


# Cranston<sup>(/)</sup>

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### NEWS

## Largest class reunion ever

CHSE '71 will celebrate this June



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**GATHERING WITH FRIENDS:** Class President Dan Barry and reunion planning committee member Pat Giarrusso (far right) enjoy their 60th birthday party celebration that was done in place of the class's 45th reunion.



Posted Tuesday, March 8, 2022 9:46 pm

### By EMMA BARTLETT

Cranston High School East's class of '71 ended senior year with 721 graduates – making them the largest graduating class in the state. The class will now celebrate its 50th reunion on June 25 at Bonnet Shores Beach Club .

“It felt like we were always a cohesive class despite the size,” said Pat Giarrusso, who has been on the planning committee since the tenth reunion.

Class President Dan Barry said everyone was very active and involved. With singers, musicians, poets, athletes and more, Barry said the class had a lot of talent – with a class member even writing a class song.

In some cases, it's hard for the planning committee to fathom that they're already approaching the big five-o reunion.

“It's very hard to believe. I don't feel any different than I did back then,” said Giarrusso. “I still feel like I'm in my 20s.”

Giarrusso attended the University of Rhode Island and pursued a degree in textiles. She started a business making children's clothes, with storefronts in East Greenwich and Newport. She eventually pursued a second career working as a special education teacher for 18 years. Giarrusso now resides in South Kingstown.

Barry had a similar response.

"It's hard to believe we're that old," he said .

After high school, Barry went on to Providence College and started a career in fundraising. He moved to Narragansett and has lived there for the past 40 years.

He said reunions give people a chance to see friends they may not have seen in years. Barry occasionally runs into people on the street and they'll ask about the upcoming reunion.

Since 1971, the class has had 68 classmates pass away. Out of the remaining 653, reunion committee member Ernie Rheaume said 475 individuals still have addresses in Rhode Island.

The graduates are also living in 37 of the 50 states with several individuals in Japan, Italy and New Zealand.

The class has seen the transition of technology when planning their reunions. From sending out physical mail to the usage of email, the class now has two Facebook groups and a website to keep in touch.

"Dan has been the driving force behind the reunions," said Giarrusso. "I don't think we could've had a better class president.

Rheaume said every year a pep rally would be held at Cranston Stadium and, as juniors, the class of '71 beat out the class of '70 in the loudness of their chanting. Since graduation, Rheaume went on to pursue a degree in business administration and a masters in finance at the University of Rhode Island. He said after taking a computer class in tenth grade, he ended up in IT for 43 years and has worked for Old Stone Bank, Hasbro and Lifespan.

The class has held a reunion every five years except for their 45th. Since all the classmates would be turning 60 that year, Barry decided to host a 60th birthday party at the Park Theatre. Together, those who came sang to each other and ate birthday cake.

"This class likes to dance and mingle and this was an easy one to get people to come to," Barry said.

Past venues include the Biltmore in Providence, DoubleTree, the Viking in Newport and Bonnet Shores Beach Club.

One of the biggest obstacles for the class is finding a large enough location. Giarrusso said the reunions average between 175 and 225 people.

While the class has done an assortment of sit down and buffet style gatherings, this year will be buffet style so they can reconnect with old friends and walk around with a small plate. The planning committee has had fun by setting their entrance fee at \$71 – a nice play on their class year.

As for the friendships along the way, they have remained steady.

“Sitting at the meeting last night, it struck me that my closest friends are from high school,” Giarrusso said. “Those friendships survive.”

For special events, the reunion committee is surveying the class to see if they would like to take a tour of the building. Giarrusso said she hasn’t been inside the school since graduation; the most major change was the addition of the school’s new gym.

Giarrusso joked that if they do have a school tour, they should have everyone meet in the back lot, between the buildings where individuals would hang out, meet up with friends and have a smoke.

The CHSE class of ‘71 will hold their reunion at Bonnet Shores Beach Club on June 25, starting at 6 p.m. Tickets cost \$71 and individuals must RSVP by May 25. For more information or questions, please contact Dan Barry at [dbarry@drbassociates.net](mailto:dbarry@drbassociates.net).

## Keywords

reunion ([/search\\_mode/keyword/browse.html?search\\_filter=reunion](/search_mode/keyword/browse.html?search_filter=reunion)), class of 71 ([/search\\_mode/keyword/browse.html?search\\_filter= class of 71](/search_mode/keyword/browse.html?search_filter=class%20of%2071))

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class-reunion-ever,172092)

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