

Meet Sam & Edwina Friedman



Good Times, Good Hospitality, Good Will



by Sharleen Nelson

The parking lot at Louisiana State University's Tiger Stadium sits deserted and silent; that is, until six o'clock Friday evening before a Saturday LSU football game, when Marathon coach owners Sam and Edwina Friedman—and a couple thousand other people—converge at the site. Getting there early ensures season ticket holders easy access to their primo tailgating spot.

The tailgate has become as much a part of the sports scene as the sports themselves, and sports fans across the country have taken the art of tailgating to new levels, gathering together to enjoy spirited pre-game camaraderie and mouth-watering entrées. After staking their spot, the Friedmans head out for dinner. "Everybody goes out to eat to get acquainted and take in a little libation and friendship," Sam said. "And that's how you end up inviting 200 people to your tailgate party."

A Google search for tailgating brings up roughly 6,010,000 results. At least two magazines are devoted exclusively to the art of tailgating, and scores of Web sites offer tailgating tips, recipes that range from grilling a pig whole to your basic beer-can chicken recipe, and the hottest cool gear and gadgets stamped with your favorite team's logo.

Given the profusion of paraphernalia that goes into creating the ultimate tailgate experience, the Friedmans take their coach to the game. "We love our 'H' because of all the bay space," Sam said. But even that fills up fast. Their essentials list includes: 1 big purple LSU tent, 12 purple LSU chairs, 1 LSU flag, 1 football field-painted table, 1 group of metallic signs with slogans such as, "I'm on the way to see the Tigers play," 2 barbeque grills, 1 industrial-sized frozen drink machine, and 1 very large LSU "Mike the VI" stuffed tiger. "The drink machine weighs 90 pounds, so we have to find a place for it, and then the 2 grills, and there's



Photograph courtesy of LSU.

the table and all those chairs,” Sam said. “There isn’t room for even one little hamburger once we have it all loaded up.” Marathon’s service department attached a custom mount on the rear bumper to hoist the LSU flag, and an extra freezer was installed in the rear bays. As far as Edwina is concerned, tailgating with the coach is the only way to go. “I will *not* go to the game unless I can take my motorhome,” she said.

Setting up the gear, however, is only the beginning. No successful tailgate would be complete without food, and the cuisine is what positions LSU tailgate parties above the rest. ESPN ranked LSU as the #1 tailgating venue, primarily for the abundance and variety of food, and because “nobody cooks like the Cajuns.” Indeed, a stroll down “Tiger Alley” on game day yields a virtual cornucopia of tasty victuals. Sizzling on smoky grills is alligator, chicken, shrimp, crawfish, roasted pig, and boudin, a blend of rice, pork, and Cajun seasonings wrapped up like a sausage. And boiling in jumbo pots: jambalaya, gumbo, and étouffée, which is cooking a vegetable or meat in its own juices, similar to braising or “smothering,” as it’s called in New Orleans.

The Friedmans split the cooking duties. “I do the grilling and the frying,” Sam said, “and Edwina does everything else.” Their menu is sea-

sonal. Early in the football season when it’s hot, they grill steaks, ribs, and chicken, and when it turns cooler in the fall, they switch to gumbo and gravy-based dishes that are served hot. “You’ll see people frying alligator and shrimp, and then most everybody will make a pot of what we call jambalaya. It’s a tomato-based mixture with rice, and you put anything in it you want—from alligator to chicken,” said Sam. “We make it in a 20-quart pot and stir it with a little boat paddle.” (See Edwina’s jambalaya recipe at the end of this article.)

On game day the Friedmans rise early, don their purple and gold garb—Sam puts on his LSU grilling apron—and they start cooking. “Everybody’s flying their colors and doing their thing,” said Edwina. “There are even two white standard poodles that the owners shave and put LSU on the side of them in purple.” LSU football is different than most colleges because their games are played at night, which gives tailgaters a full day to party and exhibit their Tiger spirit. “Every game I see something I can’t believe. People have tiger tails hanging off their bumpers; a lot of them paint themselves and their hair, and anything else you can imagine,” said Sam.

“As the day progresses, people start coming by. They’ll eat until it’s time to go into the





game...and they drink," said Edwina. Which makes the Friedman's frozen drink machine a big hit. "It has two buckets on it, so we can make two different kind of drinks, three gallons at a time," Sam said. "Early in the season we mix margaritas in one and either pina coladas or daquiris in the other. Later in the season, we put egg nog in them."

In their row alone, as many as 35 motorhomes are hosting parties. "You can go visit the neighbors and they can come visit you, and the people that don't have a motorhome, they just come along, grazing as they go," said Edwina.

"We'll finish cooking, and then I may walk across to six other motorhomes and they'll say, 'look man, I'm cookin' alligator sauce picante, come try what I'm doing,' and you fix yourself a drink and go try it."

It's no surprise that the Friedmans are devoted LSU fans considering nearly the entire Friedman family attended the Baton Rouge, Louisiana university. "I received two degrees there, and my wife, one son, and my daughter all graduated from LSU," Sam said. They continue to actively support the university as foundation members and alumni. Sam spent six years on its board of supervisors and the family also provides the Friedman Family Scholarship, an academic award for LSU athletes. The Friedmans further cemented their relationship with LSU when Sam's hotel development company developed the Alumni Association's Lod Cook Hotel & Conference Center on campus. "If I invite friends to the games they don't stay in the coach; I put them up in the hotel," said Sam.

A former attorney, Sam went into the hotel development business with a partner in 1974. His Natchitoches-based company, Dimension Development, purchases franchises from companies such as Hilton or Marriott, then develops, builds, and manages the hotels. The irony

that a hotel guy prefers his motorhome over a hotel isn't lost on Sam. "Half my friends think I'm nuts," he said. "But we love the coach. It's a dream to drive." Sam and Edwina agree that staying in the coach allows them to meet people that they wouldn't otherwise come in contact with if they stayed in hotels. "That's what our lives are about," said Sam. "We get to a space where we can pull over, we pull the chairs out, pull the grill out, and we're in business!"

Owning a Louisiana-based hotel development company provided Sam and Edwina, who is a corporate officer in the company, the opportunity to give something back to the community following Hurricane Katrina. Fortunately, the Friedman's Hilton Homewood Suites hotel in New Orleans received only minor damage and opened a few days after the storm—but not for paying guests. "We let our staff stay there because they didn't have any place to live, and each room is a suite with a full kitchen," Edwina said. "We also opened it up to the police and fire crews, and to people who were there working who didn't have a place to stay."

They were also able to help a family that had come up to ride out the storm in one of the Bed & Breakfast inns they operate in Natchitoches. The family lost everything, but Edwina and Sam got the gentleman a construction job with their company and he remains a valued associate. The storm also damaged the historic Roosevelt Hotel in New Orleans. Recently, Sam's company acquired the property and announced plans to restore it to its former grandeur and reopen it as a Waldorf-Astoria Collection Hotel. "Katrina affected all of us," Sam said, "but we've seen New Orleans rebound and every day it gets a little better."

Although the Louisiana connection runs deep, the couple also owns a home in the Florida Keys. Yes, tailgating is one of their big activities, but



they are also big boat enthusiasts. "When it's cold in Louisiana, we go to Florida to boat, and when it gets hot in Louisiana, we take the motorhome and go somewhere else," Edwina said. "Boating is like motorhoming on water—same great people and good times."

Sam and Edwina have been married 28 years, and just as they split their tailgating duties, they also split their coach-owning responsibilities. Sam does the driving and Edwina takes care of coach maintenance. "She's good at the kind of stuff and I'm awful at it," Sam said. "I do the driving, and she hooks up all the utilities and unhooks them; whatever maintenance is done when I turn the switch and it doesn't work, that's Edwina's job."

Edwina explained that she's always been mechanically inclined, and as a child, she liked to tag along with her electrician dad. When the couple bought their boat, the manufacturer suggested that they attend their Detroit Diesel engine school, which is the same engine used in a Marathon coach. "I learned all about the

injectors, the belts, the spark plugs, and the starters, so on the coach, I do everything. I check the oil and the coolant, I check the belts and the oil filters, all of that. A lot of women ask me, 'why do you do all of that?,' and I say, 'because we wouldn't be able to motorhome or boat if I didn't!'"

Meanwhile, this fall's LSU national champion football tailgating extravaganza promises to be even bigger and better than last year's. The Friedmans recently traded in their triple-slide coach for a larger, quad slide. The added space will not only be great for tailgating, but also for accommodating their two large German Shepherds, Bake and Amigo. "The extra room from that fourth slide makes it great with the two big dogs," said Sam.

So if you're ever down Louisiana way and happen to spot Sam and Edwina in their coach towing a car bearing metallic LSU signs, be sure to give them a hearty shout—preferably something like, "Geaux Tigers!" •

This recipe is from Edwina Friedman, who is profiled beginning on page 13 with her husband, Sam. Enjoy!



In the Galley with Trudy

Chicken & Sausage Jambalaya

1 pound boneless skinless chicken, cut into bite-size chunks
 1 pound link smoked pork sausage, cut into bite-size pieces
 1 lg onion, chopped
 1 lg bell pepper, chopped
 2 celery stalks, chopped
 1 bunch green onion, chopped

3 cloves garlic, minced
 14 ounces stewed tomatoes
 10 ounces Rotel tomatoes
 14 ounces tomato sauce
 1/2 Tbs Italian seasoning
 1 Tbs Konriko Creole Seasoning or Tony Chachere's Creole Seasoning
 1 pound Uncle Ben's converted rice

Sauté the sausage in a heavy pan over high heat until browned. Add the chicken, sauté 5 minutes. Reduce heat to medium, then add the onion, bell pepper, celery, garlic, and green onion. Sauté 5 minutes. Add the stewed tomatoes, Rotel tomatoes, tomato sauce, Italian seasoning, and Konriko or Tony Chachere's seasoning. Stir well, and cook uncovered over medium heat 15 min-

utes. Add the rice and stir well. When the mixture begins to simmer, cover the pot and reduce the heat to low. Cook for 50 minutes. Do not remove the cover during this time.

After 50 minutes, remove the cover and stir the contents of the pot. Replace the pot cover and cook an additional 10 minutes. Serves 6. •