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UD grads recall their glory days

New book documents unofficial history of college life

By CHRISTINE NEFF

Late nights at the Stone Balloon. Long meals at Rodney Dining Hall.

Block parties on Wilbur Street. Drinks for your 21st at the Deer Park.

Making friends, sharing laughs - this is the stuff that makes up a University of Delaware student's glory days, and a new book by a UD grad takes a humorous, nostalgic look at that collective college experience.

Darren Kane, UD '95, describes his 400-page book, "Glory Days at Delaware, the Completely Unofficial Modern History of College Life in Newark, 1987-2007," as a "gigantic inside joke" to be understood by 20 years worth of alumni and current college students.

Kane weaves his personal stories from college in with those of hundreds of contributors that he first reminisced with online. He started a MySpace Web page for DelGrads in February 2006. The site quickly caught on and now has 60,000 "threads" or messages posted to it.

Its success surprised Kane, and he realized the topic had book potential. He started to arrange the material in a way that could be read in "bite-sized pieces" and sought permission from hundreds of bloggers to use their stories for his book.

"The book isn't really about me," said Kane, who now lives in New York City and works as a publicist for comic books. "I'm just your host. I don't think I'm anything unique or outrageous. I'm just a normal dude who ran into some fun people and had a mix of experiences at college."

Any student, he said, can relate to the material, and many probably shared his experiences.

"My college years were probably just like yours: I bummed around the dorms, hung out with friends, went to parties and bars, slept, drank, and sometimes studied. Moments of hilarity along the way," he writes in the book.

One of his favorite chapters, he said, focuses on a house on E. Cleveland Avenue that has something of a "party house" legacy. He traces the residents

and their stories back 15 years. It shows, he said, that "the more we change, the more we stay the same."

But, things did change at UD and in Newark over the last 20 years, and the book covers many of them: residence halls that came and went, the annual turnover of Main Street businesses, amendments to college policies, and, of course, the closing and demolition of the Stone Balloon.

The Balloon "eulogies," as Kane called them, take up two chapters of the book - one written from the students' perspectives and one by the bands that regularly performed there.

But, it's not just the buildings that graduates miss, especially after spending a few years in the "real world," he said. It's the people they met and the memories they shared in their "good ole' days at Delaware."

"I think it's the little things. You might remember the giant events - the annual parties, turning 21. But I think what puts a smile on your face are the little conversations you had in the dining hall or the dorm room, walking down the Green. You miss more the little moments of day-to-day than the bigger, ridiculous stuff," he said.

Kane said he travels back to Newark about twice a year to walk around campus and meet up with friends. "It's not like it makes me feel like I'm still in college or anything, and it's not that it makes me feel younger, either," he writes. "What it does do is remind me of a time when I was less cynical. And maybe that's what I miss most about that time and that place, the 'innocence' of it."

Copies of "Glory Days at Delaware" are available at Delaware Book Exchange on Main Street and online at amazon.com, barnesandnoble.com and borders.com. For more information, visit www.mugnight.com.