

Garden City Public Schools  
56 Cathedral Avenue  
Garden City, NY 11530

Coordinator of Public Information  
Catherine Knight, Ed.D.  
516 478-1079

November 21, 2016

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**A Treasured Instrument is Key to Connecting Alums over a Half Century**

Time is funny that way – it slips away, moment by moment until, before you know it, 50 years have gone by. For alums from Garden City High School’s Class of 1966, such was the sentiment at their 50<sup>th</sup> Reunion held on October 14<sup>th</sup>. Name tags helped to refresh memories, as did walking the high school hallways during a special afternoon of activities coordinated by three ’66 alums: Bob Hughes, Kathy Setian, and Cici Fougner Hunt, and current high school vocal teacher Mr. Stephen Mayo along with the district’s coordinator of Music & the Arts, Dr. Nina Prasso.

Music was the connector for many in this class, a lifelong love of vocal music instilled by a very special teacher, Mr. Bert Konowitz, who, to the delight of all, attended the reunion. Mr. Konowitz’s first year teaching music at Garden City High School was with the Class of ’66, another special bond that renewed itself at the reunion.

After many hugs, broad smiles, and animated conversations, the three dozen alums and their teacher settled in for a brief history of the high school’s music program led by Mr. Mayo. A tour of the new music wing followed, with a lingering stop outside one classroom where teacher Ms. Amanda Conte was leading the Vocal Jazz Ensemble in a rehearsal for an upcoming performance.

The tour culminated in the high school chorus room with the most touching moments of all. There, in the center of the room, was the beautiful Steinway grand piano, gleaming, shiny, and as new as when the alums stood by it to sing together for the last time as the Class of 1966.

Of course, to the alums the piano was instantly familiar, but over the ensuing years, a half-century of daily use, the moves here-and-there within the building, and the five decades of general wear-and-tear had reduced the once stunning instrument to a pale shadow of its glory-days self – a Stein“was,” as described by Mr. Mayo.

He explained that the piano had just undergone a complete restoration at the Steinway factory, however, and played “like a whole new instrument.” After viewing slides of the piano’s “before” state, alums could see that the transformation back to the image in their memories was indeed dramatic. To demonstrate the quality of the refurbished piano’s sound, high school student Connor Cowie performed Sergei Rachmaninoff’s Prelude Op. 3 No.2 in C# minor as an added treat.

Mr. Mayo surprised the group by playing a recording he discovered of the alums singing at the New York Pavilion during the 1964 World’s Fair. As he played the recording, several alums chimed in to sing along, word for word, note for note, as if their last performance were

only the day before. Tears were shed as the group came full circle back to the love of music they had discovered so many years before.

As a final memento, Mr. Mayo handed each alum a CD of the original Class of 1966 World's Fair recording he had made for the group.

A few weeks after the reunion, the alums, in turn, thanked the school district and Mr. Mayo with a "Success-o-gram," an online submission form the district has established to honor staff members whose service goes above-and-beyond. At the November 15<sup>th</sup> Board of Education meeting, Superintendent of Schools Dr. Robert Feirsen presented Mr. Mayo with a "Success-o-gram" certificate and read a section of the message from organizer Bob Hughes:

"On behalf of my 50<sup>th</sup> reunion music committee colleagues, Kathy Setian and Cici Fougner Hunt, and the entire Class of 1966, I'd like to thank you and your team for the hospitality and support you gave us for our reunion music event. In particular, we are extremely thankful for Steve Mayo's involvement. He was supportive throughout, provided everything we asked for, made important suggestions to make the event better, and even surprised us with some very welcome details."

Thank you to Mr. Steve Mayo, and congratulations to the Class of 1966! Thank you for sharing such wonderful memories from your days at Garden City High School!



**Caption for 10-14-16IMG\_6368HSBert.jpg:**

Mr. Bert Konowitz addresses his former students, the Class of 1966 at the mid-October 50<sup>th</sup> reunion. Pictured standing are (left to right) Cici Fougner Hunt, Kathy Setian and Bob Hughes.



**Caption for 10-14-16IMG\_6379HSMayoChorusRm.jpg:**

Garden City High School vocal music teacher Mr. Steve Mayo (left) speaks with the Class of 1966 about the restoration of the grand piano; a new instrument when the alums were high school seniors.



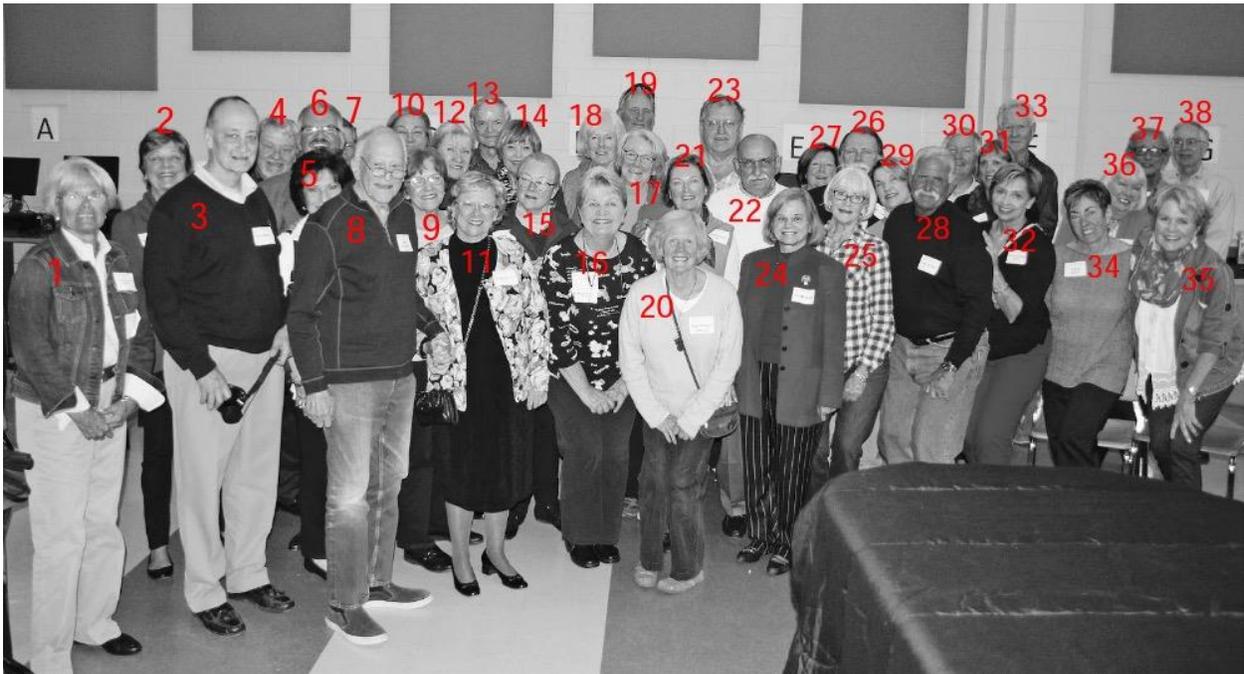
**Caption for 10-14-16IMG\_6385HSConorPlays.jpg:**

Garden City High School music student Connor Cowie performed Prelude Op. 3 No.2 in C# minor by Sergei Rachmaninoff on the refurbished Steinway for the Class of 1966.



**Caption for 10-14-16IMG\_6389HSSigningAlong.jpg:**

Singing along with their younger selves from a recorded performance at the 1964 World's Fair, alums were teary-eyed but happy during the reunion.



**Caption for 10-14-16IMG\_6396HSClass66GroupwBert.jpg:**

The Class of 1966 with music teacher Mr. Bert Konowitz at their 50<sup>th</sup> Garden City High School Reunion: 1. Ellen Johnson Schlosser, 2. Wendy Behrer Robertson, 3. Clark Wilson, 4. Doug Beck, 5. Tina Hughes, 6. Duane Hughes, 7. Mark Tomasko, 8. Bert Konowitz, 9. Kathy Healy Hamon, 10. Joan Eberle Young, 11. Ellin Fredricksen Wilson, 12. Deirdre Torney Fortune, 13. Peter Taylor, 15. Susan Bachelder, 16. Norine Freeman Noonan, 17. Laura Nelson, 18. Lynn Hile Hughes, 19. Larry Volper, 20. Gigi Klayer O'Malley, 21. Jill Hobson Kassis, 22. George

Kassis, 23. Jim Roth, 24. Pam Stuart, 25. Jeannie Wolff Stevens, 26. Bill Green, 27. Portia Green, 28. Jon Christ, 29. Susan O'Hare Christ, 30. Bill Sheldon, 31. Maggie Perry Sheldon, 32. Daria Stemple Weber, 33. Stephen Garypie, Kathy Setian, 35. Cici Fougner Hunt, 36. Jane Haag Garypie, 37. Mike Stern, 38. Bob Hughes.