

Fan, 14, remembers Mark Donohue's class

Services held for 'Captain Nice'

By PAT DALTON
Daily Times Staff Writer

Family, friends and the greats of racing were all at St. Theresa's Roman Catholic Church in Summit, N.J. on Monday afternoon to pay final

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tribute to Mark Donohue

Shy and soft-spoken, he was nicknamed "Captain Nice" and racing fans will always remember him for his consummate class, both on and off the track.

Just ask his Number One fan, 14-year-old Paul Glessner.

Paul, who lives with his parents Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Glessner at 29 Acres Drive, Ridley Township, was

Donohue's pen pal for the past six years and traveled with his father to Donohue's funeral, where he served as an altar boy.

No athlete in any sport ever had a more devoted fan. As you enter Paul's bedroom, you see a sign above the doorway which reads—"The Pit."

To say the sign is appropriate is an understatement. Paul's bedroom walls are covered with pictures of racing cars and Mark Donohue. At first glance you're not sure whether you should don a pair of coveralls or start waving a checkered flag.

Most of the pictures are autographed by Donohue and have been collected through consistent correspondence with the famed driver.

It all started in 1969, when Paul's father, a corporate architect working out of Sun Oil Company's offices in St.

DaDavids, Pa., brought home a press kit containing material on the Rodger Penske Racing Team, which Sun Oil was sponsoring at the time.

Donohue, the team manager and star driver, was featured in much of the material.

Naturally Paul, a wide-eyed, inquisitive second-grader at St. Madeline's School in Ridley Township, took an immediate interest.

He started writing fan letters to Donohue, and unlike many famous sports stars, Donohue wrote back.

As the friendship deepened, Paul wrote that he too wanted to be a race driver. Donohue advised him to get a good, solid education, which was appropriate advice coming from a man with a degree in mechanical engineering from Brown University.

"When he wrote to me," Paul

said, "he seemed like a regular guy. It was like we were sitting in my room having a conversation."

The high point in Paul's young life came at Christmas two years ago. He had written Donohue a couple of weeks before the holiday to ask for a souvenir, possibly a pair of old racing gloves.

Donohue wrote back and told him to expect a package in the mail.

When the package finally arrived, Paul was ecstatic. It contained one of Donohue's old fireproof nylon racing uniforms.

"I couldn't get him out of the uniform the whole day," said Mrs. Glessner.

Not surprisingly, Paul, who will enter St. James High School in Chester next week, plans to get a degree in mechanical engineering.

"If I don't make it as a driver," Paul said, "I'll design race cars."

What does his father think of the whole experience?

"It's wonderful," said Mr. Glessner. "We need more people like Mark Donohue, who will take the time to help motivate kids."

"I couldn't believe it. One time he didn't answer Paul's letter right away. So the next time he wrote, he apologized and explained he had been away for a couple of weeks."

When Paul heard that Donohue was involved in an accident in Austria last week, he sent him a miraculous medal.

"I thought it might help," Paul explained. Unfortunately, this time it didn't.

Paul and his father were on vacation in Canada when they heard about Donohue's death.

Mr. Glessner called down to St. Theresa's Parish in Sum He told the pastor, the Rt. Rev. Harold A. Murray, about Paul's devotion to Donohue and Msgr. Murray agreed that Paul should serve the funeral.

Ironically, Paul never did get to meet his idol in person.

The closest he got to him was Monday afternoon—when he held the cross at the head of his casket.

