

Anyone planning a reunion...?

Your class's anniversary year—10, 25, (gasp!) 50—is approaching. You anxiously read the TAA newsletter and comb www.taftalumni.org for news that someone has gotten the ball rolling. Sound familiar? The catch is that everyone is doing the same...and no one is taking the bull by the horns. The excuses? It's too hard...I don't have time...(and my favorite) I was a nobody in school. Nonsense!

Most alumni equate reunion planning to root canal, but let's be honest—today's root canal has become fairly painless. So has reunion planning, and with some careful thought and an enthusiastic planning committee, YOU can pull it off. TAA has accumulated lots of reunion experience, so we're offering a few tips to get you started.

Do-It-Yourself or Professional Planner?

If you anticipate that your turnout will be small, or if you prefer to keep your hands on the reins at all times, then do-it-yourself is the way to go. Begin a year before the projected reunion date, if possible, by first forming a committee. If you don't live locally, contact a few classmates who do. Consider contacting the class officers. Delegate one person to maintain the master class list. Select reliable people on your committee to whom you'll delegate budgeting, securing a site, catering (often handled on-site), decorations, mailings and invitations, phone calls, door prizes, souvenir book, etc.

If you don't have the luxury of time, and most of your friends live out-of-town, you'll want to consider hiring a professional planner who does most of the work for you with your committee's input at various steps along the way. The planner is able to handle credit card payments, secure the site with a deposit, book a band or DJ, hire a photographer, etc. without any advance layout from you. Generally, their fees are bundled into the price of the ticket. (Amazingly, the reunion committee for the successful 35 year reunion of the Class of 1967 never met once as a committee in person, but conducted all business online using the services of a reunion planner.)

Building Your Class List

Whether you use a planner or not, it's best that you keep control of the class list. Begin by requesting a list of your classmates from eagleemail@taftalumni.org. This can be the foundation of your contact list. (And by the way, this is the only time a list of TAA members is released on request.) Now, grab your yearbook to fill in the missing names. The professional planner may have access to a few databases that you don't, but for the most part you can easily scan Classmates.com, Reunions.com, Switchboard.com and many others. One of the first mailings should be a request for each classmate to send in a list of every other classmate with whom they're in touch.

After the reunion, a planner should return the final list to you without charge. If an address has not produced a response of some sort, be skeptical of its accuracy unless it comes from an

unimpeachable source—a parent, let's say. Flag the address as questionable, and then send a copy of the final list back to TAA for our records.

Formal or Informal?

You may have attended a traditional reunion in formal wear complete with band, white table cloths, and three course meals. If that's not your style, be creative; consider other alternatives. Does a classmate own a restaurant, bar or other possible reunion site? In the summer, consider a picnic in the forest preserves, at a beach, or a state park—maybe include the whole family. How about a sock-hop at a local gym or American Legion hall? When you put your heads together, you'll think of lots of interesting venues.

Advice from Rich Lindberg, Class of 1971

For the first reunion, it is wise to engage a reunion planning company to do the initial address lookup spadework. The company will initiate the first database -- that should be kept on file by the committee and made available to future committees. The second reunion -- five or ten years hence -- the committee can build upon the old list. With the search tools available on the web, it is much easier now to locate people than before.

It took the resources of a dedicated committee, all engaged in the look-up process, to pull it off. But we did it without the help of a private firm, proving that it is possible. Also, grammar school lists might be available from former classmates. The initial mailing should ask the alums to share such lists, or whatever word of mouth information that can be passed along.

Miscellaneous Thoughts

- Consider having mini-reunions within the reunion—learn what elementary schools your classmates attended, and then include the school's name on the name badges.
- Think it might be a low turnout? Include January and June classes or a even whole decade together in your plans. And why does it have to be every 10 years? Why not have a 17-year reunion? Or how about an all-class reunion for your locality as has been done annually in Florida?
- Bring your own stereo, boom box or satellite radio and forego a DJ. (Be sure to ID your personal CDs.)
- Use disposable cameras if you are fearful of mislaying that expensive digital model, but by all means take lots of photos.
- Sing the Taft Founder's March (lyrics posted on www.taftalumni.org). It doesn't matter if you forget the words or sing off key—just sing it LOUD!

- Display TAA merchandise order forms and membership forms next to the memorabilia table. Contact Frank Heyer regarding available merchandise at the time of the reunion.
- Solicit donations from your classmates and local businesses for door prizes. The businesses can advertise in your souvenir book.
- Relax and have fun! Accept the fact that *something* will probably go wrong, but it won't be the end of the world. Before the reunion, take a long hot bath, listen to some oldies, and tour the old neighborhood to get yourself into the right mood.
- Hold an ice-breaker event the day/evening before the reunion to kick off the weekend. Contact Frank Heyer (yes, he does get around) to arrange a group tour of Taft. Check the TAA website for a comparative floor plan. If you haven't been back since the construction of the last addition, you'll be amazed.
- Above all, don't skip the reunion because you've lost your girlish figure or you've traded one six-pack for another. Jump in with both feet! You could be missing the time of your life...and who knows? Maybe the one that got away didn't get too far away after all.

When it's over, tell us all about it. Send your comments and photos to Jerry Stephenson at jbbloom@charter.net so that we can share them in the newsletter. If you have other helpful suggestions to offer future reunion committees, send those in as well.