

JOE AND TINA MERKEL A LIFE LEGACY

For some, like Joe and Tina Merkel (right), volunteering at St. Louis Center is a family tradition. Involvement with the Center started with Joe's great grandfather, Joseph Thomas Merkel, and has continued with each first son, all named Joe.

Joe's father, Joseph Martin Merkel owned The Wolverine Food & Spirits, known affectionately as The Wolverine, for 46 years. Whenever they had leftover food, they brought it to SLC. "When I was eight or nine years old," said Joe, "I remember delivering big bowls of potato salad or plates of roast beef. Dad would drive and I'd take the food in to the kitchen."

Those with disabilities have always been a part of Joe's life. Not only did he attend school with residents from the Center, but he also has a family member with autism. "My parents and grandparents educated me that these were people who just need our help," he remembers.

When Tina came into Joe's life in 2009, he told her about SLC, and she immediately decided to get involved in the auction. Joe had been contributing his services as a professional auctioneer

for years, so Tina joined the planning committee and helped at the event. That fueled a desire to do more, particularly with residents.

After she left her corporate job and took a position at the Chelsea Wellness Center, she continued to work with residents who went there for fitness classes. She also volunteered at the Center in a program to help get residents up and moving and joined the Golf and Glory committee.

Of her many memories working with residents, one of Tina's favorites is when she partnered with Stephon in the Run for the Rolls race. "I told Stephon not to go out too fast, otherwise, he might get tired before we finished. But he was a good athlete and it was all I could do to keep up with him! When we crossed the finish line together, I gave him a high-five and a hug."

Tina's perseverance also paid off when it came to the 2020 auction. With the pandemic in full swing and people unable to gather, it appeared that the auction would be canceled. Tina brainstormed with Joe who was experienced at online auctions, made a few phone calls, and the auction was back on. The committee contacted local



"What you do makes a difference, specifically to the residents. It's important to help them know that they are part of the community. Everything I do for the Center enhances my life, too."

-Tina Merkel

businesses, artists and individuals for donations and in an outpouring of generosity, collected enough items for 16 live auction packages, raising more than \$36,000.

"It feels good to help those who can't help themselves," said Joe. "I consistently donate my time to the SLC auction because it's a place where the monies raised go directly to help the people."