



Monday, October 6, 2003

OU's charter class returns to campus

By **Liz Lent**, contributing writer

More like a family reunion than a class reunion, the reconvening of Oakland University's charter class brought together more than 100 "siblings," guests and faculty this past weekend to share 40 years of memories.

Organized by the **OU Alumni Association** and charter class volunteers, the 40th Anniversary Charter Class Reunion kicked off Friday night with a get-together in the Fireside Lounge and continued on Saturday with a faculty and staff coffee social, an archives open house and a festive evening gala with dinner and dancing. Alumni then said a reluctant farewell to one another at a Sunday brunch, which closed the weekend's activities.

"I'm lucky," said A. Michael Deller, a member of the organizing committee. "Being part of the committee meant that I've been meeting with my favorite classmates since January. Everyone else had to try and do that over 48 hours."

Current OU faculty and administration welcomed back this groundbreaking group of alumni. "Your class blazed the trail and set high expectations for the students who followed you," said OU President Gary Russi. "Your contributions and accomplishments will never be forgotten."

Each guest made the most of the celebratory weekend with many taking the opportunity to tell former classmates and professors just how much they had meant to them. At the Saturday morning coffee, alumna Mary Jo (Koren) Ahern leaned over to former English professor Gertrude White and thanked her, saying, "You taught me how to write." Other alumni showed their affection for Chemistry Professor Paul Tombouljian, a charter faculty member and a reunion organizer, at the Saturday night gala with a standing ovation honoring his excellence as both an educator and friend.

Alumni also honored two absent friends, OU Founder Matilda Dodge Wilson and Woody Varner, OU's first chancellor, with a special video tribute on Saturday night.

"Mrs. Wilson was like a grandmother to us," Ahern said. "She and Mr. Wilson were very close to us."

Many alumni attended the reunion still wearing the one-of-a-kind diamond class rings given to them by Matilda Wilson upon graduation. Each remembered it as a characteristically kind act from a woman who gave them so much.

Varner, too, was remembered as a generous and inspiring leader. "I came to OU because of Woody Varner," Russi told alumni, recalling how Varner phoned him every night urging him to join Oakland's faculty. "Woody loved building this university."

For the students, being on the ground floor of a new experiment in higher education was a memorable experience. "It was very different being in the first class," Deller said. "Everything our class did, we were the first class to do it." From choosing the school colors to establishing new traditions, they pioneered it all.

Alumni also recalled the rigorous standards set for them by OU's early administration and faculty. "They tested us to our limit every minute of every day," said Linda McAllister, who majored in Russian. "They pushed us. And when I graduated, I felt like I could have done anything."

Preserving memories of these early days at Oakland are high on the list of priorities for many members of the reunion organizing committee.

"The committee would like to bring attention to the needs of OU's archives," Deller said. He and the rest of the committee issued a charter challenge at Sunday morning's brunch, urging the class to join them in preserving the history of OU and developing an endowment fund for the archives. It was a generous act, typical of this family of alumni who started it all.

SUMMARY

More like a family reunion than a class reunion, the reconvening of Oakland University's charter class brought together more than 100 "siblings," guests and faculty this past weekend to share 40 years of memories during the 40th Anniversary Charter Class Reunion.

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