Summer Picnics, Receptions & Socials

Alumni picnics are a favorite gathering occasion. Ideally the weather is enjoyable and there is an opportunity to talk with people in a relaxed, outdoor setting. For some Chapters, picnics are not the best solution for gathering; dessert receptions and ice cream socials may be other options more suitable for your group.

Here are some things to consider when planning, whether it is a picnic or reception, to help ensure your event is a success!

Who?
Who is your target audience for your gathering? Do you want an event for alumni and their families? Would you like to include current students from your area? Would you like to invite the new incoming students or Rensselaer Medalists from your region? We strongly encourage welcoming current and incoming students to these events. The students truly benefit from talking with alumni about Rensselaer and vice versa. (Consider the timing when inviting students.) If you would like to include students, please be advised you will need to work with your Alumni Relations contact to secure the list of students in your region. This list takes some time, so as much advance notice as possible is requested.

What?
A gathering can take on many forms. Do you want to grill food, like hot dogs and burgers, or chicken and ribs? Do you want to have it catered, such as a New England Clam Bake? This is a more costly option, but something to ponder. What about a Pot Luck Picnic? Or perhaps you can give thought to a combination of several styles, such as the Chapter providing the burgers and buns, but the side dishes being pot luck? Be sure to offer vegetarian options!

Carefully select the food keeping in mind the local climate, since chips do not hold up well in a humid climate, and mayonnaise does not do well in extreme heat. Think about assigning foods to different people, so there is a balanced menu.

Do you have coolers and ice for beverages and supplies? You may want to ask attendees to bring lawn chairs and blankets. (And sun screen as needed!)

Maybe some sporting supplies, like softball, volleyball or football would add some fun, especially if alumni can challenge the current students!

Not interested in grilling or having a pot luck? Dessert receptions or ice cream socials are also great ways to engage students and alumni. Some Chapters may choose to contact a local ice cream shop and secure a “make-your-own-sundae” station or contact a local restaurant or facility with a private room that may be able to supply a dessert menu. This is a solution to catering that may be more cost effective.

Where?
Many Chapters use a state park or a local beach. Consider a historical location or the home of an alumnus/a. Any picnic spot should have an appropriate set-up, such as built-in grills, shaded
pavilion, benches, open space or games or mingling. Supplies such as a grill and folding chairs can be brought to the site, but try to make your logistics as simple as possible. Consider a rain date/location – just in case! If the climate is such that an outdoor picnic in the summer would prove unbearable, think about possible indoor locations.

Please consider that some locations may have a space capacity and attendees may be turned away. For example, a state park may only allow a certain number of patrons in at one time. In some cases, the parks will close until enough patrons exit the facilities, which would then allow others to enter. Chapters may want to check with their locale to confirm their policies.

**When?**
Consider the weather of course! Many Chapters like a summer picnic to enjoy the outdoors, but if your climate dictates an “outdoor winter” picnic, then consider one for alumni and their families. If you would like to include current or incoming students, no later than mid-August will work. Mid day on a weekend seems to work best for families.

**How?**
Plan ahead and early! Use many volunteers to lighten the work load. What will the cost be to buy supplies? Do you have a specific budget? How much would you like to charge alumni (dues paying verses non-dues paying), students, friends, etc.? Examine the options and make decisions considering your specific Chapter members. Who will be doing the grill cooking – and should this hot job be shared by a few people to allow for breaks?