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Nostalgia reigns in book on UD glory days

1995 grad collects stories on his MySpace Web page

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Special to The News Journal

NEWARK -- Wine, women and song. Sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll. Mad Dog, cheesesteaks and Skidfest.

Call it what you will, but chances are as a University of Delaware graduate (or flunky), memories of your four years (unless you followed the five-year plan) may have included one of the above.

No matter what decade you roamed the Mall -- ahem, the Green -- "Glory Days at Delaware: The Completely Unofficial Modern History of College Life in Newark, DE UD 1987 -- 2007" is bound to unchain those memory vaults.

Darren "Digger" Kane, a 1995 UD graduate who wrote, researched and edited the book, capitalized on nostalgia and contemporary communication by collecting and organizing comments from his MySpace page, delgrads. Former and present students have been leaving memories like remains on Cleveland Avenue on a springtime weekend. The 463-page paperback covers it all -- from campus living to food and, of course, the party scene.

"That was such a great time -- more innocent, less cynical," said Kane, 34, now a New York City resident. "We had adult freedoms without adult responsibilities." Kane, a comic book publicist, put the book together in about a year. Gaining permission to use people's commentary, making trips to campus and researching hearsay to verify sections called Rumor Control were all part of the labor-of-love legwork.

"You can never 'go back' to college," Kane wrote in the book, "your college experience is not just about the buildings, but about the people you were with, and the era you were there."

Kane relied on friends such as four-year roommate, Andy Bullard, an environmental consultant. The former soccer player and still friend came through with a censored photo of his leg and several entries including one about an ice hockey game that involved Mad Dog 20/20.

"I don't know anyone named Darren," said Bullard, a Doylestown, Pa., resident. "But I'm amazed and proud but more amazed that Digger could do it."

Like a student cramming for finals, Bullard couldn't put down the book the first 72 hours because it was so interesting and funny. While the paperback could have been raunchier, he said, it was more benign than originally intended.

Kevin Francis, a 1990 UD grad originally from Claymont, also contributed much to the text. Since Francis graduated before Kane arrived at the school, he supplied loads of information about those earlier years, including the music event Skidfest. Francis, 42, started the festival, named after the Skid Row housing on Academy Street. Then the raised funds went to AIDS Delaware.

Francis and Kane, who have yet to meet, became acquainted after Francis had been trolling online and discovered a Skidfest website on MySpace. The information was incorrect, so Francis created his own site about it. Kane saw it and contacted him about contributing to the book.

"Those memories started coming back through my fingertips and to the keyboard," Francis said. "It was a rush of memories unlocked."

Seventy chapters from numerous perspectives made for a good read for Francis, as did other students' social experiences at places such as Ray Street that were not available during his tenure.

Reminiscing about true by-gone places such as the Amber Lantern, the State Theatre, the Stone Balloon and the Down Under also hit home.

"I wouldn't trade my college years or experience for any other," he said.

Kane could have attended New York, Rutgers or Lehigh universities. But on a rainy day UD tour, the laid-back guide pitched the campus so that it felt like home to Kane.

A non-drinker, Kane, is kicking around a few ideas about a sequel or a companion book. Another consideration is franchising the concept to other schools.

"Thoughts on being published?" asked contributor and California resident Kristin Anderson, a 2002 UD graduate. "It's pretty fun to be a permanent part of the unofficial memoirs; it somehow validates four very hilarious years. Not to mention it proves that I went to class and the library. My mother will be so proud."

Friend Scott "Chubbs" LaScala, who earned his UD degree in '96, was originally from Dover, but now resides in Newark. The corporation operations manager got a kick out of adding his "two-bits" to the "ground-breaking" book.

LaScala keeps a copy on his coffee table for confirmation about his college escapades as people think they are tall tales.

"It gives a completely accurate portrayal of college."