Alums serve up hogs and hope at annual fundraiser

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Members of the Boar’s Nest team at the 2016 Hogs for the Cause fundraising event. From left are Chris Roos, Chris Puckett (MBA ’04), Ryan Kenter (MBA ’04) and Brett Dougall.

As members of the Boar’s Nest, a team competing at the annual Hogs for the Cause fundraiser, Chris Puckett (MBA ’04) and Ryan Kenter (MBA ’04) are cooking up pork aplenty this year.

“The Boar’s Nest throws the biggest barbeque party in the festival,” Puckett says, “and it’s all for a good cause.”

Hogs for the Cause has exploded in popularity since its debut in 2009. What started as a fundraiser for Ben Sarrat Jr., a young boy stricken by cancer, has grown into a major festival that each year draws more than 30,000 attendees and raises millions of dollars for families dealing with the unexpected expenses associated with pediatric cancer.

For Puckett, the festival is personal. His mother passed away from brain cancer, and when he heard Sarrat’s story, he was deeply moved. “I still get choked up thinking about it,” he says.

Puckett’s wife encouraged him to turn his grief into action. Enlisting the help of Kenter, Puckett founded the Boar’s Nest in 2011 to help raise money for a cause he believed in. Since then, the Boar’s Nest has become one of the festival’s largest teams and biggest fundraisers, boasting over 100 members and sponsorships that include Yuengling, Tito’s Vodka, Red Bull and Tabasco.



This year’s Hogs for the Cause will take place April 4-5 at the UNO Lakefront Arena Festival Grounds.

In addition to lip-smacking smoked ribs, pulled pork nachos and boudin corndogs, the Boar’s Nest has become notorious for a special frozen daiquiri called Purple Drank.

“Some people come just for Purple Drank,” Puckett says. “We serve over 550 gallons of it in a 48-hour period.”

To date, Hogs for the Cause has raised over $12 million for families in need, with the Boar’s Nest pulling in over $2.5 million of that. Festival organizers say the event has helped more than 200 families navigate difficult times with grants and monetary donations.

“We show up with a check and tell these families we’ve got them,” Puckett says. “We give them funds to make it easier.”

During the festival, chefs who have mastered all manner of pork preparation compete in seven categories: Whole Hog, Ribs, Pork Butt, Sauce, Fan Favorite, Fundraising Champion, and the catch-all category “Pork-pourri,” which includes any creative dish that uses pork as an ingredient. Festival attendees are encouraged to sample offerings from the 90+ barbeque teams competing and to cast a vote for their favorite by making a donation.

As Hog for the Cause’s popularity has grown, so, too, has its impact. To provide long-term support to families, the organization has begun real estate and renovation projects.

“So many of these families have their kids in the hospital long term, and not all of them are in a position to get hotels,” Kenter says. “We decided to renovate one of the buildings near Children’s Hospital to give families a place to stay while their child is receiving treatment.”

The facility became known as The House that Hogs Built or Hog House for short. Today there are two Hog Houses, one on the campus of the Manning Family Children’s Hospital in New Orleans and one on the campus of Our Lady of the Lake Children’s Hospital in Baton Rouge. One of the rooms in the New Orleans house was dubbed the "Boar’s Nest” to recognize the contributions of Puckett and Kenter’s team.

The spirit of giving back is all too familiar to Puckett and Kenter, who met in the MBA program at the Freeman School.

While at Freeman, Puckett, an entrepreneur and co-founder of Marsh House Rum, and Kenter, director of Crescent Growth Capital, developed their own service-learning program to benefit local businesses.

“We created a consulting group,” Puckett says. “We went to bars and restaurants and helped them with their business plans. It allowed us to go out into the market and learn about a certain business and give back. In return, we got a free bar tab.”

Their time at Freeman yielded more than just free drinks, however.

“Being part of the Freeman community created some lasting relationships,” Puckett says. “Ryan and I have kids who are growing up together. And it was Freeman that brought us together.”

“We wouldn’t be where we are today without Freeman,” Kenter adds.

From their early days in the business school, Puckett and Kenter have made it their mission to have a lasting impact in their community.

“A lot of kids with cancer don’t make it,” Puckett says. “We’ve been lucky to have seen kids who have made it. It’s why we do what we do.”

The 2025 Hogs for the Cause kicks off Friday, April 4, at the UNO Lakefront Arena Festival Grounds and continues through Saturday, April 5. Tickets are available for purchase at HogsFest.org.