



Lower Mayfair Eagles bus

The Greatest Party in Philadelphia

BY KURT SMITH

There is no gathering anywhere in the region like an Eagles tailgate.

Most of the thousands clad in green at the party on Pattison probably don't even realize it, but there is a truly special element to being in the parking lot on Eagles game day.

It's that no matter your political persuasion, your religious denomination, your ancestral roots or your musical taste, you have something in common with the stranger next to you. In the parking lots surrounding Lincoln Financial Field on game day, everyone bleeds green and shows their commitment. On Game Day, the Birds are the only thing that matters to anyone.

Tailgating, at first glance, seems an alternative to paying the eternally brazen "atmosphere fee" for food and libations inside a sports venue. But when the party encompasses more than a square mile and looks like this, its purpose goes well beyond thrift. To call an Eagles

tailgate a party, to even call it a celebration, is a rank understatement.

Throughout the lots at the home of the Eagles, including those meant for other teams who happen to play here, you can walk in any direction and see buses, campers, trucks and vans...the majority of them covered with artwork that would provoke a double take on the highway. It gives one pause to consider how much of a fan one must be to shell out the kind of coin needed to decorate a vehicle so magnificently.

Everywhere in this mammoth block party, one hears loud music from a variety of styles and eras. Everywhere, you can smell coal, sau-

sages, burgers, and yes, frequent whiffs of reefer. And anywhere you happen to be, you won't often go five minutes without hearing an Eagles cheer...usually begun by one person, which easily gets at least a dozen more to join in.

If you've never been a part of tailgating at this level, you'll be truly amazed at the dedication of a large number of participants. The seasoned pros arrive early...as much as six to eight hours before game time. (Do the math of how early you'd have to get out of bed, on a cold November Sunday morning, to tailgate for a 1:00 game.)

Veterans of Eagles tailgating even have their designated parking spots, that they head directly to when the gates open...for various reasons, such as being near a grate that can be used as a bathroom. True.

You can easily spot the amateurs...the late arrivals. They spend far too much time in an agonizingly slow quest...not only to find an

open spot, but to work their way into it as carefully as possible to avoid gazebos, coolers, and equipment that other tailgaters have established hours before.

Hopefully, they've learned their lesson from the experience...you need to take this party a heretofore unheard-of other level of seriously.

Dan Kukral is the head chef of the Danny Burke tailgate, named for his brother-in-law who runs much of the party. He was given the chef's role, he says, because "I come up with all the fun ideas for food."

Kukral is a research scientist at a pharmaceutical company, which is remarkable given what you're about to read about his contribution to game day.

He and Burke usually begin the party preparation about five to six days before game day (yes, you read that right). Once they've gathered food and supplies for a party that can be for as many as 200-300 people and brought it all to the Linc, he takes on the sizable cooking duties.

Needless to say, it's a lot for one guy. Kukral simultaneously looks after the preparation of ribs, pulled pork, shrimp and sausage bayou, Buffalo chicken dip, and of course, dogs, burgers, wings, sausages with peppers and onions... even long hots with stuffed provolone and prosciutto. As anyone can easily see from the hefty, mouth-watering piles of grub, he's more than up to the challenge.



Photos by Kurt Smith

It's all a labor of love, he says. No kidding...a system as efficient as this doesn't happen casually. The Danny Burke folks get contributions from participants, which covers the food and drink, but he doesn't get paid for his more than considerable efforts.

Kukral is just one of many for whom Eagles fandom is a passion worth the investment of time and money.

This observer also spoke with Ed Callahan, whose camper has occupied a spot in the Wells Fargo Center lot since the opening of Lincoln Financial Field. Ed tells an amusing story of why he and his crew acquired a camper.

"In 2004," he recalls, "I went to a road trip game in Cleveland. There were four of us, and we parked in the lot next to a beat-up old RV. For a swap of a cheesesteak, the guy who owned the RV let us use the bathroom."

An even trade, certainly. But bringing a bathroom to a tailgate, they realized, was a super idea, for obvious reasons.

Ed and his crew bought an old RV, fixed it up, and made it a staple of the parking lot. They eventually had to replace it following a wreck, so they've upgraded to a new one.

Callahan's current camper is a thing of beauty to behold for a Philadelphia football fan, and it



might be the most artfully decorated vehicle at the Eagles tailgate...which is undeniably saying something. The back of the RV is adorned with a large-scale timeless image (above) of Frank Gifford lying motionless on the field, following the epic Chuck Bednarik hit. On the side is a wide panorama skyline shot of our city, ranging from 30th Street Station to Billy Penn's statue.



The cook of Callahan's crew is a gentleman named Anthony. Anthony is definitely keeping busy looking after sausages and other comestibles. He estimates that their party serves anywhere from 30-100 fans each home game.

Executing a successful tailgate, Anthony

The Jetro Lot

While the Eagles' tailgating scene is a thing to behold throughout all of the parking lots, some lots are at a different level of enthusiasm than others, and the parking lots at the Jetro Warehouse east of the Linc are undoubtedly the wildest.

To Philadelphians, the name "Jetro" is probably more known for what takes place in their parking lots than for what they do... they are a wholesale restaurant supplier, selling catering supplies and food preparation equipment to caterers and restaurant owners throughout the region.

But it's likely that their most important...and maybe profitable...contribution to the city is their ample amount of parking spaces in the Sports Complex. The Jetro folks are, needless to say, aware of this, and they even have Facebook and Twitter pages dedicated expressly to their parking offerings for Philly sports events.

The most serious of Philly tailgaters seem to congregate at Jetro. In this observer's visit, just a small sampling of things to see were a large number of beautifully decorated buses, a gentleman by the name of Jonathan



Metz selling superbly Eagles-themed woodworks, coasters and other items (above), and a live band whose guitar player could mimic Eddie Van Halen's licks quite well. That's a ridiculously small sample, but magazines have space limits.

Jetro's lot isn't a place where you'd want to bring the kids or your church group. It's loud and raucous, with music that often features lyrics full of f-bombs. There are also a few flags that are openly critical of the current occupant of the White House, and not in a polite way.

But if you can handle that, and you truly want to show your Eagles fan dedication, the Jetro lot is likely the destination for you. It's well worth a visit, if only just to see the level of fandom the local football team inspires.

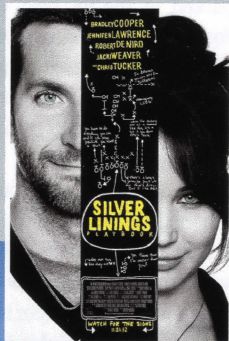
As Seen In The Movies: The Silver Linings Playhouse Eagles Bus

If you've ever seen the movie *Silver Linings Playbook*...and if you're an Eagles fan, you should... you likely remember the scene where the Eagles-decorated "Asian Invasion" bus shows up in the Linc's parking lot on game day.

In the scene, protagonist Pat Solitano Jr. has just been released from a mental health facility for bipolar disorder. At the game, he notices that his therapist, Dr. Cliff Patel, has emerged from the bus.

He catches up with Patel...whose face is painted green and silver...and Patel dispels any concerns about their meeting outside of the facility: "Today, I'm your brother in green, not your therapist." Soon, the two have a discussion with Pat's friend about the Eagles strategy for the game, punctuated with hilarious foul language.

After the movie was made, no one really knew what to do with the bus, and so a movie hand decided to sell it on Craigslist.



Bill Curley, a long, long-time veteran of Eagles tailgates, went for it, and today the Asian Invasion bus is parked in the Wells Fargo lot for every Eagles home game.

"One of the people working on the movie ended up with the bus, and nobody wanted it," Curley remembers. "The [Philadelphia] Inquirer wrote an article about how the bus was for sale prior to the Super Bowl. Once they won it, I called the guy on the phone and said, 'Hey, is the bus for sale?' and he said yes."

Curley bought the bus for \$9,000 in 2017. He estimates that he's put a total of \$30,000 into the investment. The bus is comfortably remodeled inside, with cushioned benches and Eagles decorated chairs, offering a spot to escape weather that can be trying in this part of the world any time of year.

"I come here early and park right here at the end, so people can take pictures. It attracts people from all over the country, I've had several people from Canada. A lot of 'This is my first game, I'm from Utah, it was a birthday gift.' They come and introduce themselves. It's a neat thing."

He still gets into the party, showing up early, saving spots for family and friends, and cooking sausage and peppers for whoever shows up. He was at the Linc at 11:30 AM for the Thursday evening home opener. "It starts early and it ends late," he laughs. "My daughter's coming today with her friends."

"This isn't the most comfortable thing to drive in traffic, so I leave early."

If you'd like to see the movie scene, you can search for "Silver Lining Playbook Eagles Tailgate Scene" on YouTube. And the next time you're at an Eagles home game, check out the Asian Invasion bus...it's well worth a look.

says, is a full-time job. "All week, getting food together, cleaning the RV, getting all the grills, utensils, tables, and all that. It's a full day... breakfast, lunch and dinner in the parking lot."

Ed says their breakfast specialty is an Irish American Philly Omelet... made with imported Kerrygold cheese from Ireland, Cooper brand American cheese, and Philadelphia cream cheese, all in a three-egg concoction.



Photos by Kurt Smith

There might be a few NFL cities that are in Philadelphia's universe when it comes to the magnitude of the pre-game party. But there are things that The City of Brotherly Love offers that are unique: cheesesteaks, scrapple and pork roll.

Buffalo can keep their wings, December weather, and four straight Bowl defeats.

To witness football fan dedication of this level brings to mind a whole world of entrepreneurial opportunities for local businesses. Incidentally, our friends at Duck Donuts realized this...on the day this article was written, the author received an email with a subject line that read: "Win The Tailgate With Donuts!" They get it.

Sure, for liquor stores, sandwich shops and food markets in the area, it's obvious. Put it in your promotional materials that you offer everything Eagles fans need for Game Day... cases of beer, large bottles of liquor and mixers. Ready-made subs and pizzas, bulk packages of burgers, sausages, chips, dips, and rolls.

But that's just scratching the surface. A party this size needs it all.

An owner of an RV dealership can add a bar and lounge to the inside of a used camper to make a sale to a dedicated Eagles supporter. Vehicle wrapping and decorating outfits could market their wares to fanatics that buy multiple spots at considerable cost for their RV.

Needless to say, anyone selling Eagles gear could market to the block party...most all of whom represent their team faithfully with jer-



seys, caps, face paint or any kind of accessories featuring the Eagles logo and colors.

Outdoor stores could make a serious profit too. Grills, propane tanks, coolers, generators, portable toilets, anything associated with RV adventures might be applicable to a tailgating demographic. Space heaters and fuel would undoubtedly be in big demand in the colder months. Decorating anything with the Eagles

colors and logo could make the sale to the typical Linc lot enthusiast.

It's even an opportunity for catering services, private event coordinators, DJs, even live musicians, all of which you can easily find at an Eagles tailgate.

If nothing else, fly a plane towing a banner over it all for the thousands in the lot to see... which also happens frequently.

You get the idea, but even if you're a realtor or a financial advisor, there's no reason why you can't build goodwill by renting a camper, hosting a game day party and inviting your customers, as one business owner (who asked for her name not to be shared) does.

No doubt, your Eagles fan patrons will speak well of you.

Because after all, you're family! ■

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