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Tradition Continues: Prom Full of Memories

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Tradition Continues: Prom Full of Memories

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Saturday evening is a big night in the lives of lots of Dexter High School students. It's glitz and glamour; long, flowing dresses and top hats and tuxedos; it's an evening to be enjoyed and remembered. It's prom.

And this year as they gather for "Enchantment Under the Sea" in their finery, the gymnasium, lobby and auditorium will have been transformed into a unique and special environment. And there are years of tradition and customs that helped shape the evening.

Traditions have evolved with Dexter's prom.

For instance, a banquet used to be part of the evening. For a number of years the school cooks prepared the banquet meal. Then in the 1970s it was catered, with the Hickory Log bringing in the meals. Sophomore girls were generally asked to serve the meal to the juniors and seniors.

A photo from the 1975 prom shows long cafeteria tables decorated for the banquet in the gym, with a head table for teachers and school administrators. The tables were adjusted for the dance afterward.

The banquet was eliminated from prom night - and something new added - all in one year:1985.

"We decided to do away with the banquet but decided to add something new in its place," April Isbell of the Class of 1986 said. As juniors in 1986, the Class of '86 planned prom. "So we added Grand March."

Isbell said that neighboring Poplar Bluff had a grandmarch and had received some national media attention for its elaborate march. Dexter added it in 1985, and it has been a popular feature ever since.

Then there is the location.

In 1962, the gymnasium and the entire high school facility were new, and Judy Evans Rimel was a junior that year.

"The gymnasium was brand new, and they (administrators) didn't want us in there," she recalled. So everyone loaded onto school buses and went to catch a boat on the Mississippi River.

"We went for a ride on a boat," Rimel said as she recalled the prom dance on the river. "It was different; it was fun. But it wasn't a lot of fun getting on a school bus in your high heels and dress, I can tell you that!"

No other Dexter prom went "on the road" that anyone can recall, but other traditions evolved.

This Saturday evening the couples will be introduced and presented on the auditorium stage, where everyone will see – and photos snapped – as they walk across - for Grand March.

Some things, however, have remained the same. For instance, the junior class continues to plan and prepare the prom, which is presented for the graduating seniors. And the gymnasium – once off-limits – is decorated and transformed into a special place just for prom.

Junior classes raise money for the prom through the annual magazine sale in the fall – and the success of that endeavor often is a measure of the prom's success.

For Judy Patterson, this is prom number 18. Attending prom at a student in the early 1980s, Patterson has been the faculty prom sponsor for 18 years.

"Two more years," she said while sitting down after a long work day. The western wall was just put back in place after a gust of wind from the outside doors toppled them over. All was well. "I will retire from this (prom sponsor) in two more years."

Alana Dowdy and Amy Simmons are also faculty members at DHS today, but were both members of the Class of 1994. Dowdy very proudly points that their class was the first to use "wall boards" to help decorate.

"We painted them all at our house, and we roasted hotdogs while we were working," Dowdy said.

Dowdy and Simmons are part of the faculty sponsors working with the juniors on prom. Juniors were 'busy bees' all day Friday, transforming the gym, auditorium and lobby for the special night. Prom Work Day is a busy day, but one juniors look forward to throughout the year.

Prom committees often kick into high gear in the spring, with any meeting and working evenings. But one set of guys remember prom meetings for an entirely different reason.

A prom committee met on the evening of April 8, 1974, and while the girls on the committee were working diligently in the basement, Mark Becker and other committee members slipped up the stairs, and watched baseball with host Barney Miller. The guys were just in time to see Hank Aaron hit career home run number 715, breaking Babe Ruth's record. Some things just took priority over prom walls!

The Grand March for the 2012 prom will begin at 7:30 p.m. There will be a "window of opportunity" when parents and friends may view the gym, and then the event is closed to the public.

Photo Above: Juniors Sydney Graves, Samantha Midgett and Kaitlin Viers worked hard Friday on a boat and anchor that stand as a centerpiece in the DHS Gym for Prom 2012. (ShowMe Times photo by Annabeth Miller)

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