

EARLY HISTORY OF THE CENTRAL H. S. ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

In late 1992 and early 1993, a number of La Crosse Central High School graduates were asked to attend a meeting to discuss the possibility of forming an Alumni Association. Central Principal, Tom Barth, and a number of Red Raider Booster Club members spearheaded this idea. The purpose was to formulate an association that would have as its major goal, the benefit of Central High School.

They started by setting up a Board of Directors, electing officers, writing by laws, and also worked toward setting up a non-profit organization. This all proved to be a very long and drawn out process, particularly the non-profit status. Paul Robinson was a prime collaborator and colleague in securing the non-profit status. Then they needed to develop a system to communicate with the 15,000 plus graduates. When they started this task it seemed overwhelming, both in the cost and the printing. Fortunately, they had a couple of graduates who contributed financially to this endeavor. An anonymous donor gave them \$3,000 for the initial mailing and Curtis Printing supplied the materials and printing time to allow them to send out the first mailing. Then they were in business.

Shortly after the first mailing, then President of the Association, Len Vingers, received a note from a 1944 graduate by the name of Jim Lewis who wanted to know more about the association and said that he could contribute some money for a scholarship. Len called Mr. Lewis and explained what they were trying to do, and much to Len's surprise, Jim Lewis contributed \$10,000 to a scholarship in memory of his brother, Roy Milton Lewis. In addition, the reason he wanted to do this was because of the fine teachers he had at Central who contributed to his career as a long time journalist. Jim is now retired and lives in Texas. Every year the board awards over 50 scholarships on behalf of individuals, foundations, corporate and class donors.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

We need to constantly strive to market our alumni association. There are so many opportunities for our association to help build Central High School. We can give moral support, scholarships, sponsor basketball tournaments and, yes, perhaps even someday build a swimming pool. We need to keep the proud tradition of Central High School at a very high level. Thousands of graduates have benefitted from Central's great tradition. This tradition has been of academic achievements, athletic achievements, and the school spirit which has lead to long-term friendships and associations with classmates and teachers.

WHAT CAN WE DO TO SUPPORT CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL?

We need to grow in numbers so that we can achieve some of the financial accomplishments that were mentioned earlier. We need to grow so that we can communicate with each other as an association. We need to grow so that we can be recognized as a strong supporting arm of La Crosse Central High School. We need your help and the help of all past graduating classes to achieve this goal.

WHAT CAN THE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION DO FOR YOU?

Hopefully, we can provide an updated list of all of your classmates. However, we need your help in keeping these lists up to date. In April of 2001, the association contracted with Harris Publishing Company to complete a directory of all Central High School graduates from 1936 to 2001. There will be at least four sections in this publication. The 1st section will include the Alumni Associations Mission Statement and a letter from the Principal, it will also include the history of the school and pictures of our choosing, the 2nd section will be the Biographical Section with names, addresses, phone no. and email

addresses. This section will also include a cross reference by maiden names. The 3rd section will be a class year section, and the 4th section will be geographical. The cover will be our school colors and will have Central's mascot on the cover. One very important aspect is that this directory will be available for purchase from the Harris Publishing Co. Soft bound copies will sell for \$69.95 and hard bound copies for \$79.95 with some of the proceeds reverting back to the Alumni Association.

WHERE HAVE WE GONE AND WHAT HAVE WE ACCOMPLISHED SINCE OUR INCEPTION?

Currently, we have 137 annual members and 239 lifetime members and already the addresses are incorrect. Keeping up to date on addresses alone is almost an insurmountable feat.

From 1998-2002 the Alumni Association sponsored the Central Holiday Boys Basketball Tournament. We provided the funds to help pay for the awards and association members attended the games and helped distribute the medals.

In 1999 Central High School faculty, in conjunction with the Central Alumni Association, established the Hall Of Excellence to recognize outstanding achievements and service by Central Alumni, Faculty and/or Community Members. Nomination forms are available on the website if you would like to nominate someone. The Association, in conjunction with Central administration and faculty, sponsors the Hall of Excellence reception every year in May.

In 2001 the Alumni Association contracted with Harris Publishing Co. to produce a directory of all Central graduates from 1936-2001. We also received an original artwork, done by renowned La Crosse artist and mother of 3 Central graduates, Chris Nudd, titled "Old Central". Old Central was located at the corner of 16th & Cass Streets.

On July 7th, 2017 we dedicated a statue of Walter "Babe" Weigent at Weigent Park, the site of "Old Central". The statue was made by La Crosse artist Mike Martino. An unveiling ceremony took place at the park, followed by a celebration at the Freighthouse Restaurant, where alumni of all ages gathered to celebrate the occasion. Babe served as Central's athletic director, football and track coach, and teacher from 1933-70. A standout athlete at Central, Babe was posthumously inducted into the Wisconsin Football Coaches Wall of Fame in 2014.

The Association sponsors an annual Chicken-Q at the Hanson relays held at Central each May. In addition, we put out an annual newsletter every summer. If you would like to receive a newsletter, send your email address to Vice President, Jeff Voss, at jhvoss@att.net.

Our most important job is to manage and administer thousands of dollars in scholarships to Central graduates. We have grown from ONE scholarship to 56 scholarships in 2018! The annual scholarships range from \$200 to \$25,000! Many of the scholarships are in honor of or in memory of a Central graduate given by that graduates family. There are also some scholarships given by classes - the Classes of 45, 49, 59, 61, 63 & 67 each give a scholarship. Some scholarships are given to graduates studying in a particular field, such as art, medicine, the technical fields, etc. In 2017 Central received it's largest one-time contribution, a \$25,000 annually renewable scholarship from the Mark and Anne Hansen Foundation. Hansen, who is a partner at a major law firm in Washington D.C., attended Central from 1971-73 before moving from La Crosse his senior year.