

Community packs fundraiser

By Michael Krenn
Special to the Reporter

Nearly 1,000 attendees participated in a benefit this past weekend to raise money for ongoing care and therapy for local restaurant owner Scot Severson, who suffered a debilitating stroke over the summer.

"We loved that place, we loved the people who owned that place," said attendee Kenneth Westby, referring to Severson and his family, and to the restaurant, Emigail's Roadhouse, that the Seversons long

operated. Westby and his wife, Debee, of Edgerton, successfully bid in the event auction to win a large Emigail's sign that fronted the now-closed restaurant.

Added Debee Westby: "We made so many friends at Emigail's, this sign represents memories and relationships that we will keep with us even though the restaurant has closed."

Event organizers have not yet tallied up all the income generated from the event, however, the live auction alone gen-

erated an estimated \$15,000.

The auction along with a raffle of services and products constituted just one source of funds raised at the benefit, held at Countryview Bar and Restaurant, adjacent to Lake Koshkonong and not far from the Newville location where Emigail's held forth for nearly two decades.

Other benefit income came from the sale of food and drinks—Emigail's favorites—that were available. The food was prepared by longtime Emigail's cook Heather Asplund, assisted by her mother, Donna Ide. Still more income was produced through the sale of decorated cookies baked up by the owner and stylists at the Studio 8 Salon in Fort Atkinson.

Asplund's and Ide's support of the event went beyond whipping up Emigail's favorites for the event. They offered to prepare, as a featured auction item, a five-course meal for six—using Severson's recipes—in the winning bidder's home.

Chico and Dawn Pope, of Edgerton, won that auction item. The Popes own the Buckhorn Supper Club on Lake Koshkonong and Chico Pope was one of the chief organizers of the benefit.

Over the course of 18 years in business, Emigail's had earned Severson a reputation for serving food that faithfully reflected the unique cuisine of the Cajun region of Louisiana. So it wasn't surprising that many attendees recalled meals they were served at the restaurant.

"We really enjoyed Emigail's Friday night fish, Sunday brunch, having dinner at Scot's place was a treat," said Dan Williams, of Milton, who, with his wife Deanna, participated in the benefit. "So, we're glad we could be a part of his event."

For the raffle and auction, Williams donated the interior painting of a room, while his wife, an artist, donated a snowman painting. The Williams also successfully bid for a large framed photographic print of a University of Wisconsin Badg-



Debee Westby, left, and Kenneth Westby, with the oversized Emigail's sign they won with a winning bid.

Photo by Michael Krenn



Dawn Pope, left, and Chico Pope, right, joined by artist Trish Minton-Wedel, who produced and donated the painting that the Popes successfully bid on at the Severson benefit.

Photo by Michael Krenn

to support restauranteur

ers football helmet as it is dramatically hoisted into the air.

Describing himself as having been a "late-night regular" at Emigail's, Jeff Valentine, of Edgerton, successfully bid for a decorated window from the restaurant. "I was at home there, this was a great cause, and getting a piece of memorabilia meant a lot," he said.

The large turnout, the live music, and the drinking, eating and auction bidding, all mixed together to create a boisterous atmosphere within the packed restaurant. This, however, did not obscure the underlying heartache at the center of the event: a friend of so many, his life, in a moment, so harshly altered.

As a result it was a mood that, while festive, was something else, too.

Brought to the event by his family, Severson was present for a portion of the activities. Friends, Emigail's customers, others, many of whom had not seen him since he sustained the stroke, others who had never before met him, greeted Severson, gave him a hug, squeezed a hand, as he sat in his wheelchair. Always, he was accompanied by a family member—his wife, Christine, his daughters Abigail Houfe and Emily Pelz—thanking attendees for their presence and support.

Among many interests he pursued before sustaining the stroke, Severson especially enjoyed long-distance bicycling. But now Severson's standard mode of transportation is a wheelchair, while his graceful, ever-so-light, racing bicycle, acquired by Severson only two years ago and looking nearly new, was on the auction block at the event.

Chico Pope said two thoughts motivated his effort on behalf of his fellow restaurant owner.

"One, we were classmates together, and, two, we both were entrepreneurs: we both had dreams and we both followed our dreams, only Scot's dream got cut short. I respected that dream, that motivation, and I felt I needed to



The Severson family: clockwise from bottom: Scot Severson, his wife Christine Severson, daughter Emily Pelz, and daughter Abigail Houfe.

Photo by Michael Krenn



Painted steel signs donated for the Severson benefit auction by Christy Fitzgerald and Steve Meinhardt. At front right is bid caller Curt Watson.

Photo by Michael Krenn

help."

So, too, did many other fellow alumni of the Edgerton High School class of 1971, along with other members of the area's restaurant community. They were joined by many Emigail's customers and others in the community who simply had heard about Severson's circumstances and were motivated to offer assistance.

"I just love our community. I will jump in and help just whenever," said Mary Thronson, of Edgerton, who attended the event with her husband, Tim. "Plus, I was a big fan of

Emigail's," she added.

The Thronsons successfully bid on a colorful duck decoy, on that beautiful bicycle of Severson's and on a delightful miniature electric travel guitar, just slightly larger than, oh, a bottle of bourbon—because who doesn't need one of those?

Although the event is over, organizers remain committed to providing ongoing support to Severson. So anyone interested can contribute to an account set up at the Bank of Milton/Bank of Edgerton, or at the Scot Severson Health Fund at the gofundme.com site.