

Class of '88 glad to go home to Upper Arlington

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BY MARTIN ROZENMAN

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ANDREA KJERRUMGAARD DISPATCH

Don't tell the Upper Arlington High School Class of 1988 that you can't go home again.

A significant number of that class shuns author Thomas Wolfe's theory and instead embraces the philosophy of Dorothy, the Kansan who visited Oz but decided there's no place like home.

Of 590 graduates, the Upper Arlington Alumni Association knows where 403 live, said Joanie Dugger, the association's executive director. Forty percent either checked out Oz but returned or never left the ZIP codes representing their hometown, Grandview Heights and northwestern Columbus. Sixty-three percent live in



central Ohio.

It's the highest rate of returning graduates among several central Ohio alumni associations that keep track.

Caroline Rall Diwik said she and her husband, Jason, who both graduated from Upper Arlington High School in 1988, are ready to move back to the suburb from German Village.

"We're going to put our house on the market. We held out as long as possible, but now Arlington is sucking us back in," Diwik said last month.

She remains close friends with classmates Sabrina De Libera Walters, Wendy Secrest



Andrea Kjerrumgaard, DISPATCH

Four members of Upper Arlington's Class of '88 are, from left, Sabrina Walters and Niki Callanan of Upper Arlington; Caroline Diwik of German Village; and Wendy Kane of Hilliard.

Kane, Niki Bavelis Callanan and Julie Licklider Kirk.

Walters, Callanan and Kirk live in Upper Arlington. Kane lives in nearby Hilliard.

As society is increasingly fractionalized by divorce and technology, people often return to their hometowns in search of a sense of community, to connect, said Dennis Marikis, a Mansfield psychologist.

"I think several things occur," he said. "Usually at some time, they move away to get some sense of freedom, to get some sense of who they are."

They return, he said, to recapture values, thoughts and feelings of the past.

"It's almost a security feeling," Marikis said. "(They) come back to a sense of 'who I am.' ... It's not just familiar local haunts or to experience the glory days of high school, but a real strong desire for a sense of community."

Though tracking graduates from local high schools can be hit and miss, a few alumni associations have numbers.

Twenty years later, 18 percent of Bexley's 192-member Class of '88 has returned, and 48 percent are back in Franklin County, said Carol Middaugh, the Bexley alumni association's treasurer and membership chairwoman.

At DeSales, 31 percent of its 227 Class of '88 graduates live on the North Side and in the Westerville areas that are its primary draw, and 52 percent live in Franklin County, said Colleen Cook, alumni relations director.

At Watterson, 58 percent of the 291-member Class of '88 live in its 14 feeder parishes west of I-71 that include Clintonville, Upper Arlington, Worthington and Dublin, said Joe Hill, the school's alumni director.

Marty Traver, a Powell psychologist, said many people simply like where they grew up, but others return because of a turning point in their lives. That might be a divorce or a job change, she said.

"We have a lot in common with the people we grew up with," she said. "Many people can't wait to leave but come back" because of the safety, comfort and opportunity associated with their hometowns, especially if they have family there.

None of Diwik's friends stayed in the area for college. Diwik, Callanan and Kirk left Upper Arlington for DePauw University in Greencastle, Ind. Walters went to Ohio University. Kane went to Miami University.

Callanan left DePauw after a year for Southern Methodist University in Dallas. She twice lived in Chicago before returning, first to New Albany and then Upper Arlington in 1999.

"I had to ease him into Arlington," she joked of her husband. "It was too close to my family, but I wanted to come back to be close to my family."

Walters returned quickly.

After earning a teaching degree at Ohio University, she interviewed for a job in Upper Arlington.

"I was actually hired that summer in Upper Arlington schools at Barrington Elementary," she said. "It was definitely a dream to get a job in UA right out of school."

Diwik returned for law school at Capital University. Her husband served in the Peace Corps in Western Samoa. They lived in San Francisco.

But \$2,500-a-month rent and the call of home brought them back to central Ohio, she said. Now, with two children, it's time to move the last few miles, Diwik said.

"The thing pulling us back is family and friends," she said. "You find that's especially true when you have kids. It's really cool (in San Francisco) to be able to ski one day and be at the beach the next, but ... Arlington is a great place to raise kids.

"I think why most people come back is because the schools are good, the parks are good, it's safe, it's a good place to live," Diwik said. "That's the draw."