

LOT 1 @ LAMBEAU

A LEGENDARY PARTY

"Tim the Diehard Packer Fan" gets recited at every Lot 1 @Lambeau tailgate party. Sometimes they do "The Wedge of Allegiance" by Cheeseheads with Attitude, too.
KENDRA MEINERT/USA TODAY NETWORK-WISCONSIN



This Packers tailgate is big, the traditions strong, and everyone is welcome

Kendra Meinert Green Bay Press-Gazette | USA TODAY NETWORK - WISCONSIN

GREEN BAY — For years, Scott Schwartz had a guestbook at his Packers tailgate at Lambeau Field, but the line to sign it eventually became so long it turned into what he calls "a logistical issue."

Now that could mean it got in the way of folks getting into formation for the shotski, or it made it tougher to grab a photo with his tinfoil replica of the Lombardi Trophy or any of a host of other party interference, but regardless, he retired it.

So you'll just have to trust him when he says he has met *a lot* of people from near and far during 30 years as one of the grand poobahs of Lambeau's tailgating scene. Not just thousands, but more like tens of thou-

sands, if he had to guess.

For the Packers-New England Patriots game on Oct. 2, he was hosting people from Illinois, Texas, Virginia, Ohio, Iowa ... probably 10 states in all.

"That's nothin'," he says from outside his official tailgating vehicle, a Toyota Tundra in Arctic White, of course. "Last game I had a guy from Australia, a guy from Germany."

He points out a couple who moved from Kentucky to be closer to Lambeau. Over there, another couple who made the drive from Andover, Michigan, because she's a Green Bay native. As for the wayward Kansas

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City fans, they showed up just because they heard it was a blast.

"How I met most of these people is how you met me today," said Schwartz, who lives in Pulaski. "You walked up to me and said hi."

Don't be fooled. That's not always as easy as it sounds.

Some games it's nearly an impossible feat to find Schwartz — he of the bright yellow fedora, No. 74 jersey with the "May the Schwartz Be With You" patch on the front and a hefty Tailgate Hall of Fame captain's badge around his neck. He tends to get swallowed up by the crowds that gather for the party known as Lot 1@Lambeau.

"Last game, you couldn't even get to me. There were people pulling me every which way."

In an ocean of green-and-gold good times on game day, Lot 1@Lambeau has established itself as a prime destination, drawing roughly 100 tailgaters. That's not by accident. The party-planning Packers fans behind it take having fun seriously.

Your first clue to the level of commitment is the big custom bar plastered with personalized Packers license plates from all over the country, Canada and Guam and adorned with homemade trophies. It has become a well-known fixture in Lot 1 on the east side of Lambeau near the Oneida Nation Gate — or at least it is when that lot isn't closed for construction like this season.

Operations have temporarily moved to Lot 9, where Schwartz's flags still fly high, Cheeseheads with Attitude tunes blast at full volume, Grandma Lambeau's Homemade Apple Pie shots with the secret ingredient flow freely, and the welcome mat is always out no matter what color your jersey.

That last part was written into the Lot 1 playbook in big letters after Schwartz went to NFL games in Dallas and Minnesota in the mid-1990s and wasn't exactly treated nicely at either.

"I vowed then when I see somebody walking by in a Patriots jersey today, I'll go talk to them, I'll go offer them a drink, I'll go give them one of my buttons. I try to be nice to opposing fans."

Yep, Schwartz bought himself a button-making machine years ago and passes out 100 buttons unique to that day's game to fans he bumps into or insiders who know enough to hit him up for one. He does it for every game.

He makes VIP Lot 1@Lambeau lanyards, too, but those are considerably harder to get your hands on. Those have to be earned.

Three co-captains, the Brett Favre days and tables of treats

A second-generation Packers season-ticket holder, Schwartz comes by his tailgating prowess honestly. His parents went to games during the Vince Lombardi era, and they were there at the Ice Bowl in 1967. They would tailgate in a Lambeau RV lot with friends who hauled in a hot tub on a trailer.

Schwartz was working as a bartender at McSwiggin's when he first started tailgating in the '90s. He would invite three people from the popular party bar

and Packers player hangout on Green Bay's Main Street to go to the game with him. They would close down the bar, go out for breakfast and then head to Lambeau for the tailgate.

He hopped around between a couple of lots for 10 years before getting a parking pass for Lot 1 about 20 years ago. Lot 1@Lambeau has been going strong ever since.

The family of former Packers quarterback Brett Favre tailgated with Lot 1 back in the day. The owners of The Broke Spoke bar in Favre's hometown of Kiln, Mississippi, would tailgate right next door. As one of the only really big tailgates back then, Minnesota Vikings, Chicago Bears and Detroit Lions fans would all join in great numbers. Now many set up their own tailgates off site, which has cut into some of the mingling, Schwartz said.

The best opposing fans are still Bears fans, he said. He lets slip who the worst ones are and then thinks better of it and asks to scratch that.

"That just goes without saying anyway," he says with a smile.

Schwartz is the head cheesehead and the master of ceremonies, but he is by no means a one-man party. The crew is really made up of a bunch of subgroups of tailgaters who coordinate efforts and set up together. They're often in line by 4 a.m. waiting for the Lambeau lots to open four hours before a noon kickoff.

"This is a conglomeration of people who do this," Schwartz said. "Yes, I get the most headaches, but I like to give them credit as well."

The key players are recognizable by those coveted lanyards, and two have been his co-captains since about 2010.

Justin Sipla, a professor at the University of Iowa, drives more than five hours from Iowa City for every home game. He's in charge of figuring out who parks next to whom and is "the enforcer" when needed. He's missed only three games during his Lot 1@Lambeau tenure.

"When I'm not here they hold a stick of me up with a picture of my face. They call it the Sipstick," he said.

Reyne Kasieta comes from the Wausau area, often with obscene amounts of eats, including elaborate Packers-themed cakes, magazine-worthy platters of decorated cookies, crocks of chili and shrimp soup and a 50-cup Nesco coffee pot filled with hot chocolate (RumChata spiking optional). For Halloween season games, she's been known to have a six-table spread that has included cutting open an opposing team's jersey and making the innards a delicious buffet and carving Clay Matthews' likeness in a pumpkin.

"Everybody else brings the liquor. I'm all about the food," she said. "I don't want to be noticed. I just want my tables to be noticed."

Any tips from her treats go into a jar for JDJR. Her 15-year-old grandson was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes when he was 5.

Wearing a captain's badge is not without stress. Not all the groups of tailgaters within Lot 1@Lambeau always agree on everything. "Sometimes I am the referee," Schwartz said.

"This is a collection of a lot of families that have a lot of egos and a lot of feelings about what it means to tailgate at Lambeau, but our job is to thread those all together in a way that's cohesive and will keep people coming and wanting to be here," Sipla said.

Schwartz, Sipla and Kasieta all met while tailgating, but Lot 1@Lambeau is about more than just teaming

up to throw an expertly choreographed pregame party. It goes deeper than friendship, too.

"We call each other family," Kasieta said. "I see more of these guys than my husband."

They've been there for one another for family funerals and weddings. When Sipla is on spring break, he drives to Green Bay, and he and Schwartz travel to Wausau to see Kasieta and and Gary Platt, one of the Lot 1 founding fathers, in Wisconsin Rapids.

"It's like Thanksgiving for us but in March," she said.

Reciting 'Wedge of Allegiance,' rolling out red carpet for fans of all teams

The festivities have come a long way from the days when Schwartz salvaged an old bi-fold closet door, painted it yellow, put a "G" on it and turned it into a table with a pair of sawhorses.

The old home stereo is gone, replaced by a professional DJ sound system — and the former DJ from McSwiggin's. Schwartz doesn't budge much though from Packers parody classics by C.W.A. and The Wedgies.

"I get a lot of crap for my playlist, because I don't change my playlist very often," he said.

Visitors also can count on a pause during the partying at every game for the ceremonial reciting of the poem "Tim the Diehard Packer Fan" by comedian Paul Gilmartin. Schwartz and Sipla climb up onto the Tundra tailgate as everyone gathers around. When Aaron Rodgers took over as quarterback, they changed the Favre-era references, but they've since gone back to the original.

It's a similar scene when they remove their hats and lead the crowd in C.W.A.'s "The Wedge of Allegiance." "A wedge of cheddar protects us better ..." it begins.

It's all those little touches that have earned Lot 1@Lambeau national recognition. When Jack Daniels scoured the country looking for the "Great American Tailgate Party" in the early 2000s, Lot 1 took the honors three times. They made Schwartz a judge one year so he would quit winning. In 2013, Lot 1 was invited to join the Tailgating Hall of Fame, a coalition of tailgaters across the country "bound by their love of good food, good people and the age old tradition of putting meat to flame."

Earlier this year, Schwartz got a call from a producer with "Emeril Tailgates" asking if he wanted to be on celebrity chef Emeril Lagasse's new show on The Roku Channel in which he invites NFL superfans to New Orleans to cook tailgate dishes for them. His episode airs Dec. 1, on his birthday.

All that exposure is much appreciated, but it's not the spotlight that has made Lot 1 legendary. Or social media. Schwartz confesses to being "lackadaisical" when it comes to posting on Facebook. It's mostly word of mouth. Make everyone feel welcome and exemplify the friendly fan atmosphere that so often gets mentioned with Lambeau Field, and word tends to get around, even behind so-called enemy lines.

"One of the things we pride ourselves on is this sense of we're all in this together," Sipla said. "Yeah, we want to beat your team and we hope we win today, but have a shotski with us. Tell us what your tailgating rituals are. Teach us what you do. Show us."

"No matter who your team is ... you're treated like family. We roll out the red carpet for anybody at this tailgate. We don't care who you are. Your job is to come here and share your joy of this sport."