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UD HOSTS LARGEST REUNION WEEKEND IN HISTORY, HIPPIES, WORLD WAR II VETS TO RETURN TO CAMPUS

DAYTON, Ohio -- When Regis Lekan, the University of Dayton's director of alumni and parent relations, plans a class reunion, he usually pores over an old yearbook and tries to imagine the times.

This year he wandered into his Centerville basement and retrieved a trunk full of memorabilia from his undergraduate days 20 years ago. As part of his job, he's helping to plan his own class reunion.

"I've saved a lot of stuff. I was destined," he says with a smile, "to become an alumni director."

Lekan is overseeing the largest class reunion weekend the University has hosted since reunions were moved from Homecoming to spring two years ago. Classes that graduated 50, 40, 30, 25, 20 and 10 years ago are returning to campus May 31-June 2 "to be transported back in time to vicariously experience the good, old days," according to Lekan.

For the class of 1971, they were the best of times--and perhaps the worst of times. For Lekan, they were the most memorable of times. "In the yearbook, there's a section right before varsity basketball that's labeled 'Events/Drug Scene.' That points out how absolutely crazy the times were on college campuses," he says.

In the fall of 1967, the freshman class arrived on campus wearing "white Levis and Madras shirts and listening to the Beach Boys." They all donned small, red and blue beanies at orientation.

And with a chuckle, Lekan remembers the "scorch porch" outside the first-year women's dormitory. "Anywhere from a half hour to one minute before the daily curfew, the large patio area outside Marycrest became a place where scorching--goodnight kissing--took place. I can't believe that a student today would respond in any other way but laugh heartily at this."

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The days of innocence turned into days of awareness. "When we came to UD, ROTC was mandatory and curfews were firmly in place," Lekan recalls. "By the time we left, society had begun to emphasize the freedom of the individual more and more, and this filtered down to UD. Our clothing and hair styles changed drastically. We were hippies. Just as guys' hair grew over the course of four years, the level of participation on the part of students grew, too."

Some of Lekan's classmates were drafted to fight in the Vietnam War, a conflict that polarized the nation's campuses. On UD's campus, students successfully fought to change mandatory ROTC membership to voluntary. More than 150 students staged a sit-in outside the president's office on St. Patrick's Day in 1970 to draw attention to the need for educational reform and student representation on university policy groups. Confrontations between students and "the establishment" had become as common as today's porch parties in the student neighborhood. The year before, hundreds of students rallied, demanding that the Rev. Raymond Roesch, UD president, reinstate a history professor whose contract hadn't been renewed.

But it wasn't all "heavy stuff," says Lekan, recalling how students took to the snowy streets for boisterous parties the day the team won the NIT basketball crown in 1968 and how UD Arena "went nuts" in 1970 when the Flyers beat Notre Dame. "I can remember an entire floor of Stuart Hall huddling around a television set during the NIT. We were all jammed in there, and when a good play occurred, Stuart Hall literally resonated."

As "a lark," Lekan says he tried out for the cheerleading squad his junior year because he loved the Flyers, could "almost" turn a cartwheel and "had a big mouth." The men were called yell leaders.

"Put a megaphone in front of me, and I could get a crowd going," he says. "My job today is as much a cheerleader for UD as anything else."

As chief choreographer for the third annual reunion weekend, Lekan won't have much time to lead cheers on the sidelines when his old classmates are in town. "I suppose I'm going to need another reunion weekend when I'm not alumni director," he says, "to truly appreciate this."

For media interviews, contact Regis Lekan at (513) 229-3299.