

Centennial Plus Reunion Recap

On the weekend of July 11-13 about 150 Theta Phi alumnae, ranging from 1930 to 1986 graduating classes, attended the festivities of the Centennial Plus Reunion held on the Cortland College campus. And what a fantastic time was had by all! The weekend began with a Friday welcome party on the lawn in front of Brockway Hall. You could see sisters' faces light up as they recognized their friends coming down the path, greeting each other with big hugs and huge smiles. Conversation flowed like no time had passed, though in many cases it had been decades since friends had seen each other. Sisters were grinning from ear to ear with the pure joy of connecting with their old buddies once more. A wonderful digital slide show created by Kim Mayer ('82) ran in the background during the evening, and as photos appeared from Theta's past, peals of laughter and "remember when's" burst out among the crowd. (See the item on the slide show elsewhere in this newsletter.) It felt just like old times when the beer keg overflowed, despite the heroic efforts of Sherry Ryder ('74), currently employed by Anheuser Busch, to salvage the beverage for the crowd! Memorabilia of all sorts were displayed on tables throughout the weekend, and included items such as banners, pledge class paddles, historian's photo albums, friendship candles, an Outstanding Junior plaque, and the president's gavel.

On Saturday morning TPSI president Sue Knapp ('75) spoke to a packed, standing-room-only crowd at a morning sorority meeting. She explained the TPSI organization and its activities to those not already familiar with it. Many sisters attended the all-college alumni luncheon, and were especially pleased to hear Theta sister Ann Graziadei speak as one of the two distinguished alumni honored this year. Also, as part of the luncheon program, Theta Phi memories were presented. These recollections included winning the Alpha Beta Scholarship Cup, the President's Cup, and Hellenic Sing; the Madame Ball and Dance Club; the only Chinese housemother, Miss Lee, and the last housemother, Jean Hodgkinson, fondly known as "Modge"; the sorority house moving from Lincoln Avenue to West Court Street; the annual weekend at Raquette Lake beginning in 1953; the Red Dragon tavern on Main Street, a re-enactment of Lady Godiva; and the Puckers and Flyers women's ice hockey team.

Saturday night, the dinner at the newly acquired Alumni House was a gala event! Tours of the beautiful mansion were followed by a group photo in front of the house. Can you imagine a picture of almost 150 Theta Phi sisters draped over the wall and down the front steps? (We think it may have to come supplied with a magnifying glass!) The dinner program was opened by greetings from Cortland's new president Dr. Erik Bitterbaum and Executive Director of Alumni Affairs Doug DeRancy. Doug just happened to mention that our reunion attendance far surpassed that of Nu Sig from last summer, in fact that of any Hellenic group in recent memory, which was greeted by the Theta sisters with rousing cheers and applause.

The program continued with a welcome from TPSI's Corresponding Secretary Karen Uhlendorf ("KU") that recapped the sorority's 100-year history (which can also be found on the TPSI website at www.theta-phi-alpha.org), TPSI's creation and its charitable activities, as well as honoring special attendees and guests. For all her help, cheerful attitude, and hard work in making our weekend happen, Mickey Gibbons of the Alumni Association was showered with Theta Phi gifts including a mug, a shirt, a pin, and a Camp Huntington dinner plate. Among others thanked at the dinner were the reunion planning committee: Marjorie Dey Carter '50, Mary Alice "Petey" Catlin Haase '50, Mary Morgan Hosking '53, Norma Young Rhodes '53, Gloria Shokey Burns '57, R. Sandra Stone Forbes '59, Vincentia Hoeffner '61, Alice Decker Couser '62, Jane Grastorf '62, Carol Okoren '63, Carol "Mavis" Davis '66, Pat Sullivan '69, Nancy Baxter '72, Patricia Quinn '72, Kris "Kringles" Terrillion '72, Donna Freeland '73, Teri Tiso '74, Karen "KU" Uhlendorf '75, Sue Knapp '76, Sue Klinger '77, Bette Schneider '77, and Phyllis Danks '82.

Other special attendees were recognized with a corsage: Priscilla "Kenny" Kennett Dick '53, who traveled the farthest (from San Diego) to come to the event; Mary Murphy '85, who represented the latest graduation class; and Evelyn Clark '30 and Margaret Moyer Stevens '32, who represented the earliest graduation classes in attendance. Former Cortland faculty members whose presence at the dinner meant a great deal to so many sisters whose lives they touched during our college years included Dorothy Arnsdorff, Dolores Bogard, Marsha Carlson, Nancy Langham, Toni Tiburzi, Bill Tomik, and Suzanne Wills. Before our meal, Phyllis Danks offered a touching tribute to the sisters who are no longer with us.

After the meal, the real fun began! Representatives of various decades shared their comrades' memories of their time in the sorority. We were treated to fond recollections and hilarious scenarios from the 50s, 60s, 70s, and 80s. We won't soon forget the humorous presentations, especially the performance of the Snoopy line dance to the sounds of Barry Manilow's "It's a Miracle"! Two singing groups entertained the crowd with renditions of old favorite songs from the early to mid-70s, including former Theta Nine singers and their version of "Feelings." The evening formally closed with friendship circles around each table and the singing of "A Long, Long Line of Thetas." But that wasn't the end of the musical entertainment! The singing continued after the program concluded with a crowd gathered at the center of the dining area, belting out pledge class songs and sorority favorites one after another.

Both Friday and Saturday night the party continued at the Red Dragon, the sorority's former favorite hangout, in its new location on Tompkins Street. Karaoke renditions of favorite popular hits of the 70s were provided courtesy of Barb Hemink ('72), Jane Kindlinger Abrams ("Janeo") ('71), and Jodi Schmeelk ('73). Music was certainly a theme of the weekend as it has been for many years in the sorority.

The reunion weekend concluded with a Sunday morning brunch at Corey Union. Sisters exchanged addresses, prolonged hugs, and many tears. As the group made a big friendship circle and sang "Peace" and "A Long, Long Line" once again, there was hardly a dry eye in the crowd.

Everyone who attended the weekend received a 100 years Theta Phi lapel pin, and many purchased the golf shirts embroidered with the special 100 years banner above the sorority's crest. These nice mementos won't be needed to remind us of this most special weekend that is not likely to be repeated in our lifetimes. The reunion was indeed a heart-touching event.