

They find long-lost friends for reunions

By Carol Azislan
staff writer

FOR RICHARD Poling, finding members of Andover High School's class of 1968 without the help of Reunions Inc. was like digging for buried treasure in the Atlantic with a garden shovel.

"Most of the records from our class were lost," said the Birmingham attorney who organized his 20-year reunion.

"Out of 525 class members, we had only 50-75 valid addresses," he explained. "At the time of our 10-year reunion, several people were attending graduate school and many of the women were single. Their addresses changed over the years."

"We did a lot of leg work — everything short of hiring a private detective."

Poling and other committee members advertised in local newspapers and on cable television. One Sunday, they ran up a \$700 bill after combing through the telephone book.

If it weren't for assistance from Reunions, A Class Organization Inc. — a company based in Palestine, Ill. — they never could have located 250-300 of their classmates.

"We hired them for three reasons," Poling explained. "First, we didn't have the time. Second, we didn't have access to people outside out of southeastern Michigan and third, we didn't have to come up with the money up front."

IN AN age where time is a more valuable commodity than rain water, committees are turning to businesses like Reunions to lighten their load.

There are probably 50-60 companies across the country — many of them operated out of homes and the cottage industry is growing.

When it first started in 1968, Reunions Inc. arranged events for 12 high school in the Chicago area. This year, they expanded their market to Michigan and set up parties for 160 schools, including the Groves, Lahser, Seaholm and Troy High School classes of 1978. By next year, they expect to plan more than 300.

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Reunion Planners Inc., a Mount Clemens company, staged three in 1987 and five this year, including the Avondale class of 1976 and North Farmington class of 1978. They hope their business will start booming.

"We take all the work out of reunion planning," said Lee Kendall, who co-owns the firm with Alice Viviano.

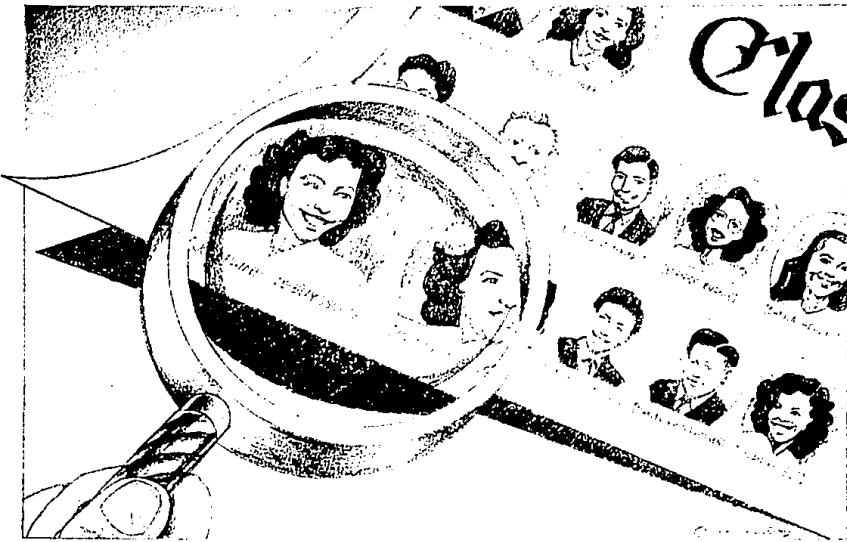
The women launched their operation after attending a seminar in Chicago, offered by Shell and Judy Norris, owners of Class Reunions in Skokie, Ill. (They were pioneers in the field.) The Mount Clemens company relies on word of mouth rather than publicity blitzes to gain clients.

Both the Reunions Inc. and Reunion Planners meet with high school committee members (usually consisting of former class officers) to set a date, find a banquet hall and hire the entertainment.

THEY ASSUME the financial risk by putting money up front and take a percentage of the ticket price. At Reunions Inc., profits may run as high as \$3,500 for a single event, and losses as much as \$2,000. At Reunion Planners, the average profit is \$3 per ticket.

"We benefit from volume purchase and try to translate that into the best package price," said Kevin Kinsella, one of half a dozen partners at Reunions Inc. in Illinois.

"While the price may be the same or higher than what reunion



committees would charge on their own, we're generating 25 percent more attendance."

To draw bigger numbers, firms must become sleuths. Reunions Inc., which has a staff of 15 full-time and 40 part-time employees, uses several tactics to track down former students: Word of mouth, computer data bases, directory assistance and telephone books — including those from states such as Texas, Florida and California where yuppies have migrated.

Alums receive lists of "lost classmates" just in case they can offer tips to the company.

"If someone's real hard to find, it's because he or she doesn't want to be found," Kinsella said.

POLING RECALLS locating

four former classmates, all living within five miles of each other in Colorado. "Two of them got together regularly, but the other two didn't know their classmates were in the area."

Kathy Stepanian, president of the Groves High School class of 1978, said she started out with a "lost" list of 300 students. "Reunions Inc. dwindled it down to 86," she noted.

Stepanian and Doug Fregolle, co-president of the class, organized their five-year reunion without any help. "I'm 99 percent sure it was cheaper with Reunions Inc., she said.

"They have computers to update lists. If I did it myself, the cost of mailings would have been ridiculous. All I paid for were the name

tags."

In this high tech world, there are some folks still doing it the old-fashioned way.

Eleanor McCotter, a member of Rochester High School's class of 1943, has been organizing reunions every five years for the past 20 years.

"We were a wartime class and we waited 20 years before we had our first reunion," she said. "A bunch of us girls got together and decided to plan it."

It was easy to hunt down people because about half of the 135 class members are still living in the Rochester area, she noted. "We only have one girl that we've never been able to find."

class of 1978 is relying on the resources of its members to set up a party. One former student owns a printing company and another owns a paper company.

Sometimes, no matter how hard somebody searches, it's impossible to find a lost soul. Kendall remembers combing through telephone directories and asking former classmates if they knew the whereabouts of a man named Melvin Chubolski from Farmington High School's class of 1983.

"He didn't exist," she said with a laugh. "It was a pseudonym for someone who wrote on the school paper." Reunions, A Class Organization, can be reached by calling (312) 397-0010. Reunion Planners, 465-2777.

SOUTHFIELD High School's

Inkster man pleads guilty in '85 Hills robbery of 3

A Wayne County man has pleaded guilty to conspiring in the armed robbery of two men and a woman in Farmington Hills in 1985.

The robbery preceded a shootout that left one Livonia officer seriously wounded and a companion of the men dead.

Appearing before Oakland County Circuit Judge David Breck June 30, George Frederick Leland Jr., 37, of Inkster pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit armed robbery. Leland is free on \$5,000 cash or surety bond pending sentencing Aug. 11. He faces up to life in prison.

The robbery took place after 11 p.m. May 5, 1985, at a house on Nine Mile. Police said three men brandished a sawed-off shotgun and bound and terrorized two brothers and a woman for 3½ hours during a robbery. The men demanded drugs, money and other possessions before ransacking the house. They drove away shortly before 3 a.m.

One of the brothers then drove the woman to a nearby hospital and notified Farmington Hills police.

At Leland's district court exam in Farmington in January 1986, one of the victims said there were no drugs in the house at the time of the robbery.

POLICE SAID Leland recruited James D. Barton, 26, of Inkster and Casimir E. Bagaculonis, 23, of Westland to rob the occupants of the house and turn over a cut of the profits.

Oakland County Circuit Judge Frederick Ziem sentenced Barton to 20-50 years and Bagaculonis to five years in prison for their parts in the armed robbery after they pleaded guilty Nov. 7, 1985.

Barton also was sentenced to a mandatory five years

in prison for possessing a firearm in the commission of a felony/second offense. Bagaculonis also was sentenced to a mandatory two years in prison for felony firearms possession/first offense.

Police believe Arthur E. Sherman, 25, of Garden City also was involved in the robbery. He was killed in the shootout on the I-96 service drive in Livonia. Bagaculonis and Livonia officer Gregory Henderson were wounded.

According to police reports, Henderson and officer Charles Baron-Klaak stopped the car containing Barton, Bagaculonis and Sherman because of a traffic violation. Police said the officers were unaware of the Farmington Hills robbery when they stopped the car about 3 a.m. The three men, all in the front seat, were ordered from the car when the driver, later identified as Barton, could not produce identification.

AT BARTON's district court exam in Livonia in May 1985, Henderson testified he was crouched in the doorway on the passenger side of the car, trying to remove a gun he saw lying on the floor when he looked to see why the driver wasn't getting out. The driver fired several shots, he said.

Both officers returned fire. Sherman and Bagaculonis were struck by bullets. Neither was armed although both were advancing toward Henderson when they were shot, according to Henderson's testimony and police reports.

In February 1986, Barton pleaded guilty to shooting Henderson. Wayne County Circuit Judge Michael Conner sentenced him to 20-50 years in prison for assault with intent to commit murder. Barton also was sentenced to a mandatory five years in prison for felony firearms possession/second offense.

'Kids Day in Park' launches festival

A child's greatest dream could become a reality Tuesday as Farmington and Farmington Hills host "Kids Day in the Park," the kickoff event to the 24th annual Founders Festival.

From noon to 5 p.m., children can enjoy a day devoted to fun and games at Farmington's Shawanawee Park, on Power between Grand River and Shawanawee.

"This is the biggest event for kids in the city of Farmington," said Rob Strick, Farmington Community Center director of public relations. "If you were a kid, this would be the ultimate fantasy for you."

SPECIAL EVENTS of all kinds will be offered free of charge to children. A magic show, a junior Grand Prix, a national frog-jumping contest, professional stage en-

tertainment, the Flying Aces Frisbee team and the first annual Pet Show are only a few of the scheduled activities.

"It gives kids a variety of things to do right in their own hometown," said Carol McMillan, Farmington YMCA youth program director.

"Kids Day in the Park" was organized by the Farmington Community Center, Farmington Hills Parks and Recreation and Farmington YMCA.

Many companies and organizations also have sponsored the event, including the cities of Farmington/Farmington Hills, the Metro Bank of Farmington, Botsford General Hospital and the Farmington Area Arts Commission.

Classwork on campus for boys in program

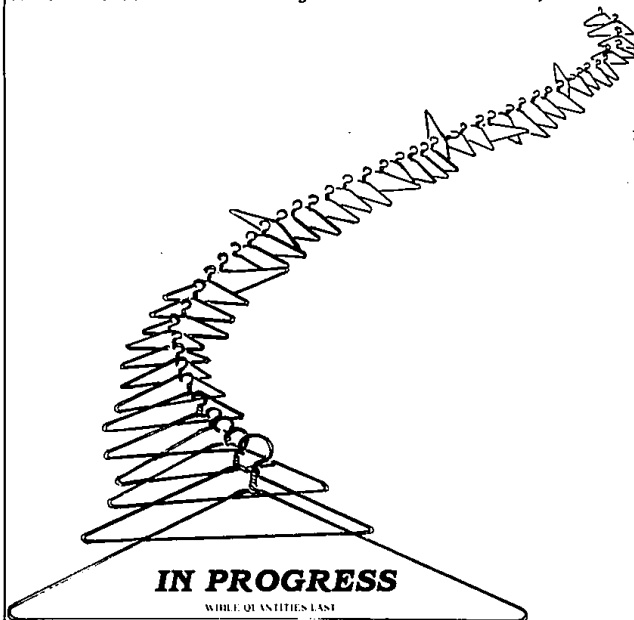
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they wanted their residents to be educated closer to the facility, because some of the youths can be violent. Last month, they suggested the move back to the grounds.

Farmington Public Schools has been required, by law, to educate the youngsters since 1979. They were originally schooled on the Boys Republic campus, then moved to Shawanawee — a former elementary school — in the fall of 1979.

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