

## CUSTOMER TESTIMONIAL

# Slinger Speedway



Photo by Elaine Mueller

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## THEIR STORY

Todd Thelen fell hard and fast for short track racing. His love affair began as a simple family outing to Hales Corners Speedway when he was a kid in the 70s. Shortly thereafter, he realized his neighbor was a race fan at Slinger Speedway. From there, the story was written. Not only did Todd begin hanging out at Slinger Speedway every Sunday night, but he began to dream about becoming a racecar driver himself. He worked on a pit crew during high school, raced go-karts in college, and eventually moved on to dirt cars after college. From 1997-2002 he raced a super late model at Slinger Speedway, realizing one of his childhood dreams of racing with his heroes.

When Todd realized a career as a race car driver wasn't going to happen, he decided the next best way for him to be involved in the industry was to make a career of it.

"I've always been entrepreneurial," said Todd. "I used to pick night crawlers and sell them. I had a newspaper route as a kid and a snowplowing business in college. Owning a business is always something I've wanted to do."

## THE CHALLENGE

In 2005, Todd left his job as a vice president at a manufacturing company and took on the role of public relations and marketing director at Slinger Speedway.

"When I interviewed in 2005, I said I would like to be in management operating the race track and one day own it," Todd said. "The table was set right away."

At the time, the track was owned by Wayne Erickson. In 2013, Todd and Rodney Erickson (Wayne's son) became owners of the business and leased the property from Wayne. In 2019, with the support of his family, Todd became the track's sole promoter.

Todd's dream of owning a business and making a career out of the racing industry came to completion when he closed on the sale of the racetrack property itself in June 2021.

## THE SOLUTION

Financing a race track is not an everyday occurrence. Understanding the historical significance of Slinger Speedway and its impact on local tourism as a destination race track, Forte Bank worked with Economic Development Washington County and the Small Business Administration to create a financing package for Todd.

Photo by QCWilly Photography







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**“Forte Bank understood the bigger picture,”** Todd said. **“They did what they said, and they said what they meant.** There was no lip service. Words became actions and there was always an attitude of ‘We’ll figure this out.’”

For Todd, the biggest impact of the property sale is that he can now more easily plan for the future.

“We want to make each event bigger than it was the previous year,” Todd said. “People need a reason to come to the Sunday night races and we really want to make each race an event.”

Among the **new events on the 2022 race schedule** are a **Monster Truck Throwdown** and a **“Fall Special”** race, both in September. These contests join existing favorites like the Slinger Nationals and Slam Fest.

“Race tracks need to diversify so you’re going to see new things like monster truck shows because that’s what fans want to see,” Todd said.

In addition, Todd is planning facilities improvements, including new roofs for buildings, updated billboards, and eventually track resurfacing and a family seating section.

**Todd believes the secret to his success is his drive and problem-solving skills.**

“I’m loaded with common sense and the word ‘can’t’ isn’t in my vocabulary,” said Todd. “My whole life I’ve set different goals and they’re all geared toward activities I enjoy. Work becomes part of my life. It’s not ‘work,’ it’s what I do. The secret to my success has a lot to do with what I’m passionate about and being a problem-solver.”

*“Our situation was unique. Throughout the process, there were many things that occurred that nobody had ever come across before. Forte Bank found creative solutions and made everything seamless in a challenging situation.”*

– Todd Thelen



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