

West grads 'attend' cyberspace reunion

By Amber Hunt

News correspondent

IOWA CITY — The reunion is a tradition almost as old as high school itself, a time for old acquaintances to get together, reminisce about the old days and gauge just how far everyone has come.

For Iowa City West High School's class of 1973, however, the 25th high school reunion that was supposed to take place this summer wasn't meant to be, so some of its members decided to mix the old days with some modern technology.

"Our class is a little odd anyhow," class of '73 graduate Brenda Bradley said.

Just as her class didn't have the traditional end-of-the-year senior prom, the class of '73 plans to celebrate its 25th reunion over the Internet, in what Web site designer and West High alumnus David Gerlits called a "Virtual Reunion."

"I haven't set up (a time) yet" for the online reunion, Gerlits said. "The chat technology is pretty user-friendly, though, so if there's enough interest, it's possible."

Gerlits designed a class of '73 Web site after missing every previous high school

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West High School Class of 1973

Welcome to the West High School Class of 1973 Internet Home Page

Iowa City West High alumnus David Gerlits has created a World Wide Web site for the class of 1973's "Virtual Reunion" at <http://home.ici.net/~dgerlits/westhigh73/in.ex.htm>.

reunion due to scheduling conflicts. The site was established so Gerlits could keep in touch with his classmates and to help those classmates locate each other.

The Web site, located at <http://home.ici.net/~dgerlits/westhigh73/index.htm>, was supposed to promote the class's 25th reunion.

Interest in the reunion didn't gain momentum until this spring, however.

That left too little time for graduates still living in Iowa City, Coralville and

the rest of the area covered by West High to make the necessary arrangements. Thus, Gerlits' Web site became the only forum for a reunion until next year.

"There will probably be a 26th reunion," Bradley said. "For our class, that would be fitting."

The class didn't have senior prom because "it was just a rebellious time," Gerlits said. "Guys didn't want to wear the ties and the tuxedos, and I don't

think the girls were into the long gowns."

Gerlits' site has the most up-to-date mailing directory for the class of '73, plus a few extra perks for classmates interested in getting a little nostalgic.

A "Then and Now" link displays old graduation photos next to more current photos of a handful of classmates, while

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a "Missing Classmates" page lists the names of 35 classmates for whom Gerlits can locate no information.

Former classmate Bonnie Weldon, who still lives in Iowa City with her family, updates Gerlits regularly on Iowa City events, especially those pertaining to their alma mater.

"My son just graduated from West High, so I probably keep the class updated on all the current events, like the sports end of it," Weldon said.

The class of '73 Web site, she said, was the first of its kind in the Iowa City-Coralville area.

Since then, the classes of 1978, 1980 and 1983 have followed suit, and all four class pages can be reached through West High's official home page, and they also link to each other.

"It's a neat way to keep up on what's happening," Weldon said.

"We've e-mailed to different people and gotten responses. We found a couple different classmates we didn't know anything about. One of them lives in Singapore and his wife or girlfriend found his name on the site and directed him to us."

For Gerlits, designing the Web site was time-consuming, especially when it came to typing the 251 names and addresses of his classmates.

"It was a way to hone my Internet skills, a labor of love," Gerlits said with a laugh.

After typing all the names, Gerlits noticed that half of his

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**Bonnie Weldon,
class of '73**

classmates still live in Iowa, and half of those are in the Iowa City-Coralville area.

Gerlits — who described himself as a "nerd" in his high school days but who had athlete friends to protect him — now lives in Franklin, Mass., with his wife, Bobbi, who helped conceive the Web site design. His parents, Janice and Dr. David W. Gerlits, live in Coralville.

Posting the class of '73 valedictorian and salutatorian speeches is next for the Web site, he said, as well as a copy of the original graduation program.

Gerlits also hopes to find a few more "missing classmates" by Aug. 1, which is when he'll send a copy of the class directory to Weldon and Bradley so they can start sending out invitations for the 26th reunion.

It might not be the most traditional reunion, Bradley said, but "we haven't done many things the traditional way anyhow."