

Post Graduation Party (PGP): Fact, Fiction and Opinion

On the night of Ridgefield High School's commencement in June 1983, Christopher Ely, 17, was killed by a hit-and-run driver outside of a North Salem Road graduation party. His 18-year-old classmate was later arrested and convicted for drunken driving. Several years later, that driver committed suicide.

Fact: The Wilton High School Post Graduation Party (PGP) is one of many all-night, parent-sponsored, alcohol-free parties held across the nation on the night of high school graduations for the express purpose of creating a safe environment for graduates to celebrate a major milestone. The tradition began in reaction to the Ridgefield tragedy, as well as many other such accidents across the nation. The party is open to all Wilton public and private high school graduating seniors and has been held annually for the past 20+ years.

Fiction: The party costs \$80,000!

Fact: The PGP costs about \$40-\$45K for a class our size, which comes to \$125-\$140 per attendee, with a portion of the funding having been raised through events and activities sponsored by the Class Projects beginning at the end of seventh grade. (A specific per student donation will be sought from families at the end of junior year. More on this, below).

Held at Middlebrook School, the party starts at 10 p.m. (allowing families to have time together immediately after the graduation ceremony). The all-inclusive evening features food, alcohol-free drinks and numerous entertainment options, providing an exceptional value. How do we do it? Most of the items and services are donated or purchased in bulk at prices near wholesale. Many decorations are recycled or repurposed from the previous year's party (now you know what one of the storage trailers at Middlebrook is for!) and much parent sweat equity is invested in the event. Party chairpersons are frugal and aspire to get the most out of the dollars donated to their project.

One Opinion: Wilton kids have so much; they should do community service instead.

Our Opinion: This party is our gift to them: a gift designed to keep every graduating senior in our town safe for the night. As for community service, many of these students have volunteered on numerous community service projects throughout their high school experience and at the end of every year, the soon-to-be graduates spend one specific school day as a class on community service projects. In addition, most, if not all of the parents involved in the planning and execution of the party are heavily involved in many community organizations, so that giving time to the PGP does not exclude giving it elsewhere.

One Opinion: I shouldn't have to donate at the end of junior year; the party is a year away!

Our Opinion: Those involved with the Class Project understand it is difficult to think that far ahead. However, the donation is requested early, so we can determine the size of our budget and are able to give each committee their spending parameters. We cannot spend more than we have in the bank.

Under the governing document of the Wilton Youth Council, any funds left at the end of the party will revert to the Council, the parent organization of the Class Projects, a nonprofit dedicated to the continued positive development of the social and emotional environment of our youth. *Traditionally, the last two digits of the graduation year plus \$100 is the suggested donation amount (i.e. ours will be \$113).*

One Opinion: Parents spend way too much time and effort on this party.

Our Opinion: Parents involved with the Class Projects believe the time, energy and assets used for the PGP are well spent if it prevents another tragedy like the one in Ridgefield in 1983. In addition, consider that if there were no whole-class party, families would likely be sponsoring individual parties which would include only portions of the class, encouraging graduates to drive between parties and excluding others from participating altogether.