

# Families Get Pregame Fun at Tar Heel Town

By KAREY WUTKOWSKI  
Assistant University Editor

In just four years, Tar Heel Town has become a University tradition for football fans who keep coming back for the food, tunes and spirit before home games.

"We're called a pregame party," said Jim Ervin of UNC Sports Marketing, who also serves as mayor of Tar Heel

Town.

"It's a nice place where people can bring their pregame chicken and biscuits."

Tar Heel Town sets up in between Wilson Library and the Kenan Labs 2 1/2 hours before every home football game and packs up an hour before the game starts.

The outdoor festival tries to create a family atmosphere and features free

painting, games for kids, football poster give-aways, live entertainment and appearances by the live mascot Ramses.

"Kids have the best time," Ervin said. "There are lots of little cheerleaders that come with their mom and dad and get a tar heel painted on their face."

He said the kids also get a kick out of some youth-oriented booths like the inflatable moonwalk and a radar pitch machine that detects the speed of a

thrown football.

But Ervin said the festival is not just for the kids.

He said parents also have a good time due to the live performances. Tar Heel Town has hosted bands like The Castaways and The Nomads, which play oldies and beach music.

The only sparse demographic is UNC students.

"We have some, but we'd love to have more students," Ervin said. "Generally we have thousands of folks there."

"There's a lot of families and also season ticket-holders in general. It's been a great perspective to see folks again this year that were at last year's Tar Heel Town."

Tar Heel Town started in 1997 as a way to get fans into the game atmosphere.

"We wanted to create an environment in the pregame that was alcohol-free and leading to getting more people on campus early," said Angie Bitting, director of the Smith Center. "It's grown so much."

This year's first Tar Heel Town, which

was put on before the Tulsa game on Sept. 2, garnered the most attendance yet, Ervin said.

"We're growing out of the space we have," he said.

"There's no telling what we'll do in the future. We'll probably continue to improve and enhance what we already have."

Ervin said Tar Heel Town is so popular because of the high energy level it creates.

He said the energy starts building when the football team is dropped off at Tar Heel Town.

"That's one of the attractions of Tar Heel Town," Ervin said.

"They get to see Carl Torbush and the team."

"Then an hour before kickoff (the UNC) band basically performs along the edge of Tar Heel Town and marches and leads all the fans to the stadium. It's the official exodus out of Tar Heel Town."

And Ervin said you can't help but feel the stirrings of Tar Heel spirit.

"It's so cool," he said. "You get so pumped up just being there."

*"There are lots of little cheerleaders that come with their mom and dad and get a tar heel painted on their face."*

JIM ERVIN  
Mayor of Tar Heel Town

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