

Racing legend Mario Andretti helps open new business in Covington

Mario Andretti, a racing legend whose resume includes wins in NASCAR's Daytona 500 as well as the Indianapolis 500 among many others, helped open the new Firestone in Covington Dec. 14 and broke the ceremonial scissors in the process.

By Kris Hill

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Isabella Jocz

Mario Andretti, a racing legend whose resume includes wins in NASCAR's Daytona 500 as well as the Indianapolis 500 among many others, helped open the new Firestone in Covington Dec. 14 and broke the ceremonial scissors in the process.

The racing legend signed the broken scissors. Turns out he wasn't the first one, according to staff from the Covington Chamber of Commerce.

It was a light moment during what was a joyous grand opening for a new Covington business.

Andretti, whose relationship with Firestone since he started racing decades ago, has helped open eight Firestone stores this year including the one in Covington. He explained the company is selective about which stores he makes appearances at, so, it's something special for him to visit.

"These stores are fabulous," Andretti said. "It's all about trying to create some awareness that they're here. Firestone, they're a very good neighbor. When they come into the community, they become a part of it. They'll be a good asset."

He commended the design of the store, describing it as "efficient," while Firestone will provide a full line of tires and services for cars.

Andretti added that Firestone selects locations like Covington because the company sees value in communities that are investing in development.

During the grand opening ceremony, Firestone donated \$500 each to Meals on Wheels and the Covington Rotary Club, demonstrating what Andretti explained about the company's involvement in the community.

It's something that city officials are pleased about as well, as Covington Mayor Margaret Harto noted.

"We are excited to have Firestone come to Covington," Harto said. "They're not just sitting on this corner trying to get your business. They're involved in this community."

With the addition of Firestone, Harto said, it enhances the city's mission to make Covington a great place to shop, work and play.

This wasn't his first trip to the Pacific Northwest or the Covington area.

Andretti raced once at Pacific Raceways on the road course.

"I have a faint memory of it," Andretti said. "I think it was back in the late '60s, could be '68 actually. I remember that I finished second ... other than that, the closest I've raced in the Pacific Northwest is Portland."

In fact, Portland has some special memories for Andretti, who beat his son Michael by seven one-thousandths of a second on Father's Day in 1986.

"I nipped him right at the end," Andretti said. "He was so pissed then he realized it was Father's Day, then he said, 'Happy Father's Day.'"

Andretti, who is 72, was happy to return to Covington to support the latest Firestone store. His relationship with the company goes back to the mid-1960s when he raced on the tires and became a tester of the product.

"My relationship with them helped me tremendously to develop my skills," he said. "I won some major races with Firestone tires, so, the relationship continued."

During the grand opening ceremony, Andretti told the crowd that even though it's unlikely most drivers won't need tires that can handle speeds in excess of 200 mph, the testing and development he's been involved with ensures that those tires can handle that which enhances their safety on the roads.

“When I have the opportunity to make these appearances, I have the ability to talk with some authority,” Andretti said. “It’s one of those win-win relationships.”



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