

# Perhaps Packers will prove positive for pig party

Annual fund-raiser for local charities began with friends gathering for a football game

By Jennifer Uebersetzig  
News Graphic Correspondent

Who would have ever thought being a die-hard Cleveland Browns fan would win you friends in Title Town? But, that's exactly what it's done for Cedarburg resident Tom Stanton. Well, not exactly. More like, it's won him pigs.

Since 1995, the Cleveland native has run the now-famous "Mel's Pig Roast" — Stanton is affectionately known as "Mel" in Ozaukee County — the large Packer party and fund-raiser for Special Olympics and other local charities. The party officially kicked off when Stanton's friends from The Cedars Bowling Alley approached him to organize a get-together for a Packers/Browns game. Coincidentally, Mel found a friend in fellow Browns season ticket holder Dave Hoffmann from Hoffmann's Market, who set him up with the man who runs "Just Add Pig." And, the pig, as they say, was roasted.

For about three years, the same group of friends enjoyed themselves at the party and all chipped in for the cost. But, when Stanton's good friend and fellow tailgater Blaine Bergmann lost his sister to cancer - everything changed. That sister had a daughter who participated in Special Olympics. Wanting to help out, Stanton thought "why not raise money at the same time?" A couple of signed Packer helmets and many raffle tickets later, Stanton's group had raised \$300 for the Bergmann family. And, the story gets better from there. Each year, the pig roast and list of charities has grown and Stanton says it has been amazing to watch the community come together.

"I remember being amazed by the generosity and people asking how they could help at next year's event," recalls Stanton. "Each year more and more people began to help us in promoting the event and providing raffle and silent auction items. We did no advertising. It was all word of mouth. More people showed up and more was raised each year."

Last year's event drew over 300 people and raised \$15,000 for Ozaukee County Special Olympics, the fund-raiser's major benefactor. Other local families and charities also benefited including Circle of Friends; Portal Industries; Niki Doeden's scholarship fund; and Children's Hospital in memory of Ryan Refinski. But, despite the growth, Stanton says he tries to keep the experience as intimate and meaningful as possible.

"This is not your normal fund-raiser. Even though we have had tremendous growth, 95 percent of the people reside in the Ozaukee County area and pretty much know each other," Stanton says. "This is what we like the most —

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— Tom "Mel" Stanton,  
an organizer of Mel's Pig Roast

it's all walks of life, hanging out watching the Packer game. It's great that we're still able to hold the event at The Cedar's. Tents are placed in the back with TVs and enough food to handle the crowds."

Stanton says their success also hinges on the generosity of the community.

"As we grew, more and more people who attended the event wanted to donate food, tents, tables, sound systems, or electrical services. The majority of these people are now on the committee," says Stanton. "This is a huge reason why the event and monies raised have grown. People have embraced this event because it has turned into a big family reunion and they look forward to it each year. Plus, every last dime raised is put back into the community."

And, as Stanton's friends will attest to, "Mel" himself is also a major draw. Tim Horrigan is in his sixth year of helping out with the event and says Stanton pulls out all the stops because of the type of person he is.

"Mel's got one of the biggest hearts, just a huge heart," he says. "This event is our baby and we put every ounce of our energy into it. We start planning in June and it's something we look forward to every year."

Horrigan says he and a small group of other volunteers go out into the community and solicit donations and raffle or auction items - American TV has donated a 40-inch TV, and Sysco Food and Cream & Crepe, among others, donate food.

"I call in all my favors this time of year and everyone knows that," Horrigan laughs. "Everyone helps out. That's what I like about it. Everyone has a role and it helps everybody. We distribute the money wherever it is needed in the community."

Cedarburg resident and Special Olympics coach John Armbruster says the longevity of the event is based on recognizing what's important to the community.

"It's not just for Ozaukee County Special Olympics, but helps many in the special needs category or who have suffered a loss," Armbruster says. "It's a great day, a great meal with ice cream sundaes included. It benefits those that are sometimes forgotten in the community."

Armbruster gives much of the credit to the event's group of organizers — Mel included.

"I think this has evolved because Mel is such a friendly and outgoing type of person. He's a very likable guy," Armbruster says. "With Mel supporting this — it's just great for the community."

Another unique aspect of the event is that it involves the people it helps most — those with special needs.

"We have many of the (Special Olympics) athletes helping out with the root beer, the food line or the raffle," says Armbruster. "It makes them feel involved in the event also."

Stanton feels grateful to those who have helped and the community at large for participating. And, for once, this Browns fan says he is thankful the Packers are around.

"It gives us the opportunity to continue having a great time one Packer Sunday each fall," says Stanton. "That is hard to say from a die-hard Cleveland Browns fan but I'm very happy they played each other in 1995 or this might never have happened."



Mel's Pig Roast is held rain or shine and you can even watch the game outdoors.

## Mel's Pig Roast:

Date: Sunday, Oct. 23rd  
Place: The Cedar's Bowling Alley  
Cost: \$25.00 per person (includes pig, refreshments during the game)

Time: Doors open at 11 a.m. (must be 21 to attend). Ends between 4 p.m.-5 p.m. Raffle tickets and silent auction items separate.

Details: Silent auction items available: Duane Wade/Shaquile O'Neal signed basketball. Bart Starr signed ice bowl picture, Ted Williams/Joe DiMaggio signed picture. Many more silent auction items and outstanding raffle prizes.

Call: Tom (Mel)Stanton with any questions: 375-7044



Gathering to cheer the Packers onto victory was the humble beginning of a tradition that has grown and now gives back to the community in the form of charitable donations.



Submitted photos

From front: Sandy Doedens, Mark Johnson, John Armbruster, Gary Refinski, Nancy Stanton, Craig Thull, Nancy Horrigan, Rick Rathke, Tom (Mel) Stanton, Bryan Bastar, Tim Horrigan, Kathy Bergmann, John Stauske, Blaine Bergmann, Tim Hilgart, Don Hahn, Todd Boesch, Andy Doedens, Jim Robbel, Mitch Luther team up together to make Mel's Pig Roast the success that it is.