



Blue Bars



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50 YEARS OF CHICAGO CORVETTE CLUB

The Chicago Corvette Club began when the Corvette was in its six model year – 1958. In Chicago, Keith Lais, Corvette owner and salesman at Ferrell Hicks Chevrolet, had been surveying other Corvette owners, through a variety of means including newspaper ads, to determine if enough people were interested in forming a club. On March 21, twenty-two people became members of the Chicago Corvette Club (CCC). The first meeting was held in the salesmen's meeting room at the Ferrell Hicks dealership, which became the club's home for some time. Later on meetings were held at local restaurants, then for a period of time at the GM training center in Hinsdale, Illinois.

The new club acted quickly, electing temporary officers with Keith Lais as President and unanimously adopting the name "Chicago Corvette Club." Committees were formed at subsequent meetings to generate a constitution, club logo, jacket patches, stationery, membership cards and the club newspaper called the "Grand Prix." On June 28, 1958, the club held its first social banquet and installed its first permanent officers. The club's first dues per member were \$15 and currently are just \$40. Membership grew to an active group of 35-40 members. The club wanted to hold its membership to under 100 members in order to maintain close working relationships.

The members' great enthusiasm expanded competition activities rapidly. In May of 1958, CCC held its first gymkhana open to all sports cars in the Chicago area. Concourses, rallies and economy runs quickly followed. Social events also grew. Two banquets were held yearly, one to honor past and new club officers and a second to present the "Competitor of the Year" and "Member of the Year" awards. The club ran caravans to the St. Louis Corvette assembly plant and the Indy 500 race. Ken Bonser and his brother in law, John Fenton, owners of Clarendon Hills Auto Repair, held "garage events" where members could work on their cars for free using their facilities. CCC held an annual picnic called "Christmas in July" which included a concourse for members, family and guests. There were also occasional house parties and non-automotive sports events. Our club spawned the formation of two new clubs, the original Windy City Corvette Club and the Northern Rays Corvette Club.

Other clubs devoted to the Corvette emerged nationwide. The idea arose of having a national organization of Corvette clubs. The Chicago Corvette Club was one of the key instruments in forming the resulting National Council of Corvette Clubs (NCCC) in January 1961. CCC is one of a very few charter members of NCCC and indeed much of NCCC's present structure; even the design of the steering wheel logo, was drawn from that of the Chicago Corvette Club. William Burda, our club member and NCCC's first treasurer, set up a bank account at the Bank of Elmhurst

that served formally as NCCC's bank into the 1980's.

The Chicago Corvette Club, over a rich 50-year history, has sponsored many unique events, many of them "firsts." CCC sponsored the first car club speed events in several Illinois parking lots at Chicago Soldiers South Field, Gurnee's Great America, and Oak Brook Shopping Plaza. Speed events were also held at the following Illinois tracks – O'Hare Stadium, 1/4 mile track, in Schiller Park; Meadowdale Raceway in Carpentersville; and Utica Go-Kart Track. In Wisconsin speed events were held at Wilmot Hills Road Course, now a ski hill, and Lynndale Farms in Pewaukee. In the late 60's and early 70's we didn't store our "Vettes" during winter — we had fun and challenging events on ice!! Lake Geneva had a Winter Festival that had ice-skating and motorcycle racing on the lake. Our club held ice races on the lake during this festival. Corvettes would race around pylons — one car at a time to beat the clock! This event proved very interesting as the ice melted from the heat of the cars. We also did ice racing on Wisconsin's Pell Lake and Twin Lakes. Car shows were held at various Chevrolet dealerships, Gurnee's Great America amusement park, and even in conjunction with a promotion at Lake Geneva's Playboy Club. Many of these facilities no longer exist.

Eighteen CCC members attended the first NCCC convention in Lansing, Michigan, in July of 1962. CCC began running driver training schools for gymkhanas early in its history. On June 7, 1970, CCC sponsored the first Allan Clarke Memorial Time Trials to honor Allan Clarke, one of our members who past away after a

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motorcycle accident. The first event was held on the 1/2-mile oval of Illiana Speedway. This yearly event in honor of Allan was held at the following tracks: Blackhawk Farms in Rockton, Illinois; Grundy County Speedway's 1/2 mile track; Rockford Speedway's 1/4 mile NASCAR sanctioned track; Love's Park Go-Cart Track in Rockford, Illinois; and Lake Geneva Raceway.

CCC was the originator of the popular "Corvette Corral" at the Road America Race track in Elkhart Lake, Wisconsin. The "Touch of Glass" Concourse in September of 1975 was another landmark event. Naturally, Corvette fans wanted to see where these cars came to life. CCC was one of the first clubs to tour the original St. Louis assembly plant. This tradition continues, as members tour the assembly plant now located in Bowling Green, Kentucky, as well as the Corvette Museum.

Chicago Corvette Clubs' emphasis has changed throughout the years to the desires of its membership. In 1996 the membership had dropped and the club temporarily faded away. At present, the CCC has roughly 150 members of incredibly diverse backgrounds and interests, all unified by enjoyment of Corvettes. With such diverse interests, our members enjoy a variety of activities, which include an annual picture day at the beginning of "Corvette season," many day or weekend road trips, picnics, and our annual Christmas party. Additionally, the club is active in many area civic activities, community sponsored parades and charity events. For example, CCC has worked with the following charitable organizations: American Red Cross, American Cancer Society, Salvation Army, West Chicago Police Children's Fund, and the Westwood Resource Center. Currently, it is supporting events with the Shriners Hospital in Chicago to benefit disabled children and is

involved with Marklund Children's Home to help raise money for their organization. These activities allow others to experience not only our passion for Corvettes, but also our desire to meet the needs of the community in which we believe.

Certainly, the next 50 years will bring about change in the Chicago Corvette Club. However, it is clear that the last 50 have impacted not only the lives of each of its members, but Corvette history as well.

Look for the Chicago Corvette Club at the following 2008 events: Spring Chevy VetteFest in Rosemont, Illinois, on April 5 & 6; Chicago Corvette Club Brunch & Picture Day on May 4; Bloomington Gold in St. Charles, Illinois, on June 27, 28, 29; Mid-America Fun Fest in Effingham on September 19, 20, 21; Fall Chevy VetteFest in Rosemont, Illinois, on November 22 & 23; and the Chicago Corvette Club's Christmas Party December 7.

If you were part of the Chicago Corvette Club in the past and want to join the fun, please contact any of the people below for more information:

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