



The Weequahic High School Alumni Association

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

By Phil Yourish, 1964, Executive Director



It's so hard to believe that it was only 1997 when the alumni association made its debut at The Newark Public Library. So much has happened since. Who knew then that the visions leaping around in the minds of *Hal Braff*, class of 1952, and *Sheldon Bross*, class of 1955, would capture the hearts of so many Weequahic alumni. Who knew that an idea of fancy would turn into such a viable organization that has made many significant contributions?

It's been an incredible journey - so much accomplished in so little time. As we move forward in our 20th year, I can remember vividly how it all began. We were a group built on the intangibles - *dreams, visions, faith, trust, enthusiasm and the good intentions* of a small group of alumni. And we secretly wondered how far would that take us?

I can recall that fabled Friday evening at the Library when more than 300 alumni showed up, elbows touching elbows, in a place too small for such a large crowd, thrilled about reconnecting with classmates and friends from the high school of their youth.

That night was the first tangible - *real evidence that this improbable idea might actually have some substance.* We got the attention of our alumni, but could we sustain it? There were still the doubters. Was this just a one-time feel-good occasion or could we build upon it and garner greater interest and participation? Only time would provide the answers.

Over the years we have grown steadily. The response from our alumni has been exceptional. Since 1997, we have brought thousands of alumni, from all generations, living in all parts of the United States and other parts of the world, "*back to the old neighborhood.*"

Currently, we have nearly 10,000 alumni on our mailing list and almost 1,500 members representing eleven decades from 1933 to 2018. Our biggest

alumni states are New Jersey, Florida and California, but we have alumni in almost every state and 12 countries as well. And we have an office at the high school, a part-time paid Executive Director, and twenty-one alumni serving on our Board of Trustees.

The Weequahic name is still magic. When uttered, it immediately launches a flow of wonderful memories from the past. It connects us with our roots, to the days of our youth, and to the moments when everything just felt right and good. The colors *Orange and Brown*, a most unlikely combination, are viewed as beautiful by only those who attended the high school. And the first 20 years of the alumni association has been an unparalleled phenomenon.

When people speak of Weequahic, they usually describe it as follows: "*a very special place; the best years of my life; an outstanding high school; a great place to grow up; I wish it had never ended; I wish my children could have grown up there.*"

Our alumni association is a wonderful example of passing on one's legacy as previous generations of Weequahic "*give back*" to support the students currently at the high school. The alumni association has had a tremendous impact on the Weequahic of today. It has become an important resource to the high school as it provides students with opportunities that might not otherwise be available to them.

So you see, you can never underestimate the power of *dreams, visions, faith, trust, enthusiasm and the good intentions* of a small group of people.

Today we have become one of the most unique and successful urban high school alumni associations in Newark, in New Jersey, in the country!

And why not? It's in the venerable tradition of Weequahic. And isn't that the way it should be?