



Alumni Board has a legacy after 100 years

Balancing tradition with transformation, honoring past while forging a future

By **Caroline Smith Pryor '11** and **Kaleb Tilton '12**, Alumni Board members

When the Association of Alumni and Former Students of the Webb School was chartered in 1920, its goal was straightforward: “to assist in preserving the traditions of the school by directing promising and acceptable boys to it, to maintain a closer touch between the management and former students as a body and to provide means by which those who are so disposed may make gifts of money or property to that end that the good work of the school may be indefinitely and permanently assured.” Since the school was still privately owned at the time, this group became the first to call itself Webb’s Board of Trustees.

During the next 100 years, the name, composition, and mission of what is now the Alumni Board would evolve and adapt to the ever-present changes facing the school, not the least of which would be the addition of girls to those “boys” referenced in its 1920 Constitution. Today, the Alumni Board serves as the School’s working board, complementing the governing Board of Trustees.

“The Board of Trustees does most of the heavy lifting where the school is concerned,” says former Alumni Board Vice President Jack Bailey ’72, “but they can’t do everything. Alumni relations is one area that can be ‘outsourced’ to the Alumni Board.”

In this capacity, the Alumni Board has a hand in the major ways in which alumni interact with the School – from

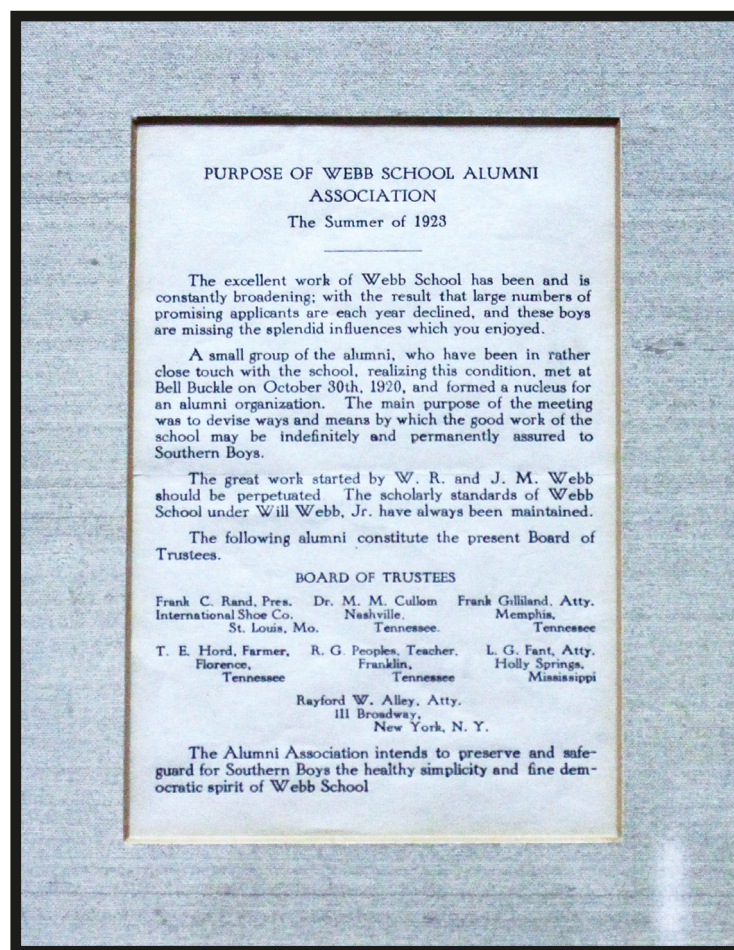
reunion, to the Class Agent network, to coordinating special projects such as Senior Blazer Day and engaging with new Webb families. And while that work goes a long way in “preserving the traditions of the school” as the

first constitution put it, a century’s worth of perspective and experience have transformed the A-Board’s purpose and given it another directive: looking toward the future.

The vibrant involvement of today’s board is the result of a revitalization in the 2000s, when according to Bailey and Wilson Sims ’72, the group had an infusion of enthusiasm after years of turnover in the Alumni and Development office and lack of engagement with the A-Board itself. At the time, the Alumni Board and class agent program were “kind of like an afterthought” according to then-newly hired Director of Alumni Relations and Annual Giving (and current Board of Trustees member) Sandi Jobe Puett ’95. Alumni outreach on social media was nonexistent, and up-to-date

contact info for many alums was hard to come by, especially recent graduates. From that point, the A&D staff worked with then-Alumni Board President Trey Tygrett ’88 to get the A-Board excited again, gaining momentum through more on-campus involvement, dinners at the headmaster’s house, and overnight stays in the dorms at summer meetings.

A-Board members started coming together for fellowship in



a way that had been rare in the past: summer meetings featured WILD adventures with Brian Wofford and pool tournaments that

went late into the night – and still do today. Of course, the Alumni Board underwent a transformation on paper too – rewriting the bylaws to reflect the A-Board’s role as a working board, building committees to do that work, recruiting new members who reflected Webb’s identity in the 21st Century – but the Board’s relationship-building was vital to those efforts bearing any fruit. Crucially, the A-Board worked with Class Agents to reconnect with alumni who had fallen off the school’s radar and started actively engaging with young

grads from the past 10 or 15 years who had little to no contact with Webb since graduating, but who were ready to revisit the school that shaped them. Today we continue to cultivate relationships with the young alums who represent the future of the school, who are able to bring new stories to Webb’s rich tapestry.

100 years following its inception, the Alumni Board is more visible than

ever, serving as ambassadors of the school and getting involved on campus year-round. From presenting Senior Blazers in the fall to planning Reunion in the spring, A-Board members are actively involved in the school, drawing in old classmates and prospective students alike. Even in the midst of 2020s unpredictability, we’ve continued to meet virtually and carry out our mission, which would likely shock 1920s Association of Alumni and Former Students, who incidentally had just lived through the Spanish Flu epidemic of 1918. Today’s Alumni Board has evolved and expanded from our origins in many ways – starting with the Board’s nine women.



Alumni Board - June 2019



Mike Read '77



Mary Huddleston Earthman '80, Jessica Delbridge Woosley '82
Melora Wilkins Turner '80

Still, our fundamental goal remains – we do what we do so that “the good work of the school may be indefinitely and permanently assured.”

As we look toward the next 100 years, the Alumni Board has a legacy to consider – balancing tradition with transformation, honoring our past while forging a future. Surely Webb’s landscape will have changed at least as much by then as it has since 1920. But if our history is anything to go on, there will be a group of enthusiastic alumni volunteering to serve the school, providing a voice for all alumni, ready to take a hand in the game.



Dr. John Flexner '44

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