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## Hats Off

NFL PLAYER IS RAISING FUNDS FOR VILLAGE OF MERICI THROUGH A CREATIVE ENDEAVOR



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NFL PLAYER IS RAISING FUNDS FOR VILLAGE OF MERICI THROUGH A CREATIVE ENDEAVOR

“I AM SO GRATEFUL THAT A FUN GIFT AND PROJECT HAS FOUND A SPECIAL PURPOSE.”

— TED KARRAS, CINCINNATI BENGALS



Ted Karras

Writer / Renée Larr  
Photographer / Justin Sicking

An act of friendship toward new teammates is blossoming into a full-fledged philanthropic endeavor for Cincinnati Bengals player Ted Karras. When Karras moved to Cincinnati, he wanted to gift his new teammates with something special — a hat emblazoned with the word Cincy and a large cat scratch mark. Fans and local media quickly took notice of the players wearing hats in the locker room, peppering them with questions about where they got the hats and how others could get their hands on one.

Karras is looking to capitalize on the newfound attention for the piece of apparel by selling them online, with the proceeds going to the Village of Merici in Indianapolis. The organization

provides direct support services, learning opportunities, and independent living through partnerships with various developers. The Village of Merici currently supports more than 75 people throughout Indianapolis with a goal of self-reliance.

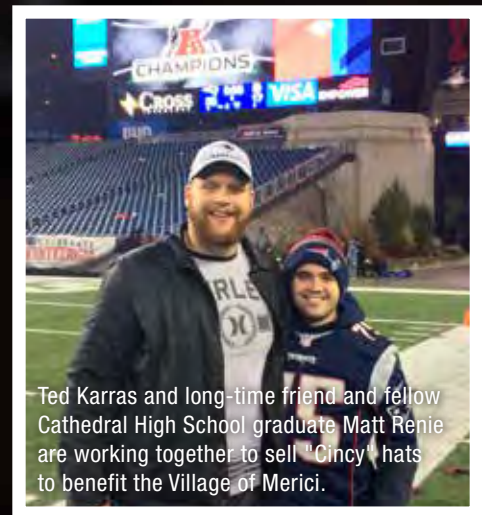
“The hats were originally a fun gift for my new teammates through a family friend’s golf supply business,” Karras says. “I figured everyone loves to get a piece of gear, and the response from my teammates, Bengal fans, and media members was extraordinary. The demand for the hats grew rapidly thanks to my teammates wearing them in interviews, and we decided to sell them, but it had to benefit Village of Merici.”

Karras’ involvement with Village of Merici is thanks to childhood friend Matt Renie. Karras and Renie both attended Saint

Matthew Grade School and Cathedral High School in Indianapolis. Renie recently stepped in to facilitate the logistics of producing and selling the hats.

“Ted grew up as a family friend observing his friend’s brother who has intellectual and developmental disabilities,” says Colleen Renie, Executive Director of Village of Merici, and Matt’s mother. “Ted also has a family member with autism. He saw the potential in individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their desire to live independently as they grew up, just like other people want their own place to live, have a job, do fun things in the community and have money to achieve those goals. Ted saw the struggles of his friend’s brother who had limitations in earning money, trying to find affordable housing, and acceptance in the community





Ted Karras and long-time friend and fellow Cathedral High School graduate Matt Renie are working together to sell "Cincy" hats to benefit the Village of Merici.

and finding friends.”

There are currently three hats available, with a fourth in the works. The hats retail for \$35 each, and customers can choose from black, orange or white. Matt says the pair hope to sell as many as possible. The fourth hat will be white with a black logo to match one of the fans’ favorite new uniforms.

They’re utilizing some of the people served by the Village of Merici to assist in packaging and shipping the hats. Colleen says finding employment opportunities for the individuals they support is critical.

“It’s still a little up in the air, but we’re hoping to involve the community there in some of the logistics,” Matt says. “We’re considering making this an employment opportunity for some of them and a volunteer opportunity based on volume.”

Colleen says the funds will go to supporting the programs that teach and support individuals in independent living skills to enable them to be successful. The selling of the hats is really a two-fold win for Village of Merici.

“Not only are we helping to raise needed funds, but we’re also looking to get the name of the organization and what they do out in the world,” Matt says. “Many people resonate with the idea of knowing an adult with developmental disabilities but haven’t heard of Village of Merici. We’re hoping to start a conversation.”

Colleen says the people Village of Merici serve know and love Ted. She says he visits when he’s in town, and they watch him play on Sundays. Ted has even brought his Super Bowl rings for them to see and try on. He’s also spent time teaching them card games,

and he texts with several of them. They know how he supports their lives with his donations and sincere interest.

“I am so grateful that a fun gift and project has found a special purpose,” Karras says. “It’s a great hat with an awesome design that I hope can become the unofficial hat of the Bengals. Our goal is that these hats can provide an income stream for the Village and involve many villagers in the process. The Village of Merici is a very special place that does so much good. Any way I can ever help their cause is a special opportunity for me.”

To purchase a hat, visit [thecincyhat.com](http://thecincyhat.com).

The website also offers a link for donations for Village of Merici. For more information regarding Village of Merici, visit [villageofmerici.org](http://villageofmerici.org).

