

Gamecock fans get ready for games

Tailgating grand old tradition at USC

By GREG RICKABAUGH
Assistant Photography Editor

Tailgating. Just say the word and Gamecock fans everywhere think of food, friends and fun.

It's a Saturday party before and after the football game that has been a grand old tradition at USC for more than 20 years.

But some fans are taking it further and making it a pre-game party that is hard to forget. They're what you would call extravagant tailgaters.

"We look forward to it all week," Kevin Dunn, a 1988 USC graduate, said at a recent home game.

"It's just a good time to get together because when we were in school that's all we did," he said.

Dunn considers himself a "serious tailgater." He has been tailgating with his family and friends for more than seven years. Recently, he was surrounded by a dozen friends and family from Raleigh, NC, Anderson and Columbia.

But if you've ever wondered about those tailgaters in front of the stadium, don't think it was an easy task getting there. Tailgaters who have been allotted those convenient spots have donated full scholarships to the University.

R.P.R. & Associates Inc. donated three full scholarships in return for two spaces in front of the stadium. Phil Roof, a member, said he has been in front of the stadium for 15 years now.

The tailgating group meets hours before each home game and each person brings a different dish. In the middle of their fancy-covered table is a stuffed Gamecock that attracts the eyes of many passing Gamecock fans.

And for senior tailgaters like Harold and Betty Butler, Tailgating is a time to fraternize. They use it as a time to find people you haven't seen in years. At the Virginia Tech game, the Butlers did not bring their motorhome as they do most times, but it didn't keep them from finding friends.

But for USC students, tailgating usually means partying at Tally Ho or somewhere nearby. It often means drinking and socializing. Whether to meet new people or hang out with old friends, tailgating often brings people together.

As for what it costs to enjoy the popular event, one must consider parking, gas, food and drinks. And that's not considering the original price of the ticket.

The most popular food choice among tailgaters seems to be chicken. Whether it's Bojangles chicken or homemade chicken, it remains part of the fall ritual.

Tailgating in the South is popular at South Carolina, Georgia and Clemson. Most of them have active and fervent tailgaters. But Georgia Tech and N.C. State fans can't tailgate as much because they don't have a central parking lot near the stadiums.



Greg Rickabaugh/The Gamecock

Tailgaters Dewitt Thigpen and son, Steve, munch on some boiled peanuts while listening to the Gamecock Sports Network before a recent game.

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