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Tuesday, Jun 10, 2003

## Business

Posted on Tue, Jun. 10, 2003

THE KANSAS CITY STAR.

### LEARNING CURVE: Reunion planners find, bring people together

By SU BACON  
Special to The Star

Class reunions are a rite of summer.

They have a mix of uncertainty about measuring up and curiosity about who's up to what.

But before any of those questions can be answered, someone has to find former classmates and bring them together.

That means "planning the event, mailing all the invitations, following up and confirming attendance, negotiating with the venue of choice, securing food, staffing, music, entertainment and decorations," said



Jesse Hernandez (center) checks to make sure everything is going well at the Oak Park High School Class of 1983 reunion. He chats with Annette Cristofano (left) and Andrea Grace (right). - Luke Davis/Special to The Star

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Phil Johannes, a member of the reunion planning committee for the Winnetonka High School Class of 1983.

Johannes' class is celebrating its 20th reunion Aug. 2.

After the Winnetonka reunion committee members had calculated the costs of doing all the work themselves, "it was an easy decision" to hire a professional reunion manager, Johannes said.

The committee turned to Jesse A. Hernandez, owner of An Event With Class, a full-service event planning business in Gladstone.

Hernandez handles the entire reunion -- from finding and contacting classmates to registering guests the night of the reunion. He also contracts with the facility, makes arrangements for food and decorations, coordinates music and photography, and pays all up-front costs.

"There is no cost to the committee by using a reunion manager," Hernandez said.

Hernandez's profit comes from the reservations that are made. As a member of the National Association of Reunion Managers, Hernandez is bound by a code of ethics when he plans reunions. He is not allowed, for example, to accept money from committee members, and he is required to work with class officers.

Once a contract is in place, Hernandez begins locating classmates and typically finds between 70 percent to 90 percent of alumni. In a class of 300, Hernandez has found that turnout averages 90, including dates or spouses.

"The biggest mistake most committees make is overestimating turnout," he said.

Reunions are a seasonal business, and Hernandez's season begins this year with the Oak Park High School Class of 1983 reunion June 7 and ends in October.

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With a professional planner handling all the details, class officers and committee members can then enjoy their trip down memory lane.

"Now, our committee is looking forward to catching up with old friends and long-lost classmates rather than worrying about whether the deejay will show up or the food will be cold," Johannes said.

For information

- National Association of Reunion Managers

P.O. Box 23211

Tampa, FL 33623

(800) 654-2776

[www.reunions.com](http://www.reunions.com)

- Income potential

Part-time average: \$10,000 and up



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