

Julie Lankey-Smallwood - Wonewoc, WI

I am nominating my mom, Julie Lankey-Smallwood, to be named the 2022 Packers FAN Hall of Fame inductee. My mom has lived her entire life in the small town of Wonewoc, Wisconsin. She didn't have the luxury of growing up in a Packer family. She began the legacy! She began watching the Packers as a fifth grader and teaching herself the game of football. My aunts claimed she would sit in front of the television in her Bart Starr shirt with her football clenched in her arms. When the Packers won – elation! When they lost, it would ruin her day. Her enthusiasm piqued the interest of other family members who themselves became Packer fans. She would clip out every newspaper article about the Packers, keeping them in a box. When her parents saw how important the Packers were to her, they started taking her to Fan Photo Day every year. The highlight of her year would be to get player autographs and have her picture taken with them. When my sister and brother and I were growing up, Packer games meant all activities stopped so we could watch the Packers! We would dress in our Packer gear; my little brother, Lucas, would play catch with a tattered green and gold Nerf football during the game. One day, tragedy visited our home. Upon awakening one morning, my mom was devastated by the unexplained, sudden death of my brother. There were no answers for what happened but years later, it was discovered that Lucas had an undiagnosed genetic heart disorder, inherited from my mom. When life seemed unbearable—Mom had three things to help her through the loss—her faith, her two daughters, and the Packers. She signed us up for the season ticket waiting list. This year we are still #20444 on the list. In 2006, the unthinkable happened. My 24-year-old sister, Nicole, passed away suddenly in the night, dying along with her unborn son, my mom's first grandchild. It was the same genetic heart disorder that took my brother. Now I am an only child. How would my mom survive? She did, because she is the strongest person I know. Mom and I are each other's salvation. She and I went to one Packer game when the temperature was minus 30 degrees. We wore blaze orange coveralls, used hand/foot warmers and drank hot chocolate to stay warm. Throughout years of heartache, there have been some joys. My husband and I welcomed a baby girl and at her baby shower Mom gave her a special gift -- Aaron Rodgers jersey put inside a football with the inscription "Bring her up right!" Every year on her birthday, our entire family goes out for breakfast. We are required to wear Packer gear! Her birthday and Christmas lists always include Packers clothing and puzzles. Julie Lankey-Smallwood is a super Packers fan. I love her to the moon and back, and I respectfully nominate my mom for the 2022 Packers FAN Hall of Fame.