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THE DAVIS enterprise

YOLO COUNTY NEWS



The Grad Night casino, shown here in 2009, is always a popular activity. Wayne Tilcock/Enterprise file photo

Our Sunday Best

Grad Night — the most important party in town

By **Special to The Enterprise**

From page A1 | May 04, 2014

*** Editor's note:** Solveig Monson chairs the 2014 Davis Grad Night Committee.

By Solveig Monson

Grad Night 2014 is just about six weeks away, and while hundreds of hours of preparation have already gone into planning this annual event, we are not quite to the finish line yet ... which is where you come in.

There are still many opportunities to contribute to Davis' most important party; to volunteer, to make donations or to be a financial sponsor. Grad Night does not happen without the full support of the entire community — individuals and our local businesses — so don't miss the chance to be a part of this grand tradition.

For those who may not know how this tradition came to be in Davis, here's a brief history.

In the summer of 1984, in response to a growing problem of alcohol-related accidents and deaths involving recent high school graduates, a group of Davis High School parents — including Sharon Rose, Jeannie Spangler and Paula Miller — got together to discuss the idea of starting a "Grad Night" at DHS. There were few high schools in the country to do so at that time, but as strong community volunteers, they were committed to getting it off the ground in Davis.



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Parents who were looking for something they could do for their kids came together in true Davis fashion to create a way for seniors to be together in celebration and ensure they had something to do that didn't involve drinking.

Spangler and Miller agreed to take on the responsibilities of coordinating the first Grad Night; in the process, Spangler said in an interview, "We had a lot of fun."

The parents that first year set about throwing a party to remember. Many of the elements that have become tradition were present at that first Grad Night: The Emerson Junior High location, the elaborate themed decorations and the popular movie room. Parents from younger classes signed up to staff the various activities during the party itself, so the kids wouldn't feel inhibited by the presence of their parents.

Although many parents of graduating seniors do work the event each year, the tradition of having parents of younger kids and alumni parents working is an important part of making Grad Night a success.

"We had tons of support from the community," Spangler noted at the time. Every business that donated to Grad Night received a framed certificate saying "I support Grad Night." Organizers told every parent to thank those businesses when they saw the certificates. That's another tradition we still honor today.

With a great deal of parent participation and community support, the first Grad Night on June 16, 1985, was a huge success. Out of a class of 420 students, 250 attended. No students who were under the influence of any substances were allowed to attend, setting this most important standard for the years to come.

"I think it's important for kids to know that they can have a good time without alcohol or drugs — they can actually have a fabulous time," Sharon Rose said at the time.

The parents of the Class of 1986 had the chance to observe how to put on a Grad Night, and they were able to successfully recreate the experience the next year ... as has every class since.

On Friday, June 13, the 30th annual Grad Night party will take place at Emerson. The tradition has continued to grow each year even as times have changed. It now includes all graduating seniors from Davis High, Da Vinci High, King High and the Davis School for Independent Study.

It's an amazing event for the seniors to celebrate one last, fun-filled night together. Before they all move on to their various academic, vocational and life endeavors, they have an opportunity to be a part of their school community one more time, in this completely positive setting.

Students who attend Grad Night — and more than 85 percent of each class does — are able to participate in a variety of activities all night long, including a casino, rock climbing wall, henna tattoos, inflatable adventures and the famous hypnotist show, to name just a few. The goal of the parents is still the same as it was in 1985: to provide a fun party that doesn't include alcohol or drugs.

The party is immediately after the Davis High graduation ceremony since they are the last school to celebrate commencement (Da Vinci, King and DSIS graduations take place

Anoushka Chander has been singing for as long as she can remember. From her first recital at the

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in the days before) to keep the energy and excitement of the ceremonies going.

Tickets have been available since the first day of school, and 60 percent of seniors already have purchased theirs. A ticket guarantees a student all of the activities plus unlimited food and beverages, along with many opportunities to win prizes and raffle items throughout the night.

Students are given casino chips to gamble in the casino, they can win prizes playing other games like Wheel of Fortune and Boxer Bingo, and at 4 a.m. the big raffle prizes like laptops, tablets, bicycles and high-value gift cards are awarded before the event wraps up at 5 a.m. Saturday.

The scope of the planning and work involved has broadened since the event began. Now, more than 250 volunteers help with Grad Night from beginning to end — parents, grandparents, alumni families and members of the Sunrise Rotary Club. But being drug- and alcohol-free remains the most important focus of the event.

Much of the cost for putting on the event is covered by ticket sales; the remainder comes from the donations of food, drinks and other supplies and resources made by many individuals and local businesses.

Students and parents are encouraged to buy tickets early in the school year to get the best price and to give the organizers the resources they need to start the planning and purchase supplies. Also, scholarship tickets are available for any student or family who is unable to pay the full price; no student who wants to be there is left out.

Each departing class passes on approximately \$6,000 to the next year's Grad Night committee for start-up money, because planning for Grad Night starts a year in advance. Grad Night is a 501(c)(3) organization and is governed by a small board that provides fiscal oversight and sets policies and guidelines for each annual planning committee, to ensure that the tradition is preserved for decades to come.

Volunteers create extensive decorations every year to go along with a specific theme, which is kept secret until it is revealed on Grad Night. There is a strong emphasis on re-using and re-purposing decorations and other items from year to year, which helps to keep the cost down; plus, it makes it fun to go through the elaborate inventory and see the amazing creations that so many talented parents have created over the years.

Guided tours of the completely decorated site are offered each year to the public, and this year will begin at 4 p.m. Friday, June 13, at Emerson Junior High, 2121 Calaveras Ave.

"If there were no Grad Night there would be many private parties that our kids would be going to — all separate, and not with everyone in the class ... and many would include alcohol," says 2014 parent volunteer coordinator Lori Schilling-Davis.

"And, above all, Grad Night is blast for the graduates! I have been volunteering for Grad Night for several years and am so excited that this year my son will be a part of this awesome tradition — I know he will love it."

I have been a member of school site councils, I have participated on numerous boards and committees for school groups, sports programs and events over the years, and I can honestly say that



coordinating Grad Night is by far the most fun I have had in all my volunteer capacities.

This great tradition, now in its 30th year, has continued on for thousands of graduates who have kept the party going. Grad Night is a gift we give to our kids — it is truly the most important party in town!

To be a part of the 2014 celebration, go to www.davisgradnight.org to sign up to be a volunteer or to make a donation today. We are still accepting raffle prize donations of all types. We can't do this without the support of the community and the enormously generous, creative and gifted volunteers who make Davis such an incredible place to raise our children.

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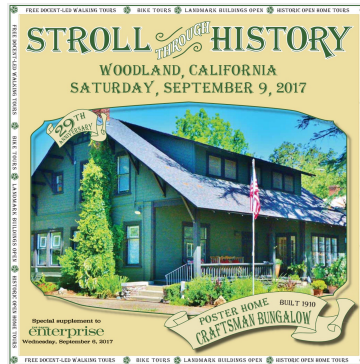
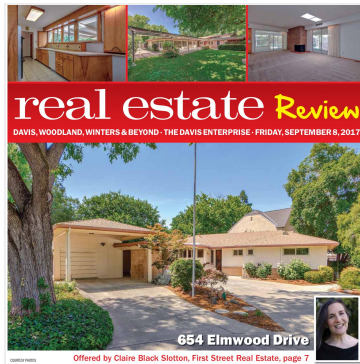
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