celebrate the 32nd anniversary of his victory with Staff Director in the 1985 North America Cup.

On the Saturday (June 17) Pepsi North America Cup card at Mohawk Racetrack, Wall will also be remembered with a race named for one of the greatest horses he has ever driven when the \$251,000 Goodtimes stakes for sophomore trotting colts will go to post on the undercard. Goodtimes, a winner of more than \$2.2 million on the track, was trained by John Bax and driven by Wall.

"I always give Dave the credit for Goodtimes lasting so long," Bax once said. "Goodtimes was very good at taking care of himself and Dave was very good at taking care of Goodtimes. And the combination made him last until he was 12 years old. He made a minimum of \$100,000 for nine consecutive years — I think that might be a record — and I have to give Dave all the credit for that, because he knew when he was good and when he wasn't good and he raced him accordingly."

As for starting out with Campbell, Wall said the two of them were racing at Windsor Raceway in the 1970s when the Meadowlands Racetrack was built near New York City. When Windsor Raceway's Joe DeFrank was hired as the director of racing for the New Jersey track, he began recruiting Windsor drivers to make the move to the big track.

"I was one of the ones Joe DeFrank asked to go to the Meadowlands when they opened it," Wall said.

Campbell, a native of Ailsa Craig, ON, jumped at the opportunity and made his career at the Meadowlands. Wall stayed home and made his career in the Ontario Sires Stakes (OSS) program and elsewhere.

"The only reason I didn't think about going was I was having such a good go in the (Ontario) Sires Stakes that I didn't want to give it all up. I was training quite a few myself. I thought I'd better stay home," Wall said.

Some 40 years later, Wall — a longtime Komoka, ON resident that has won over 7,200 races and more than \$60 million as driver — said he has no regrets. After all, he made his mark, earning the nickname "Mr. OSS" en route to a 2012 induction into the Canadian Horse Racing Hall of Fame.

"I'm a Canadian boy and (moving to New Jersey) never really enthused me that much. But it was nice of (DeFrank) to ask," said Wall, who is still driving and training in his 70th year.

Legends Day began in 2001 and is celebrating its ninth edition in 2017. The event is raising money for the Clinton Public Hospital Foundation.

"It's something for the community, which is a great thing. Everybody that goes supports it well. We have a great day. We sign some autographs and get out with the public. It's nice," Wall said. "They always take us up on the hill before and they have a little lunch. We all sit around together and reminisce about the old times and everybody has a story."

Wall will be one of eight of the world's greatest harness drivers contesting the Legends Day Trot on the card along with Campbell (11,049 career wins and \$303 million), Ron Waples (6,923 wins, \$75 million), David Miller (12,100 wins, \$215 million), Mike Lachance (10,421, \$190 million), Steve Condren (6,845, \$114 million), Bill O'Donnell (5,743, \$99 million) and Doug Brown (8,427, \$89 million).

Combined, the eight legends have earned over \$1.15 billion and won nearly 69,000 races.

Fellow legends Bud Fritz and 93-year-old Keith Waples — both of whom are retired from driving — will also be on hand for the autograph session.

Wall obtained his driver's license at age 25, but struggled through his first few years on the track. In 1972, he caught his first break when his father gave him the first foal from Dina Wall. Piper Wall turned out to be a better-than-average racehorse that came along two years before the Ontario Sires Stakes program was born in 1974.

He has campaigned such provincial stars as pacing filly Arrochar Wendy in the inaugural year of the program, as well as pacing filly Dovers Dottie in 1982 and '83, pacing colt Snipper in 1984, trotting filly Armbro Luxury in 1992 and '93, trotting gelding Goodtimes in 1993, pacing filly Odies Fame in 1998 and '99, trotting colt Northern Bailey in 2001 and trotting gelding Windsun Pride in 2008.

He earned the Lampman Cup as the top driver on the OSS circuit in 1994 and 1998, but also achieved great success outside of the provincial program. In 1991, he won the Canadian Pacing Derby with Odds Against.

In 1999, Wall finished third with Goodtimes in Sweden's famed Elitlopp the same year the pair won the Maple Leaf Trot and Wall piloted Odies Fame to victory in both the Fan Hanover and Breeders Crown. Wall also raced Northern Bailey in the Elitlopp in 2003.

Wall is also a five-time winner of The Raceway at The Western Fair District's Molson Pace — Rock N Wave (1979), Monkey Wrench (1984), Staff Director (1985), Jagger Hanover (1990) and Such Sparkle (1994) — and was inducted into both the track's Wall of Fame (1988) and the London Sport Hall of Fame (2011).

At the peak of his driver career, Wall often drove at two tracks a day and trained a large stable, which isn't well reflected in his statistics because he often listed his assistant trainers on horses so they could get the five per cent of any winnings. One year, Wall trained as many as 120 horses with 30 in Toronto, 30 in Windsor and 60 in London.

"I used to drive to Toronto when we raced there on Saturday afternoons and then I'd fly to Windsor and race Windsor at night, then I'd race in the afternoon at Windsor, then fly to Toronto and race again that night," Wall said.

At Legends Day, Wall said he will be happy to help give Campbell a fitting career send-off, but he will also remember Campbell's late father, Jack.

"Jack was a wonderful person, just a wonderful person. So is John," Wall said, adding that there were few things Jack Campbell loved more than the Little Brown Jug and Legends Day.