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Former Lion Takes Ill Children Into Great Outdoors

November 13, 2008

When Tony Semple wants to escape, he turns to his love of the outdoors. The former Detroit Lion offensive guard, who spent his entire nine-year career with the Lions, developed a passion for hunting and the great outdoors as a University of Memphis student.

After retiring from football following the 2002 season, Semple decided to utilize his favorite outdoor activities as a way to help terminally ill children escape from the reality of their prognosis. Inspired by the indomitable spirit of a terminally ill boy he once hosted at a Lions game, Semple joined forces with his friend Craig Mortz to create The Tony Semple Foundation For Hope, an organization that offers outdoor adventure programs geared toward rejuvenating severely challenged or terminally ill youth.

"I'm proud of this organization," Semple said. "We have fellowship around the campfires and grow together as a family. This is a place where our candidates can put down their protective shield from the world and open up to experience what is real in life."

The Tony Semple Foundation for Hope is currently hosting four to five camps per year, each lasting three or four days. The goal of the organization is to someday hold 10 to 15 camps around the country annually. Participants have the opportunity to take part in outdoor activities like hunting and fishing, hobbies that have long brought Semple joy and, more importantly, a diversion from his daily routine. Semple strives to build a supportive relationship with campers and is willing to do whatever it takes to enhance the lives of children facing the most difficult circumstances.

"A father of one of the participants told me that the camp helped his son cope with his disease by giving him a new appreciation for the outdoors," Semple said. "On one of our Outdoor Adventures I remember sitting around the campfire and watching one of our candidates turn to his mom and say, 'Mom, I haven't thought about the hospital once since we've been here!' That's powerful testimony when you understand what these kids go through in their daily hospital regimens."

Semple will continue to work on expanding the foundation and looks forward to coordinating camps and events all over the country. This year's 2008 Foundation for Hope events were held in Wisconsin, Florida and Michigan. Semple ultimately hopes to garner participation from each NFL team that plays in a state where outdoor adventures are hosted.

In addition, Semple would like to increase the number of camp participants as well as the number of NFL players involved with the organization. Several retired players have recently volunteered their time and support, including Adam Timmerman, Bill Schroeder and Marc Spindler. The foundation is involved with active players as well. This year Brett Favre and the Brett Favre Fourward Foundation fully sponsored the 2008 Outdoor Adventure in Wisconsin for five kids.

For more information or to make a donation, please visit www.tonysemplefoundation.org.

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