Beer and licorice sticks were the hors d'oeuvres for John McDonnell of Sterling Heights, Jim Robertson of Clinton Township, Tom Stevens of Redford and Ken Vance of Livonia as they waited for the portable barbecue to heat up.

It's Go Blue mania, but how do you get there?

By Jeff Counts
staff writer

The best place to watch a University of Michigan football game?

"On television," answered one veteran sportswriter in Ann Arbor.

But just remember, that comes from a sportswriter who has over the years overdosed on maize, blue and Bo.

Too much M-E-E-E-E-E-E-E-E-I-G-H-E-I-G-A-N football? Maybe for that writer and others living in the shadow of Michigan Stadium.

But for the rest of us, there's nothing more fun than recharging our collegiate batteries with an afternoon of Go Blue mania, even if we never got closer to Michigan's campus for a class than an evening at a college tavern.

But before you go, there are some numbers to remember. No, they aren't the players or the team stats.

The figure 104,000 should stick in you head. That's the number of people that the stadium holds. Then there's M-14 — it's not a score — it's a freeway and it takes you quickly into Ann Arbor land.

HOWEVER, there has been road work going on where M-14 intersects with U.S. 23, although not on football days. A quick way to avoid the traffic is by exiting south off of M-14 onto U.S. 23, and then getting off on the Plymouth Road exit.

U-M fans that favor M-14 include the likes of Greg Housman of Livonia, Gary Wight of Farmington and Kim Budnick of Birmingham.

Munching on a tailgate menu of barbecued hamburgers, potato salad, cole slaw, beans, cheese and snacks, Housman shared his secret route to the home of the maize and blue — M-14 to Maple and Maple to Stadium.

Wight, whose bill of fare placed an emphasis on chili — chili dogs, chili soup and snacks — takes M-14 to Main Street and Main to Pioneer High School, where he stakes out a spot to park and picnic.

Budnick's route is a bit more complicated, partly because she stops to pick up friends in Ypsilanti. While her companions dined on pasta salad, ham and roast beef sandwiches, herring and gouda cheese, she dictated her route: M-14 to Geddes Road to the Huron Parkway to Geddes Avenue to Hill Court to Main.

There's one die-hard fan who opted for the M-14 to U.S. 23 — Marvin Bauer, who works for Tutt and Associates in Farmington Hills.

His route reads like a list of who's who of suburban freeways. He starts with I-696, moves over to I-275, switches to M-14 and then hops on U.S. 23. No wonder he dines on cold cuts, cheese and snacks. There's no time to warm up the barbecue before the game.

SPEAKING of Plymouth Road, it's another route that provides more than just a ride — there's some scenery. And the ride from Plymouth is the kind that gets one in the mood for an afternoon of football.

There's no Astro-turf-like scenery on Plymouth, once you get past the town. It's open land and at least one centennial farm house to see on this route. The farm house is on the south side of Plymouth Road just west of Ford Road.

And the route runs through Dixboro, your basic cute little town on the outskirts of Ann Arbor.

Plymouth runs into Main in Ann Arbor, and much of the traffic congestion starts there. Try a parallel route. The traffic often comes to a stand still on Main, while the traffic moves freely on sidestreets.

It seems only natural that Ron Lukasik would take Plymouth Road to Main Street in Ann Arbor and Pioneer High School. He lives in Plymouth.

The most unusual route has to be that of Mike and Barbara Kirby of Livonia. They take Seven Mile Road to Pinckney then cut through Dexter to Ann Arbor. They take the same route for every U-M game, but there's a reason for it — their tailgate party includes friends from Pinckney.

And while sometimes the starting quarterback may be a question mark for a Saturday, parking is the real question mark.

To pay or not to pay is a question to grapple with. It's also a question that divides the young from the middle age.

AT LAST year's Notre Dame game, I decided to join the middle age crowd, and would never go back. I paid to park. Faced with taking a son in a cast and on crutches to the game, I decided that I wanted to get as close to the stadium as possible.

The cost: $5. The result: I zipped in and zipped out. I can't remember the score of the game, but I do know I'd pay again.

But if one is into prestige parking, there's the Victors lot, but it's only open to members of the alumni club, said Chris Hill, of the Athletic Information Department at U-M.

Parking is also available at the U-M Golf Course near the stadium, he said, adding that access to the course is off of State Street or Stadium.

"The best bet is to get there early," Hill said. "About an hour and a half before the game is about right."

But to really get the choice spots for tailgate parties, 9 a.m. is about right, he said. As for tailgate fare, it ranges from deli sandwiches and Franklin Mill cider brought in from the Detroit suburbs to cold filet sandwiches and crudites.

And on the subject of parties, there is no alcohol allowed in the stadium, Hill said.

"The only thing you can bring in is a six-pack size cooler," he said. "The guards will take anything larger."

BUT GOING dry and staying dry are two different things. Michigan weather being what it will, rain often can drench a crowd unexpectedly.

Ponchos can be purchased at the stadium, but plastic garbage bags are cheaper and you don't have to carry them.

But as the weather gets worse for the Minnesota game on Nov. 5 and the Illinois game on Nov. 12, and the layers of clothing come on, just remember the words of the sage sports writer — television.

(Emory Daniels contributed to this story.)

photos by THOMAS ARNETT/staff photographer

Two coolers and a portable barbecue were a must for pre-game festivities for Eric Hettel (standing) Ken Smolinici and Dawn DeMarsh, all of Redford.

The pitfalls of driving to Ann Arbor

University of Michigan football fans need to add some driving time to their game schedule this year because of road work being done in the Ann Arbor area.

The Michigan Department of Transportation recommends that motorists avoid a seven-mile section of U.S. 23 on the east end of the city from south of Plymouth Road to I-94 where construction work is expected to slow traffic.

Traffic has been reduced to one lane in both directions on the U.S. 23 bridge at the Huron River between Geddes Road and Washtenaw Avenue, according to the MDOT.

The MDOT suggested routes from the Detroit area are:

- M-14 to Main Street in Ann Arbor.
- I-94 business loop.
- U.S. 23 south to the Plymouth Road exit.
- I-94 to State or Saline exits in Ann Arbor.

Shuttle bus services also are available to the stadium on football Saturdays from the Ann Arbor Transportation Authority. The bus pickup points are:

- At Plymouth Road near U.S. 23, the Red Roof Inn, Marriott Inn and Domino's Farms.
- At State Street off I-94, Bombay Bicycle Club, Sheraton Inn and Wolverine Inn.
- At Huron Street off I-94, Weber's Inn, Holiday Inn West and the Comfort Inn.

Amazing grace or how I 'found' Elvis at Graceland

By Roberta Schwartz
special writer

Graceland Mansion smells like a funeral home 11 years after Elvis Presley's death.

When the front door opens, the scent of dried flowers and stale air pour out into the humid Memphis afternoon.

I never thought of myself as an Elvis fan, but southern cooking, elegant museums and curiosity drew me to Graceland during Elvis International Tribute Week.

Heartbreak Hotel Restaurant, a dozen shops and the seven-room Lisa Marie jet show how the entertainer has become a cottage industry. Pink Cadillacs for $40, $10 for T-shirts and Elvis photo buttons clutter the stores. Even in death, Elvis is still making money for his managers.

Once Marilyn Monroe said super stardom meant being turned into a thing. Day after day, tourists line up to see Elvis' hall of gold records, guitars and even his wedding cake and Army uniform.

The Graceland staff say that the museum benefits thousands of tourists. So far 2½ million have paid $7.50 to see the house and memorial garden with four graves beside the pool. Two planes, a tour bus and two shows bring in still more cash.

A stable of horses and one beautiful pony that Lisa Marie Presley rode a week before the international tribute week keeps the legend alive as Graceland folks say. Elvis' Aunt Delta lives at the mansion in a small room off the kitchen.

ELVIS' PRESENCE looms over Memphis. He's the solitary figure on the famous gate with its musical notes and love messages scribbled by fans. A mature Elvis looks out on Beale Street from his sculptured perch in Presley Park.

Graceland Enterprises conducts tours through the historic district where Elvis learned about the blues. Fans march past W.C. Handy's statue and a pawn shop turned into Handy Hall. The facade of an old building leans on timber supports waiting for restoration near Schwab's dime store.

The cleanup goes on in this district littered with bins of junk.

The wire service wrote that 35,000 filed past Elvis' grave at the 11th anniversary service. At 10 p.m., the crowd looked like about 5,000. Some fans had stood in the sun since noon and when a torch lit from the eternal flame at the grave passed through the crowd, thousands of candles illuminated Elvis Presley Boulevard.

Media guides advised the press that no interviews would be allowed in the Meditation Gardens or along the procession. A spokesman advised the crowd that rumors that Elvis is alive in Kalamazoo were in bad taste and painful to the fans.

ROBERTA SCHWARTZ

Hundreds of paper hearts, flowers and Confederat flags decorate the grave of Elvis Presley, located on the grounds of his Graceland Mansion in Memphis.

WHEN THE press went through the gates ahead of the line, fans grumbled: "They must be part of the family."

As the procession began, two women marched, supporting each other, before the cameras of Fox Television. A local station stood by with a monitor as the anchor waited to cut into the Republican convention and go with a live report.

Colored lights made the white pillars of Graceland seem like some macabre Halloween house. Hundreds of candles in single file flickered as the mourners solemnly made their way up the drive as cameras clicked.

At the grave site, an unsteady Aunt Delta appeared. She was supported on the arm of a male friend. Her bright red dress blended with hundreds of paper hearts, flowers and Confederate flags.

After the reading of the 23rd Psalm by a Graceland representative who also spoke on the theme of loving Elvis forever, someone from the crowd shouted, "Let's move. Priscilla is watching us on television."

By the time they reached the graves, the two women in the lead were in tears. Old people, children who weren't born when Elvis died, many invalids and quite a few grandmothers left gifts or took pictures of the grave on the one day when no admission is charged.

Many cried. All paused to reflect.

When "Are You Lonesome Tonight" floated through the air, I was embarrassed to be in tears.

I'VE NEVER owned a Presley record, but the starkness and simplicity of the ballad reminded me of a rather poor, underfed Elvis Presley. It brought back the face in the photo at Sun Records and the nervous falsetto voice on an early recording.

A picture of father and son beside Elvis' mother's grave shows how truly alone the two men felt and how close together death brought them. "He had a God-given talent," Vernon Presley wrote on his son's marker. "We miss you, son."