

Spotlight

Back on the Block

Upper Arlington alumni return for the city's annual block party reunion

By: Eric Atienza

Maybe there's something in the water, or the air. Or maybe it's that particular way the sun breaks through the trees on a summer day. Whether or not you can define it, there's definitely something that keeps people coming back to Upper Arlington for the 4th of July Alumni Reunion block party year after year.

The block party takes place outside Barrington Elementary School each year, immediately following the city's 4th of July parade. Yearly features include food and snack vendors, music and attractions for kids that include a giant slide and games. The UA Civic Association also is on hand to present the awards to parade entries. But the chief reason for the block party is to catch up with old friends while making new ones. "The block party is a place for people from all UA graduating classes to meet and catch up," says John Kost, chairman and sponsor of this year's event. As the chair, Kost is in charge of planning the party, and as sponsor he covers the cost of renting equipment.



Members of the UA Class of 1969 enjoying last year's City Alumni Party are Libbie Pfefferle Trott (seated left, with black visor); Jackie Cooper (seated right, in blue top); Patrick Dynes (waving); and Julie May Jones (dark shirt next to Dynes)

New this year will be an old car display featuring vehicles from the UA parade.

The UA Alumni Association will have a tent where people can check or update their personal information in the alumni database, and where reunion organizers can obtain a list of graduates. Kost says the association is one of the largest in the country, with more than 5,000 dues-paying members. Membership dues are \$15 annually, \$60 for five years or \$250 for life. Lifetime members who wish to donate more may give \$500 to achieve "Golden Bear" status. Kost adds that the block party annually draws around 3,000-4,000 people. "It's like old home week. You run into people you haven't seen for years," Kost says. "It's a tremendously uplifting experience."



John Kost sponsors the Alumni Block Party.

Kost has been in the Alumni Association for nearly 10 years and is a former association president. He was asked to get involved with the planning committee at his 20th high school reunion, and he says it's been a terrific experience. "It's been a fun group with people from all different classes," Kost says.

The party is not only for UA alums, however. "It's a very popular event, and everyone is welcome," Kost says. Attendees pack the baseball fields at Barrington once the parade ends, and the crowd starts to disperse in the afternoon. But the celebration continues long after the block party winds down. Reunion classes usually schedule their own events and cookouts around the 4th of July, and many have floats in the parade.

Kost credits several UA attributes for bringing so many alumni back year after year. "I think it's because we are a small town near a big city," Kost says. "You can have all the downtown culture if you want it, but you never really have to leave UA either."



He also cites UA's strong school system, saying the curriculum enables students from diverse backgrounds to enroll in a variety of courses. "We have five elementary schools that feed into two middle schools which then serve one high school," he says. "We have people that grew up in tiny houses in school with people that grew up in mansions and everything in between. It's surprising many people move away and then move back when they have kids."

Kost adds that while many neighboring communities are mostly comprised of young families with kids, UA is much more diverse. "In UA we have (young families with kids), but next door might be someone who is single, who is middle aged with kids in college, or someone who is retired," Kost says.



Whether you want to catch up with age-old friends or make new ones, the Upper Arlington Alumni Block Party is the perfect place to mingle with Golden Bears past, present and future. For more information, visit www.bearalums.com

Eric Atienza is a former editorial intern.

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