

Mustangs for Life: Southwest through the Ages

By Olivia Garrett

As fall approaches, it's nearing the time to celebrate Homecoming at Southwest Minnesota State University. This year Homecoming is held the week of Oct. 1-6. The theme is Mustangs for Life: Southwest through the Ages. Homecoming at SMSU has evolved over the years in large part because of the dedicated faculty and community members in the Marshall area.

None of the Homecoming festivities would be possible without people to plan them. That's where Michael Van Drehle and his office come in. He is the director of Alumni Relations. Through him and the Alumni office, Homecoming is coordinated each year.

"The majority of Homecoming planning begins in December/January of each year, but the initial planning for Homecoming 2013 has already started," said Van Drehle.

The theme for this year's Homecoming was announced in April on Facebook. The theme, Mustangs for Life: Southwest through the Ages, aims to bring together the campus and community by capturing the different eras at SMSU.

Every year, SMSU has celebrated Homecoming with a different theme. Some memorable ones from years past are: Mardi Gras in 2009, Animania in 1998, and Wild Wild West in 1994. Previously, it was called Founders Day, Fall Fest, and Round-up Days.

Conni Stensrud, a faculty member since 1999, reflects on how Homecoming has evolved over the years.

"I think they have added more activities, which has created more buzz and excitement," Stensrud said.

The football game and Homecoming parade attract a large number of community members. “We have a strong community college following in Marshall,” said Stensrud.

The entire campus community is involved in the planning process, but narrowing down the logistics is left to a committee.

The process of picking the theme each year has multiple steps. The Homecoming committee brainstorms ideas in small groups, the suggestions are discussed, narrowed down, and then ultimately voted on.

“Our committee is made up of directors and advisors from all different clubs and departments on campus that contribute to the success of Homecoming,” said Van Drehle.

Homecoming is a memorable time filled with many traditions, “the biggest tradition being Homecoming itself,” explained Van Drehle. “I encourage all students to participate in the Homecoming activities. We have a full schedule all week with events ranging from arts to athletics.”

Of the many memorable events that happen during Homecoming week, some of the best memories are made by just being with people.

When asked what her greatest memories of Homecoming are, Stensrud simply said, “fun, sun, and friends.”

“Each year, thousands of alumni come back to Southwest to celebrate their pride and passion for the university. Most are proud to say that ‘we are Mustangs for life,’” said Van Drehle.

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