



Salzeider Family Charity leads the pack on rooftop no matter how low Cubs go

*By George Castle, CBM Historian
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You could accurately say the Salzeider Family Charity is Rebuilding-Proof.

No matter how many years in a row John and Robin Salzeider of Highland, Ind. hold their annual fundraiser across the street while the Cubs are in the dumper, by management choice, they keep getting support for good causes.

And that's the Wrigley Field rooftop experience.

At their 12th – or was it 14th?, nobody could keep accurate count – rooftop party at Beyond the Ivy at 1010 W. Waveland Ave., there was hardly room to move in the indoor club room, really one large bar. John and Robin's backers showed up en masse on the same day Julia Ruth Stevens, Babe Ruth's daughter, threw out the first pitch and sang in the seventh inning.

It's a great atmosphere for socializing, and it's weather-proof. A modest number of brave souls found their way to the roof to actually watch the Cubs-Brewers game through a nice perch in between the center-field scoreboard and the rise of the left-field bleachers.



John and Robin Salzeider (left photo). The couple got five volunteers to help with the rooftop party, including in right photo Tiffany Serrano (left) and Alex Castaneda.

That viewpoint may be closed up in future years if the Cubs build their Jumbotron behind the bleachers. But for now, the vantage point was equivalent to high in the outfield upper deck at one of those bygone cookie-cutter stadiums in Cincinnati, Pittsburgh, St. Louis or Philadelphia nearly five decades ago.

Inside, nobody could see the game, the inside club at the same height as the bleachers concourse, and the view thus blocked by fans walking around in the ballpark. But that isn't the point.

"I think more people like this environment for business and networking," John Salzeider said. "Here, as opposed to going into Wrigley Field, you can walk around (sometimes!). You won't be rained on. A lot of people like coming up here. It's a bar."

They're eating, drinking and being merry, all for a good cause. Salzeider, a personal-injury attorney-partner at the downtown Chicago O'Connor and Nakos law firm, and his wife began their own family charity 14 years ago: "simply to do some things and teach our children to give back to the community."



The Beyond the Ivy staff includes (from left) Sean Price, Patty Purcell, Brian Murphy and Joe Mazz.

Family runs everything

The charity has grown, and even added a board of directors. But it is still John and Robin's baby. They run everything themselves, pay no staff and rely on volunteers to help run their events.

The Salzeiders started out with a golf tournament – still running – at the old Woodbine club in Hammond. More recently, they've staged a 5-K run. But the rooftop event is now a tradition.

"The first year we did this, we were hoping to sell 40 tickets," Robin Salzeider said. "We've sold as many as 360."

When they reached their record in ticket sales – usually \$120 to \$125 a head – the couple had to spill over onto a second rooftop, also owned by Beyond the Ivy, just west at 1038 W. Waveland Ave.

On this day, with the Cubs hopelessly out of it 1 ½ months into the season, several hundred squeezed into the main club area. Those who ventured onto the roof could take advantage of outdoor grilling treats, rain or shine. In the process, their attendance helps dozens in both Chicago and Northwest Indiana.

John Salzeider estimates he has raised more than \$150,000 from all the rooftop events.

“We started raising money for Haven House, a domestic violence (refuge) home in Hammond,” he said. “As we progressed, we added new causes, like the Little Heroes pediatric cancer program at University of Chicago and Northwestern hospitals.”

A local cancer charity in Highland, the Friends of Michael Williams, also drew support. Williams was a youth athlete who died of cancer. A local coat drive became a beneficiary.

“We also do a lot for local citizens, individuals in need suffering from cancer,” said John Salzeider.

Said Robin: “We see people in the newspaper, and we help them.”

WJOB-Radio does remote broadcast

WJOB-Radio (1230 AM) in Hammond annually does a live broadcast from the rooftop event hosted by station sports director Ryan Walsh.

Patty Purcell, who runs Beyond the Ivy, feels “honored” to annually host the Salzeiders.

She might need some help herself. The rooftop owners are an embattled species, especially after Cubs chairman Tom Ricketts recently announced he’d plow ahead with an enhanced list of Wrigley Field improvements after failing to reach an agreement with the owners on ballpark signs.

But the rooftop owners also are fighting a two-front war. Business has slumped the past five years as both the Cubs and the economy have slumped. Several rooftop owners either have bailed out or gone into foreclosure.

“That’s our biggest challenge -- what’s on the field,” Purcell said. “It’s very hard to sell something people don’t want to see. People have lost interest, although you still have the diehard fans. It is a very uncertain time. Very hard.”



Dr. David Fletcher (left), president of the Chicago Baseball Museum, does an interview on WJOB-Radio in Hammond with sports director Ryan Walsh.

Amid all the stresses is the highlight of the Salzeider Family Charity event, bearer of a good name.

“But this isn’t about us,” said John Salzeider.

Best quote of the day.



The view from the bleachers atop Beyond the Ivy. Jeff Samardzija of the Cubs delivers a pitch to the Brewers. Fans can see the majority of the field from this vantage point.