

# Pack attack

It can be easy to catch Packers fever in Green Bay (unless you're a Bears fan)

By Katherine Rodeghier  
Daily Herald Correspondent

At the sight of light at the end of the tunnel, my pulse quickens. Deep in the bowels of Lambeau Field, our tour group begins following in the footsteps of football legends as we pass from the exit of the locker room into the dark corridor.

Rousing music bounces off the concrete walls, but as I walk toward the light I imagine hearing the insistent chant, "Go, Pack, Go." With every step the opening of the tunnel grows larger, the blackness recedes and then I am in sunlight, standing next to the grass near the end zone with the massive bowl of the stadium rising around me.

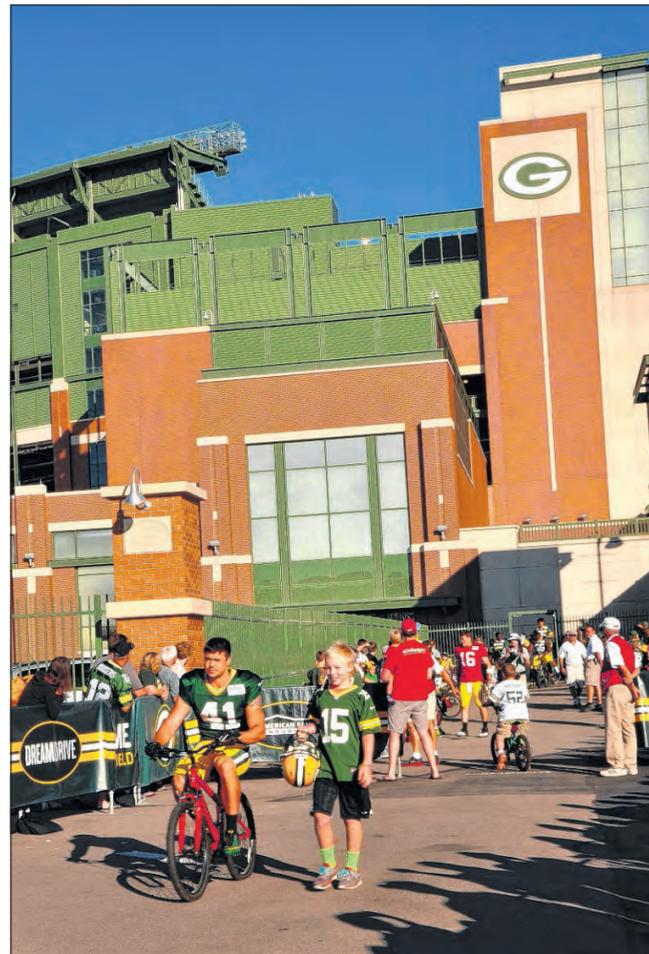
For a Green Bay Packers fan, this is hallowed ground. But even for a rival Chicago Bears fan, it makes for an impressive sight.

It certainly will be on Thanksgiving night when the Bears meet the Packers here on their home turf in a game commanding the highest ticket prices in the NFL this season. SeatGeek.com puts the median ticket price at \$552. The NFL ticket exchange shows some as high as \$10,000.

But you don't have to be sitting in the stands to catch football fever in Green Bay on Thanksgiving. It's all around — and all year long.

## Cheering from afar

Green Bay remains the smallest city in the NFL by a long shot with a population of just 104,000 — smaller than Naperville — and just 250,000 in all of Brown County. But the Packers' fan base far exceeds these numbers. At a typical game, 87 percent of spectators do not live in the county. In fact, season tickets holders reside in all 50 states and several foreign countries. Those tickets have been sold out for years and the number of fans on a waiting list would fill Lambeau Field almost to capacity. Some ardent Packers followers put their child's name



During training camp in late July and August, kids offer their bikes to players who ride them to the practice field.

on the list before he or she is even born.

What's behind this fan frenzy? Perhaps fans feel so invested in the team because so many are invested — literally. The Packers remain the only NFL team owned by its fans. More than 360,000 have shares in the Packers corporation. With no billionaire owner to bail them out when times get tough, the corporation has to come up with creative ways to boost revenue. Increasingly, it has looked to Lambeau Field.

## Stadium stays open year round

Visitors find something to see and do at Lambeau Field almost all year long. They gather in its Atrium, where 56 weddings were held last year, and line up for first-come, first-served stadium tours available except on game days, holidays and special events. Three tour options range from one to two hours.

All tours peek inside some of Lambeau's private suites and



The 24 Walk of Legends monuments describe eras in Packers football history and honor individual players, such as Bart Starr.

pass through the players' tunnel onto the sidelines of the field for a view up in the stands. Though Lambeau has a capacity for 80,735, it's the only stadium in the NFL that has bleachers as its main seating. When spectators bundle up in heavy coats on cold days, fans say those 18-inch-wide spaces make for cozy conditions.

Some tours go to the Champions Club, the MVP Deck, the press box and the South Lawn observation deck for a close look at the Big G, a 40-by-60-foot initial crowning the field. By local ordinance, no building in Green Bay can be taller than Big G.

Visitors also come to Lambeau Field to tour the Packers Hall of Fame, renovated in August and moved to the Atrium. Expanded to 15,000 square feet, the two-level museum holds the Packers' 13 championship trophies and a replica of Coach Vince Lombardi's office. Interactive exhibits contain historical artifacts, audio and video clips and show Packers legends describing historic games.

The Packers Pro Shop at Lambeau expanded to 21,500

square feet last year and contains a dizzying variety of green and gold gear, including a wall of hats measuring 36 linear feet. Cheesehead hats, though, have their own special place in the store. After the Bears' Super Bowl victory in 1986, some Bears fans began calling Packers fans from the Dairy State cheeseheads as a form of derision. But Wisconsin residents turned the scorn around by proudly adopting the nickname and took to wearing hats in the shape of a wedge of cheese. Now a sea of shockingly yellow headgear floats around Lambeau Field.

A fine-dining venue began serving lunch and dinner inside Lambeau's Atrium in July. No beer-and-brats dive, 1919 Kitchen & Tap (named for the year the Packers was founded) has a chef turning out creative comfort foods and a bar serving craft cocktails, wine and more than 40 kinds of beer.

And there's more to come. The Packers corporation will break ground this fall on its 34-acre Titledown District including a 10-acre public plaza and 16 acres of retail, commercial and residential development. Hinterland Restaurant and Brewery will build a brewery turning out 20,000 bottles a year. It will offer tours and tastings as well as a farm-to-table restaurant with retractable walls, heated concrete, and heat lamps for tailgating and other outdoor events. The folks who run the American Club, Wisconsin's only five-star hotel, will build Lodge Kohler, another high-end property. Titledown is targeted for completion in the fall of 2017.

## History unfolds on walking and trolley tours

While visitors pick up plenty of Packers history at Lambeau Field, more awaits on two self-guided walking tours and a seasonal trolley tour.

The Walk of Legends takes fans



PHOTOS COURTESY OF KATHERINE RODEGHIER

You can tour Lambeau Field almost any day of the year except game days, holidays and special events.



The Atrium at Lambeau Field is a hub of activity most of the year. You can start a stadium tour here, enter the newly expanded Packers Hall of Fame or eat in the new high-end restaurant, 1919 Kitchen & Tap.

past 24 engraved granite and steel monuments stretching for a mile along streets around Lambeau Field. The 14-foot-tall monuments depict an era of Packers history and honor individuals such as Lombardi, Bart Starr and Brett Favre. The Oneida Tribe of Indians of Wisconsin sponsored the walk to memorialize tribe members who became Green Bay's first professional football players.

The self-guided Packers Heritage Trail starts in downtown Green Bay with 22 bronze plaques marking spots significant to Packers history. The home where Packers founder Curly

Lambeau was born is marked, as is the team's early practice and playing fields.

Visitors can save themselves some walking by taking the Packers Heritage Trail Trolley that offers two tours on select dates during football season. Along the way, they get a history lesson.

Curly Lambeau, a local high school football star, left Green Bay to attend Notre Dame University where he played as a freshman for Coach Knute Rockne. He came home for Christmas and never returned. It may have been the tonsillitis that kept him in bed for weeks, or a girlfriend in Green Bay, or

perhaps he just didn't adapt to college life, says trolley owner and guide Susan Broberg.

But he missed football.

In 1919, the meat packing company where Lambeau worked gave him \$500 for uniforms and he formed the Packers. They played in an open field while their manager passed a hat to collect money for the team. Thus began the tradition of fan-supported football in Green Bay.

In 1921, the team joined the American Professional Football Association, later the NFL, but their franchise was revoked after George Halas of the Chicago Staleys (later the Bears) told the league the Packers used college players in violation of league rules. The franchise was reinstated, but the Packers-Bears rivalry has remained to this day.

## Watching training camp

In late July and August, Packers fans head to Green Bay to watch players during training camp. The days start early as kids line up with their bikes outside a door at Lambeau Field waiting for players to emerge. In a tradition that dates back decades, young fans offer their bikes to players to ride to the training field a couple of blocks away. It's quite a sight to see a hulking football player riding a tiny kid's bike, his knees hitting the handlebars, as its young

See **LAMBEAU** on page 11

## Green Bay, Wisconsin

**Packers information:**  
Stadium tours (\$12-\$30 adults), hall of fame (\$12-\$15 adults), training camp, tickets: (920) 569-7500 or packers.com

### Tourist information:

Greater Green Bay Convention & Visitors Bureau: greenbay.com

Wisconsin Department of Tourism: travelwisconsin.com

Packers Heritage Trail Trolley Tour: \$25 and \$38, (800) 895-0071, ticketstaronline.com

### Where to eat:

1919 Kitchen & Tap, Lambeau Field, 1265 Lombardi Ave., Green Bay, (920) 965-6970, 1919kitchenandtap.com

### Where to stay:

Green Bay is loaded with chain hotels, and they're packed when the Packers play. Chateau De Pere in suburban De Pere offers a quiet retreat from the hubbub. The 36-room boutique hotel on the Fox River has a retro French flair. Rooms from \$109. It's located at 201 James St., (920) 347-0007, chateaudepere.com.

The home where Packers founder Curly Lambeau was born is marker No. 16 on the Packers Heritage Trail.



COURTESY OF KATHERINE RODEGHIER

## LAMBEAU from page 7

owner runs alongside, often carrying the player's helmet.

Afterward, as many as 2,000 fans fill bleachers and line the fence around Ray Nitschke Field to watch practice. Kiley Ross of Hampshire was there in August with 10-month-old son, Owen. "We come every summer, the whole family," she said.

Roxanna Keegan of Dav-  
enport, Iowa, drove in to see the Packers train and hopes to return one day to see a game. "That's on my bucket list, to be there to see them do the Lambeau Leap" after scoring a touchdown. I asked if she plans to attend the Thanksgiving game against the Bears. She just rolled her

eyes and said, "I wish."

• *Information for this article was gathered during a research trip sponsored by the Greater Green Bay Convention & Visitors Bureau and the Wisconsin Department of Tourism.*