

This weekend began months ago

Ripken party of 320 is wife Kelly's creation

BY DAN CONNOLLY
(SUN REPORTER)

Kelly Ripken wasn't going to wait until the last minute to plan for this Hall of Fame weekend. Not with a guest list of 320. Not when the invitees to Cooperstown, N.Y., included folks from John Travolta to Jeff Reboulet. Not with three parties to plan.

So she started last fall, months before husband Cal Ripken Jr. even was voted into the Hall of Fame.

In a perfect example of the legendary Ripken preparedness, Kelly Ripken traveled to Cooperstown to get a sense of the place, a decision that paid off when the inevitable was announced in January.

"I had never seen the town," she said. "Now, I was able to visualize what it looked like and how to do things. It helped me plan."

Planning a big event is nothing new for Kelly Ripken, the first lady of Orioles baseball and coordinator of various charitable fund-raisers throughout the years.

It reminds her of planning her wedding nearly 20 years ago — except this is bigger, more complicated and several hundred miles from home.

"It's like a wedding and then some," Kelly Ripken said. "At a wedding, it is your event and you have control of it and you choose the hotels your guests stay in. In this case, people have to understand that Cal and our family are guests of the Hall of Fame. It's not our party; it is theirs. We go by what they would like us to do."

The immediate Ripken family, Cal, Kelly and children Rachel and Ryan, will stay at the luxurious Otesaga Resort Hotel, where the rest of the Hall of Famers will be.

Their extended families are staying in another location arranged by Kelly Ripken. The hundreds of remaining guests and thousands of Orioles fans are spread within and around the upstate New York village.

The Ripkens' list of invited guests alone might be a record at Cooperstown; it breaks Ripken family records, anyway.

For their wedding in November 1987,



The party planning clock was already ticking for Kelly Ripken (left) when husband Cal Ripken Jr. got the official word from the Baseball Hall of Fame in January.
GENE SWEENEY JR. (SUN PHOTOGRAPHER)

they hosted 275 people. Their guest list for this weekend in Cooperstown is 320. That doesn't include the 200 or so employees of Ripken Baseball that will be there as guests of the company.

"This is insane," she joked. "This is nuts."

The guest list was revised, and revised some more. It includes family, close friends and business associates, locally and nationally. Among the notables from the Baltimore business community are Steve Geppi, Orioles minority owner and president of Diamond Comic Distributors, and prominent attorney Ron Shapiro, Ripken's longtime agent.

"I represented Cal since he was a rookie. Being there and seeing this ultimate recognition for all he has accomplished in his career is an important milestone. And I wouldn't miss it for the world," said Shapiro, who now has five clients in the Hall

of Fame. "On a broader scale, it is important to be there to show support for someone who has done so much beyond his accomplishments on the field."

The biggest A-list celebrities are actor Travolta and his actress wife, Kelly Preston, with whom the Ripkens became friendly when Travolta was filming the movie *Ladder 49* in Baltimore.

Also in attendance will be an Orioles contingent of roughly 25 representatives, including majority owner Peter Angelos, his wife Georgia and their two sons, executive vice president Mike Flanagan, athletic trainer Richie Bancells and umpires attendant Ernie Tyler.

As returning Hall of Famers, Orioles legends Earl Weaver, Eddie Murray, Jim Palmer and Brooks Robinson and Frank Robinson are expected, as are some of Ripken's closest former teammates, in-

cluding Brady Anderson, B.J. Surhoff and Reboulet.

In forming the guest list, the Ripkens didn't address many former teammates because of the sheer number. Instead, they left it open-ended; if old Orioles inquired, then they'd extend an invitation.

"For him, it would have been a difficult thing to do. Gee, who do I invite?" Kelly Ripken said.

For the most part, the husband stepped aside when it came to the arrangements, letting his wife take charge.

Earlier this year, the coordinating began for what are essentially three separate parties. And if the invitation is an indication of the weekend, it should be a memorable time for their guests. Wanting an invitation befitting the events, she designed a booklet that resembles a scrapbook, with facts and pictures of her husband's career as well as party specifics.

"I never do anything simple," she said. "When it is an event, it is an event."

The first party, Thursday night, was a small affair — but an important one. It was their son Ryan's 14th birthday, so they celebrated it in Cooperstown with some friends and family. Yesterday, it was a lakeside barbecue sponsored by Maroon PR and mamma ilardo's restaurants.

Tonight, the night before the ceremony, Geppi and the Geier Financial Group are sponsoring a dinner party.

The guest of honor will be at each event, of course. But he'll also be jumping all around Cooperstown.

There was a golf tournament yesterday afternoon and a private dinner with a Hall representative and fellow inductee Tony Gwynn and his wife.

Today, he'll throw out the first pitch of his Aberdeen IronBirds' game at Cooperstown's Doubleday Field. He also will attend an afternoon news conference, an early evening party thrown by the Orioles and evening cocktails with the rest of the Hall of Famers at the museum.

Oh, and then there's the induction ceremony and speech tomorrow.

Good thing he had his own event planner to handle the other commitments.

"It was one less thing he had to worry about and something I enjoyed doing," Kelly Ripken said. "I volunteered. I said, 'I'd do it.' It was great fun."

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