

Cranston High School's last class reunites, 50 years later

By Pam Tcath



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ALL TOGETHER NOW: The Cranston High School Class of 1961 squeezes in for a picture outside their 50th reunion celebration at Alpine Country Club.

In 1961, John F. Kennedy was President, a stamp cost 4 cents, there was no such thing as the Super Bowl, and Cranston High School graduated its last and largest class ever in June of that year.

They were called “the last class of Cranston High School,” because in September of 1961, Cranston West opened across town.

Last weekend, alumni from that class of over 700 graduates gathered in Cranston to reminisce, catch up and mourn the loss of classmates who passed away.

The planning committee for this undertaking has been meeting for the past five years at the same location, the home of Marie Koutsogiane Zurowski. This is the same committee that has worked together for 25 years.

After the 45th reunion, committee chairman, Richard “Dick” Evans started a website, www.chse61.com, to help classmates stay in touch and to provide information about upcoming reunions.

Evans said they have 702 names in their database, 333 active e-mails, 72 classmates are deceased and they cannot find 79 people.

“I am shocked at how many people are coming,” said committee member Fran Capirchio Calore.

In total, 22 states were represented and one international guest from Hungary attended.

The festivities started Friday evening, Sept. 9, with a 50’s style old-fashioned sock hop at the Kelley Gazzero VFW post on Plainfield Pike. About 100 people attended this event, said Dick Evans, the reunion committee chairperson.

“Carol and Butch Silven won the best dressed award with her in her poodle skirt and him in 50’s style sneakers, rolled up jeans, and a white tee with cigs rolled up in one sleeve. Steve and Jacky Carlson won the jitterbug contest, Alexis Leonard won the Hula Hoop contest, and I won the Yo-Yo contest,” he added.

The main event of the reunion weekend was the dinner dance at the Alpine Country Club, which 280 people attended.

The rooms were decorated in traditional green and white. Candid photos from the yearbook had been blown up to poster size and placed all over the room. At registration, each alumnus was given a 15-page program that included names and contact information of all those in attendance and a special "In Memorium" area to acknowledge those who had passed, as well as a personalized CD with songs from their era.

Each table had a handmade ice cream sundae centerpieces donated by Eileen Kennedy Pallante and her husband Mike.

During the cocktail reception, classmates Bobby Leonard and Jean Maio Dionne led guests in 50's sing-a-long. The group was three people deep gathered around the piano with their song sheets.

Before the main event began, all the attendees gathered outside for a class picture. Attendees brought yearbooks to look over.

Mayor Allan Fung presented the class with a citation from the city in celebration of the 50th reunion.

To get the evening started, Evans welcomed everyone and said a prayer for the evening. Richard DiSano had a moment of silence for all who lost their lives in 9/11 and the classmates who have died.

The committee put all of the classmate's names in a box and drew the names of Joel Westerman and Carol Caliri to become King and Queen for the night, complete with crowns and a special dance.

Paul and Ann Haltenberger, who journeyed from Budapest, Hungary, received a gift for traveling the furthest to attend the event.

"We scheduled our vacation so that we would be here for the reunion," said Haltenberger. "I was 3 years old when we moved to Rhode Island. It was very important for me to be here. Growing up here was so much fun. I became a citizen while living in Cranston, my father was able to practice medicine again, after leaving Europe during the war."

People left that evening already planning for future reunions.

The last event of the weekend was a brunch at the Airport Sheraton in Warwick. There were 81 attendees for this event, and Evans could not get over the positive reactions from the whole weekend.

"Everyone could not stop talking about how much fun it was at both the Sock Hop on Friday and at the banquet at the Alpine on Saturday. They not only want to come back for a 55th reunion, they want to get together in Florida in February," he said. "Some live in Florida, some are snowbirds, and some are considering a winter vacation to join in on the fun."