

**Townsend Harris Alumni Association, Inc.**

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Directors (as approved on October 5, 2016)**

**May 18, 2016**

**Location: 31 West 34<sup>th</sup> Street, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor, New York, New York 10001**

The following directors were present and constituted a quorum: Jesse Ash, Principal Anthony Barbetta, Jomaire Crawford (by phone), Kimberly Eaton, Ethan Felder (by phone), Ben Fung, Shari Gruber, Selina Lee, Kimberly Lo, Gary Mellow, Debra Michlewitz, Michael Rosen, Nily Rozic, Craig L. Slutzkin, Vincent Yuen (by phone).

Guest: Michael Byc.

- I. Selina Lee called the meeting to order at 6:40 PM and welcomed the directors and other attendees.
- II. **Approval of Board Meeting Minutes**. The Board reviewed the minutes of the March 22, 2016 meeting. A motion to accept the minutes was made by Michael Rosen and seconded by Principal Barbetta to approve the minutes with edits by Craig Slutzkin. Motion passed unanimously.
- III. To open our meeting, attendees shared plans and dreams for the upcoming summer season. Plans included spending more time with children, going to ballgames, traveling, sleeping, and making wedding plans.
- IV. **Executive Committee Report**. **Dr. Lee reported the following activities.**
  - A. The **2016-2017 schedule for board meetings** will be provided during the summer. There was a brief exchange about the March meeting venue and today's new venue. There was positive feedback about this new venue. We want to take into consideration parking and transportation available for specific locations.
  - B. 16 additional alumni **paid dues**. We have not mailed or emailed notice for the next dues cycle yet. Mr. Slutzkin noted that we avoid summer mailings to avoid the problem of erratic schedules can led to things "getting lost in the mail."
  - C. The **Video Project** continues though no specific new interviews have been completed.
  - D. Ethan Felder reported for the **Mentoring Committee**. He corresponded with Dr. Lee and Mr. Slutzkin, brainstorming ideas to try to connect the alumni network with current students and new alums currently attending college. The aim is gaining new active members of the alumni association. Alumni contact and professional data needs to be updated before we proceed.
    - a. Mr. Slutzkin focused on the problem of designing a good method to do this. Mr. Felder said he was willing to work on his own to consolidate various existing email address lists.
    - b. Mr. Slutzkin added that we can send out an email blast to contact alumni and ask for new information but this might prevent their going into the website and seeing other things. He encouraged the use social media as a way to reach out and noted that dues notification is another way to do this.
    - c. Gary Mellow asked for clarification of the goal in this project, wondering if it was professional internships during college, inside information about college, or other function. Mr. Felder said that the hope is those services will connect these younger members of the THHS community to the Alumni Association and

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motivate them to join. Mr. Mellow suggested that at some point we provide an array of possible services with tick boxes so that these prospective members can tell us what functions and activities interest them.

- E. The Electronic Newsletter will be issued in the next couple of weeks before the summer. Mr. Slutzkin spoke to Mr. Felder his providing a paragraph about the Mentoring Committee, the soon-to-be-live mentoring website, and the goals of this new initiative.
  - F. End of Year Events include Baccalaureate and Commencement, on Monday, June 6<sup>th</sup> and Friday, June 24<sup>th</sup> respectively. Dr. Lee will attend Baccalaureate and Mr. Slutzkin will attend Commencement as representatives of the Alumni Association. Even though we discussed a post-commencement collation at our last meeting, realistically the picture taking immediately after commencement precludes this. We will host the post-Founder's Day collation in the Principal's Conference Room as we did last year.
  - G. Mr. Slutzkin summarized the awards that the Alumni Association gives at Commencement and Baccalaureate, many in the amount of \$100. He will be adding and funding the Tanya Odom Award for Dedication to Diversity and Inclusion in recognition of Tanya's extraordinary contribution to the alumni association and her personal and professional work to further diversity and inclusion.
  - H. Alumna Alexandra Stergiou, Class of 2006 has received approval from the DOE and THHS to create a documentary about the Election Simulation.
- V. **Principal's School Report. Principal Barbetta reported.**
- A. The Principal noted that Alexandra Stergiou was amazed by the innovations in the Election Simulation since her first-hand experience of it.
  - B. Principal provided notes on personnel. Science teacher and THHS Alum Phil Porzio will be leaving THHS and going to Mamaroneck High School. He feels that this is real loss for THHS. He will be picking up a complete chemistry teaching program; he had been teaching six various science classes each term. Mr. Porzio advised students in the Research program, as well as other extracurricular activities. There will also be a 'maternity leave' in the science department. The Principal is interviewing candidates to fill those two positions. The Humanities Department will be losing Ms. Rizzuto to retirement. Ms. York, AP Pupil Personnel Services, will be returning from maternity leave shortly.
  - C. 284 students have accepted the THHS invitation to join the Fall 2016 Freshman Class. The Principal expects that number to decline to 275 due to students' deciding to attend parochial schools. The Freshman Class acceptances include 14 Special Ed students. Principal had only ranked 6 or 8 of them.
  - D. The current Special Education student struggle most with math and science. The principal is seeking to have an additional teacher in those classes with them, modeled after the design of the Senior Seminar where there is a high school teacher and college professor.
  - E. The program for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Senior Seminar Symposium was distributed. The principal voiced the possibility that this kind of event could be streamed if the Alumni Association provided some funding for the technology. Dr. Lee asked if this technology also would allow for the recording of the events. The treasurer advised the principal to submit a formal proposal.
  - F. Harvard Latin Exams results included a record-breaking 292 Gold Awards and 48 perfect scores.

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- G. New science lab will be ready by the summer.
- H. The pending Queens College Grant has 9 out of the needed 10 approvals; only the chancellor has to sign off. This new enhanced grant provides over \$1 million in funding for THHS programs, including the Queens College Seminar, the 12 credit Bridge Program, the Newspaper, the school play, an additional music teacher, an extra music class, the visiting professors program, the Queens College liaison, Professional Development, access to the college gym, and a writing fellow.
- I. There will be two spring concerts, dividing the performances into a band program this week and a string and chorus program next week.
- J. This year 1400 students will take 23 different AP exams.
- K. An impressive College Acceptance list was distributed for the Class of 2016 including 30 acceptances for Ivy League schools, twenty to Cornell. NYU accepted 80 students with varying degrees of financial support including full scholarships. The Class of 2016 has garnered over \$40million in scholarships and aid.
- L. Various guidance and quality of life issues were discussed.
  - a. Mr. Slutzkin commended the principal in the move of the senior prom from Water's Edge to Russo's. This was done because of students' concerns over unfair work practices at Water's Edge.
  - b. Mr. Slutzkin asked the principal about a Confessions page which might be related to bullying. The principal made clear that the school monitors this type of outlet, including Facebook, and does take action even though these forums are outside the school's realm of authority.
  - c. The issue of a Confederate Flag in a Founders Day skit was discussed though the principal said that no students approached him with concerns. The supervisor of guidance for the superintendent, Ms. Singer, now has provided an additional counselor ostensibly to replace Mark Duke, a SPARK counselor who retired a few years ago.
  - d. The school is finally getting surveillance cameras, a safety tool, which other schools have had. There will be an all day Mental Health Day. It will be an all day event, staged in the cafeteria with the distribution of literature and scheduled speakers. The goal is to encourage students to talk about their concerns.
  - e. The Queens High School Superintendent visited to evaluate the Principal and was impressed with the students and their clear ownership of the building based upon her observation of so many activities and sports team practices.

**VI. PTA Report. PTA Liaison Michael Rosen presented.**

- A. The last PTA meeting, on 4/21, was well attended. The next meeting will be 5/26.
- B. At the last meeting, four seniors spoke about their college application experience. This kind of feature is part of the PTA's strategy to boost attendance.
- C. The PTA Co-President, Penny Stern, who devised creative ways to improve meetings, such as running a raffle for people who stayed until the end of meetings, will be leaving the position because her child will be graduated. Fortuitously, the current Co-President, Liz Sadik, who is running unopposed, will be able to continue work and projects which are underway.

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- D. Michael Rosen spoke thematically about various aspects of THHS life and the THHS PTA's work as following the example of the Phoenix, that there is renewal and reinvention. He cited several examples: Phoenix Literary and Arts Magazine, new participation of alumni, and the principal's "wide ranging and deep commitment" to parent engagement. He hopes for more direct participation by teachers in the PTA.
- E. Fundraising continues to be a concern. The PTA did not reach its reduced \$55,000 goal which required adjustments in their budget. He noted that fortunately Queens College does support some programs that the PTA used to support. Nonetheless, it seems that parents are more squeezed financially and unable to contribute additional funds. He stated that the school needs the alumni piece to help with fund raising.
- F. The PTA continues its work to develop the Future Alumni Program and to sponsor the SAT Prep Program.
- G. The Principal noted that some parents give directly to a program, such as robotics, which may limit the dollars realized by general fundraising efforts. In that line of thinking, he thought we might pursue this kind of affinity donations.

**VII. Social Media Project Report. Jesse Ash presented.**

- A. He is working on aggregating all the Social Media accounts to make it easier to track and send out messages.
- B. The platforms that he's investigating are Buffer and HootSuite; we can still post on Facebook.
- C. Currently we have four people who separately manage our various social media platforms. This divergence repeatedly raises the question as to what we can and will post. Craig cited a recent post of a biography of an alum who achieved a career milestone on our Facebook account. A new aggregating platform would post that to all our social media outlets, keeping everyone in the THAA community up to date. The thinking is that this kind of up to date information will increase the value of THAA for its members.
- D. Dr. Lee will facilitate the movement to this aggregate platform via an email that will be sent to all THAA members requesting updated and complete contact and career information.

**VIII. Membership Committee Report. Shari Gruber presented.**

- A. The committee has a plan to increase the payment of 2016 membership dues by capitalizing on the innate competitiveness among the graduating classes. It entails choosing a month like June to solicit membership payment with the goal of each graduating class outperforming all others during the period extending from January 2016 to June 2016, and then a second round ending December 2016. The plan includes weekly reminders and various updates on progress. The precise dates of the cycle and cut-off dates were considered.
- B. The next step is deciding on a compelling, appropriate prize. One thought entry into a raffle. A class prize could be a commemorative plaque on an auditorium seat.
- C. Dr. Lee suggested drafting the various emails in advance of the specifics.

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- D. Ben Fung imagined that we could send a letter every month until the end of the year avoiding the pitfalls of exclusive summer mailings. We continue to send both paper and email notices. This is another opportunity to gather information about members' professional status and college affiliations.
- E. There was some discussion about the means by which alums can pay dues with some suggestion that we might use other methods that are more convenient and require less input. We would then lose the opportunity to update and gather information.
- F. Related to the goal of creating a basket of membership benefits with multiple possibilities, Mr. Fung hasn't gotten a response from PlumBenefits.

**IX. Events Committee Report. Vincent Yuen presented.**

- A. The Lawyers Event didn't work out. There were too few RSVPs to merit going forward. It will be pushed to another day.
- B. There are several reunions in the works. The reunion of the Class of 2011 plus the Class of 2001 is scheduled for Saturday, 7/23 at Lido Deck with a cover charge of \$40 which included two drinks. There is lagging interest in the reunion of the Class of 1991 on 6/4 although Yannick is working hard. Ben asserts that his Class of 1996 reunion has enormous interest percolating. There is the hope that this reunion can take place at the high school, as a first choice, or on Queens College campus, as a second choice. The service of alcohol is an issue if we use the HS as the venue. Principal Barbetta said that accommodation may be possible and, certainly, alcohol can be served on Queens College sites. The reunion will definitely take place in Queens and Ben is forecasting the attendance of 150 alums with another 150 guests. The Class of 2006 reunion is still on track for Thanksgiving Weekend.

**X. Young Alumni Committee Report. Kimberly Lo reported on her work with Lara Traum.**

- A. Kick-off event is still being planned. They continue to try to develop a list of activities for June and July. These activities will be offered to all THAA members.
- B. A draft of the prospective email announcement was sent to Selina and Craig in anticipation of the email blast.
- C. The planned volunteer event at the Queens Botanical Garden on June 5 has 10 spots available for THAA members.
- D. We still have our planned activity with the Coalition for the Homeless.
- E. We continue to reach out to Greenwood Cemetery for a Fall tour.
- F. Similarly we hope to have Michael Byc coordinate and lead a Flushing Meadow Park tour with a casual gathering as a prologue.
- G. The committee is in touch with our numerous Boston alums to coordinate some event in Boston.
- H. We sold 12 tickets out of 30 reserved tickets to the Yankees and Mets Subway Series game. Tickets were purchased by three people including Ms. Appel.

**XI. Fundraising and Development Committee Report. Kimberly Eaton presented.**

- A. Ms. Eaton had not received positive feedback in terms of asking Directors to approach possible donors. We need to re-evaluate and think of other options. She is happy to do major gift asks herself. She suggested that we might choose a

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project and then target donors. Conversely we can choose a donor and then target an area to fit them.

- B. Mr. Slutzkin spoke about past fundraising, recalling Ted Peck's initiatives and Charles Sigety's funding of various activities.
- C. The principal spoke about the ongoing need, remarking that an Extra Curricular Fund, to pay teachers who advise clubs, programs, and activities, would be greatly appreciated.
- D. Some later conversation will develop these and other ideas and appropriate strategies.

**XII. Treasurer's Report. Craig Slutzkin presented the financial report for the period ending April 30, 2016.**

- A. Craig distributed and reviewed the report noting the Association recouped \$116,000 through a strong increase in value in the Alpine Rising Dividend Fund. He also reiterated the financial arrangements with the Robotics Account.
- B. One key note is we are invested in a mutual fund and we should look for professional management as part of our fiduciary responsibility as a Board of Directors. In the past, Craig had done some research to this end with Gerry Halpern. They considered TIAA-CREF as a possible company to hire, a company with a good reputation for managing non-profits. Selina Lee made a motion to transition to TIAA-CREF. The motion was seconded by Michael Rosen and was passed unanimously.

**XIII. Old Business: We briefly revisited the tie project.**

Ms. Lo, Dr. Lee and Mr. Slutzkin talked about a clear plan to proceed, that first we need to know who will buy a tie because we don't want to lay out money that we can't recoup. The issue of a tie being an item targeting male alums seems a bit of a sticking point. Michael Byc will be asked to research the possibility of a matching scarf. We see inspiration in the PTA's ideas for producing and marketing branding merchandise.

**XIV. New Business**

Kimberly Eaton has a strong contact who owns a Robotics Company. This executive is open to providing internships for students or alums. The company is located in Philadelphia which would require the ability to relocate to that city for the summer. The company executive is interested in kids who are hard working and smart, a perfect fit for our students and graduates. Directors thought that this person could be a speaker for the robotics team.

Motion to adjourn was made by Shari Gruber and seconded by Kimberly Eaton. Meeting adjourned at 8:54 PM.

Respectfully submitted,  
Debra Michlewitz  
Secretary