

# Seneca High alums reunite classes through Web site

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SENECA — Last week, high school seniors donned caps and gowns to receive diplomas that officially marked the end of their formal education.

It is a bittersweet time, the euphoria of reaching one of life's first milestones combined with the somber realization that it marks the last time when an entire graduation class will ever be together. In fact, many classmates will never be heard from again.

Seneca High School alums Billy Lee (class of 1976) and Tommy Wood (class of 1978) understand that all too well. However, both have worked feverishly to bring together as many graduates as possible — both from their own classes as well as those from other years. The result has been the establishment of a Web site ([www.shsclassof76.com](http://www.shsclassof76.com)) that is a high school version of Facebook — complete with classmate profiles, photos, discussion boards, acknowledgment of deceased classmates and even songs that were popular during that time period (remember the Bee Gees?).

Now, the duo has gone one step further by organizing a reunion for the 1976-1980 classes that will take place June 27 at The Madren Center.

Lee said it was his own 30-year class reunion in 2006 where the idea for the site originated.

"We were leaving one of the committee meetings and Gary King told me the hardest thing about these reunions is getting everyone together," Lee said. "Planning the time and place, what to eat — one person could do that sitting down — but it's meeting and trying to find people that's the hardest."

Inspired by King, Lee began seeking a way to bring his 1976 classmates together. But while the first site he examined did feature some room for discussion

forums, it was limited when it came to content.

"I wanted something that was free or a minimal charge but, with free, you get what you pay for," Lee said.

But Lee soon learned about a site called Class Creator. In August 2008, enlisting the help of Wood and Alan Brooks, a 1978 alum, the trio began formulating a Web site that could be presented at an affordable cost for a school the size of Seneca High.

The cost of the site has been defrayed through classmate donations made through a donation link.

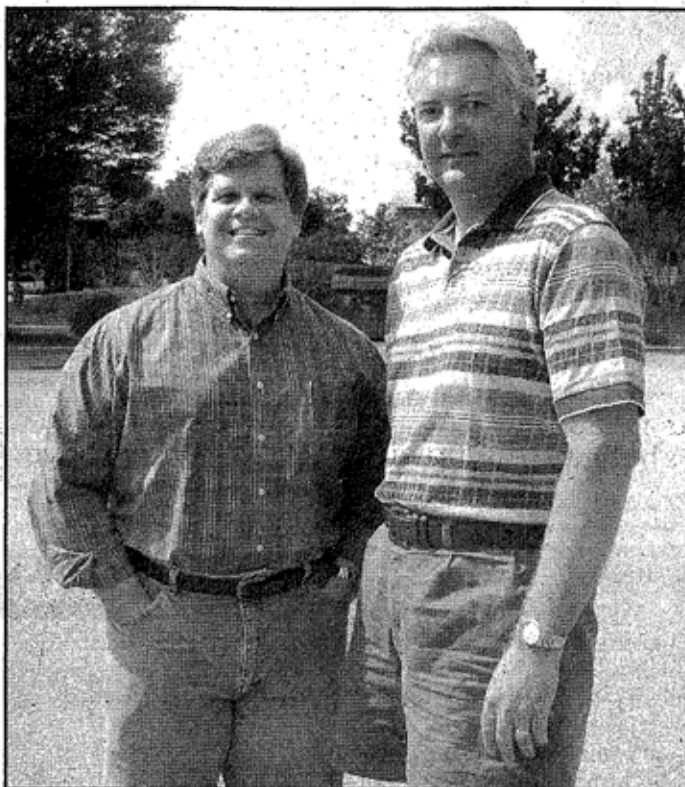
Lee said initial plans to create the site solely for the class of 1976 quickly changed.

"We decided to expand the range from 1976 through 1979 and then from 1979 to 1980," he said. "We stopped it at 1980 because we had the potential of having a little more than 1,200 classmates and, even with 40 percent or so signed in, it takes a while to work with classmates, their profiles and such."

From there, interest in the site grew as a number of students throughout the five classes registered online. Wood said Tina Hardin Stephens developed the idea of having an interactive Spirit Stick competition, similar to the actual spirit stick awarded to grades cheering the loudest during Football Friday pep rallies at Seneca High years ago.

"The 1976, 1978 and 1980 classes showed a lot of spirit at first, but the 1977 and 1979 classes didn't seem to have it initially," Wood said. "But, as the competition has gone on, 1977 had a 14 percent growth and 1979 a 13 to 14 percent growth in just one week."

Wood said one of the things he most enjoys about the site is the nostalgia it brings. Discussion board topics range from favorite teachers, stories ranging from padlocking the lunchroom door to removing hammers from the



Greg Oliver/Staff

**Billy Lee, left, class of 1976, and Tommy Wood, class of 1978, were the key players behind the establishment of a Seneca High School Web site ([www.shsclassof76.com](http://www.shsclassof76.com)) geared toward the classes of 1976 through 1980. The pair is also planning an All Year Reunion for the five classes on June 27 at The Madren Center. Reservations and/or payments must be received by Monday.**

school bell to "decorating" the roof of the former high school site that now serves as the location for Seneca Middle School.

"High school was a party to me — I didn't miss a day," Wood

said. "It was so much fun hanging around with friends, playing pranks and chasing girls."

Another fond memory Wood recalled involved Freshman Initiation Week, a rite of pas-

sage for ninth-graders who were subjected by seniors to tasks that involved pushing pennies with their noses in the hallway and carrying seniors' books. At the end of the week, Kangaroo Kourt was held in the school gymnasium and punishment merited out to offending freshmen included riding a tricycle with a diaper around their pants or drinking prune juice from a baby bottle.

But such frivolity is a thing of the past in today's more academically conscious environment. That is why Wood feels fortunate to have lived in such an era.

Wood is also pleased to see faculty members from that era registering on the site, and some plan to attend the reunion.

"Some students have commented on teachers they didn't like, but that's OK," Wood said. "We're all adults now."

A football player at Seneca High, Wood named former head coach Ken Rushlow among his favorite faculty members. Rushlow, who led the Bobcats from 1976 through 1979, eventually retired from the School District of Oconee County and now serves as a professor at Middle Tennessee State University.

"He was good at motivating you and trying to make you mad," Wood said. "He would cause us to

get into fights because he wanted to see some emotion. But once a group of guys goes through a bunch of tough times together, there's a bond that develops. I still feel a bond to those football players I haven't seen in 30 years and always will."

In February, Lee said he turned over operation of the Seneca High site to Wood. A second site has been established for the class years between 1981 and 1985 and efforts have recently begun on a site for the class of 1974.

Both Lee and Wood hope there will be a good turnout at the June 27 reunion. Approximately 300 are expected to attend and "The Music Machine," where DJs Charles Grace (class of 1979) and Brooks spun many vinyl hits 30 years ago, will return for this one night. The doors open at 5 p.m. and a time to mingle will take place from 5:30 p.m. to 8 p.m., complete with heavy hors'doerves.

At approximately 8 p.m., a program will be presented to honor deceased classmates and games and other activities will also be featured throughout the evening.

The deadline to register for the reunion is Monday and registration information is available by logging on to [www.classof76.com](http://www.classof76.com).