

Tips for Planning Your Class Reunion

No two reunions are alike but every reunion requires upfront planning to be successful.

The Big Picture

It will be natural to think of the many, many details that go into reunion planning. Focus on the most important of the many fun details:

- Recruiting and organizing your Reunion committee
- Finding your classmates and their addresses
- Choosing the style and content of your reunion events
- Setting the date
- Estimating the costs and setting a ticket price
- Choosing the method of communicating with your classmates

How do we form a reunion committee?

Start by forming a core local team of dedicated and enthusiastic individuals who are willing to go the extra mile to ensure a successful reunion. Appoint a reunion chair who will arrange and drive meeting agendas. Appoint a treasurer to oversee finances. Beyond these two key individuals, solicit classmate volunteers who can actively participate and be assigned to work on various reunion tasks. Share the work amongst as many who are willing to offer their help. There are many details and arrangements that have to be taken care of. Successful reunions are the result of successful committees. Committees that are active and well organized will be positioned for success. Organizing a successful reunion can be a truly enriching and rewarding experience where old friendships are reestablished and new friendships formed. A consensus approach probably works better than a top down driven style.

When do we start?

Some reunion committees begin forming and start planning up to two years in advance of their reunion. The amount of lead time you need really depends on how elaborate of an event you are planning but, generally speaking, the more time you give yourselves the better! Whether you are planning a simple picnic or a formal event, you will minimally want to start planning at least 12 to 16 months in advance. Don't expect to pull off a successful reunion if you start planning just 6 months before the event as many of your classmates will need significant lead time in order to travel. Another consideration is that prime locations and other services you want may require advance booking.

How often should we meet?

Your reunion committee should plan to meet once a month either in person or via conference call. You may even consider augmenting some of your meetings by using an online chat room or message boards. This can be a convenient inexpensive way of discussing some of the finer details of the reunion and may make it easy for non-local classmates to participate and contribute.

What work items does the reunion committee need to consider?

Consider dividing the work activities of your reunion committee into subcommittees or work groups.

Here is a listing of some of the tasks you will need to consider:

- date selection
- determine event content and format
- event program (speakers, tributes, etc.)
- event location / lodging selection
- financing and setting the price
- classmate contact listing, postal addresses, email addresses, phone numbers
- search for missing classmates
- web site development / maintenance
- decorations
- entertainment
- photographer
- registration & name tags
- mementos
- marketing & communications
 - mailers, emailings
 - newspaper and internet advertising
- deceased classmates tribute
- additional reunion activities
 - San Juan campus tour, pre & post reunion events
- class gift to the San Juan Alumni Association

What are some of the upfront expenses we might incur?

Here is a listing of some expenses you might incur before ticket money starts arriving. One thing to consider to avoid these expenses is to use a professional reunion planning service. Many of these services will handle all your upfront costs for you.

- Stationary supplies
- Postage
- Printing (reunion booklets, name tags)
- Gifts / novelties
- Decorations
- Web site development & hosting
- Liability insurance
- Reunion facilities deposit
- Entertainment deposit
- Deposits for additional activities (tours, etc.)

Finding Lost Classmates

Finding addresses and email contact, Facebook page, or other ways to contact your classmates is vital. Be sure the school secretary and the San Juan Alumni Association knows you are planning a reunion and whom to contact for info. The association can publish the info in their newsletter where it will spread. If a classmate is lost to you, check yearbooks a few years ahead and behind your class for siblings, and perhaps those classes will share the contact info of a brother or sister. The internet searches can be fruitful. Setting up a website with a link to the Alumni Association website can allow people who are lost to find you. If a postal address is not good, try the telephone directory in the same town, try the old email address, it may be still valid.

Timeline for success

Here is a timetable to consider for planning your event.

Twenty-four months before

- Form a committee
- Recruit and appoint subcommittee members
- Survey classmates for ideas and venue preferences
- Determine event format
 - picnic, dinner-dance, etc.
 - informal, formal
 - single day event, multi-day event
- Brainstorm additional activities (school tours, etc.)
- Set date(s)
- Scout candidate reunion facilities and hotels
- Develop budget
- Start developing mailing list

Eighteen months before

- Select and reserve reunion facility and hotels
- Arrange for and hire entertainment, caterer, photographer, etc.
- Set a rough budget, attendance count, and ticket price

Twelve months before

- Send initial mailer announcing date and location of reunion
- Publicize reunion information
 - public web sites
 - newspapers
- Arrange for additional leisure activities (sightseeing tours, etc.)
- Pay deposits

Six months before

- Mail reunion registration materials
- Confirm all reservations, caterer, entertainment, etc.
- Select menu
- Meet with hotel and reunion venue staff

Four months before

- Make payment arrangements with all suppliers for group functions
 - meals, tours, photographer, DJ, etc.

One month before

- Finalize any last minute details

When should we have our reunion?

Certainly Friday or Saturday are the most desirable dates to consider for your reunion. The most popular times of the year to have a class reunion are early summer through late fall. Thanksgiving weekend is also a fairly popular time as many classmates may be in your home area visiting family for the holiday. There are several factors you should consider when selecting a date. Certainly the weather is more accommodating during these periods especially in areas of the country where the winters are cold. If your classmates are in the child rearing stages of life the summer months might be a more ideal time while children are out of school on summer vacation, especially for those classmates traveling from out of town. Of course fall is also a wonderful time of year as it evokes memories of homecoming and football games. You may want to consider coordinating your event around San Juan's homecoming as it offers an opportunity for classmates to participate in additional activities on your reunion weekend.

Should we have a single day or multi-day event?

Some classes just have a one evening reunion event while other classes host multi-day reunions. Those classmates who have attended reunions repeatedly echo the same words after the reunion is over....'the evening went by too fast'...'there just wasn't enough time to talk with everyone I wanted to'. How do you pack 5, 10, 20, 30 years of each other's lives inside of 5 hours? The answer is you can't. Hosting a multi-day reunion however gives your classmates additional time to relax and get reacquainted. This is also a far more attractive venue for those traveling from afar to attend the reunion. It may involve a little more work to host a multi-day reunion but offers many advantages to your classmates. Following are some suggestions for the weekend should you choose to hold a multi-day reunion.

Friday night

Many classes kick off their reunion activities with an informal Friday night get together that are referred to as 'Mixers', 'Warm Ups' or 'Icebreakers'. As these names imply this event is intended to loosen classmates up in an informal, neutral and relaxed atmosphere prior to the grand event. Typically these are held at a local restaurant or bar. Usually light Hors d'houevres are served and classmates pay for their own cocktails at these gatherings. Keep this event simple. Don't put a lot of undo stress on

yourselves as you need to direct most of your energies toward planning the big event. If such an event is not offered, consider getting together informally on your own with some classmates you were close with at San Juan. It gives you extra time with those you were closest with. One of the most popular events you might want to consider arranging is a tour of San Juan's campus. The Alumni Association can help set up a campus tour led by students after school on Friday afternoon. They can also open and offer a tour of the Legacy Exhibit in the cafeteria. After 10, 20, or 30 years this can be a wonderful rejuvenating experience to once again walk the hallowed halls of San Juan. If your event happens to coincide with the San Juan homecoming or a home football game, encourage classmate participation and try to organize special seating arrangements so your class can all sit together.

Saturday

While the night is typically reserved for the big event, consider adding some daytime events.. Some classes also organize activities like a morning golf outing, local site seeing tour or a group shopping trip.

- ✓ *No matter what pre-reunion events you plan, don't underestimate their value in terms of making classmates more comfortable attending the reunion event. They all serve as relaxers or anxiety reducers so to speak that can help make the big event a smashing success.*

Sunday

If your class isn't already burned out from Friday and Saturday festivities you might want to consider a wind down event such as a Sunday picnic. This is a chance for any last minute catching up and to say your good byes in a less hectic atmosphere. For younger classes, make it a family event with spouses and children invited.

What kinds of activities and decorations should we provide at the reunion?

If you are planning a more formal evening event, certainly the night will contain a sit down dinner and likely music entertainment. A separate, smaller room for cocktails and registration will encourage mixing. Most venues will have red napkins to put on a white tablecloth. Red carnations can serve as a simple centerpiece. Red coffee mugs can be a fun souvenir. You can add some formality to the evening with an official opening welcome and a few brief speeches and awards before dinner. Perhaps offer a tribute to classmates who have passed away. One thing you need to remember is that people are coming to the reunion to catch up with old friends. You need to allocate the majority of the evening to free socializing. You might also want to consider setting up a continuously running slide show of old class photos in one corner of the room.... this is always a great attraction. The San Juan Culinary Academy can provide a student decorated cake for the staff to serve. Consider setting up a nostalgia table for classmates to view memorabilia and artifacts from your class past.... this is a great way to jog faded memories and spark discussions amongst classmates. Ask each of your classmates to bring one piece of personal memorabilia for the nostalgia display. Having the decorations and tables in different areas of the room will encourage mixing and moving about. If you want to encourage dancing make sure your music provider plays music from your era. Use www.Google.com to find a list of "music hits" from your class era! Mix in slow dances for the shy guys. A raffle of San Juan logo wear (available from San Juan Booster's Club) and donated prizes can raise money for a donation to the *Alumni Association*.

Balancing the Budget

How much should the ticket price be for the reunion? There will always be a remark about the cost compared to merely going out for a meal. In an early mailing or Facebook post, mention that the ticket price will have to cover the costs of mailings, decorations, printing, and room costs. Recent 50th reunions have set a price in the \$75 range. Some costs are variable depending on the attendance count, such as meals and souvenirs. But other costs such as room fee, DJ, or mailings to all classmates do not change based on attendance. One way to balance the budget is to make a spreadsheet of expected costs and set up columns of costs based on different attendee counts. This will suggest a “break even” price for a different attendance counts, or a “break even” attendance count for different prices. It will likely occur that registrations and money come in later than you would like, but it seems to always happen. One approach is to set a price if money is received by an early date, and a higher price if received later. After setting the price, the committee can commit to extras such a DJ and flowers once a certain attendance count is confirmed, then commit to souvenirs and programs after a next attendance count is confirmed. That way, the reunion will never be in a financial loss position.

Staffing the event

Unfortunately the reunion committee's job isn't over after all the plans and arrangements are complete. On the day of the reunion there is still the work of registering guests as they enter. You've worked hard and you too deserve to enjoy the reunion. Some facilities may provide this service for you or you might want to consider asking friends or family members to handle this for you. You might even be able to make arrangements with volunteers from the class year ahead of you or behind you to provide this service in turn for providing this service at their reunion. Given the likelihood that they may know people in your graduating class it could be an attractive opportunity for them as well to help out. Name tags with a picture from the yearbook will make recognition easier. Use large font for first names on nametags, this makes recognition more comfortable.

Some local venues

Classes have recently used the **Crowne Plaza** at Madison Avenue and Interstate 80 (877 320 8454), the **Lions Gate** at the former McClellan Air Force base (916 640 0800), and the **Dante Club** on Fair Oaks Boulevard (916 925 8230).