

Shawn Kammerud - Hometown Hero Living The Dream  
by Greg Parent

Many of us can rekindle memories when we were a young child of anxiously waiting for race night to roll around each week at our local speedway. At last the day arrived, and the thrill of being at the races, watching your favorite drivers compete, and just plain having a fun time with friends and family forever etched itself into our being. Like so many others who share the same passion, Shawn Kammerud became hooked on the sport of auto racing at an early age. Shawn's father, Gary, owned a stock car that was driven by local racer Kevin Viebrock for many years. At the age of six, Shawn began attending races each and every week at his local area track, the Cedar Lake Speedway located near New Richmond, Wisconsin. This is where Shawn's story and his adventure in our great sport begins.

Racing is a way of life in the Kammerud household. Shawn got the bug at an early age, and soon he was attending the weekly shows at the Cedar Lake Speedway. Shawn states, "I never missed a weekly show at Cedar Lake from 1987 through 1991." As a young fan, Shawn watched his dad's driver Kevin Viebrock race in the CLS late model division at the time. Viebrock also raced a winged outlaw modified, and young Shawn was known to sport a winged racing cap on occasion at the track. Shawn's desire to race was brewing inside of him while he continued to watch racing from the stands. In 1996, Shawn got into go-kart racing at the Flying Pines Raceway near St. Croix Falls. Shawn raced karts for five years, claiming the King of Dirt Series in 1999. Shawn also made an occasional trip south to the Thunder Hill Raceway near Menomonie to compete. Racing karts was fun, but Shawn had his sights set on racing cars.

In 2001, Shawn bought his first race car. It was a street stock. "It wasn't much of a car and had been pretty well used up when I got it," quipped Shawn. "We went over to Charlie Weber's house and literally went out in the woods to get the car." Shawn laughs a bit now when he looks back, but it was the starting point of his auto racing career. Like so many other young rookies that enter the sport, the first year was a big learning curve for Shawn. "I didn't really have much of a clue on how to set the car up or even how to drive it, but I kept asking lots of questions and learning as the weeks went by." There were some blown motors and some typical rookie mistakes made, but Shawn was persistent and the passion to become more competitive burned within him.

In his early years in the street stock division, Shawn generally raced at two tracks. Shawn raced on Friday nights at the Kopellah Speedway located near Centuria and on Saturday nights at the Cedar Lake Speedway. Shawn is quick to credit his friend, and fellow street stock racer at the time, Mike Loomis with helping him to learn. As Shawn became more competitive, he upgraded his equipment in 2003 to a new Kurshinsky street stock. His first career win came the following season at the Kopellah Speedway when he beat his good friend Mike Loomis. "That was a special night," states Shawn. Shawn continued to learn as much as he could and slowly began accumulating the knowledge necessary to help run up near the front on a more consistent basis.

The biggest boost to his racing career came in 2006 when Bernie Ohmann came on board as crew chief. With help from Bernie and local racer Jason Gross, Shawn built a new Aggressive Chassis street stock. "Bernie made all the difference in the world," smiles Shawn. "I could see the results immediately as to where I finished each night. Bernie was great at setting up the car and did an awesome job in the shop too. I learned that winning starts in the shop with a well maintained car." Indeed, Shawn began to run consistently in the top ten and then top five. His second career win came at the Superior Speedway in August 2006, as Shawn made a few appearances up at Superior that year in addition to racing weekly at Cedar Lake. That elusive Cedar Lake win was still lurking out there though.

In 2006, Shawn became the DTRA driver representative for the street stock class. "It was an important position because you're voted in by your peers," Shawn proudly states. He served in that position for two seasons, listening to other driver's concerns and helping bring issues to the forefront for discussion. It helped him learn more about the sport from a slightly different

perspective. But the learning didn't stop there, as Shawn attended a few race seminars to help him with driving and some setup advice.

As the pieces of his race team started to fall into place, Shawn was steadily moving forward in the season point standings at his weekly Saturday night track, the Cedar Lake Speedway. Shawn cracked the top five with a fifth place finish in the 2006 DTRA track point standings, then improved to third after the end of the 2007 season. As the 2008 season rolled around, the team was gaining momentum and that first CLS win seemed imminent. For the 2008 season, Cedar Lake Speedway changed to NASCAR sanctioning for their weekly racing program. On May 24, 2008 Shawn Kammerud obtained one of his goals, as he crossed the finish line with his first CLS street stock feature victory! Shawn would win two more times during the 2008 season enroute to a runnerup finish in the track's NASCAR point standings.

With Cedar Lake Speedway dropping the street stock class for the upcoming 2009 season, Shawn needed to make a big decision. What would be next for this young 28 year old driver from St. Croix Falls? Shawn felt he was really getting his street stock program in full gear, but without that class on the weekly show at Cedar Lake, Shawn decided to move up to the NASCAR super stock division. After selling his street stock to a driver from the Ashland area, Shawn purchased an Affordable Chassis from Chad Finckbone up in Grand Rapids, MN. The learning curve will start over again in many respects, as Shawn attempts to earn the 2009 Rookie of the Year in the super stock division at the Cedar Lake Speedway. Shawn's goal is to finish in the top ten in the point standings. Shawn also plans to return to the Kopellah Speedway on several Friday nights in order to get as many laps in his super stock as he can.

Throughout his racing career, Shawn has always had the #99. When asked how he settled in on that number, Shawn smiles. "That's kind of an interesting story that not many people know about. In the early 1990s, we were attending the USA Nationals at Cedar Lake Speedway. Bill Frye from Arkansas was there, and my brother bought me a #66 decal. I wasn't real fond of the #6, and two of them together, well that just didn't seem right. So I turned the decal over and it made a cool-looking #99. That's how I got my car number when I started racing, and I've been #99 ever since."

Shawn credits his dad, Gary, as his biggest supporter over the years. "If it hadn't been for my dad, I wouldn't be involved like I am today. He is one of my biggest fans, and he never misses any of my races," states Shawn. Shawn's mother was also a huge supporter until her untimely passing in 2005. Shawn is married to Jolene, and his face brightens with a big smile when talking about her. "Jolene is a tremendous supporter of my racing. In the ten years that we've been together, she's only missed three nights of racing. She is also a big part of my pit crew and is one of my main sponsors," mentions a grateful Shawn. As is true in so many racing families, a dedicated spouse is often a key element to success.

Speaking of sponsors, Shawn would like to give credit to those who help support his racing. They include Outdoors Realty (Jolene), Elite Screen Printing (his dad), GRP Motorsports, New Richmand Auto Salvage, Carlson Highland Accounting, Chubeck Racing Products, Scott's Engine Shop, Whiplash Graphics, and Apostle Septic Service. "Without their assistance, it would be difficult to race," nods Shawn. Shawn is also very appreciative of his crew chief, Bernie Ohmann. The Kammerud Racing #99 team is looking forward to getting the 2009 season underway. Further information on the team is available on Shawn's website at [www.kammerudracing.com](http://www.kammerudracing.com).

If the above story sounds somewhat familiar, it should. A large number of our hometown heroes got their start in auto racing in a similar manner. A person could substitute thousands of names nationwide in place of Shawn Kammerud's, change the circumstances a bit here and there, but the end result would be a local area driver persuing his or her passion to race. Shawn Kammerud, like so many who have come before, so many who are currently in the sport, and so many more to come in future years, is a hometown hero living the dream at his local area race

tracks! And that race fans, is a memory that is priceless.