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Bringing back the roar to Detroit and its neighborhoods through the Detroit Lions “Living for the City” program

Posted on August 3, 2013 by [Marge Sorge](#)



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The Detroit Lions want to bring back the roar to Detroit and they have a plan to do it.

Sure, they want to roar into the Super Bowl next January but there is so much more to the team than football. Last year the Lions launched an entirely new community engagement strategy in an effort to make a stronger and more lasting impact in Detroit from a grass roots level. The team's Living for the City initiative now focuses on sustainable community health, wellness, and development in the city of Detroit, and the team and its players are totally involved.



Linebacker Tahir Whitehead plays four-square at Detroit Lions Academy during Hometown Huddle, a league-wide day of service

"Living for the City is a reflection of the Detroit Lions' commitment to Detroit's resurgence and our focus on areas of critical need," said team president Tom Lewand. "It supports innovative citizen philanthropy and promotes personal and community wellbeing. The Detroit Lions organization is excited for the potential that Living for the City continues to offer for making a real difference in the community we all call home."



Ad in Detroit Free Press

To publicly show their commitment to Detroit the team took out a full-page ad in the Detroit Free Press. The ad simply says "One Detroit. One pride."

"Everybody makes comparisons between the Lions and Detroit and all those things. I'd like those comparisons to be resiliency, blue-collar, hard work, toughness," said head coach Jim Schwartz. "I think those are the things that are most important about the city of Detroit. And those are the things that I hope the Lions reflect in that."

Through Living for the City, the Detroit Lions aligned itself with organizations that support innovative citizen philanthropy and promote personal and community

wellbeing.

"People here are fantastic, and that's what makes me want to give back and help out, and I'm just lucky enough to play for an organization like the Lions that's willing to give us a platform like "Living for the City" that makes it easy for players to go out and give back," said Lions quarterback Matthew Stafford when the initiative was announced last September.



Matt Stafford at a Living for the City Playworks session in Eastern Market's Shed 3

So what are some of their examples of how the team is getting involved?

The Lions are participating in year two of [Challenge Detroit](#) and will host a fellow for one year beginning in August. I bet the 33 young people chosen as fellows this year are fighting over his one.



Rob Sims at the Lunch with the Lions program at Eastern Market

The Lions work with [D:hive](#) to encourage fans to explore the greater downtown Detroit area and experience the many downtown bars and restaurants on game day.

They are also partnering with [Come Play Detroit](#) to provide exciting opportunities for downtown employees to transform Ford Field into an indoor playground for adult yoga, kickball, etc. Speaking of Ford Field, it is source for the [Detroit Economic Growth Corporation's D2D initiative](#). That program encourages Detroit business to buy more from each other. The DEGC says it could add 7,700 more jobs and increase their revenue by \$2.5 billion over the next ten years and help rebuild the

city's economy.

If that wasn't enough, here are some of other programs the team supports:

- Detroit Lions Academy:** An alternative public middle school located in Detroit's east side that supports at-risk students experiencing challenges in traditional educational settings. During the 2013-14 school year the Lions will provide a number of ancillary programming elements, including weekly [Playworks Detroit](#) recess sessions, yoga conducted by the [Yoga By Design Foundation](#), community garden program, and a fully integrated health and wellness curriculum sponsored Walgreens, the official pharmacy of the Detroit Lions.
- Playworks Detroit:** In accordance with the Lions Play 60 program, Playworks Detroit encourages play as a way to help kids make the right choices when it comes to respecting and including others. During the school year, trained program coordinators work with students at the Detroit Lions Academy and Detroit Public Schools.
- Eastern Market Corporation:** In an effort to address food insecurity and food access in the city of Detroit, the Lions will continue to partner with Eastern Market on the second annual Lunch with the Lions program. The program provides vouchers for fresh foods from Eastern Market, Lions Play 60 recess sessions and cooking lessons from Chef Joe Nader at Ford Field to students at the Detroit Public Schools. The program also includes a Lions player or alumni speaking to students about the importance of healthy eating, followed by a tour of the market with the students. The program is held every Tuesday, September thru October, at Eastern Market and is a component of Tuesday's at Eastern Market.
- Hatch Detroit:** Hatch Detroit and the Lions are partnering to help Detroit neighborhoods, which are a critical component of the revitalization of the region, shine a spotlight on entrepreneurs who contribute to the community, keep their surrounding areas safe and clean, and are an asset to the neighborhood and its growth. In 2013, the focus has been on The Avenue of Fashion (Livernois, between Seven and Eight Mile Roads). Future neighborhood initiatives will take place in the Villages, North End, Grandmont-Rosedale, Southwest Detroit and Corktown.
- Goodwill Industries of Greater Detroit:** Goodwill Industries of Greater Detroit and the Detroit Lions will once again join forces on "Rock for Jobs." "Rock for Jobs" is a celebration of Detroit's musical past and present, and a collaboration to support and create a brighter economic future for the city of Detroit and a fundraiser to support job training, education and placement programs that put Metro Detroiters back to work. The concert brings together many of the stars who build and continue contributing to the city's reputation for being musically renowned. Details for this year's concert will be available in the coming months.



Matthew Stafford and Calvin Johnson during a Playworks session at the launch of Living for the City in Eastern Market last year



Halftime event (December 22 vs. Atlanta Falcons at Ford Field) where the Lions celebrated/promoted Playworks

"We remain optimistic about Detroit's future," Lewand said. "The entire Lions and Ford Field team, both on and off the field, will continue our efforts to make positive contributions to our community's next great chapter."

It's exciting to bring back the roar... on the field, and off.

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Weary Spirits Watch: Lions Show Hometown Pride With New Slogan

August 14th, 2013, 7:10 AM

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We'll see and hear more of a new Lions slogan -- One Detroit, One Pride -- as the team tries to, yes, lift a weary city's spirits.

Team president Tom Lewand talks to Free Press columnist Tom Walsh about the tagline introduced last month.

It's "an expression of our feelings about about what it means to be a Detroiter in tough times . . . looking at this as an opportunity for anyone who is a Detroiter to embrace the community," Lewand tells the business writer.

Since the tagline first appeared last month, the Lions have used it during public days at the team's Allen Park training camp and will soon be deploying it in a multipronged effort to support economic development projects, along with health and wellness initiatives around the city.

Though the phrase was developed before Detroit's bankruptcy filing July 18, that action spurred a quick play.

Three days later, the tagline "One Detroit, One Pride" made its public debut in the center of a full-page advertisement in the Sunday Detroit Free Press, with only a photo of the Detroit skyline as a backdrop and the blue Lions logo at the bottom of the page.

Lewand explains: "There was a strong feeling on our part that we needed to pull that idea ahead, instead of waiting for training camp or the regular season to roll that out."

Now it will be part of the Lions' partnership with Hatch Detroit to boost retail storefront development in six Detroit neighborhoods, starting with the "Avenue of Fashion" on Livernois.

Businesses in each area will get an "extreme Hatch makeover," including new signage, lighting, window displays and the like — and involving Lions players, fans and alumni as volunteers.



Lions players and alumni joined an "Avenue of Fashion" cleanup on Livernois in May. They pose with Vittoria Katanski, executive director of Hatch Detroit, and Rufus Bartell (white shirt), owner of Simply Casual .



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Lions' goal to help city of Detroit be a winner

JOSH KATZENSTEIN THE DETROIT NEWS 20 COMMENTS



Lions running back Joique Bell, a Wayne State alum, said the 'One Detroit, One Pride' initiative is 'well overdue.' (Daniel Mears / Detroit News)

Allen Park — “One Detroit, One Pride.”

For decades, the Lions have provided hope — though not always victories — for the downtrodden city of Detroit, and although the team hatched its 2013 slogan before the city filed for Chapter 9 bankruptcy, the message of togetherness remains.

But while the Lions have added new community initiatives, president Tom Lewand said the best way the team can help Detroit is by winning.

“The first thing that we need to do is win on Sundays,” Lewand said Tuesday. “We need to play well. We need to give people a product that they can be proud of. That’s where the focus has to be, but while you’re doing that, while you’re preparing for it, you do look at opportunities to give back to the community.”

The Lions weren’t planning on announcing their “One Detroit, One Pride” theme until the season began, but three days after Detroit filed for bankruptcy (July 18), team officials took out a full-page ad in the Free Press displaying the new slogan. The motto also hangs over the entrance to the practice facility and graces the cover of the team’s media guide.

“We go through bankruptcy as a community,” Lewand said. “It touches everybody, and we all have a sense of pride. We all bristle when something negative is written about our city or you get the pictures, the ruin porn people post. That affects all of us, and we all have a little sense of pride and of defending our community.”

“The fact that we took the ad out when we did was a way of sending a positive message about the fact that we’re all in this together.”

Among their many community initiatives, the Lions are ramping up their “Living for the City” program, which started last September. Every Tuesday in September and October, a Lions player will meet with Detroit Public Schools elementary students at Eastern Market to talk about nutrition.

Team officials also are continuing their work on neighborhood development programs with Hatch Detroit.

“As these programs continue to develop and evolve, they’re going to really expand and thrive,” Lions spokesman Ben Manges said.

The Lions also are looking into in-game contests that will benefit charity, with this being the first year the NFL is allowing digital raffling, Manges said.

Cornerback Ron Bartell, a product of Detroit Renaissance High, thinks good play on Sundays can help people briefly escape the dark reality facing the city.

“The city is going through a transition right now,” he said. “It’s unfortunate but it’s something that, quite frankly, needs to happen. I think if we, as a team, can help people just for one day out of the week get away from the realities going on in this city, then I think it could be a huge boost.”

Bartell also understands the Lions, as highly paid professional athletes, are capable of helping off the field, too, which is part of the reason he’s planning on opening a restaurant on the west side this fall.

“Reaching out to the community, giving back any way that we can, inspiring people, I think that’s a huge part of it,” Bartell said. “We all play a role, and me personally it touches home because I’m from here and I want to do what I can to help in any way possible, whether that’s being a mentor to young people, being an example or whether it’s helping provide employment. It’s definitely something that I take serious, and I’m glad as an organization the Lions are stepping up.”

Lions running back Joique Bell has spent some time in Detroit, too. After graduating from Benton Harbor High, Bell attended Wayne State. Although the Lions have supported the community in various ways for decades, Bell said the “One Detroit, One Pride” idea is “well overdue.”

“When you think of Detroit, you think of the Detroit Lions,” he said. “We represent Detroit, so for us to be able to come and say one pride, one team, we’re not just talking about the team. We’re talking about the entire city.”

Bell also said the bankruptcy could create a chip on many of the players’ shoulders, knowing wins mean more now than in the past.

“It would most definitely bring the city closer together, give us something to fight for, give us something to hope for,” Bell said. “We know the situation that our city is in right now, so when we’re out there playing, we’re not playing for just us, we’re not playing for just our family, but we’re playing for the city and we’re playing for hope.”

jkatzenstein@detroitnews.com
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How football foots bill: Lions work to put fans in stadium seats and on the couch watching TV

By [Bill Shea](#)

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The **Detroit Lions** play their first official game of the season on Sunday, confronting the Jekyll-and-Hyde reality faced by all **National Football League** owners and executives: the need to attract fans and their wallets to the stadium every Sunday (and some Thursdays and Mondays), while also keeping them watching games at home to fuel television ratings.

It takes a multipronged strategy to pay bills.

The league's cap on player salaries this season is \$123 million, and each team must spend at least \$106.8 million of that (89 percent), a requirement under the collective bargaining agreement with the players' union.

"Our business model is pretty simple: We try to generate revenue to pay players to win football games. It's the biggest line item on the cost side of our budget, player costs," said Lions President Tom Lewand.

The Lions enter 2013's season opener, at home against the **Minnesota Vikings**, having sold out every game at 65,000-seat Ford Field the past two seasons and continue an on- and off-field reconstruction of the franchise that began in 2009 with Lewand's elevation to team president.

To keep fans coming back, the Lions will host an elaborate **Bud Light**-sponsored pregame tailgate party near the stadium's Gate A entrance on Brush Street, replete with five food trucks, picnic-style eating and music.

The team also is rolling out a tablet app, has installed new turf, has bolstered Wi-Fi connectivity and plans a new game introduction production.

The Lions also dropped sales of the slick full-color game-day programs and instead will give fans a fold-out roster upon entering the stadium.

Detroit's popular **Slows Bar BQ** was available last season on the club level, and in 2013 is expanding its presence there and adding a "superstand" on the concourse level.

Pegasus Taverna and **Billy Sims BBQ** also will be on the concourse.

New on the club and suite level will be **Sugar House** cocktails, **Zingerman's Creamery**, **Corridor Sausage** and **Russell Street Deli**.

"Fans have a choice. It's also a choice as to whether they go to the zoo. It's how they're spending their day. Fans want an experience, sometimes at home, sometimes at a game," said Elizabeth Parkinson, the Lions' chief marketing officer. "We recognize that. We have different strategies on how we present ourselves to those different audiences."

Unshared money

Getting fans to the stadium is vital because NFL teams are permitted to keep certain local revenue: concessions, parking, merchandise sold at the stadium, and suite and club seat sales — which are about 10,000 seats at Ford Field.

The Lions get to keep 66 percent of regular ticket sales for their home games. The remaining 34 percent is split evenly among the 31 other teams. The home team keeps revenue from suite and club seat sales.

But it's the TV ratings that translate into broadcast rights fees paid by the networks, the equally shared revenue lifeblood intended to promote competitive parity and team solvency.

In December 2011, the league's 32 owners approved TV deals with **Fox**, **CBS** and **NBC** that begin in 2014 and run through 2022 and have a combined worth of \$28 billion. That translates into nearly \$2 billion in new annual revenue from the contracts, which will be split equally

The league's total broadcast revenue, including deals with **ESPN** and satellite broadcaster **DirecTV**, will be about \$6 billion annually starting next year, according to an analysis by *The Wall Street Journal*.

The 32 teams equally split the national broadcast rights licensing fees, which last year amounted to \$179.9 million per team (a figure known thanks to the publicly owned **Green Bay Packers** being required to disclose an annual financial report).

Despite that, the Lions are said to be in the red.

Seeing red?

Detroit has posted operating income losses in six of the past seven seasons, according to an annual analysis by *Forbes.com*, with the 2009 season being the outlier at \$17.8 million in the black.

In 2012, *Forbes* estimated that the team lost \$3.5 million on revenue of \$248 million.

Forbes defines operating income as interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization, which allows a measurement of revenue-generating ability among teams in different tax situations. The Lions, like most pro sports teams, dispute the *Forbes* estimates but do not provide alternative numbers.

The team also carries one of the NFL's weightier debt loads, at \$279 million based on *Forbes'* estimated 31 percent debt-to-value ratio for the Lions. The financial news website put a \$900 million value on the team.

Lewand said that the debt was refinanced in 2012, but he didn't disclose any details.

The debt stems from the team financing, via loans and private-sector contributions, about \$420 million of Ford Field's \$500 million construction cost.

Lewand, who said several new corporate deals will be announced in coming weeks, also is keeping the money flowing with non-Lions deals:

- In March, advertising agency **Lowe Campbell Ewald** signed an 11-year lease for 122,000 square feet on five of the seven floors of the old Hudson's warehouse that became office space attached to Ford Field. The agency is moving 600 staffers from Warren to the new offices once they're renovated by early next year. Financial terms of the lease between the agency and football team were not disclosed.

- The Lions announced this summer that they signed six-year deals with the **Big Ten** and **Atlantic Coast** conferences to participate in a new college football bowl to be played at Ford Field beginning in 2014. A deal has yet to be finalized with a naming-rights sponsor.

Bill Shea: (313) 446-1626, bshea@crain.com. Twitter: [@bill_shea19](#)

What's new for the Lions this year?

- The team gave veteran free-agent running back Reggie Bush, 28, a four-year, \$16 million contract on March 14.

- The Lions gave quarterback Matthew Stafford a three-year, \$53 million contract extension, which reportedly includes a \$27.5 million signing bonus, in July. Various media reports say the contract extension, which covers the 2015-17 seasons, includes \$43 million in guaranteed money.

Stafford, 25, currently is in a six-year, \$73.5 million deal that runs through 2014, according to pro sports salary tracking website *Spotrac.com*. He threw 727 passes, an all-time NFL record, last season.

- The Lions announced this summer that they've signed six-year deals with the **Big Ten** and **Atlantic Coast** conferences to participate in a new college football bowl that will be at Ford Field beginning in 2014. A deal has yet to be finalized with a naming-rights sponsor.

- Advertising agency **Lowe Campbell Ewald**, which is moving its 600-person headquarters from Warren to five floors of office space inside Ford Field, created the "One Pride" branding campaign for the Lions, which was launched to much praise with a full-page advertisement in the *Detroit Free Press* the day after the city filed for Chapter 9 municipal bankruptcy.

- The Lions agreed to a deal in July with Dan Gilbert-owned paperless digital game ticket company **Veritix LLC**, the first NFL team to do so. Individual-game Lions tickets are now handled through **Flash Seats**, the name of Veritix's digital ticketing system.

Flash Seats allows fans, for Lions games and other Ford Field events, to enter the stadium with a digital ID, such as a credit card or driver's license. A ticket-taker then prints a map to the fan's seat.

Veritix replaces Ticketmaster, which will continue to sell Lions tickets as a secondary-market provider under a deal with the NFL.

- Verizon** installed new technology at Ford Field in December to offer free wireless access and improved connectivity for its customers during games.

- In February, the team replaced the original artificial turf at Ford Field, from 2002, with a new field from the same manufacturer, Montreal-based **FieldTurf**. The Lions are selling pieces of the original turf online and at the stadium. The rest was recycled.

Source: Crain's research, Forbes.com, ESPN, Detroit Lions

Can Lions get a double bump?

The **Detroit Lions** cobbled together a 10-6 season two years ago, earning a playoff spot for the first time since 1999, but inexplicably collapsed to 4-12 last year and reignited fan grumbling and media criticism.

Losing a dozen games in 2012 didn't harm attendance. Playoff teams traditionally see a ticket sales boost the following year, and the Lions got a very slight bump last season after 2011's wild-card berth.

Whether last year's losing affects attendance in 2013 remains to be seen. Detroit's two home preseason games were both sellouts.

In 2012, the Lions averaged 63,769 attendees per home game, good for 22nd in the 32-team **National Football League**. That was 98.9 percent of Ford Field's capacity, 14th-best in the league.

In 2011, the team averaged 63,742 per game, 21st in the league, and capacity was 98.8 percent, ranking 13th in the NFL. The incremental movement in rankings was because of other teams moving up and down.

— *Bill Shea*

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