Bringing C.H.E.E.R. to Regional Associations

In 2013, President of the Alumni Association Nancy Newman ’78 introduced C.H.E.E.R., the theme that overarches the Alumni Council Executive Committee’s current activities. C.H.E.E.R. urges alumni volunteers to Celebrate, Honor, Embrace, Engage and Recognize the alumni community. This issue of the Regional Roar highlights tips, resources and activities to help regional associations incorporate C.H.E.E.R. into events.

Celebrate

Regional events frequently serve to highlight alumni activities and occasionally focus around a specific achievement. A few clubs host events purely for the sake of celebration.

From the 1920s to the 1960s, an Orange and Black Ball was held on campus the weekend of Princeton’s annual homecoming football game against Harvard or Yale. In 2008, thanks to the enthusiastic leadership of Ellen Kratzer Rose ’84, the Princeton Association of New York City (PANYC) revived this tradition by holding its first Orange and Black Ball.

Celebrating all things Orange and Black, the Ball is now a biennial event for PANYC. Gary Pai ’99 former president of PANYC and co-chair of the Ball, says it is extremely popular: “This event brings together seven decades of alumni, from the Great Class of 1949 all the way through the Class of 2019. Even parents attend. It’s a very special event for alumni in that it’s simply a celebration of being a Princetonian.”

Pai and his volunteers pay attention to every detail. “Everything has a Princeton touch, from having the Alex Donner ’75 Orchestra, to a delightful guest performance from the Princeton Wildcats, to purchasing centerpieces from a young alumna’s floral business, to all of our silent auction items.”

“An event like this is very challenging to organize, especially the first one. The key is to make sure you have the support of key alumni in the region as well as the Office of Alumni Affairs. That way, you can have a much larger group of people promoting the event and helping to reach out to constituents who may not normally attend.”

Honor

Honoring Princeton’s Old Guard forms an integral part of the events calendar for a growing number of regional associations.

In Vero Beach, Florida, local alumni celebrated the 100th Birthday of Van Richard ’36 at one of the club’s core events. Richard was joined by John Hardy ’38 who had just turned 99. Scott Alexander ’71, President of the Princeton Club of Vero Beach, notes that both Richard and Hardy are frequent attendees at events.

Asked about the impact of the event on local alumni, Alexander observed, “this celebration was definitely an ‘up’ event for us and one that should be considered by every club in our system.”

The Princeton Alumni Association of South Carolina – Hilton Head hosts an annual celebration of the Old Guard and birthday party for its oldest living alumnus. The club’s vice president, Lisa Drakeman *88 S*88 P02, says the event has become a wonderful tradition for members. “Everyone in the club looks forward to this party. We really treasure and honor our Old Guard. It is a great draw and some people attend only this event all year.”

Adding to the atmosphere of celebration, alumni attend in their reunions regalia, bring Princetoniana items and sing Princeton songs. Drakeman notes, “this party helps us all feel connected to each other and also to Princetonians across time. This feeling is, I believe, one of the really special aspects of being a Princeton alum.”
Sharing stories and memories at the event has uncovered some hidden gems unique to Princeton. “We have an Old Guard member, Tex Farrington ’42, who tells a wonderful story about asking Einstein for help with his calculus homework. As he recalls it, Einstein could not solve the problems. This could be the best excuse ever for not completing a calculus assignment.”

In an effort to preserve stories of the Princeton experience over the years, the Princetoniana Committee started an initiative to record memories recounted by Princeton Alumni.

The Princetoniana Committee Oral History Project consists of digital audio recordings of interviews undertaken by alumni to capture various aspects of Princeton’s history. Once transcribed, the interviews reside in the University Archive collection. The Project has the full support of the University Archivist.

According to Princetoniana Committee member Thomas Swift ’76, 65 interviews are available online, with more to come. “Interviews include Old Guard, World War II era, early alumnae, emeritus professors, University Staff, and undergraduate and graduate students who subsequently rose to great prominence, such as a former NJ Governor and a former Secretary of the Treasury.”

The Princetoniana Committee actively seeks interested alumni volunteers. Swift says involvement ranges from finding prospective interviewees, to conducting regional interviews.

“Regions can identify alumni within their regions who would make interesting subjects for interviews. This can be by virtue of their contributions to Princeton, or because of the influence Princeton had upon their subsequent endeavors. Or, regional associations could partner with the Princetoniana Committee to conduct and record interviews.”

To date, the Princeton Area Alumni Association, of which Swift is a director, has started two joint oral history projects, one focused on WWII era alumni; the second on early alumnae. “Everyone who has been an interviewer has very much enjoyed the experience, and enjoyed a sense of accomplishment in contributing to the historical record of the University.”

Swift urges interested volunteers to step up. “No doubt there are some wonderful stories about Princeton residing in the memories of many local alumni. If you know of such alumni, you need to act now. Oral history is different from ‘regular’ history because without recording technology, it is lost over time.”

Interview transcripts can be found at: http://findingaids.princeton.edu/collections/AC259/c002. Regional leaders can learn more by contacting either Princetoniana chair Sev Onyshkevych ’83 at vsevolod@alumni.princeton.edu or Tom Swift ’76 at tswift@alumni.princeton.edu.

Embrace & Engage

Over the past few years, Princeton undertook several initiatives to better support affinity communities on campus and its alumni. These included conferences such as She Roars, Coming Back and Many Minds, Many Stripes.

As a result of University initiatives and in furtherance of the C.H.E.E.R. theme, resources now exist to assist with embracing and engaging alumni who may not have participated in regional activities in the past.

This year, the Association of Princeton Graduate Alumni aims to double its efforts to encourage greater engagement of graduate alumni. A few simple strategies by regional leaders can bring a significant increase in event attendance, volunteering and other forms of engagement. To find out more about resources to assist in engaging graduate alumni in your region, contact apga@princeton.edu.

Office of Alumni Affairs of Princeton University, Maclean House, P.O. Box 291, Princeton, NJ 08544, 609-258-1900, fax 609-258-1281, http://alumni.princeton.edu/
In April of 2013, Princeton hosted the Every Voice conference, bringing together approximately 550 LGBTQ+ alumni, faculty, staff, students, and their guests on campus. Building upon the success of Every Voice, in December 2014, the Alumni Council Ad Hoc Committee on LGBT Alumni Affairs released its Committee Report. The report includes numerous recommendations aimed specifically at connecting with LGBTQ+ alumni. To view the report, go to http://alumni.princeton.edu/goinback/conferences/lgbt/.

Recognize

Thanking volunteers who help bring Princeton Alumni activities to life in your region increases alumni engagement and event participation. The simple act of saying thank-you or sending a card can go a long way.

Mary Newburn ’97, President of the Princeton Club of Chicago (PCC), knows the importance of volunteers in her region. “The Princeton Club of Chicago is the 8th largest regional association in the world, and our organization only runs with the support of many, many volunteers. I firmly believe you cannot say ‘thank you’ enough.”

Each winter, the PCC hosts a free volunteer breakfast courtesy of the club, which includes remarks from a University speaker. The club also thanks volunteers through other, less formal channels, such as a thank you given at a larger event or hand-written notes or flowers after particularly notable efforts.

Thanking volunteers reaps many rewards. Newburn believes that it has broadened event participation by Chicago alumni and increased the number of alumni actively seeking to increase their involvement.

Newburn also makes the effort to celebrate alumni who may not have the extra time to volunteer. “When I attend events, alumni will often approach me and apologize for not being more involved. I’ve made a conscious effort to try to shift the paradigm away from feeling guilty for not being more involved to a message of ‘we’re simply grateful you are here.’”

“Our goal continues to be to engage alumni on any level and, once engaged, thank them for their participation and volunteerism. It is a formula that works - attendees turn into volunteers, volunteers then seek to get more involved, which leads to a vibrant club.

To find resources for thanking your regional volunteers, including stationery templates, go to https://alumni.princeton.edu/volunteer/login/resources/recognition/; To share your ideas for thanking volunteers, contact the Office of Alumni Affairs.

Join CORA’s discussion group for regional officers and share information and best practices.

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