

5 Best New Alumni Program

Title of Entry: *Golden Pioneer Reunion Weekend, Marietta College*

Hub Burton, Assoc. VP, Alumni and College Relations, Marietta College, 215 Fifth St., Marietta, OH, 45750, 740-376-4709, hub.burton@marietta.edu

General description of the program

Golden Pioneer Reunion Weekend takes place the first week of June and is an opportunity for *members of the 50th anniversary class to return to Marietta College to celebrate their special occasion. In addition, the reunion weekend is also open to members of contiguous classes and any Pioneer who graduated prior to the 50th anniversary being celebrated.* The weekend schedule is a mixture of planned activities and opportunities for impromptu re-connections by returning members of what is called The Long Blue Line of graduates. Finally, a class giving program has been put in place and is spearheaded by a volunteer identified through the collaboration of the Office of Advancement and Office of Alumni Relations. This volunteer also acts as the lead spokesperson and lends their input and signature to all reunion correspondence in an attempt to create the greatest possible interest and awareness of the opportunity to participate.

Goals and Objectives of the Project

To fully appreciate the goals and objectives of the Golden Pioneer Reunion Weekend, some context surrounding previous class anniversary celebrations at Marietta College is appropriate. In past years prior to the introduction of this new program, class anniversaries, including the signature 50th, were routinely staged during Homecoming Weekend. Given recent levels of funding and staffing, such a schedule assured that these important constituents would not and could not be treated with the special care and attention they deserved or expected. It is also important to note that due to inconsistent programming and scheduling, more than a few 50th classes failed to have anything more than a cursory recognition of their milestone during Homecoming as well.

Recognizing that such omissions continued to fuel alumni frustration and discontent and that the ongoing neglect of the opportunity to mark such important milestones continued to both literally and figuratively “cost” the College significant benefits, the Golden Pioneer Reunion Weekend was created with the following specific goals:

Establish a new standard of care and attention for those celebrating significant anniversaries at Marietta College – Given past levels of service to those achieving a 50th anniversary, it was imperative to junk traditional approaches and create an entirely new environment in which to welcome back treasured alumni and affirm to them the gratitude and appreciation of the institution for their loyalty and commitment.

Recapture those whose anniversary had come and gone without appropriate notice – Recognizing that many alumni from the Forties and Fifties had failed to experience the very special emotions and connections that come with a signature reunion, it was determined that

Including them in the spring reunion format would provide them the window to re-connect with classmates and alma mater as well.

Overhaul program to introduce new expectation of the experience – In the past, during Homecoming Weekend, the extent of the reunion program was a mix-mingle reception rendering the effort to return to the College for a special celebration hardly worth the expense and effort.

With the creation of an entirely new schedule complete with various events such as alumni college, riverboat cruise, campus tours, reception with the president etc., the attraction of such a weekend could be enhanced and potentially attract greater numbers of attendees.

Leverage particular interests from within the alumni audience to boost attendance – Recognizing that often the affinity of alumni is strongest to organizations or special interest groups within the greater audience, a goal of the program was to identify “events within the event” to serve as an additional incentive to invite back those who otherwise might not participate.

Engage significant members of the classes as lead donors and volunteers – Recognizing that many of the effected classes featured individuals for whom a connection with the institution was still not in place, the new reunion program was designed to provide an opportunity to reach out and establish a meaningful relationship in combination with a worthwhile project or initiative.

Create a viable class giving program – With the discontinuation of the class agent program several years ago, no ongoing fundraising effort was in place surrounding the powerful motivation that comes with class affiliation. The reunion program was designed to tap these strong emotions and sentiments to enhance the program of giving for the Marietta Fund,(annual giving).

Create special time for graduates with Marietta College president – Following the lead of a consultant’s survey that much of the College’s leadership remains largely unknown to our graduates, the reunion was planned with an eye toward providing key alumni with new and comfortable access to the institution’s president.

Develop more effective communications and marketing approach for on-campus events – With new capacities for cross-promotion via web site and publications and enhanced quality of registration materials, the reunion was structured in such a way as to also take advantage of new online registration software and feature of attendee list to invite increased participation.

Role of Golden Pioneers Reunion Weekend

Finding opportunities for alumni to return to campus is crucial to the sharing of the excitement, momentum and growth taking place at the College. With the addition of such new buildings as a library and planetarium, it is important to create a proximity that no magazine or web site can duplicate. By creating a second, (Homecoming Weekend being the first), significant option for graduates to return to their alma mater, the building of support for key initiatives and programs can be cultivated to an even greater extent than ever before while strengthening bonds and connections between Marietta and its alumni in the process.

Total Number of Professional and Support Staff Working on the Project:

Beyond the three full-time staff members within the Office of Alumni Relations, volunteers from across our division were enlisted to assist with such functions as registration and organization of class photo, etc. In all, there were three event volunteers, six more for registration, two tour guides provided by Admission, two Alumni College presenters and a photographer.

Total Program Budget and Unit Cost:

Golden Pioneer Reunion Weekend Budget, June, 2008

Total cost including catering, materials, rentals etc.	\$10,968.00
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Revenue from Reunion registrations \$ 7,625.00

Total cost of event to College \$ 3,343.00

(Please note registration cost of \$125.00/person and river cruise \$25.00/person)

Special Circumstances/Challenges

- No tradition of spring reunions or any significant on-campus alumni gatherings other than Homecoming
- No campus lodging available
- Limited staff and budget for handling on-campus special events
- Climate in which ninety-degree temperatures are the norm during reunion period
- Providing for the special challenges that accompany 50th anniversary graduates

Measurable Results of the Project

Thanks so much for a once-in-a-lifetime memorable weekend. Everything was perfect. I didn't talk to anyone who wasn't completely satisfied. I don't know what else you could have done to make it better.

Everything was perfect.

The combination of events spaced with lots of down time for talking can't be beat. I don't think you can improve upon the experience.

Having the event in spring was an excellent idea and putting the several reunioning classes together made for interesting conversation and sharing of varied Marietta experiences. Enjoyed the young people seeing us around the campus and we were constantly aware of the attention to detail that went into the planning – food, activities, meeting with Dr. Scott – Loved it all!

The weekend was wonderful and we enjoyed every bit of it. The separation of seniors from the rest of the younger alumni was a real treat – we felt very special and it was a very congenial group. We look forward to coming again.

The above referenced comments and positive evaluations received on everything from menu to registration brochure indicate that many of our primary goals were met.

We did achieve a **special atmosphere and environment for our treasured 50th anniversary class** and Golden Pioneers.

It is obvious that for some who had never had a previous chance to reunion on their real anniversary that **our alternative was not only most welcome, but added some variety and spice to the program that otherwise might not have been present.**

The variety of the program and **mixture of activity and sensitivity for the desire to reminisce and visit were seen as strengths of the weekend and its planning.**

From within the program, it was realized that a number of graduates wished to re-visit their former fraternity house and with the cooperation of its current owners a tour was arranged that drew multiple individuals who might not have otherwise participated. **One group of three**

brothers, including a member of the Board of Trustees, hopped in the car from Cleveland just to come down to poke around the old ATO house!

With the cooperation of Advancement colleagues, **a willing lead donor and volunteer coordinator was identified and his issue of a \$10,000 challenge gift to the Class of '58 immediately drew a \$15,000 response and a total contribution from the reunion weekend of more than \$34,000...**a significant boost to the Marietta Fund during the final drive that goes with June 30 end of fiscal year.

Graduates were very pleased and genuinely surprised to have access to Dr. Scott during a reception in her home...a perfect backdrop for the presentation of the class gift.

Online registration was successful creating a new and convenient way for Golden Pioneers to become involved and the attendee list was a constant source of conversation in terms of who was planning to attend. In addition, a template of enhanced registration materials, e-mail follow-up and telephone work down the homestretch combined to create a successful response to the event.

By the numbers, the attendance for the event featured fifty-four attendees, up substantially from the number of Golden Pioneers attending Homecoming as recently as 2005, (12).