*“Ohana means family, and family means nobody gets left behind.” - Lilo*

It’s a bold statement. “Best weekend of the year”.

For the lucky “elite”, some claim it’s Nationals weekend. The culmination of a full season of college or club when you get to lay it all on the line with the people you’ve been working so hard with for months. It’s a chance for you to exceed exceed expectations and prove yourself.

For another group of players, Wildwood weekend will reign supreme. Some can’t stay away from the hot sand with dangerous objects scattered just beneath the surface combined with the scent of the closest Hot Spot where a Philly Cheesesteak Pizza is a staple on the menu, all-the-while listening to the constant sound of “watch the tramcar please” in the background. People fly in from across the country to experience the “beautiful” beaches of Wildwood, NJ and make the annual pilgrimage every year.

On the 2nd weekend of every November a group of ultimate players descend on a college campus in Troy, NY. Some are coming fresh off a weekend at Nationals, and others haven’t picked up a disc since the same weekend last year. Troy isn’t known for much. In fact, until recently, it’s had a pretty negative reputation and people avoided it like the plague. November in Troy is also far from pleasant. It’s regularly in the 30’s, rains every other day and regularly snows. Far from an idyllic paradise. Yet, every year, this same group of players return. Welcome to F-Giving.

F-Giving (Frisbee Thanksgiving) was started by a group of RPI Ultimate players in the mid 90’s and remains a staple of the program to this day. RPI is a no-name DIII school based right outside of Albany and isn’t considered famous for anything but Engineering and Hockey. Everyone confuses us with Rochester. We hate that… But Rensselaer is hard to spell. Most of you probably haven’t even heard of RPI, but you’ve likely heard the names of players who’ve gone there. You couldn’t play club in the late 90’s without hearing about Brandon Steets (‘00), one of the most dominant cutters of his generation. If you played mixed in the Northeast in the late 2000’s you definitely bumped into (or were run over by) “Fat” Zac Hilton (‘08). In recent years you may have even heard of Alex Grin (‘08) or Emma Stoltze (‘12) who lead Metro North to a finals appearance in the mixed division or Dan Donovan who captained Michigan’s High Five. RPIs latest celebrity player is Tamar Austin (‘18), winner of the Donovan Award and a major contributor on Boston’s Wild Card. For a small school, we’ve got swag.

The annual tradition is centered around one idea: family. It’s a common mantra amongst ultimate teams, and one that’s proven valuable for many across divisions and calibers. The ultimate community provides a sense of belonging. Between club teams, leagues, pick up groups and goalty games, our community prides itself on being able to make you feel at home anywhere in the world. For some reason, college seems to be different. Maybe it’s the endless hours spent together in the dining halls, maybe it’s the 11 hour road trips to go to an out-of-state tournament because “why not?”, maybe it’s the fact that you lived and breathed the same life almost step-for-step for 4 years at a time of life where change was not only inevitable, but required. These big moments create bonds that can’t be described in simple words. When people talk about their college days it almost comes out as a fantasy, a far off-world that can’t be accessed again. Regardless of why, our teams made us feel at home. They were our family.

F-Giving helps us capture those moments again. Not the late-night study sessions or debaucherous evenings, but connections and bonds we formed. Players across generations come together to share that experience and association. Regardless of your age, background or gender, you’re welcomed into the family, a connection we guarantee for life. New friendships are formed between alums both new and old and stories are passed around, ensuring legacy survives.

“Remember that time Johnny did donuts on the field and got us kicked out before finals?”

RPI attends tournaments as an alumni team, from Fools Fest to Sunbreak, but F-Giving is pinnacle of it all. With an average of 100+ attendees each year, the weekend encompasses a hat tournament between all current and alumni players, a skills competition (TRC, longest huck & accuracy), the coveted alumni vs. currents game, a quest for the Green Jacket in the annual frolf game and a formal Thanksgiving feast.

This weekend is not about ultimate. It may be the thing that brought us together, an excuse for us to gather, but is certainly not the reason we keep coming back. In the slick winter of Troy we trudge back to our alma mater to share, connect, educate and learn. This weekend is about family, and the love we all share for one another. Somehow, we leave every year with our hearts fuller than they were before.

This marks the 22nd year of the annual tradition, with the alums looking to extend their winning streak to 9. Shenanigans will ensue and new memories will be formed. It’s guaranteed.

As years come and go, not every alum will attend annually as their families grow and other responsibilities increase. Others move abroad to explore new opportunities, and some get caught up in the other amazing adventures life brings. We keep in touch throughout the year through email threads and a GroupMe that never seems to quiet down, but F-Giving is the moment we all congregate to share those moments again. It’s kept us close after all these years and birthed the strength of a team and community that continues to thrive and grow.

This is my team. This is my family. This is the best weekend of the year.