Coming home



PHOTOS BY REX BROWN | THE JOURNAL

Tigerama emcee Woody Dantzler, a former Clemson quarterback, looks over Memorial Stadium during practice Thursday for tonight's event.

Tigerama returns to Death Valley for first time since 2002

BY ERIC SPROTT
THE JOURNAL

CLEMSON — As an understudy last year, Caroline Lewis saw one highly anticipated stride when it came to Tigerama — a return to the event being held outdoors.

But Clemson University's annual homecoming pep rally didn't reach perfection when it moved to Doug Kingsmore Stadium from Littlejohn Coliseum — the home of the event from 2003-14 — as scores of people were turned away at the gate due to limited seating at the school's baseball stadium.

With the show under her direction as its student president this year, Lewis and a host of others made a pitch to the school's athletic department to return the show to Memorial Stadium — and they got the answer they were looking for.



Tigerama student president Caroline Lewis talks with emcee Woody Dantzler during practice on Thursday night at Memorial Stadium.

"Last year in Doug Kingsmore, it was so great, but we felt bad that we had to turn people away since there were a limited number of seats, so we knew we had to go for the stadium," said Lewis, a senior from Fort Mill who will graduate with a nursing degree in May. "We went in March and made a big pitch to the athletic department with reasons it should be back in Death Valley, and they said yes.

"I've been thinking about it since last year, and I was like, 'I'm getting it.'"

Months after getting that approval, Lewis was right where she wanted to be Thursday evening, on the field at Memorial Stadium running through rehearsal for tonight's show, which is returning to its original home for the first time since 2002 and will be emceed by former Clemson quarterback Woody Dantzler.

Ahead of the third-ranked Tigers' homecoming game against N.C. State on Saturday (noon, ABC), the 60th annual

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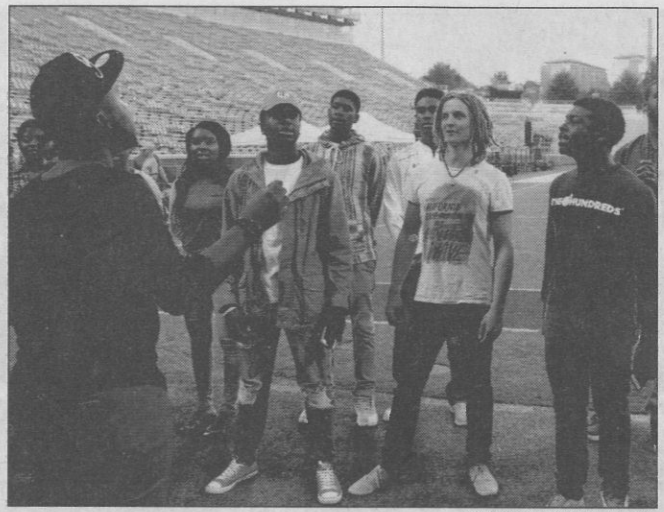
TIGERAMA: Will kick off at 7 p.m. tonight

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Tigerama will get underway at 7 p.m. Tickets are $15 at both the Hendrix Student Center and the gate today, with the football team, Tiger Band, the school's cheerleaders and Rally Cats among many others scheduled to appear. The show, themed "Coming Home to Clemson," will feature skits, floats and the homecoming court before concluding with a massive fireworks show.

The only stipulation for tonight's production was that students stay off the playing surface, as a stage has been set up on the north side of the stadium on the artificial turf that covers the sideline areas.

"We would have put a stage in the stands if we had to," Lewis said with a laugh.



REX BROWN | THE JOURNAL

Damian Williams, left, directs members of the Clemson University Gospel Choir during practice for Tigerama on Thursday at Memorial Stadium in Clemson.

The production has been an undertaking for Lewis, who is taking 18 credit hours this semester and has clinicals three times a week in Greenville. But despite fears of being overwhelmed by the prospect of running the show and taking care of her academic obligations, Lewis said those fears never came to fruition, adding the months of preparation have gone by in a flash.

"I can't imagine what it's going to be like when the fireworks go off and know that we pulled it off," she said. "This will definitely go down as my top memory of being a student at Clemson."

Memorial Stadium gates will open at 6 p.m., tonight. A pre-show event will be held from 5:30-6:30 p.m. outside the stadium. The Blue Ridge Bandits, a Clemson student band, will perform, and there will be games and giveaways.

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