

ELMER STIEFEL

Elmer Steifel's first taste of racing involved two wheels instead of four when he raced motorcycles as a youth in California, a competition that was quickly halted by his father after Stiefel was injured in a racing accident. After moving to South Dakota, Stiefel and Hall of Fame member Al Fiedler became partners in a car that raced at area tracks in the 1950s. Stiefel was a pit man, but also did some driving. In 1958, Hall of Famer and track promoter Fred Buckmiller invited Stiefel to be a charter member of the new team that would run Huset's. It was then that Stiefel began a career of more than 25 years as an official at the track. In 1960, Stiefel was put in charge of the back gate where he served as sergeant-at-arms of the operation over the next three decades. Once the races started, he would assume other duties in the control tower. For years he worked the midnight-to-8 a.m. shift at Sioux Falls-based Minnegasco. Many times, he would head straight to the track after getting off work and do general maintenance at the speedway until 6 p.m. Elmer also served on the Huset's Speedway board of directors. Stiefel was involved in a horrific accident on June 26, 1987 when sprint car driver Bill Rook crashed on the back stretch. The car flipped over the wall and struck Stiefel and fellow track official Dennis Grave. Rook and Grave both perished in the accident. Stiefel initially appeared to be critically injured, as rescue workers were unable to find a pulse. But resuscitation efforts on him were successful and, miraculously, he was released from the hospital the following day. Stiefel later worked for his long-time racing associate and fellow Hall of Fame member, Bill Leesch, at Red Devil Speedway near Hartford, South Dakota.