

Two Teams. One Mission.



**Erin Gruenewald
Madison, WI**

Leading the Charge

Erin Gruenewald is like so many women professionals in Wisconsin – she wears many hats, works hard and is always up for a new challenge. In 2012, she and a co-worker saw a billboard advertising RivALZ, a women’s flag football game. “We thought it would be a lot of fun, so we signed up,” Erin said. “At the time, I didn’t have a personal connection to Alzheimer’s, but thought it seemed like a great cause.”

RivALZ is an Alzheimer’s Association signature event where two teams of women — divided to reflect rivalries — compete in a flag football game to inspire action in the fight against Alzheimer’s disease.

A Personal Connection

Now 10 years later, Erin is one of the charter members to bring RivALZ to Madison. While she joined the event with no personal connection, that all changed. “During my time with RivALZ, my grandfather developed Alzheimer’s,” Erin shared. “It’s a devastating disease. It was so hard, not only for my grandfather, but for my grandma who was his caregiver. You never know when it will affect you, so being aware of the disease and how fast everything can happen is important.” Erin lost her grandfather in 2021 to Alzheimer’s and her grandma, his eternal caregiver, just two weeks later.

Creating Connections – A Friendly Competition

“RivALZ brings together an amazing group of women, for an important cause,” Erin said. “The teams have a family dynamic and we have an awesome retention rate. We typically start practices together, so everyone gets to know each other, before we break off into our separate teams. Year after year, we see veteran players coming back, and recruiting, to gain more players and elevate the mission.”



“You never know if dementia is affecting someone you’re in close contact with every day,” Erin said. “We start practices by sharing if you have connection to the cause. RivALZ is a safe place to have a conversation and open up if you know someone on this devastating journey. My teammates and opponents are like family, and each year I look forward to coming together with them to bring awareness of Alzheimer’s.”

Playing for the next Generation

“While this is a flag football game, it gives us a platform to raise awareness to make a difference in the fight against Alzheimer’s,” Erin said. “Now that I have a family of my own, my hope is to one day not have to worry about my kids developing this heartbreaking disease.”

The Madison RivALZ competition – with Beta vs. Tau teams – is competing in their eighth season of play this year (after a 2-year hiatus due to the pandemic). Erin, a marketing consultant at WMSN Fox 47-TV & Compulse Integrated Marketing, is the Team Captain for the Tau’s team. Her biggest fans are her kids Grace, 2 and Luke, 3 months.

