

ABSTRACT

Title of Entry: Oakland University's 50th Anniversary Celebration

Category: 48. Excellence in Special Events, Series of Events

Institution: Oakland University

Entrant's Name:

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General description of the entry

Founded in 1957, Oakland University is a nationally ranked public university located in Rochester, Michigan. The university marked its 50th anniversary in 2007, presenting an opportunity to reflect on five decades of history, boost institutional pride, publicize the accomplishments of the institution and recommit to its mission and vision for the future. To meet the established goals and objectives, and based on input from a 50th anniversary planning committee -- chaired by a University Communications and Marketing director and consisting of representatives from administrative and academic departments -- worked together to realize the 50th Anniversary Celebration vision and effectively plan, promote and produce the year-long program. Key elements of the 50th anniversary celebration included special events, publications, postage stamps, a Web site and banners throughout campus and the community.

Goals and objectives of the project

Goals

- Reintroduce Oakland University to the community and showcase the institution as a leader in the region to the public, donors, faculty, staff and alumni.
- Reenergize the university's first capital campaign, "Innovation and Opportunity – The Campaign for Oakland University," at its midpoint.
- Enhance the university's archival collection of its early history by digitizing paper photos and identifying people and events.
- Drive at least 1,000 visitors per month to the 50th anniversary Web site in 2007.

Objectives in support of the above goals included:

- Creating a 50th anniversary logo that incorporated the graphic elements of the capital campaign logo.
- Bolstering gift support by 10 percent to "Innovation and Opportunity – The Campaign for Oakland University."
- Engaging with alumni and encouraging a 10 percent increase in membership to the Oakland University Alumni Association.
- Connecting with students, faculty and staff through events that provided a balance of history and a vision for the future.
- Holding a successful kickoff event on campus for faculty and staff with an attendance goal of at least 400 people.
- Holding a family friendly event geared toward faculty, staff and their families during welcome week in September 2007 with attendance of at least 400.
- Creating enthusiasm throughout campus that would become contagious prompting individual departments to plan their own events in honor of Oakland University's 50th anniversary.

A series of events were planned to commemorate the anniversary, including:

- A January breakfast event held on campus. An OU alumnus and member of one of OU's first graduating classes gave a heartfelt speech reflecting on the early years of Oakland University and its recent successes. More than 600 employees attended the event, which featured displays of vintage photos, and the contents of a time capsule, which was later placed in OU's Kresge Library.

- An Oakland University's Founders' Day black-tie event honoring top contributors to Oakland University's capital campaign.

The gala took donors back 50 years and through the decades with pictorial displays of historic campus photos and a video containing footage from a 1992 oral history, "A Stroll Down Memory Lane," featuring Woody Varner, the university's beloved first chancellor.

- Employees and families 50th event coinciding with Welcome Week in September. This Friday evening event, attended by 2,023 people, was held in the student union, and featured the unveiling of a new mascot, pep bands, the cheer team, the dance team, a magician, prize drawings, children's activities and a buffet dinner.
- Spring and winter commencement ceremonies. The president's speech touched on the unique aspect of graduation in the university's 50th year and graduating students were able to purchase special 50th anniversary graduation gowns and tassels at a reduced rate.
- Hundreds of Oakland University students, faculty, staff, friends and alumni gathered to form the shape of a "50" on campus. The photo was placed on the cover of Oakland's alumni magazine and on the 50th Web site.
- Various celebration events campuswide. For example:
 - More than 150 former student leaders attended an event to reconnect with friends and other former student leaders, faculty and staff for an evening reception. Tours of the campus were also available during the event.
 - Two hundred people attended "Alumni Night at the O'rena – 50th Anniversary Edition," hosted by the Oakland University Alumni Association (OUAA), to watch a men's and women's basketball doubleheader. The annual Oakland University Alumni Awards Banquet also leveraged the 50th anniversary. Charter class members were presented with a special Pioneer award. The event attracted 20 charter class members and their guests, more than any other in previous years.
 - Faculty supported the 50th anniversary through the bi-annual *Oakland Journal*, distributed campuswide. This faculty-produced and published journal focused on the 50th anniversary theme. Each of the articles, submitted by faculty, the president and three vice presidents, contained stories and vignettes about the university's history.
- The University Communications and Marketing Department developed several pieces to brand the 50th anniversary, including in part:
 - A 16-month, spiral-bound calendar distributed with a cover letter from the president to donors, alumni and friends as a token of appreciation during the 50th year. Response to the calendar was positive with many recipients sending thank you notes and calling to see how they could purchase additional copies.
 - An interactive Web site featured all information about the 50th celebration. The Web site (www.oakland.edu/50) encouraged visitors to reflect on the past through historical photos and videos; read news and feature stories about the 50th; learn fun facts; and browse an historical timeline. Past and current students and faculty were invited to add their own reflections on the "Personal Memories" page.
 - A 50th logo incorporating the look of the capital campaign, was used liberally throughout campus and on university communications. The logo appeared on outdoor banners on campus and in neighboring communities. OU 50th anniversary letterhead and envelopes were created, as well as an OU commemorative postage stamp, and special meter stamping for bulk mail.

Description of how project fits into overall institutional and/or advancement goals

Dr. Gary Russi was named president of Oakland University in 1996 and since then, the university has achieved record-breaking enrollment, campus growth through new construction and renovations, a successful athletics program, and much more. Despite these successes many people in the community, as well as Oakland's own alumni, were unaware of the transformation taking place.

In 2005, Oakland University successfully kicked off its first capital campaign, "Innovation and Opportunity – the Campaign for Oakland University." In 2007, the campaign had reached its mid-point and gifts, which were coming in consistently during the kickoff phase, were slowing down. **The 50th anniversary celebration gave Oakland a platform to inform stakeholders about how much the university had evolved and achieved in five decades, as well as bring renewed attention to the capital campaign.**

Audience

The target audience for the 50th anniversary included all Oakland University stakeholders, including donors, alumni, friends, faculty and staff, students and parents, business and community leaders, and the public.

Total number of professional and support staff who worked on the program

A planning committee, chaired by a University Communications and Marketing director and consisting of representatives from administrative and academic departments, worked together to realize the 50th Anniversary Celebration vision and effectively plan, promote and produce the year-long program. In the course of planning, the team was divided into subcommittees that included: donor, alumni, friend events; faculty, staff and student events; theme, communications and video; Web; institutional history and tradition; and making history.

Within the Communications and Marketing Department, one full-time and one part-time staff member worked on the project as well as an art director, and two designers. All other members of the Communications and Marketing Department assisted throughout the year.

Program budget and unit costs

50 th Anniversary Kickoff buffet breakfast for faculty and staff	\$ 8,592
September faculty, staff and family event	21,500
Banners (Campus, Auburn Hills, Rochester)	14,418
Video (Shown at Donor Gala and on Web site)	6,000
Theme and logo design costs	1,000
Decals/stickers	1,099
50 th Calendar (printing and postage to 5,900)	35,645
Custom postage stamp	2,640
Time capsule cabinet	1,700

Total: \$92,594

Special circumstances or challenges faced

The most significant challenge of executing a successful 50th anniversary celebration over a period of 12 months was the magnitude of the project and timely execution of tactics in addition to daily responsibilities and deadlines. The sub-committees' early planning work, which began six months before the start of the celebration, and the dedication of the Communications and Marketing Department, as well as support from the university president contributed to a successful year of events.

To contain costs of the celebration, design and production projects relating to the 50th anniversary were completed in-house. The donor gala was held on campus by transforming the student union banquet rooms into a black-tie venue. The on-campus location provided a secondary benefit by giving alumni an opportunity to return to see first-hand the most recent renovations to campus and the student union.

One of the earliest challenges of the project was the limited number of historical photographs available to use digitally. Communications and Marketing staff enhanced the archives by reviewing dozens of boxes of photographs and memorabilia and scanned the best for use. The photos were used extensively during the events, within communications pieces and on the Web site.

Documented results, measurements of effectiveness

The Oakland University 50th anniversary celebration was a success on all fronts. Attendance for all 50th events exceeded expectations, giving Oakland University the opportunity to salute its past and celebrate accomplishments with stakeholders. A front page *Detroit News* article helped solidify the public perception of Oakland University in its 50th year as the second-fastest growing public university in the state of Michigan with a vision for the future and one known for its partnerships, research and student accomplishments.

A key goal of the 50th anniversary celebration was to re-energize the university's first capital campaign "Innovation and Opportunity – The Campaign for Oakland University" at its midpoint. During the 50th anniversary year in 2007, Oakland raised \$8.6 million, including pledges and commitments. **This represents a 75 percent increase over the \$4.9 million raised in 2006.**

Other key accomplishments include:

- Membership in the OUAA increased 20 percent from 2006 to 2007, surpassing the 50th anniversary goal of impacting membership by 10 percent.
- The kick-off breakfast exceeded the planning committee's goal by 200 when 600 employees attended the event.
- The faculty, staff and family event in September also surpassed attendance expectations of 1,200 when 2,023 people attended.
- Overall participation in the 2007 Oakland University All-University Fund Drive, which featured a 50th anniversary appeal, increased seven percent over the year prior among employees and retirees.
- The 50th anniversary Web site averaged 1,883 visitors each month, exceeding the goal of 1,000 hits per month. Several alumni responded to the request to identify vintage photos, and dozens of students, faculty, alumni and staff posted their reminiscences on the Personal Memories page.
- Oakland University was showcased in the media as a leader in the region to the public, donors, alumni, students, faculty and staff. Two prominent articles in local press included:
 "OU enrollment hits new high," *The Oakland Press*, Oct. 3, 2007
 "Once-quiet college aims for the big time," *Detroit News*, Oct. 30, 2007 (front page, above-the-fold feature)
- The favorable *Detroit News* article was reprinted and distributed to key stakeholders in December, and continues to be used as a marketing communications tool.
- *The Oakland Press* created a multi-page insert saluting Oakland University's 50th anniversary, funded entirely through sponsor support.
- Through the efforts of the University Communications and Marketing Department, hundreds of historical photos were scanned for use during the 50th anniversary celebration and future projects. Many of the people and events in the photos were identified by alumni, faculty and staff through the Web site and during special events.
- The 50th anniversary celebration took on a life of its own – another key goal of the celebration – with many departments creatively using the theme for events.

The year-long celebration gave the entire university community the opportunity to celebrate their accomplishments and renew their commitment to ensuring Oakland's success long into the future.