

# PAA Celebrates Twenty-Five Years

From modest beginnings, the PAA has become a major force in the life of the School of Pharmacy and its students



Fall Reunion is all about food, fun, friends, and football.

There were three thousand names and not nearly that many good addresses, but it was the list that marked the beginning of the UNC Pharmacy Alumni Association.

Mel Chambers, a professor at the School, assembled a small group of alumni in the late seventies to explore the possibility of an alumni association for Pharmacy graduates. In the summer of 1979, the group sent out a survey to every Pharmacy graduate for whom the General Alumni Association had an address. Four hundred and eighty-nine responses came back; 85 percent of them favored creating an association.

The time was just right, says Joey Edwards ('70 BSPhar), the Pharmacy Alumni Association's first president.

## In the Beginning

"The late seventies truly was a great era in pharmacy," Edwards says. "That was when pharmacy became the most respected profession (in opinion polls). There was a lot of pride and ownership in our profession. Independent pharmacy was flourishing. We did not have as much government interven-

tion as we have today. We had strong legislative support. We had good profit margins in those days. Times were good. We had those first glimpses of pharmaceutical care, and we had increasing pharmacist salaries."

The School had everything it needed to create a viable association, he says, especially a large alumni base. The majority of graduates stayed in North Carolina and lived within driving distance of Chapel Hill, and Pharmacy alumni had in common a love of the profession, of the School, and of the University.

Over eighteen months, the group worked to create the association, defining its purpose and objectives, designing its organizational structure to ensure equal representation throughout the state, writing the constitution and bylaws, and setting up mechanisms for social events and continuing education, Edwards says.

The first PAA meeting and fall reunion was held October 4, 1980, to adopt the constitution and bylaws, making the organization official.



*Left: The Fall Reunion is a great time to show off new members of the Pharmacy family.*

*Below: The PAA presented the School with its sign in 1990.*



“At the first meeting we had, Mel and I were really apprehensive,” Edwards says. “But then it just exceeded our wildest expectations. Everyone said ‘Man, we should have done this years ago.’”

Association dues at the time were ten dollars, and tickets for the football game that day against Georgia Tech were nine dollars (compared to thirty-five dollars today). Unlike reunions of recent years, there was no barbecue dinner: Kappa Epsilon sold hot dogs to the alumni crowd. The interim officers were Edwards, president; Whit Moose ('60 BSPhar), vice president; and Mary Ann Fulton Kirkpatrick ('68 BSPhar); secretary treasurer.

Linda Butler ('68 BSPhar), who was president of the PAA in the early nineties and a member since the beginning, gives a lot of credit to Chambers for launching the association.

“It was very important to him,” she says. “He had such a good rapport with the students that I think he wanted to maintain that relationship between the former stu-

dents and himself and the pharmacy school. He's really the one who got it all going.”

Edwards says Chambers was determined to make the PAA the best alumni association at UNC.

“Mel had an incredible knowledge of the alumni and all the graduates,” he says. “He found such great joy in their advancement in the profession and marriages and births. He was especially committed and enthused about graduates who went in business for themselves.”

The inauguration of the PAA made it the tenth alumni group formed on campus. As president, Edwards sat on the board of the General Alumni Association as an ex-officio member.

“They were awfully proud of us,” he says of the GAA. “The numbers we brought in that first year were just incredible for a new organization.”

The inaugural meeting of the association was held in April 1981. At the meeting, Wade Gilliam ('26 BSPhar) represented the earliest class in attendance. That first year,

the Association boasted more than six hundred members (today there are more than 1,700) and had \$5,000 in the bank. (PAA minutes also mention two \$500 CDs that were earning 12 percent interest, a definite sign of the times.)

That first year, Edwards and Kirkpatrick carried on as president and secretary-treasurer, respectively. Frank Lowder ('56 BSPhar) was elected as vice president and would assume the presidency the following year.

By 1984, the PAA Board began offering life memberships in the association, and the idea of a distinguished service award was first put forth. Gary Dunham and Cindy Dunham ('77 BSPhar, '79 MS) were the first life members. There are now approximately one thousand life members.

The Pharmacy Alumni Association Distinguished Service Award was created the next year. The first recipient was Margaret “Peggy” C. Yarborough ('66 BSPhar, '78 MSPhar). The PAA also authorized the purchase of its first computer in March 1985. The cost was not to exceed \$5,000.

## Student Support

"You focus on yourself in the early years," Edwards says. "As you gain momentum and maturity, you focus outward."

After spending its first few years of life getting organized and reaching out to alumni, the PAA began working to support the School of Pharmacy. In 1985 the organization donated \$5,000 to finish a \$30,000 redecoration of the student lounge. Since then, the PAA has always supported projects that directly affect Pharmacy students.

"The student is the key," Edwards says. "They're the future of our profession. You don't have to graduate before you're part of our profession."

In 1986, the School asked for the PAA's help in creating a microcomputer lab for students to use. The machines were specified with 512 kilobytes memory, a 20 megabyte hard drive, MS DOS 3.1, and a thirteen-inch color monitor. Those were high-end machines for the day. A desk, chair, and a

shared printer brought the price per station to nearly \$3,000. The PAA sought to raise enough money for ten stations. By February 1987, \$13,000 had been raised. That increased to \$15,500 contributed in June before Eli Lilly kicked in \$10,000, which was enough to complete the lab.

The association began working to create its first student scholarship in 1986. The next year, the board established the Pharmacy Alumni Scholarship, a \$1,000 award based on merit that was paid from the Association's annual operating budget of membership dues. Margaret McLarty ('89 BSPhar) got the first one. The PAA also began working to make the scholarship permanent by creating an endowed fund to support it. Each twenty-five dollar contribution donors made gave them one chance to win season basketball tickets.

"In my time here, I've been impressed by the Alumni Association's commitment to our students," says Dean Bob Blouin. "Whether it is scholarships or travel funds or new amenities here at the School, the PAA is always there to meet the needs of our students. That support goes a long way to making the UNC Pharmacy experience what it is."

It is also worth noting that in 1987 the PAA was the first UNC alumni group to contribute to the construction of the George Watts Hill Alumni Center. The center was to be built near the Dean E. Smith Center but ended up sited next to Kenan Stadium on Stadium Drive.

## Sign of the Times

By the 1990s, the PAA was well established and making regular measurable contributions to the School and to its students.

At the 1990 spring reunion, the PAA gave the School the sign that stands at the north end of Beard Hall. At the time, Pharmacy was the only school on campus to have such a sign, and its appearance was a subject of great debate. The University's buildings and grounds folks insisted that it match the sign of the Carolina Inn, which was the only model they had to go by at the time.

The early nineties also marked the inception of the PAA Golf Tournament in 1993. At the time, the tournament itself was a fundraising event but has since come to mark the end of a separate fund-raising campaign that has raised more than \$900,000 in its twelve years, almost 90 percent of it going to fund student scholarships. The tourney has been held at Governors Club Golf Course in Chapel Hill and at Prestonwood Golf Course in Cary, but with the redesign of Finely Golf Course, the tournament returned home to Chapel Hill in 2004, a move that has been universally praised by participants.

Butler points to the golf tournament as an example of the PAA's great success.

"Our alumni association has been exceptionally active," she says. "When we started the golf tournament, another school had stopped having their golf tournament because they couldn't get enough people to participate, and we just have these great numbers every time because everyone enjoys it so much."

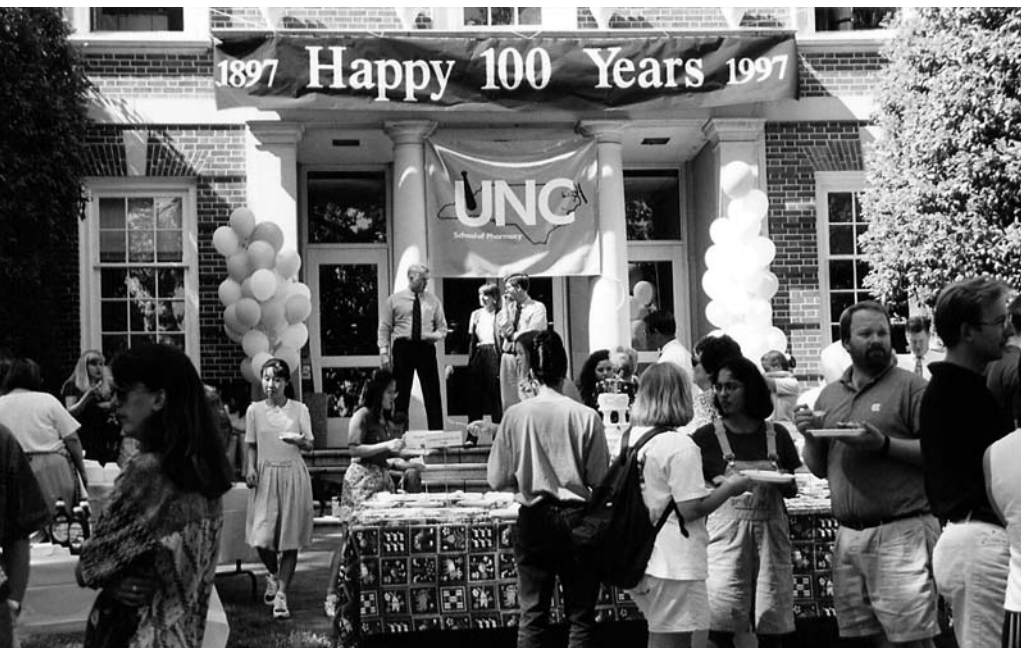
Over the past decade, the PAA has established additional scholarships and created travel funds to support students who want to attend professional meetings across the country. Each year the PAA does something special for each class, such as giving water bottles to all the first-year students and providing a picnic or dinner for each of the other classes.

Butler says she hopes that the PAA will continue to play an important part in the lives of Pharmacy students.

"They're our future," she says. "When Cliff [Butler ('70 BSPhar), her husband] quits working, we're going to be going into these pharmacies and dealing with these people. I want them to be involved. I don't want them to be there just to fill prescriptions. I want them to do it because they care."



*On August 30, 1983, the PAA's logo took flight aboard the Challenger space shuttle thanks to the efforts of Barbara Gilliam Alphin ('54 BSPhar) and her husband, Al Alphin, a consultant to NASA. Astronaut William Thornton ('52 BS, '63 MD) carried a copy of the logo during the trip that featured the shuttle's first night launch (from Cape Canaveral, Florida) and landing (at Edwards Air Force Base, California). The logo traveled more than 2.5 million miles, orbiting the Earth ninety-seven times in six days.*



Above: The 1997 Fall Reunion celebrated the School's one hundredth birthday.



Left: The Class of '48 poses on the steps of Howell Hall.

## PAA Publications over the Years

On January 22, 1980, Melvin Chambers, PhD, director of the newly formed Pharmacy Alumni Association wrote "The first issue of the newsletter has been mailed to 2,843 alumni addresses. The publication will not win any awards, and there is much room for improvement. More importantly, it's a beginning . . . ."

Since that beginning, it has always been a priority of the PAA to let alumni know what is going on with their classmates and with the School. The first PAA Newsletter came out in Feb 1980. It was four pages long. The April issue carried the first news of the School (Professor Fred Semeniuk retired) and alumni news included only mentions of John C. Wilkie Jr. ('50 BSPhar) and Olin H. Welsh Jr. (BSPhar '74).

A mockup of *Pharmacy Mirror* was presented to and approved by the PAA board in October 1983. The tabloid-format publication was mailed to approximately 4,000 students and alumni. The first issue came out in November 1983.

The *Mirror* got a fresh look in the spring of 1990 and grew more comprehensive, averaging twenty or so pages throughout the decade.

*Carolina Pharmacy* replaced the *Mirror* in the fall of 2002, coinciding with the dedication of Kerr Hall. The magazine is now mailed to all PAA members, to every pharmacy school in the nation, to UNC administrators, and to state government officials.

