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Fans in N.Y. keep up with Tide

Big Apple gatherings focus on UA

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For New York investment banker Heath Terry, home is where the heart is.

And while his physical home is in New York, his heart is in Alabama. Specifically, Alabama football.

Terry, who graduated from the University of Alabama in 1996, is one of hundreds of Alabama transplants living in New York City. But while he's established himself at an investment banking firm, his new life isn't without Crimson Tide football.

As vice president of the UA National Alumni Association chapter in New York, Terry helps organize events for Tide football fans to watch their team's games. After serving as president of the alumni association chapter in San Francisco, Terry was recruited to serve as vice president of the Greater New York Alumni chapter after he moved there. The chapter comprises more than 1,700 alumni and friends of UA in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut.

Terry said he knows what he's missing not seeing Alabama games in person, but he believes there's no better place to watch outside Tuscaloosa than in downtown Manhattan.

"It's a great group here that covers the entire spectrum," he said. "From people involved in the arts to finance, it's all over the place. Outside of being in the stadium, I don't think there's a better place to watch the game."



Photo submitted by Heath Terry
Members of the UA National Alumni Association chapter in New York City watch a Crimson Tide football game on TVs at the Ainsworth bar. The chapter meets there to watch the games. Photo submitted by Heath Terry

On any given Saturday during college football season, Terry and hundreds of other Alabama fans gather at the Ainsworth, a sports bar with 40 flat-screen televisions in the Manhattan neighborhood of Chelsea.

"We've got guys who are stand-up comedians, hedge fund managers to investment bankers. We've got writers like Warren St. John who comes to all our game-watches," he said. "We've got professional football players from the Giants and the Jets who played for Alabama before going pro."

He said the camaraderie of Alabama football fans in New York helps newcomers adjust to the city and feel more at home.

"You get up here, and you get homesick and you try to find ways to latch on to the stuff that you miss, and Alabama football becomes a way to keep in touch with things from home," he said. "You can't talk about the weather in Alabama in New York, but you can talk football."

Terry, who grew up in Birmingham, said his earliest Tide memories are of head coach Paul W. "Bear" Bryant. Of course, he attended football games while majoring in accounting at UA. The most memorable, he said, was the 1994 Alabama-Georgia game, when Michael Proctor kicked a last-minute field goal to clinch a 29-28 Tide win in Tuscaloosa.

"I still remember just sitting in that student section when everyone lost their mind. Everyone who had a cup launched it into the air. It was such a scene," he said.

Terry said he is excited about the Nick Saban era of Alabama football, and the absence of Crimson Tide football coverage in New York has only strengthened his love for the team.

"When you're in Alabama, you have easy access to Alabama football. Up here, you really have to fight for it," he said. "If you want to know, you have to do your research. It makes you work harder for it, and it makes you appreciate it that much more."

UA alum Huston Stewart, president of the Greater New York chapter for the past six years, said the chapter also gives Alabama fans and newcomers to New York a way to network.

"It's comforting to know that you can find a place in midtown Manhattan and be surrounded by Alabama football fans," he said.

Terry and Stewart plan to watch all of this season's games, either in person or on TV. Terry plans to return to UA for the games against Tennessee, Ole Miss, LSU and today's game against Florida International.

In New York, football gives Alabama fans a reason to get together and offers them a break from the daily grind.

"Even in a city this small, geographically speaking, it's hard to catch up with people. In a city like this, everybody is busy," he said. "This is the one thing a week that gives you a reason to get together with a lot of like-minded people.

"I can lie around in Central Park all day or play a game of golf, but at the end of the day, I have much more fun with friends watching the Alabama game."
