

Remembering Happy Days, 1958 At SPFW High School

By JOHN D. SMITH
Specially Written for The Westfield Leader and The Times

High schools in the 50s were always some combination of the movie, *Grease*, and the TV series, "Happy Days". *Grease* was typical of most city schools, and "Happy Days" was the model for the upscale "burbs." Scotch Plains-Fanwood High School (SPFHS) was definitely in the latter category.

In 1958, the last of the "small classes" (182) was to become the first graduating class of the "new" SPFHS on Westfield Road. It was a time when the predominant uniform for the guys consisted of black slacks, buttoned down collars and white bucks. Hairstyles were what is called a "buzz" today, although at the time, it was probably more likely to be a "flat-top." That is not to say that we didn't have our "Fonzies" too. There were always some that preferred the black look, with pulled up collars and the "DA" hairstyles, slicked down with bear grease. But that was OK—that was our idea of diversity.

Since cars were at a premium, social activities usually centered on get-togethers and parties at different houses. You could be sure "mom" would be home, and the thought of "booze" was—well, unthinkable. Drugs did not exist to our knowledge, and the parties usually meant listening to music and talking, with a few "make-out" sessions thrown in, if the karma was right. Bad language was also taboo in most mixed company—the girls just wouldn't tolerate it, and we would be disappointed if they did.

Dick Clark's "American Bandstand" was an afternoon must-see for the girls. In fact, some of the Class of '58" was on the show. Everyone looked somewhat "dorky" by today's standards, but we thought we looked pretty cool at the time.

When the guys got together the pastimes usually revolved around figuring out a way to connect with some "chick." Sometimes we would play cards and, if we could work things out, we might rebel with a smoke and maybe some vodka or gin that was borrowed from someone's liquor cabinet. Of course, the clear color allowed us to top it off with water to avoid detection and the wrath of our parents. That was about as wild as it got.

Organized sports didn't really exist, so we would have a pickup game at a park or empty lot—yes, we had empty lots then, although there were sheep on some of them. Basketball, touch football, tennis, and ping-pong, were all popular. Hiking, camping in the Watchung Reservation and long bike-rides were also popular with some of us.

Many of my cronies knew the Watchung Reservation and its many trails as well as the streets around town. The "blue barn" (since torn down), old copper mine, the many springs and the Deserted Village (it was pretty much deserted then) were our domain. I still think that we heard a mountain lion there one night while we were camping under the stars in front of the blue barn.

SPFHS had excellent basketball, baseball and track teams in those days, but the football team always seemed to struggle. That didn't stop most of the class from attending the games, and you could count on a great turnout for all basketball and football games—home or away. Admittedly, it wasn't always the game that was the draw; often it was the prospect, or fantasy, of finding a date for after the game.

The rivalry at football games was sometimes extreme. Fights with North Plainfield High School (NPHS) were not unusual and, as a result, the night games with NPHS were cancelled. Basketball games with Keyport were curtailed for similar reasons. But, for the most part, high school life was just squeaky-clean fun.

Dates after games usually meant a crowd going off together for pizza at Tito's, if we could find "wheels." Tito's was all the way out in Clark, near the White Diamond and is still an Italian restaurant today by a different name. Part of our 40th reunion was held there for old-time's sake. This was our "Arnold's" and SPFHS

would take it over after a game. The authority figure there was "Marge", and she knew all of us and would not stand for too much rowdiness. You didn't want to get on the bad side of Marge as she was also a good match-maker.

Formal dates were sometimes a problem because of the wheels shortage. If we couldn't double date with someone who had a car, we would sometimes get parents or siblings to drive us, or even take a bus. Taking a date by bus to Plainfield was not unheard of in the 50s. There were four or five movie theaters there and the skating rink was a possibility, if you really got bored.

As we approached graduation, more of the class could drive the family cars, and a few had their own, so our options increased. Sometimes we would go out to Bowcraft to play miniature golf and afterward to some place like Snuffy's. They used to have a rustic little place on the corner, where the big one is now. Usually, there would be an organ playing and they had great clam chowder. It was a cozy place to go even though they tried to discourage teenagers.

While graffiti and other vandalism were rare, pranks were a favorite pastime when the guys got together. One of my favorites happened a few weeks before graduation when about 15 of the guys camped out in the form of "58" within the quadrangle at SPFHS (it was shaped somewhat like a "C" then). We were still there in our sleeping bags feigning sleep, when classes assembled in the morning. Not knowing what the reaction would be, the tension was broken, when the legendary English teacher, Miss Higgins, held her clock out the window and set off the alarm. At that point we pretended to awake and went to the principal's office to get a late pass to class. Naturally, Mr. Adams sent us home for the day to clean up—not sure if we got detention, but you can be sure we needed a note from our parents to be let back into class.

The class had its cliques like all classes, and I am sure it was a miserable time for a few but, in general, most of us had fun and we got along pretty well. Today, with all those shared experiences behind us, it remains a pretty close bunch of folks, even though we are scattered around the world. While there are still quite a few in the Scotch Plains-Fanwood area, early retirement displaced many to Florida. There is also a surprisingly large number in California, some in the Midwest and a smaller cluster in the Southwest. Two live overseas, one teaching at the University of Warsaw, Poland.

But the path to adulthood was not without its travails. We lost 10 percent of our class in the 40 years since graduation and we had the Vietnam War to contend with. We lost Stu Burns to that war and that affected us all. I played touch football with Stu alongside his house on Martine Ave. He was a great guy, an excellent musician and member of the Moonglowers, the SPFHS dance band. It is amazing that more were not lost to this war, as many of us were in the military then.

More than 100 people (including spouses) came together at the 40th reunion when, ironically, most of us turned 58. Since then, there have been many mini-reunions with ex-classmates getting together for cook-outs or just chewing the fat over coffee or a beer. The next is planned for a classmate's house in Forked River in early August. I think we are celebrating our Social Security eligibility, or something.

So, for those of you who can reflect on those days, we can toast our good fortunes together over coffee someday. For those who cannot conceive of such innocent times, you have my sympathy. In either case, let me say, "Go Raiders!"

Editor's note: Now living in Tucson, Ariz. and The Poconos, Mr. Smith divides his time between outdoor pursuits, freelance writing and computer tutoring. He may be contacted on jdsaz@aol.com.

Mark D. Greenberg Serving As Part of Submarine Crew

SCOTCH PLAINS — Mark D. Greenberg of Scotch Plains and fellow sailors aboard the nuclear-powered attack submarine *USS Tucson* recently left on a six-month deployment to support Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF).

As the senior electrician on board, Chief Petty Officer Greenberg, the 36-year-old son of Jonathan and Nancy Greenberg of Scotch Plains, supervises the personnel who keep the vessel's electrical equipment working.

"By being on a submarine, we can provide rapid response, gather intelligence and create a strategic deterrence," he explained.

Stationed in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, the *Tucson* is a Los Angeles-class attack submarine capable of dominating undersea and surface battles. Armed with a mix of torpedoes, mines and Tomahawk missiles, the *Tucson* can strike enemy submarines, ships and land targets while remaining undetected by enemy surveillance.

At nearly 7,000 tons, the 360-foot-long *Tucson* is able to dive to depths of 1,200 feet. At these depths, fire prevention, electrical safety and damage control are important responsibilities.

"I'm responsible for electrical safety training and the safe operation of the engine room and nuclear power plant. All personnel are responsible for combating casualties



Mark D. Greenberg

and damage control," said Petty Officer Greenberg, a 15-year United States Navy veteran.

A submarine has the ability to operate undetected for months, making these vessels well-suited for covert intelligence and special forces missions.

During an operation, a sailor may not be able to see the sun or leave the cramped vessel for weeks at a time—circumstances that can prove both physically and mentally difficult.

"To deal with the conditions I work in, I exercise and watch an occasional movie or read a book," Petty Officer Greenberg revealed.

Health Commissioner Urges Caution in Humid Weather

TRENTON — Health and Senior Services Commissioner Clifton R. Lacy is urging New Jersey residents to take steps to protect themselves, their families and neighbors from heat-related illnesses, especially as temperatures reach the 90's and the air becomes humid this summer.

Heatstroke occurs when the body loses the ability to cool itself. Victims can go from being fine to being ill in a matter of minutes. They will have a high body temperature, very hot and dry skin, a rapid and strong pulse, and may be delirious or unconscious.

Heat exhaustion is a milder illness that may take several days of high temperatures to develop. It occurs when the body's water and salt is lost through perspiration and not ad-

equately replaced. Victims might become pale, sweat profusely, they may feel tired, dizzy, and may experience cramps and headaches. Heat exhaustion can be severe enough to require hospitalization.

"One of the most important ways to prevent heat-related illnesses is to drink plenty of fluids, even if you're not thirsty," Dr. Lacy said. "A body under stress from the heat may require up to 50 percent more fluid intake than thirst would indicate. One should avoid drinks with alcohol or caffeine that can lead to dehydration."

Other tips include taking advantage of air-conditioned facilities, plan physical activities during cooler times of the day, and perhaps even asking your doctor for advice especially if you are elderly.

Kean Univ. Holds Seminar On International Trade

UNION — The Small Business Development Center of Kean University will present a workshop titled De-Mystifying International Trade. The class is on Wednesday, July 10 from 9 a.m. to noon at the school's East Campus, Room 158A, on North Avenue in Hillside.

Roger S. Cohen, president of Cohen International of Old Tappan, New Jersey and lead international trade consultant for the New Jersey Small Business Development Center, will conduct the seminar, which is designed to help you determine if entering international markets, either as a buyer or a seller, is the right move for your company.

The workshop will focus on such topics as exporting and importing;

market research and planning; methods of receiving payment, such as letters of credit; international trade programs, including financing programs and freight forwarding and customs brokerage.

The seminar is co-sponsored by the Union County Economic Development Corporation of Union, New Jersey. There is a fee of \$15 per person or \$20 for two. Special arrangements for people with disabilities can be made upon request. The fee includes coffee and Danish. Participants should bring business cards and brochures for networking purposes. For further information or to register for the workshop, please contact Mira Kostak at (908) 527-2946.

Beginning of Summer Renews Concerns Over Drunk Driving

By ASSEMBLYMAN ERIC MUNOZ, M.D.

A wrecked sports car involved in a drunk driving accident sat in front of an area high school in June with a message to young drivers that no lives are worth sparing. I could not agree more.

With prom and graduation season now past us, the start of another summer is always long-awaited among our young people and their families. It is a time to get away from it all, to unwind and enjoy life outside of the workplace. Unfortunately for many, this summer will be their last because a drunk driver got behind the wheel.

Drinking and driving are two deadly combinations that destroy more than just individuals; they destroy families. Take the case of 16-year-old New Jersey MaryPat Keller. Her life ended after she made the mistake on June 22 of last year of getting in a car driven by a driver who was under the influence of alcohol. MaryPat was very involved in school and had lots of friends. Her parents are left with a grief void that will never be filled.

Twenty-two-year-old mother, pre-school teacher and part-time model, Phaedra Marriott, was on her way home from a concert in 1996 when a man who was driving his car on the wrong side of the road hit her car head-on.

The crash left Phaedra seriously injured. She broke her left femur, pelvis, ribs and right forearm. She also suffered a lacerated liver, a torn and collapsed aorta and was placed on a ventilator. She was in a coma for four weeks. Although she awoke from the coma, she was permanently paralyzed from the accident.

Despite these real life stories that would make one think we are a smarter nation when it comes to driving intoxicated, statistics continue to indicate that alcohol remains the leading factor in motor vehicle deaths.

In 2000, nearly 17,000 persons were killed in alcohol-related traffic accidents — an increase of 4 percent from 1999. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that alcohol was involved in 40 percent of fatal crashes and in 8 percent of all crashes in 2000.

Another scary statistic: about three of every 10 Americans will be involved in an alcohol-related crash at some point in their lives.

Despite the fact we have laws on the books in all 50 states making it illegal to consume alcohol under the age of 21, that has not stopped our young people from being killed in drunk-driving crashes on our nation's highways.

In 2000, some 2,400 people between the ages of 15 and 20 were killed in alcohol-related traffic crashes.

Here in New Jersey, 319 people lost their lives in 2000 from alcohol-related accidents. That number becomes even harder to swallow when you consider that amounted to 44 percent of traffic

accident-related deaths in our state that year. For the same year, New York's percentage of alcohol-related deaths was only 29.

Let's look at New Jersey's drunk driving numbers: the NHTSA reported that in 1997, 38,700 crashes on New Jersey's roadways involved alcohol. These crashes killed 282 and injured 4,300.

We have made headway over the years in lessening instances of DWI accidents. A recent Senate Task Force on Alcohol Related Motor Vehicle Accidents and Fatalities in New Jersey found that repeat DWI offenders are more likely to have higher rates of alcoholism and alcohol-related problems.

Given this information, my Assembly colleague from the 21st District, Thomas H. Kean, Jr., has sponsored legislation with Assemblyman Nicholas Asselta to criminalize third and subsequent convictions for DWI by making it a fourth-degree crime in our state.

Currently, there are nine bills pending in the New Jersey State Legislature that address drunk driving. These range from increasing the drunk driving surcharge to reducing the blood alcohol level at which a person is considered to be guilty of drunk driving from 0.10 percent to .08 percent. Phaedra Marriott helped champion the passage of a bill that lowered the blood alcohol content from .10 to .08 in her home state of Missouri.

Statistics have shown us that those convicted of DWI tend to continue to drive on the revoked list by not reapplying to have their driving privileges reinstated. Repeat offenders must go get help in a rehabilitation center or join Alcoholics Anonymous.

All the laws in the world, however, cannot substitute for common sense on the part of the driver and individuals who have the opportunity to stop an intoxicated person from getting behind the wheel.

Restaurants and taverns, as well as persons holding private house parties, have a moral responsibility to not serve alcohol to an intoxicated individual.

As a trauma surgeon, I have too often been the physician responsible to tell a victim's family that their loved one has been killed by a drunk driver. I have witnessed the pain and grief suffered by these families, but ultimately, individuals have the responsibility behind the wheel. During this holiday and summer season, please, don't drink and drive.

Assemblyman Eric Munoz, M.D., is a Professor of Surgery and a trauma surgeon at the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey. He was sworn in as a member of the State Assembly to fill a vacancy in May of 2001 and was reelected to a full, two-term in November. He currently serves on the Assembly Commerce and Economic Development Committee.

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