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BACKGROUNDER:

Meyer's thirst for buttermilk launched Indy's Victory Circle tradition

INDIANAPOLIS – When legendary race driver **Louis Meyer** pulled into Victory Lane at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway on Memorial Day 1933 and asked for a cold glass of buttermilk to quench his thirst after 500 grueling miles, little did anyone realize a tradition had been born.

Yet that's exactly what happened. With his simple request, the late, great Meyer – Indy's first three-time winner – established a tradition that has become an endearing part of Indianapolis lore.

For over 70 years – 56 of which have been consecutive – winners of the Indianapolis 500 have celebrated in Victory Lane (now Victory Circle) with a hearty swig from an ice-cold bottle of milk – a ceremony recognized around the world as unique to Indy.

In an interview shortly before his death in 1995, Meyer recalled that his favorite beverage during his driving days was buttermilk – and that's what he asked for following the second of his three wins. Three years later, on the occasion of his third 500-Mile Race victory, he was photographed drinking milk in Victory Lane. Milk was presented off and on during the next several years until, in 1956, the Bottle of Milk was made a permanent part of the post-race celebration by Indianapolis Motor Speedway owner **Anton "Tony" Hulman**. 2011 marks the 56th consecutive year for this beloved tradition, and 75 years since the photo of Meyer and his beloved buttermilk was snapped in Victory Lane.

For those who may be wondering, it's pure, ice-cold milk in those glass quart bottles these days – not Meyer's favored buttermilk. And this year's "Victory Circle Milkmen" will be prepared. In the cooler carried by Milk Promotion Services of Indiana (MPSI) board members and Indiana dairy farmers **Richard Thomas** and **David Forgey** will be glass quart bottles of whole milk, two percent and fat free (skim). Drivers who make their milk preferences known prior to Race Day can rest assured that their own favorite will be ready and waiting for them in Victory Circle.

The milk bottles are etched with the words "Indianapolis 500 Winner," the year and the official race logo – making them coveted trophies for Indy champions. The winning car owner also receives a commemorative bottle. In December 2005, writer Pete McEntegart's "The 10 Spot" on si.com – the *Sports Illustrated* web site – declared Indy's Bottle of Milk to be the "sports world's coolest prize," topping the Heisman Trophy, the Kentucky Derby's Blanket of Roses, the Olympic Gold Medal, the Masters' Green Jacket, hockey's Stanley Cup, and other sports icons from around the globe for having the most character or

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uniqueness.

The Bottle of Milk Tradition is one of two Indianapolis award programs supported annually by the American Dairy Association of Indiana and its Hoosier dairy farm families. The second has become a tradition in its own right: for 37 consecutive years, ADA has honored the 500-Mile Race's Fastest Rookie of the Year, recognizing the first-year driver who achieves the fastest four-lap average speed from among fellow rookie competitors during time trials. Among the winners of this prestigious award are 2008 "500" champion **Scott Dixon**; 2000 winner **Juan Pablo Montoya**; 1998 "500" champ **Eddie Cheever, Jr.**; '95 Indy winner and former Formula One World Driving Champion **Jacques Villeneuve**; four-time "500" winner **Rick Mears**; Indycar team owners **Chip Ganassi** and **Michael Andretti**; 1996 Indy pole-sitter and two-time NASCAR Sprint Cup champ **Tony Stewart**, plus **Tony Kanaan**, **Danica Patrick**, **Bruno Junqueira**, and **Marco Andretti**.

The Fastest Rookie award is one of the Speedway's longest-running programs under the same sponsorship since its inception – second only to Borg-Warner.

