



# prologue.

## Reunions are designed for alumni who haven't been back in years and those who come to every home game.

From the time he first arrived as president of the University of Oklahoma, campus event planners quickly came to know that David Boren just loves to get people together. The teacher in him cannot wait to share the experience of distinguished speakers; the fundraiser in him wants others to join in his enthusiasm for the project; the athletics booster in him wants to pack the house. Assembling those targeted groups has proven fairly easy. More challenging has been his desire to revive alumni reunions.

Alumni first gathered at OU in June 1898, right after the first commencement. Of the five in attendance, only two were the newly minted graduates, the other three still having a year to go. Alumni ranks eventually grew enough to stage a homecoming, but reunions continued to be associated with commencement.

Eventually the alumni pool was large enough for individual classes to reconvene. Size can be a handicap, however, and when the classes number in the thousands, their assemblages take on a different complexion. Over the years, Sooner reunions fell off dramatically. Boren wanted alumni back on campus, and not just for football games. He was building something for the current and future student populations, and he wanted students of the past to be a part of the process.

Charged with making it happen as director of reunion programs was Tripp Hall—who would go on to become vice president for alumni affairs and now is vice president for development. In 1998 Hall and his assistant, Suzanne McAuley—reasoning that with larger enrollments, alumni might not identify so closely with their class years—

began the reunion effort by offering their services to affinity groups. Two years later, Hall took over at the Alumni Association, and Suzanne Greenfield Harris became the reunion director.

A number of highly successful reunions followed. Memorable among them was the 100th anniversary celebration of The Pride of Oklahoma marching band, which enjoyed a huge turnout in fall 2004. The same year former members of the President's Leadership Class and Pe-et, the senior honorary, filled the Union ballroom in a joint reunion, since their memberships often overlap. PLC already is gearing up for a 50th reunion in fall 2011.

Rather than trying to revive all-University gatherings, the planners elected to concentrate where the nostalgia had had a chance to settle in and take root—the 40- 50- and 60-year groups. The 50-year class was designated the Medallion Class, in reference to a classy piece of hardware of near-Olympic proportions that each attendee receives.

There was still the chance that, even with a good response, the returning alumnus might not find anyone he or she knew from days gone by. The trick, therefore, was to construct a weekend so packed with activities that a good time would be had anyway. Becoming reacquainted with the campus with others who shared the connection became the objective.

The event was moved from spring to fall and united with Homecoming. A subsidy from the President's Office kept the cost down, and various facets of the University pitched in to show the alumni a good time. Friday offers a plethora of campus tours—to the National Weather Center, the Sam Noble Oklahoma

Museum of Natural History, the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, the south oval mum gardens, the rare book collections in the library, a mini concert from the great organ in Catlett Music Center—the menu changing each year to benefit repeat attendees.

A luncheon, featuring one of President Boren's characteristically rousing talks, is followed by a noted faculty speaker in Meacham Auditorium, someone like history's David Levy, classics' J. Rufus Fears, women's basketball coach Sherri Coale or religious studies' Tom Boyd. After some evening breakout sessions for individual colleges, the Medallion Dinner wraps up Friday, with Homecoming Saturday yet to come—the Homecoming Parade, Boomer Bash and, of course, the football game. For those without tickets, the Alumni Association even has a limited number available.

And now a confession: I went to my class reunion last fall for the first time. Oh, not every part of it, having seen the sights on numerous occasions. But I listened to Boren's talk, and although I had heard much of it before, as always he kept it fresh, and I was mesmerized just like everyone else in the room. There were quite a few members of my class at the dinner—but no one I remembered. Still it was fun, and Rennie Cook, the new associate vice president for alumni affairs, gave us a lot of cool stuff.

The best part was listening to my fellow alumni discuss the good time they were having, how impressed they were with the campus and the places they had toured, how life at OU had changed, how they had changed. Will I go next year? Maybe. I'm probably old enough that the nostalgia has set in for good.

— CJB