

Remembering, reconnecting and saying thanks

his is the 25th anniversary of an article I wrote back in 1993, titled, "Whatever happened to the class of '68?" about the 25th anniversary of their graduation from OPRF High School. It began like this:

"As anyone who was alive and cognizant a quarter-century ago will recall, the world was coming to an end in 1968 — the Tet Offensive, anti-war demonstrations culminating in the Chicago Convention riots, the assassinations of King and Kennedy. The '50s and '60s hadn't prepared us for this kind of turmoil.

"What was it like finishing high school during that tumultuous year? What were the critical issues facing the senior class at Oak Park and River Forest High School? Well, as it turns out, things like swimming in the nude and dresses that had to be long enough to touch the ground when you knelt on the floor.



**KEN
TRAINOR**

"Those were just some of the memories excavated by members of the class of '68, who returned recently to the place where the rest of their lives commenced 25 years ago."

Well, they're back — this Friday at Goldy's and Saturday at the 19th Century Club, the site of some of their sock-hops back in those now golden days of yore.

Since I inadvertently became the class chronicler in 1993, it seems fitting to comment on the 25th anniversary of their 25th anniversary. In 1993, looking back, Oak Park in 1968 seemed almost quaint, even innocent. Now 1993 seems quaint and innocent. As the organizing committee — chaired by Kathy Sullivan and comprising Gary Patteau, Jim Payette, Gail Rummelhoff Milner, Jacqueline Sbarbro Swiss, Carol Schroeder Skowronski, Miriam Solon and Jim Tierney — has discovered, planning a reunion these days has gotten more ... complicated.

First, of course, their outreach efforts included technology that didn't exist in '93 — email, social media, even subscription services — and many class members are now retired, have moved, and/or disconnected their landlines.

For classmates who said they couldn't afford to attend, the committee put out a call for donations and 69 classmates (and three non-classmates) stepped up, giving enough (including \$1,000 from Senior Class President Dan Schwartz, now the state treasurer of Nevada) to entice 14 classmates and three teachers to make the trip.

Given the times they grew up in, they opted to honor class veterans, especially Vietnam vets, such as Sullivan's late husband.

Many more classmates, they discovered, have developed physical issues since their last reunion, which is why the committee chose the 19th Century Club for the Saturday venue, which allows front door drop off and an elevator immediately inside for access to the ballroom. Those who can't make it will be sent signed cards and reunion booklets.



Awareness of dietary restrictions, of course, was much on their minds, and they decided not to use balloons, plastic banners and other eco-unfriendly decorations. Centerpieces (from Dick Biggins and Maggie Miles' Empowering Gardens in Forest Park, which hires and trains the disabled) will come in clay pots, featuring greenery that can be replanted outdoors.

In other words, the committee intentionally made their task more difficult in order to mirror the increasing complexity of modern life.

Friday's venue will be held at Goldy's in Forest Park, owned by classmate Mike Sullivan (no relation to Kathy), who purchased the business from the father and uncle of classmate Ellie Goldstein Boyer.

With this class, roots run deep.

"From day one," Kathy Sullivan said, "our goal was to honor the school, the teachers and the towns in which we were reared, as well as supporting the businesses of our classmates."

They opened the reunion account at Forest Park Bank where Don Offermann is senior vice president. Offermann was OPRF's superintendent in 1993 and began his career as an English teacher there in 1968. Rick Storto, OPRF class of '77, will serve as DJ, recommended by none other than the late great Val Camilletti of Val's halla Records.

April Ross, class of 1970, donated a 1968 Tabula belonging to her late sister Nancy Ross to serve as the sign-in book.

"We achieved all of our lofty goals," Sullivan said, "even as they grew throughout the past year."

The original class totaled 875. The number of

(documented) deceased is 106. They tracked down all but 65 and contacted roughly 700. Over 200 classmates will attend, accompanied by 65 guests.

The class of '68 had 13 Vietnam veterans (three of whom are deceased, one of them listed on the Vietnam Memorial). Six of the 13 will attend the reunion. Non-Vietnam vets total 32, four of whom have died. And last, but never least in a place like Oak Park, 14 classmates are published authors.

Reunions are an opportunity to remember where you came from, the community that formed and fostered you. But it's also a reminder to the rest of us that this is a major part of what any community is about: producing offspring, educating them, and providing a springboard from which they launch. And every 25 years or so, a group comes back and ponders what this place means in their lives. As a community, we take comfort in the well-worn cliché, "Our children are our future." But once in a while, the future returns and reminds us, "This community was our past."

"I think we've turned a reunion into something more impacting and far reaching, a class legacy," said Kathy Sullivan.

Whatever happened to the class of '68? One quarter are returning this Friday and Saturday night to update and renew what one classmate wrote in the 1993 reunion booklet:

"Has it really been [another] 25 years? Surely you jest! Since then we've faced many challenges. We've been put to the test. Remember the good times and forget all the rest. For then and for now, celebrate and treasure 'those things that are best!'"