



Wood's Winter Warm-up stoked by huge turnout

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Kerry Wood won't ever have problems raising funds for the expanding portfolio of worthy causes he desires to help, if the turnout at his second annual "Winter Warm-up" at Navy Pier in Chicago is an indication.

Hundreds of fans packed every nook and cranny of Harry Caray's Tavern and the hallway outside on Jan. 18 to rub shoulders with Wood, wife Sarah, and virtually the entire turnout of players at the nearby Cubs Convention. Also on hand were the Ricketts



Sarah and Kerry Wood.

Cubs ownership family, baseball operations president Theo Epstein, general manager Jed Hoyer, manager Dale Sveum and his coaching staff, and Cubs business operations president Crane Kenney.



Ernie "Mr. Cub" Banks (second from left) greets Sarah and Kerry Wood along with an unidentified guest at the "Winter Warm-up."

Cubs history hung heavy at the Wood soiree, too. Ernie "Mr. Cubs" Banks, turning 82 on Jan. 31, hobnobbed with Wood. Hanging back in a corner was the Rebel, Randy Hundley, munching on a brownie and revealing he's already a great-grandfather at 70 via Heather, the oldest daughter of son and fellow ex-Cubs catcher Todd Hundley.



Prominent agent Paul Kinzer (right) with new associate Scott Nelson, a Naperville native and former longtime Cubs front-office mainstay.

Even famed player agents were in the house. Paul Kinzer, who repped several prominent Cubs, was in the house. He chowed down with new associate and Naperville native Scott Nelson, a 29-year Cubs front-office veteran who switched over to the other side in the art of contract negotiations.

All will have even more opportunities to help the Woods direct support to causes benefiting youth in the Chicago area.

Having already broken ground on a state-of-the-art high-school baseball field bearing his name at Lane Tech High School, Wood said he'll have a new fund-raising event up and running in August to replace his longtime bowling tournament. The latter event had long been a success in raising many hundreds of thousands of dollars for Children's Memorial Hospital.

The Wood Family Foundation is funding full-ride scholarships in the honors program at the University of Illinois-Chicago for students from four targeted inner city neighborhoods: Englewood, Austin, Humboldt Park and Lawndale. Recipients qualify with a 3.40 grade-point-average, and are chosen for the scholarship program by UIC.

No doubt a slew of worthy causes now will pitch the Woods for support. They're not thrilled with turning anyone down.

"I've got a good team that I trust. My team and I go over every opportunity that's brought to us," Wood said. "We make an important, well-thought-out decision before we try to get involved. Ultimately, when I started this foundation, I told the whole team, 'Listen, my name's on this, it's got to be done the



Cubs general manager Jed Hoyer and wife Merrill.

right way.' So we're very blessed to have a great team and great partners around the city.

"There are a lot of requests. Unfortunately, we can't meet them all. But we do what we can to do the right time and spend the money in the right place."

The Woods do expect to provide more help as time marches on.

"Hopefully we can have enough support where we don't have to (say no too often)," said Sarah Wood. "We can have a few more (programs) every year and eventually we'll have 10, 15 every year and keep growing and change the culture. I think if we bring education to these families, it's life-changing for them."

Cubs owner Laura Ricketts appreciates the timing of the Winter Warm-up.

"The fund-raiser he did tonight dovetails well with the Cubs Convention," said Ricketts, who helps spearhead the team's philanthropic work through Cubs Charities. "David DeJesus and his wife had a fund-raiser (the previous night). We encourage all the fund-raising they do. We want to help any way we can and work together. It's a great partnership."



Dr. David Fletcher, president and founder of the Chicago Baseball Museum, with Cubs owner Laura Ricketts.



Cubs pitcher Jeff Samardzija (center) has a laugh with Ryan Chiaverini, co-host of WLS-TV's "Windy City Live" and an unidentified interviewer.

As a Cubs icon, Wood thus keeps his profile high. For the first time since 1995, he's not limbering up his arm in spring training at the pro-baseball level.

He's not going far, though. Wood talked to Cubs minor leaguers assembled in Chicago in the week before the Cubs Convention. And he'll provide his wizened counsel as an instructor in spring training, a role that had been envisioned for him since before his retirement. He seems a natural coach.



Harry Caray's managing partner Grant DePorter (left) and Ryan Chiaverini, co-host of WLS-TV's "Windy City Live."



Cubs outfielder David DeJesus, a year-round resident of suburban Wheaton, chats with fans.