



BISON SPIRIT

Number One

Sunset High School Alumni Association

April 2002

It's About Time

Yes, finally, an Alumni Association. Other Dallas high schools have had them for years. Why are we just now starting? I don't know, but we are cookin' now. The movement began at the last reunion of the class of 1950. For that reason, the initial board of directors has five members from the 1950 class and the first several members came from that class. However, participation by all classes is a prime objective and directors from other decades will be added.

We want to keep you abreast of the growth and development. As of March 12, 2002, there were 70 paid members. That is a small drop in a large bucket. But we are definitely on the move. Our immediate objective is to double the membership in the next month. Right now we need to spread the word that we are alive and kickin'. Enclosed you will find an application blank. Use it to recruit a friend. Copy it to recruit several friends. We know that there is wide spread interest.

In the weeks ahead, our plan is to complete the filing of a corporate charter with the State of Texas and make application with the Internal Revenue Service for recognition as a tax deductible, tax exempt organization. This will make your dues a tax deduction and will allow us to solicit businesses for support.

Plans are moving forward to have a web site. No decision has been made as to what will be included in the web site other than links to other Sunset sites, but you can expect pictures, copies of the newsletter, a message board, etc.

We still have a lot of organizational work to do and we have a monumental publicity job ahead of us to reach the thousands of alumni. However, these things will get accomplished and we will be able to devote our full energy to providing assistance to Sunset.

A Bit of Trivia

The oldest restaurant in Oak Cliff today that has been under the same name and at the same location is El Fenix at Colorado and Beckley. It opened in 1948.

The first principal of Sunset High School was W. H. Adamson.

Giving Something Back

The Alumni Association is open to Sunset graduates over a span of some 75 years. Our high school experiences are greatly affected by when we graduated. The old timers say Bisons but the younger set is grammatically correct in saying Bison. My 1981 Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary says the plural of Bison is Bison.

But there are some things all Sunset graduates have in common. We have fond memories of people and places we knew there. We have a debt to the faculty for preparing us for adulthood. Many of us have a bit of guilt for not applying ourselves a little better. There are more things that tie us together than things that separate us.

We all recognize that the needs of Sunset today are many and we would like to give just a little back. Recently some of the directors of the Alumni Association met with Ms Sylvia Lopez, the new principal at Sunset, to discuss some of the needs that the Alumni Association might address. Among the things discussed were the restoration of all prior years' National Honor Society boards to be placed in the halls in hopes of inspiring students to higher academic achievement and the cleaning and restoration of the trophies and trophy cases. Ms. Lopez said, "Trophy cases will be organized by decades. The coaches will be responsible for cleaning and polishing all trophies".

As a first step, the Alumni Association directors voted to donate \$250 each to the NHS project and to the trophy case restoration. This is very significant in that it is the first gift. It marks a great beginning and there will be many more to come.

Ms. Lopez pointed out that many positive things are happening at Sunset now. The Bison soccer team won 2nd place in District and advanced to Regionals. The UIL Academic team won 1st place in the District and advanced to Regional competition on April 20th @ UNT. Our Wisconsin Competition in Business was the Best. We won 25 1st and 2nd place trophies out of 27 places. Mr. Rose our technology teacher is doing an outstanding job. Our TAAS scores look great for the year.

How exciting it will be to play a small part in the re-emergence of Sunset as an academic and athletic standard.

JOHN M. STEMMONS

Sunset class of 1927

By *Bill Melton*,
class of 1958

[Editor's note: The following article is re-printed from the September, 2001 edition of "The HERD", a newsletter for the classes of 1957 and 1958]

One of Dallas' greatest Bisons passed away July 20, 2001, at the age of 92. John Millard Stemmons, Sunset Class of '27, made massive contributions to the City that he loved. A developer, he was among the last of a generation of men who transformed Dallas into an economic powerhouse. Among his passions were Dallas and the Trinity River. Through his vision, he helped move the natural bed of the Trinity to the west, straightening its course to help free Dallas from catastrophic floods and also allowing for development of a 10-lane freeway that runs up the old riverbed, named for his father L.A. Stemmons. The Stemmons Industrial District is known Internationally and has reaped huge economic dividends for Dallas.

From his early roots at Sunset and graduation from Washington and Lee University, he became a leader in Dallas business, civic, and philanthropic endeavors. He was President of Industrial Properties, Inc. and served as President or Chairman of Dallas Real Estate Board, Dallas County Flood Control District, Greater Dallas Council of Churches, Dallas Citizens Council, Dallas Rotary Club, Dallas County United Fund,

Dallas Better Business Bureau, Greater Dallas Planning Council, and Vice President of the State Fair of Texas.

Stemmons was honored time and again for his distinguished efforts, including, Dallas Board of Realtors Easterwood Cup, Texas Realtor of the Year, Linz Award (Dallas' most distinguished honor), J. Erik Jonsson Award, and Dallas Press Club All-Time Headliner.



John Stemmons in the 1927 Sundial

He served on the Board of many of Dallas' most important growth oriented organizations, i.e., RepublicBank Corporation, Southland Financial Corporation, Dr. Pepper Company, Southwestern Life Insurance Company, Metropolitan Savings & Loan Association, TU Electric, and Dallas Market Center. He was a Trustee for The Hoblitzelle Foundation, Southwestern Medical Foundation, Gaston Episcopal Hospital, Childrens Medical Center, Episcopal School of Dallas, Washington and Lee University, and Treasurer of the Episcopal Diocese of Dallas.

A caring man with a sense of humor, John Stemmons always greeted his friends with "Hi Cousin". In many respects, he was "Mr. Dallas". He loved, cared for and nurtured this community. In fact, what would Dallas be today without the efforts of John Stemmons and those who worked with him?

And the foundation upon which all of his hard work was built began at Sunset High School. John Stemmons is and will always be a part of the "Spirit of Sunset".

I am proud to have known "Cousin" John, to be a part of "his" Dallas, and to be his fellow Bison.

Editorial Policy

It is the goal of your Alumni Association to make this an interesting and informative newsletter that will present you with items about Sunset, both past and present. We hope you will find items of historical interest, things that will remind you of your days at Sunset and information about Sunset in the new millennium and how you are helping to make it better.

Here is your chance to become famous. We will feature a section of letters from Association members. Due to space limitations, letters may be edited or only excerpts may be used. You may briefly tell us about life after Sunset and what you are doing now, memories of Sunset and Oak Cliff, current events at Sunset, etc. Anything that will appeal to other readers. Short articles such as the one printed on page two are also solicited. We will not publish addresses, telephone numbers or e-mail addresses. We consider all such information confidential.

For WWII vet, a diploma makes his day

By JACQUIELYN FLOYD
Published in the Dallas
Morning News 11-10-2001

By the time the rest of the Sunset High School Class of '43 graduated, Jack Armstrong was long gone. Barely a month into his senior year, Jack, lured by the romance and adventure of military life, quit school and joined the Marines. There was a war on, and he didn't want to miss it.

By graduation day, Jack was wising up to the sobering truth that it wasn't romantic and adventurous at all. It was bloody and terrifying, and he would be lucky if he didn't get killed.

Those long-delayed graduations are coming up for hundreds of veterans now, spurred by enactment last spring of a state Senate bill making anyone who quit high school to fight in World War II eligible for a diploma. The Dallas Independent School District conducted ceremonies Friday for 29 veterans, some of them posthumously.

I went as Jack Armstrong's invited guest. He wrote me a letter that was impossible to resist.

"Come to the ceremony, if you feel you have the time," he wrote. "We feel like you are family because you're in our home through your column so often."

Well, I was charmed, especially after getting my tender feelings hurt lately by irate correspondents who don't seem to

think all of my ideas are completely baked. I wanted to meet Jack, who seemed pretty tolerant of my shortcomings.

The ceremony, at a cavernous field house in Farmers Branch, was the culmination of a patriotic pep rally, with high school bands and choirs and dramatic readings and busloads of students in the audience.

As school assemblies have gone for the last 100 years, this one ran pretty long, and some of the kids got fidgety. The public-address system squawked at inopportune moments.

But I found myself perilously close to tears when they started handing out the diplomas, and when they called Jack's name, I stood up and cheered along with the rest of his adoring family. Jack Armstrong, 76, is living proof that all those hard-used clichés about "sacrifice" and "the price of freedom" have real meaning.

The price of freedom Jack paid was four years as a tank commander in the South Pacific. He mildly told me about the constant fear and the seemingly endless combat on one remote island after another.

Part of the price was getting blown out of his tank by a Japanese mortar on Okinawa. He had a ruptured eardrum and a concussion, but he went back into the tank to pull out the driver, whose arm had been blown off and who later died.

"You don't want to hear about that gory stuff, though," Jack said quietly. He was carrying his Purple Heart in his coat pocket, too modest to wear it on his lapel.

But the recollection made me wonder, as I have so often, what compels ordinary people to extraordinary bravery. Why didn't they run away or go

crazy, or fall down in the dirt and refuse to budge?

"You had to do it. You had no choice," Jack said. "That doesn't mean I wasn't scared. If you weren't scared, there was something wrong with your mind."

After the war, Jack came home and had a family. He opened his own chain of car-repair shops and became a deacon at Jefferson Boulevard Church of Christ. He was widowed and then remarried. Jack and his wife, Oleta, have so many children and grandchildren that I couldn't keep up with all the introductions.

He's retired now, but he works as a school crossing guard because he thinks it's a lot of fun to josh with the kids.

For a man with so much to be proud of, he was oddly ashamed about not having that high school diploma, as if it were a credential of respectability he lacked.

"That has been an embarrassment to me for 60 years," he said. "This is one of the greatest days of my life."

I hope that they're all great days. Congratulations, Jack. And thanks.

Sunset High School Alumni Association

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Directors:

Joe Whitney (1967), President
Lynn Bergoon DeWitt (1950), V-P
Steve Levine (1960), Treasurer
Shirley Young Sutton (1950)
Bill Smith (1957)
John Lunsford (1950)
Duane Starkey (1950)
Weldon Finney (1950)
Ed Cullum (1958)