

Alton High School Class of 1968 Plans 55th Reunion

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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ALTON - The Alton High School Class of 1968 is planning its 55th class reunion in September, where they will catch up with each other and reflect on their high school years during the Civil Rights Movement and Vietnam War.

On Saturday, Sept. 23, class members are invited to Alton Sports Tap to enjoy food, drinks and music from the 60s. Earline Hopkins, a member of the planning committee, explained that she has known her classmates for so long that she considers them family.

“The class has always been very close,” Hopkins said. “They’re like brothers and sisters. They really are. I mean, I can recall every house they lived in, their old phone numbers...I remember their parents because we were in and out of their houses so often. It’s family. It’s like having extended brothers and sisters.”

Over 600 people graduated from Alton High School in 1968. While many of them have spread out across the country, there are still classmates who live nearby or who are willing to travel for the reunion.

Hopkins took a more active role in the planning committee after the passing of her friend Sheila Ventimiglia last year. She wanted to honor Ventimiglia’s passion for gathering the class. The planning committee, many of whom met in grade school, are equally devoted to keeping their classmates connected.

“They’re still all local and still all interested in trying to get our class together,” Hopkins added.

It’s unsurprising that the class is so close; their high school experience was a tumultuous time. As middle schoolers, the students found out in class that John F. Kennedy had been shot. History-making moments in the Civil Rights Movement and Vietnam War were nightly news stories as they grew up, and tensions peaked a few months before they graduated high school.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was killed in April 1968. The FBI’s attention turned to Alton for a few months, where assassin James Earl Ray was born and raised. In the afternoon of April 4 — the day King died — a fight broke out in the Alton High School parking lot and turned into what Hopkins described as a “riot,” adding to the rioting across the U.S. The school shut down for two days.

Tragedy continued to strike when Bobby Kennedy died two months later. A lot of classmates soon left Alton to fight in the Vietnam War. The reunion committee invites the families of classmates who didn’t return from the war, to honor them.

But ultimately, Hopkins noted, the reunion is about celebrating the Class of 1968 and bringing them back together. They’ve been through a lot together, and it’s a powerful moment when they see each other again. Going forward, the committee hopes to organize a reunion every five years as the class ages so they can spend as much time together as possible.

“These are people that I’ve known since I was 5 years old,” Hopkins said. “We realized our classmates are disappearing and going on to a more blessed place, but we want to see as many of them for as long as we can.”

If you're a member of the Class of 1968, you are invited to the reunion on Sept. 23 at Alton Sports Tap. The cost is \$25 per person. Make checks and money orders payable to "Class of 68" and send them to Alton P.O. Box 1493 by Sept. 10 to RSVP.

