

*The Woodstock 150 Campaign*

# How And Why I Became Involved

By Lois Neumann, Class of 1944

Little did I think when I left Woodstock as a twelve-year-old kid that I would be deeply involved decades later as a volunteer for my old school. I had fully expected to be back the next year to complete my high school education, but World War II prevented that. While my older brothers had already graduated from Woodstock, and my younger sister returned with my parents after the war to graduate with the Class of '48, I have always felt cheated out of those important years at Woodstock.

It was thirty-six years later that I next saw Woodstock. This was my first big nostalgia trip back to India. Accompanied by my sister, we visited the town south of Bombay where we were born and spent some happy childhood years. And of course we made our way to Mussoorie, where it was our good fortune to arrive just in time to join a group trekking over to Wynberg-Allen for the inter-scholastic Olympic Sports Day. We delighted in the wonderful variety of people representing the various schools on the hillside, and cheered lustily for our Woodstock athletes, who may not have had the neatest lines in the march around the field, but acquitted themselves admirably in the track events. At Woodstock, we eagerly explored every nook and cranny, flooded with memories at every turn. Though this was twenty years after India achieved independence, and there had certainly been significant changes at Woodstock, our focus then was not on what was different, but on what seemed unchanged and evocative of our early schooldays there. Certainly most of the old school buildings met that criterion.

My next visit to Woodstock was in 1989, on an alumni tour led by Jane Cummings. This time, though the nostalgia factor was still significant, we were made more aware of what was actually going on at the school. We had a chance to meet some of the students, and were impressed with what a bright and interesting lot they seemed to



be. The increased diversity in the student body was notable, with a large proportion of Indian youngsters, and with other students from many different countries.

My third and fourth visits were both last year, and with a different perspective. I had been getting progressively more involved in Woodstock matters, enjoying the annual reunions, and serving on the WOSA-North America Council. Not long after completing my second term on the Council, I was asked to return as a representative of WOSA-NA on the Woodstock School Board. These were working visits, densely packed with meetings of the

Board and various committees. I came away with the assurance that Woodstock is in as good hands as it has ever been, with a strong Administration and a strong Board. I was impressed by the caliber of the Board members and the seriousness with which they approached their deliberations. Changes in the bylaws a couple of years earlier increased alumni representatives from three to five (from WOSA-NA, WOSA-India, and KWI), recognizing the importance of alumni as stakeholders in Woodstock's future. As I walked around the campus in 2002 I could see some changes taking place which alumni Annual Fund contributions have helped to make possible. The Quad dining room was transformed into a bright inviting space, and the kitchen modernized. In March the old music cells were a hollow shell, with loads of rubble being carried out and stacks of bricks being carried in. Overlapping sounds of piano, violin and trumpet issued from the new music cells under the old Infirmary. By October the old music cells were unrecognizable. The building now greets visitors coming onto the campus with a beautiful new reception area, the Admissions Office, and other administrative offices. For all of the frustrations in obtaining permits for some of



*After school Chess Club*

the new construction, I have been very impressed with the speed and efficiency with which much of the work has been accomplished, and the quality of the architect and builders involved.

It has been a privilege to sit on the Board as presentations have been made of the "Woodstock 150 Plan" (first called the Sesquicentennial Plan), based on and expanded from the visionary "Service Through Excellence" document drawn up in 1996. The Plan outlines in considerable detail the needs of Woodstock if it is to maintain all that is excellent about the school, catch up with deferred infrastructure work, and take its place as a model among international residential schools. After due consideration, the Plan was adopted by the Board.

The next step was a Feasibility Study, under the leadership of David Canfield, professional fund-raiser and spouse of alumna Ruth Harper Axelrod '70. This consisted of detailed interviews of over 75 active alumni around the world to hear their honest views of the school, and to get a reading on the potential level of support for the Plan. Some very significant opinions were elicited and fed back to the school. Most were enthusiastically positive, and we received strong encouragement to undertake the most ambitious fund-raising effort ever proposed for the school. The outline of the "Woodstock 150 Campaign" was then presented to the Board, who gave their unanimous endorsement, and have backed that up with individual gifts.

Soon after returning from the March '02 Board meeting, I had a call asking me to

undertake the role of Co-Chair of the Campaign. As I considered this, I realized that I love the Woodstock of remembered childhood, I value the Woodstock of today, and I am excited by the vision of Woodstock's future. Here are the three major reasons I accepted this challenge:

- I believe Woodstock is at a pivotal stage in its history, with very strong leadership, and a well-thought-out plan for its future.
- Woodstock is blessed with an unusually loyal, supportive group of alumni.
- I believe that Woodstock's excellent, value-based education and diverse community make a Woodstock education more important than ever in today's fragmented world.

The past year has been a busy one with the early stages of the Campaign. The school has made a major commitment in setting up a strong Development Office team under the leadership of Sharon Seto, and with Abhra Bhattacharjee based in Delhi, traveling to meet with groups and individual alumni in India, the US and elsewhere. Jane Cummings is working harder than ever, and has added Connie Wheeler to her KWI staff. David Canfield continues to lend his

invaluable professional expertise and is committed well beyond the call of duty.

Staff alone, however talented and hard-working, can never carry off a campaign of this sort without a group of committed volunteers. Early in the year a group of loyal alumni (sixteen in the US and three in India) signed on as members of the Campaign Cabinet. Since then, Cabinet members and staff have been working together, making calls and visiting a number of individuals, seeking leadership gifts. A good number of generous gifts and pledges have been made already, getting the Campaign off to a very encouraging start. This year, the Campaign goes into high gear, calling on the entire community of those who care about Woodstock to join in the effort as they are able, with gifts, pledges and bequests, to make the vision of the "Woodstock 150 Plan" a reality.



*Piano lesson in the new music cells*



*Before: Music Cells*



*After: The newly refurbished Business Center*