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CHS Class of '76 gift commemorates famous KISS visit

BY KRIS VERHAGE
CADILLAC NEWS

Tomorrow, Cadillac High School is going to get a gift commemorating the long-ago visit by some very memorable guests.

As part of the reunion festivities planned by the Class of 1976, reunion organizers will present to the school a plaque marking KISS' visit to Cadillac during homecoming weekend in October 1975. The public is invited to a presentation set for 1 p.m. in the high school's "Hall of Fame" hallway, said Class of '76 member Harold Falan, who spearheaded the group's effort.

Although the American Bicentennial occurred weeks after graduation, the Class of '76 is best known as the "KISS Class," and its gift reflects that famous visit. It's a 24-inch by 30-inch plaque featuring photos and other memorabilia from the visit.

Falan, a retired Michigan State Police trooper, said whenever he mentioned his hometown during his law enforcement career, someone always brought up the KISS visit. He brought the plaque idea to the reunion committee and Cadillac Area Public Schools Superintendent Paul Liabenow. Both the committee and Liabenow enthusiastically gave their approval.

Falan then had Spike Lawrence Inc. in Berkley craft the plaque.

"I think this gift is going to be a nice addition to this high school," Liabenow said, adding the plaque will celebrate a moment in local history. "(The visit) put Cadillac High School on the map, if you will."

Not only is the plaque meant to inform students and the community about KISS' visit, the reunion committee wanted to replace a plaque the band had given the school. It had been placed on a wall outside the principal's office and had disappeared within six months.

Over the years, there were rumors of who might have stolen the plaque, said Jim Neff, the assistant football coach and teacher who was instrumental in bringing KISS to town.

"It never surfaced," he said. "That was kind of the odd thing."

It's hard to speculate what might have

happened to the original plaque. It would be difficult to sell today because KISS memorabilia collectors well-versed in Cadillac "KISSstory" are well aware the plaque is stolen, Neff said.

"It could be in the Wexford County Landfill for all

I know," he added.

Neff plans to attend tomorrow's presentation.

"It's just a great gesture," he said. "The fact that it came from the Class of '76 is even more special."

Also planning to attend the presentation and reunion is Harry Hagstrom, co-captain of the 1975-76 football team who met the band during its famous visit and who, like, Neff has been interviewed by local, state and national media about the experience.

"I think it's a great thing," he said of the plaque.

Both Neff and Hagstrom marvel that people are still interested in Cadillac's KISSstory nearly 36 years later.

"I'm amazed it still has this kind of attention," Hagstrom said.

Neff and his family met with the band when it performed at the DTE Energy Theater near Detroit in September 2010. Gene Simmons not only recognized him but Neff said Simmons also told him how the 1975 visit had become a "wonderful story."



One of the photos on the plaque was provided by Class of '76 member Harry Hagstrom, who's shown lifting Gene Simmons. The photo also was chosen because of Hagstrom's jersey number, 76.

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