

**SEASON OPENER** CHIEFS@RAVENS, 1 P.M. TODAY

**Meet 7 off-the-field stars who help  
make Ravens games exciting**

# TEAM SPIRIT



Steve LaPlanche of Pasadena will don 50-plus pounds of beads today for his 331st straight home football game.

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**N**otice more purple and black around town lately? That's a sure sign that the Ravens' season opener is approaching, transforming the Baltimore area's visual landscape just as surely as fall foliage will soon dot the countryside.

But there's more: The aromas of sizzling sausage cooking on a tailgater's grill, the pulsating sounds of the marching bands, the thousands of fans who chant and cheer in a fist-pumping frenzy. The behind-the-scenes staffers working to make sure everything goes without a hitch.

And that's before today's game starts.

We asked fans — from minister to law enforcement officer, from musician to bus driver — about their feelings as the season approached. Here are their stories:

## Sports Steve

"Sports" Steve LaPlanche has a job, a wife, kids and a house. Things that, you know, are quite important to him.

But, he'll tell you, they aren't his passion. At his heart is a nubby piece of cowhide getting kicked, grabbed and man-handled down a field.

"I've dedicated my life to football," the 56-year-old Pasadena resident says. "I feel like a kid when opening day comes. And when the season is over, I'm a really down person. I've just  
See **SPIRIT**, page 16

**SPIRIT**, From page 1  
always loved football."

LaPlanche, a captain in the Anne Arundel County sheriff's department, went to his first Colts game as a 3-year-old at his dad's knee in 1956. He says he hasn't missed a Colts, Stars, Stallions or Ravens home game since. Today, assuming he makes it — and why wouldn't he? — LaPlanche will mark his 331st consecutive home game.

As always, he'll ride a fan bus into Baltimore and before it comes to a full stop, he'll have layered on 51.2 pounds of festive beads, squashed a purple jester's cap onto his head and painted his round face.

After prowling the tailgate area, he'll head for the Johnny Unitas statue, to solemnly rub that famous bronze foot and salute the face he all but worships.

After posing for pictures and handing out the trading cards of himself that he has printed each year, LaPlanche will find his way to Section 138, Row 6, Seat 14, to scream, dance, sweat and cheer until it's time to get back on the bus.

And when he dies? Just bury him, he says, in a Ravens casket.