

**Rich...from Page 1A**

"When it happened, I was in the stands, and I was able to go down through the tunnel and get into the pits," Kelley said. "They took me into the infield care center before he was life-flighted out to Georgia Baptist. The 11 Alive news crew was there, and they took me by helicopter to the hospital."

Others injured in the accident were jackman Tommy Cole of Blue Ridge and Dawsonville's Dan Elliott, older brother to Bill. Cole was taken by ambulance to Henry County Hospital and was released later that evening.

Elliott went on to finish 15th despite topping all drivers with 94 laps led.

The events that unfolded in Atlanta on Nov. 18, 1990, left a black cloud looming over an otherwise memorable season that saw Dale Earnhardt narrowly edge Mark Martin en route to the fourth of seven Cup championships for "The Intimidator."

However, NASCAR did its best to make sure Rich's death wasn't in vain, instituting a pit road speed limit that is still in effect today and other safety measures before the 1991 season.

The local community

honored its fallen son in 1991 when the Union County Recreation Department, under then-Sole Commissioner Glenn Gooch, named a youth baseball/softball field in Rich's honor at the newly opened Meeks Park complex.

It was a fitting tribute, as Rich, a longtime member and former president of the Blairsville Jaycees, remained active in the community, taking a particular interest in the local youth.

According to Kelley, Rich's construction company, aka Mike Rich Construction, helped grade the area that eventually became Meeks

Park. He loved the thrill of competition and attempted to provide Union County's children with every opportunity to succeed, she said.

"He did a lot of work building those fields with his equipment," said Kelley, who was in attendance at Meeks Park when the field was dedicated to her late husband. "So, when it came time to open the park, they wanted to honor him for everything he did."

And while he was entirely devoted to helping Union County's youngsters, Rich was always just a big kid at heart who wanted to go fast.

"He was extremely competitive, racing motorcycles or dune buggies," Kelley said. "Back when the Blairsville Honda Shop was still going, he was on a team that raced dirt bikes."

"But Mike always loved NASCAR. Even before he started working with Bill, he would go to the races with a bunch of friends that he grew up with. Everyone liked him, and he liked them back. He was just a happy-go-lucky guy."



Blairsville's own Mike Rich died after a pit crew accident in 1990. After his death, NASCAR implemented safety reforms that are still in place to this day. Photo courtesy of Teresa Kelley



**Ninth District Opportunity, Inc. announces Cooling CARES Help**

Brenda Dalin, Program Director, Ninth District Opportunity, Inc. announces Cooling CARES Help for Banks, Barrow, Clarke, Dawson, Elbert, Forsyth, Franklin, Habersham, Hall, Hart, Jackson, Lumpkin, Madison, Oconee, Oglethorpe, Rabun, Stephens, Towns, Union and White counties.

Households who have NOT had Heating or Cooling assistance since November 2019 may apply for assistance with their home cooling bills beginning on July 1, 2020. One time payments will be made by check issued to the home cooling suppliers on behalf of eligible households up to \$400. Eligibility for the pro-

gram is based on the income of all household members. All eligible households must be responsible for their home cooling costs.

All eligible applicants are asked to contact Ninth District Opportunity, Inc.'s scheduling system July 1, 2020 beginning at 12:01 AM by telephone at 855-636-3125 or go online to [www.ndo.org/eap](http://www.ndo.org/eap). Phone lines or website for scheduling will not be active until the opening date of the program and no appointments will be made by telephone or online until this time. No walk-ins, please. Appointments will be scheduled until all funds are exhausted. Additional information will be

made available online at [www.ndo.org](http://www.ndo.org).

Only households who have NOT had heating or Cooling assistance since November 2019 may apply July 1, 2020. Applicants that do not meet the required criteria will be denied. If funds are available, income eligible households may apply on August 3, 2020.

Ninth District Opportunity, Inc. is an equal opportunity agency while providing services without regard to age, race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, national origin, or any other classification or category. NT(061724)CA

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