

BACK IN THE NEWS: CENTENNIAL HIGH SCHOOL'S CLASS OF 1972**THEN ...**

Provided

Members of the Centennial class of 1972 pose in the senior lounge, including (front row, left to right) Alan Schweighart, Sarah (Glenn) DeMaris, Dee Dewitt, Jim Dillavou, Kathy Henneman and Bruce Laird; (second row) Terri Stinson, Marcia (Bebout) Hirst, Vicki (Westfall) Montgomery, Mary Fagan, Mary (Jackle) Taylor and Jane (Gavigan) Miller; and (third row) Michele (Russo) Carruth, Gayla (Fiedler) Pellum, Brenda (Hoch) Crippen, Wayne Holdcroft, Debra (Hoffman) Stonehill and Theresa (Klitzing) Martin.

BOB ASMUSSEN

THESE CHARGERS SAW CHANGES

And they'll see a whole lot more during a tour of the renovated school



The organizers of Centennial High School's Class of 1972 50-year reunion got to work early. Very, very early. Five years ago, to be exact.

"It started right after the 45th," said Jeanne Valcik, one of the those responsible for the upcoming festivities.

The reunion events begin Friday with an informal gathering of alums at Jupiter's at the Crossing.

Former teachers are also invited. The principal at the time, Al Davis, will be there. So will popular coach/teacher/administrator Al Griggs.

On Saturday, there will be a tour of the school for all interested at 1 p.m. The main event is cocktails and dinner at the I Hotel and Conference Center on Saturday.

The '72 graduating class numbered about 400. One-hundred classmates are coming to the dinner and bringing 51 additional guests.

On Sunday, a brunch is being held at El Toro at the Fields. All classmates are welcome.

Back in 2017, long before we knew about COVID-19, Centennial graduate Sarah DeMaris got the reunion ball rolling.

"She started organizing the database," Valcik said. "Off and on we added to it."

It makes perfect sense that DeMaris took charge. She was, after all, the editor of the student paper her senior year.

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... AND NOW

Scott Savage/courtesy

Earlier in the month, members of the Centennial Class of 1972 gathered outside the school. Left to right: Jim Berger, Donna (Dee) Pittman, Dave Barr, Jodie (Bokenkamp) Thies, Jay Miller, Ginger (Boise) Lenz, Marc Shaw, Jeanne (Tuley) Valcik, Vicki (Westfall) Montgomery, Scott Wilson, Sarah (Glenn) DeMaris and Jane (Ogden) Wilson.



Provided

The high school courtyard as it appeared at an earlier time. Then-teacher Dave Casteel helped set it up.

CHARGERS: 'We had opportunities'

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"Sarah was on top of it, as she always is on everything," said fellow reunion organizer Dave Barr.

Valcik, Barr and DeMaris were joined in their efforts by Jane Wilson and Gayla Pellum.

"We call Jane 'The queen of all things reunion,'" Barr said. "She really did all of our previous reunions. I don't know how she did it."

Way back when, Centennial had a database of past graduates and their whereabouts at the time. Wilson added to it over the years before handing it off to Barr.

DeMaris expanded the database.

"I was going to use the people search engines," Barr said. "She was so far ahead of me, it took me a long time to catch up."

Barr has put the entire list through two different search engines. Perhaps he should work for the IRS.

"You can basically find almost anybody," Barr said.

When he signed up for the people searches, Barr had to check a box to promise he was not an internet stalker.

Long process

In the early planning days, the first order of business for reunion organizers: Find a venue. That started three years ago.

A group scouted locations. The first choice, which will remain nameless, didn't work out. Apparently, the place was double-booked. The other event? The owner's daughter's wedding. Oops.

"I was very calm," Barr said. "I said, 'Ma'am, I do understand. But we have this thing called a signed contract.' 'We were cool about it. She was great to work with.'

They later hooked with the I Hotel, which turns out to be a better option for the reunion attendees. Many will live in Champaign.

"The I Hotel was really good (to work with)," Barr said.

For the Friday event, Jupiter's at the Crossing offered a large room for free.

"The manager there, Devin (Nofftz), has been wonderful," Barr said. "It's upstairs. They've got a couple of bars, gotters up there for us. We're going to have pizza brought up."

Sunday's brunch will include a mimosa bar.

The reunion-goers are coming from across the country.

"You would be surprised to amaze how many people are traveling in for this," Barr said.

How does it feel?

The reunion they've planned for upward of five years is three days away.

"Not the least bit nervous," Valcik said.



Provided

Gayla Pellum, left, and Jeanne Valcik were two of the organizers of the Centennial High School Class of 1972's 50-year reunion. Pellum, the yearbook editor while in high school, designed the reunion logo.

"I would tell you this is some place between orchestrating the D-Day invasion and throwing a wedding," Barr said. "The amount of work that went into this thing by everybody is kind of semi-staggering. I think everything is going to come off really, really good."

Organizers kept the cost the same as their 40th reunion. "We have had classmates step up and donated about 50 percent of the budget," Valcik said.

The people on the planning committee, all in their 60s, are retired. Valcik was an investment consultant in Atlanta. Barr owned real estate and was in the student housing business for years.

A different world

The Centennial Class of '72 finished their studies with plenty going on around them. The Vietnam War was continuing, and the Watergate scandal was breaking.

"It was tumultuous," Barr said. "We were there when the protests on campus happened."

They brought the Nation-al down in town.

"It was a need of change. With change sometimes comes pain. It was a time that shaped the country and long term for the good."

While working on the reunion, Barr and Valcik realized the special nature of their class.

"We've got folks in medicine, academia, business, the trades. How well everyone has done across the board is really impressive," Barr said.

Going to high school in Champaign, a community with a Big Ten university, offered advantages.

"Our sophomore year was the first Earth Day," DeMaris said. "The whole school was closed down so we could go over to the events at the University of Illinois. When I tell young people that they say 'What, you already knew the environment was in trouble?' They can't believe it. They think they're the

first generation to be aware of this."

DeMaris remembers being excused from classes at Centennial so she could go hear a speech by feminist icon Gloria Steinem.

"Being in this community, we had opportunities that other people our age did not have," DeMaris said.

Familiar place

Current Centennial Principal Scott Savage was kind enough to let us in the building earlier this month for photos and an interview. He even took the picture of the '72 alums. He has been in their shoes. Savage is a proud Centennial graduate who is happy about the upcoming reunion.

"Whenever alumni can come back and be a part of our school, it's always a good thing," he said. "It builds the bridges between the current student activities in the school community and the students and school community that paved the way."

When Savage took the job, he started to hear from alumni.

"From various classes, even from the first Class of 1968," Savage said. "All the way to the Class of 2020."

Savage is the 10th principal in Centennial history.

Davis, who was the principal in '72, was also Savage's '86.

The school has changed quite a bit since

then. The building underwent a major upgrade.

"The way education is, we have to keep pace with our science classrooms to provide the best lab experiences," Savage said. "The facility itself, we want to be as green conscious as possible, less waste, more natural sunlight."

There is a practical side for taxpayers.

Gov. J.B. Pritzker drew families and business to the community.

"You want to have high academic achievement," Savage said. "Those are the kind of things we are pushing, beautiful facilities and excellent instruction by our teachers and our staff. And also just students doing great things."

Savage, a University of Illinois graduate, appreciates the relationship between his alma mater.

Savage is thrilled that Saturday's school tour is considered one of the highlights of reunion weekend.

"We want our alumni to be proud of the school they attended," Savage said. "We want the community to be proud."

Yes, the place looks different. But there is a constant: The courtyard is still there.

"That's like our heart beat, and we extend from there," Savage said.

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