

# Family Weekend's meaning has changed

■ The weekend used to be a campus-wide festival with colorful events, but now it showcases the University

By Beata Mostafavi  
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Graduate Holly Hutchins remembers spending hours making an Arabian float — out of napkins and chicken wire.

The float featured *Arabian Nights* princess Shahrazâd and was made to flow down the brightly lit banks of the Mill Race, along with other elaborate floats for the University's 1960 Canoe Fete.

He still has a vision of classic jazz artist Hoagy Carmichael, who had performed at the University that weekend, dressed in shorts and sitting next to students and their families. Everyone was waiting to see the floats, which greek houses had spent weeks to make, trail down the river.

But as if on cue, it began to pour down rain — soaking onlookers and the napkin floats, which turned into big "soggy messes."

"We were all devastated," Hutchins said. "If it didn't rain though, it was a spectacular event."

These are the types of memories many alumni still have from what used to be called "Parents' Weekend" at the University. A few years ago, the University named the event "Family Weekend" to be more inclusive and expanded the event to two separate weekends during the school year. The spring weekend now centers around an award ceremony that spotlights honored students at the University while the fall weekend focuses on football games.

In the University's first years, Par-

ents' Weekend began as a competition between the junior and sophomore students, who participated in a game of "Capture the Flag" at Villard Hall. Eventually the contest toned down into a tug-of-war game on the Mill Race.

In the 1920s, two separate weekends were also held for mothers and fathers but were later combined with Parents' Weekend.

But the weekend was most popular in the 1950s and '60s, when the Canoe Fete was known as one of the most extravagant University events. A stage and grandstand that seated 10,000 people stretched across the banks while an orchestra played music to accompany the theme-decorated floats. The first float always carried the selected queen and her court — another feature of the weekend — which were taken to the stage to host the evening.

The "All Campus Sing" was another one of the weekend's prime events, featuring famous stars such as Nat "King" Cole, Bill Cosby, Dionne Warwick and Carmichael, who performed at concerts in McArthur Court. Hundreds of students who had practiced songs for months would then join in and sing with the entertainers.

But the traditions slowly began fading in the '70s, and soon there were not enough people left to keep the festivities alive.

Hutchins, Class of '60 and a Theta Chi alumnus, acknowledges that times have definitely changed.

"It was quite a show," he said. "It [was] one of those special times, [now] superseded by other events."

Jim Perry, Class of '58 and a Sigma Phi Epsilon alumnus, remembers the Canoe Fete and All Campus

Sing as events that not only united families with students, but brought the whole University community together.

"It was a big deal," he said. "It was an opportunity for all students to focus on one thing ... It was just a different time."

Now returning to campus as a father during the weekend, Perry does not see the same kind of unifying events. But he added that in earlier decades, the school's population was also half the size it is now, which made it easier to bring people together. There is also a broad range of diverse groups and interests, he said, that make up today's student population of 17,000.

Mary Hudzikiewicz, retired assistant dean of student life who is helping with commencement this year, said today the campus unites for causes students did not know or even care about before. She mentioned events, such as Take Back the Night, that bring the community together.

But Hudzikiewicz, who also attended the University between 1959 and 1963, said the traditional events will not be forgotten.

"When people I went to school with get together, we still talk about those times," she said.

She added that even without those events, Family Weekend still has value — but in a different way.

"Nothing can ever stay the same," she said. "Times have changed and people have changed. Now we're taking the opportunity to highlight outstanding students and showcase the University ... [Family Weekend] just has a different kind of meaning."



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The Parents' Weekend queen with members of her court in 1954, during the height of popularity of the event. Today's Family Weekend focuses on honoring student achievements.

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