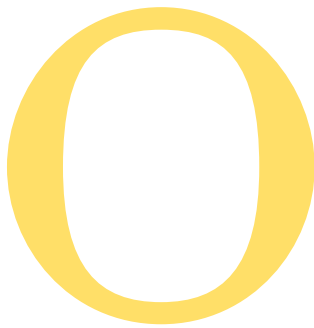




FOREVER

friends

Paired in a random room assignment
three decades ago, two graduates
find a common bond as entrepreneurs
and lifelong friends.



On a Tuesday afternoon in 1983, then freshman Jodi Parker was looking out her window in Susan B. Anthony Hall. She was waiting for her roommate, then Karen Price, to walk up the path to the dorm.

Having just met that fall, the two first-year students had already developed an important ritual.

Every Tuesday, cookies made by Price's grandmother arrived in the mail. The brown-paper package tied with a string contained snickerdoodles, or chocolate chip cookies, or peanut butter cookies—

cookies that Parker always thought “tasted like love from home.”

As the two shared each week's shipment, they talked. It was a simple way for the two of them to get to know one another, to look beyond their different habits, viewpoints, and academic interests.

Outwardly, they seemed to have little in common. An English major, Price grew up in a small, scenic village in upstate New York, where she honed a love for writing, volleyball, and homegrown vegetables; an optical engineering major, Parker grew up in Worcester, Massachusetts, the second-most-populous city in New England, and brought to campus a passion for math, science, and Chinese takeout.

Yet they felt a connection, a friendship that developed through their common ground as students, their commitments to family, and the excitement of new opportunities to test their entrepreneurial instincts.

The ties lasted through all four years as roommates on the River Campus, marriages to college sweethearts—Price married Robert Pavlicin '87 and Parker married Jacob Seidner '87—parenthood, early careers in the business world, and entrepreneurs running their own successful businesses. They've celebrated, mourned, and achieved together.

In short, the two—now known as Karen Pavlicin-Fragnito '87 and Jodi Seidner '87, '91S (MBA)—became lifelong friends.

“We have this sixth sense about each other,” says Pavlicin-Fragnito. “If one of us has something going on, all of a sudden the other is on the phone and saying, ‘I’m thinking of you and thought I should call.’”

This fall, the two friends will return to Rochester for their 30th reunion. And while the reunion is a chance to formally reacquaint themselves with campus, for the two classmates, the spirit of Rochester is never far away.

Forever Entrepreneurs

Both are now full-time entrepreneurs running profitable businesses.

Pavlicin-Fragnito, who lives in St. Paul, Minnesota, owns Elva Resa Publishing, an independent publishing company that's home to three imprints—one geared toward military families, one for general interest children's books, and one for inspirational works.

With more than 70 writers and illustrators, the company's namesake imprint Elva Resa is the leading publisher in the United States specializing in military family life. The titles in her online store, MilitaryFamilyBooks.com, range from those by self-published authors like Alia Blau Reese '95 to those published by industry giants Simon & Schuster, Penguin, Random House, and others.

In Connecticut, Seidner runs Sweet Seidner's Bake Shop, an online bakery that ships homemade cookies and baked treats to students at more than 75 colleges, universities, boarding schools, and graduate schools.

“We're always bouncing ideas off each other and tapping into each other's experiences,” says Seidner.

The entrepreneurs first whetted their appetite for business as juniors at Rochester. In the spring of 1986, prompted by surveys that indicated some prospective students thought Rochester was a public institution, the University commissioned a study to explore whether the name—“University of Rochester”—should be changed.

FOREVER CONNECTED: First honing their business skills as students, Karen Price Pavlicin-Fragnito '87 (top) and Jodi Parker Seidner '87, '91S (MBA) (bottom, with husband, Jacob Seidner '87) sold T-shirts printed with the phrase “Forever YoURs.” First introduced in Susan B. Anthony Hall in 1983, the two were roommates through all four years of college and have remained friends, encouraging each other in their entrepreneurial endeavors.





After President G. Dennis O'Brien announced the name would remain intact, the University's public relations department made commemorative buttons, emblazoned with the words "Forever YoURs." Demand for the buttons was overwhelming.

Walking across campus, Pavlicin-Fragrino overheard a classmate lament, "It's too bad they didn't put the logo on T-shirts."

That gave the women an idea. Pavlicin-Fragrino asked permission to make and sell T-shirts. She returned with the news that the University had said yes.

After asking their parents to help with financing the project, each received \$750. They researched screen-printing options and costs, and secured the OK to sell the shirts outside the dining center (using a table on loan from the University).

The response was swift. Eighty percent of the initial 500 shirts sold in the first two weeks.

The women reimbursed their parents and, having turned a profit so quickly, realized they had a knack for identifying what people want—and providing it for them.

"Selling the Forever YoURs shirts was our first real entrepreneurial venture," says Seidner. "It planted a seed in each of us that validated our business acumen and gave us confidence to pursue new ventures."

SWEET SUCCESS: After working in brand management for a decade, Seidner left the corporate world and eventually started her own business, Sweet Seidner's Bake Shop. The online bakery specializes in sending homemade treats to college students, an idea sparked when she was roommates with Pavlicin-Fragrino during her first year at Rochester.

A Taste for Business

Their current entrepreneurial success did not come immediately. Starting her career as an engineer in military defense, Seidner realized it wasn't for her.

While saving money for graduate school, she worked catering jobs, including an Inauguration Ball for George H. W. Bush, and took baking and cake-decorating classes.

"These experiences rejuvenated me," Seidner says. She returned to Rochester to attend the Simon Business School, earning an MBA in marketing and finance. She spent the next 10 years managing brands for Unilever, Tetley, and BIC, honing her business expertise.

Her perspective on corporate life changed on September 11, 2001. "I was on my way to LaGuardia Airport for a business trip. I was five months pregnant with my son, Josh," she says. "I was on the



BEST SELLING: Since launching her company Elva Resa, Pavlicin-Fragnito has grown it into the leading publisher of books and resources for military families. She began the venture when she was married to her late husband, Robert Pavlicin '87, who was a Marine. For the wedding, she asked Seidner and other friends and family members to make squares (below) for a quilt.

Whitestone Bridge on that beautiful, sunny day when the second World Trade Center tower was hit. I decided to turn around and go home.”

When it came time for Seidner to return to work after maternity leave, she realized she didn't want to travel. She retired from corporate life two weeks later. As a stay-at-home mom, she started, grew, and sold part-time businesses, including a bridal gown partnership.

When her daughter, Mollie, left for college, Seidner followed her passion for baking. Remembering her shared-cookie experience at Rochester, she gave her niece a special gift: she baked and sent her cookies every month of her freshman year.

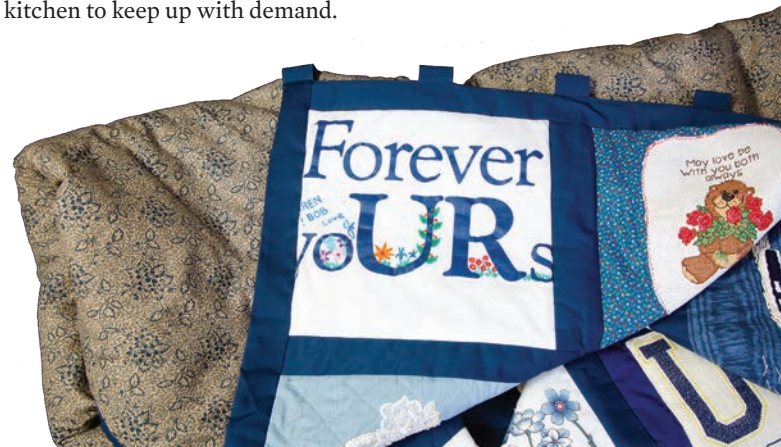
“My niece had never been away from home, so I wanted to help her meet people,” Seidner says. “She could walk down the dorm hallway and say, ‘Do you want a cookie?’ What college student doesn't want a cookie?”

Two years later, Seidner did the same for another niece. The

positive responses confirmed her new business focus: homemade treats for college students.

Seidner sent Pavlicin-Fragnito boxes of cookies to see how they traveled and tasted, then sought her friend's advice on potential business names and e-commerce platforms.

After two years in business, Sweet Seidner's Bake Shop offers a variety of cookies, brownies, macaroons, and traditional Jewish treats like hamantaschen, rugelach, and babka. As the business has grown, Seidner transformed her home's basement into a commercial kosher kitchen to keep up with demand.



MELIORA WEEKEND 2017

Ready for Reunion?

Both Karen Pavlicin-Fragnito '87 and Jodi Seidner '87, '91S (MBA) are helping organize this fall's 30th reunion for the Class of 1987.

A key part of Meliora Weekend, October 12 to 15, the celebration is an opportunity to discover what the years have brought for the campus and former classmates.

"I'm looking forward to seeing what's changed, to reconnecting with people," Seidner says. "You never know what possibilities that holds for you."

While all graduates are invited to join Meliora Weekend festivities, many of the class-specific activities are based in reunion classes. Organized by five-year increments—this fall is the 2's and the 7's—reunion has evolved from a simple celebration of nostalgia, says Paul Lanzone '03, assistant vice president for alumni relations and constituent engagement.

The activities are designed as a way for classmates to build ties and networks not only with one another, but also with other alumni and with current students. Reunion is an important way to see how the University and its programs are continually moving forward and to be involved in what that means for each generation.

"Our campuses have changed visibly over the years, and coming back is a very tangible way to stay engaged," he says. "You definitely get the sense that the University has moved into the future, but there's still this tradition of research and education. There are so many palpable sensory experiences that bring back what those four years were all about."

Jane Zimelis Cohen '67, one of three chairs organizing her 50th class reunion and a vice chair of the newly formed National Alumni Board, has attended every reunion since 2000—except in 2014, the weekend her son got married.

Highlights of this year's program, notes Cohen, include a class dinner performance by the YellowJackets—joined by past YellowJackets members from the classes of '67 and '66 and some past Tritones members—and an interfaith memorial service organized by a representation of diverse clergy who graduated in '67.

Cohen met her husband, Lawrence Cohen '66, at the University. The pair established the Lawrence J. Cohen '66 and Jane Zimelis Cohen '67 Endowed Undergraduate Scholarship Fund in 2004.

Reunion is "mostly about the people, but it's also about being able to touch base with the physical place where I really became the person that I am," she says. "The University has continued to give me opportunities to lead, to be enriched, and to interact with fascinating, intelligent people. It's a big part of my volunteer life."

For Alan Carmasin '67, another reunion organizer and a retired senior associate director for University Advancement, it's heartwarming to catch up with former fraternity brothers.

He also looks forward to creating new associations: "I make new friends that I didn't know in school, but who I see at every reunion now. Some of them I stay in touch with."
—Robin L. Flanigan

For more about Meliora Weekend: Rochester.edu/melioraweekend.



FAMILY FOCUS: Shortly after her son, Josh, was born, Seidner began to focus on her own business ideas, launching her bakery after her daughter, Mollie, left for college. She and her husband, Jacob Seidner '87, met at Rochester.

The Bonds of Friendship

During their first year on campus, mutual friends set up Seidner and Pavlicin-Fragnito with blind dates to the NROTC ball. Seidner and her date, Bob Pavlicin, didn't hit it off that night, but remained friends.

During their junior year, Bob and Karen started dating. In preparation for their wedding in 1991, Karen sent a letter to close friends and family members asking for decorated fabric squares that she could stitch together to make a wedding quilt.

Recalling that she had a few leftover "Forever YoURs" shirts, Seidner dug one out and cut a square around the logo. She painted flowers into the design to represent a phrase the two roommates used to encourage each other during tough times: "Think of flowers."

Very tough times came a decade later for the Pavlicins. When their son, Alexander, was 18 months old, Bob was diagnosed with stage-four colon cancer. Though he was given a prognosis of less than a year, he survived two years before passing away in February 2003.

"Initially I told Karen that I could not attend the memorial service in Minnesota," says Seidner. "I had not been on a plane since 9-11. I was too scared to fly and too embarrassed to admit it." Without telling Karen she was coming (just in case she couldn't do it), she made the trip to Minnesota.



CONTINUING THE TRADITION: Pavlicin-Fragnito's son, Alexander, moved into Tiernan Hall late this summer as a member of the Class of 2021, planning to double major in engineering science and international relations.

"I am eternally grateful I was able to get on that plane," Seidner says. "The look on Karen's face when she saw me come through the door at the memorial chapel almost brought me to my knees. We hugged for a very long time."

Two years later, Pavlicin-Fragnito's dad died suddenly of a heart attack. About the same time, the corporation she worked for restructured, so she took the opportunity to leave the corporate world.

"As a single mom, I wanted a flexible schedule that allowed me to be there for Alexander and that also used my talents and passions in meaningful ways," she says. She gave her publishing company, which had been a part-time venture, new attention.

The first book she wrote for military families, *Surviving Deployment*, had been published weeks after Bob's death, and forms the foundation of Elva Resa's portfolio of resources on military life.

She also advocates for military families in Washington, D.C., and works with nonprofits, military units, chaplains, and school teachers around the world to support military families.

"When Bob was sick and after his death, Marines came from all over to support us—and they still do," she says. "This is just one way I can repay that kindness."

As she left the corporate world, she focused on her own writing.

She wrote her first children's novel, *Perch, Mrs. Sackets, and Crow's Nest*. The story about a young boy who finds the courage to face the changes in his life won several awards, including a Moonbeam Children's Book Awards Gold Medal for middle-grade fiction.

She also turned to songwriting.

"The songs I wrote during that time helped me sort through my grief and find faith to go on celebrating life," she says.

With encouragement from Seidner and others, she released a 12-song CD, *Little Bit of Faith*, and has donated the profits to cancer research. (She also created the Andermax Foundation. Seidner serves on the board of the foundation, which awarded its first grant from the Fightin' Bob Fund to the University's James P. Wilmot Cancer Institute.)

Even now, "I still receive notes from people who share how the songs are helping them through their grief," she says.

This year, Pavlicin-Fragnito's publishing company celebrated 20 years in business. Pavlicin-Fragnito married Geno Fragnito in 2011 and gained two stepdaughters, Ciana and Malaina. Geno plans to join Karen for Meliora Weekend in October.

A Lifelong Legacy

With two of their children in college—Mollie Seidner is a sophomore studying biomedical engineering at Washington University in St. Louis; Alexander Pavlicin is a member of Rochester's Class of 2021, planning to dual major in engineering science and international relations in a program that will allow him to earn bachelor's and master's degrees—the women have been taking stock of the


ways in which new traditions are built.

One of those has origins in a spider plant that Bob purchased from Pavlicin-Fragnito during a volleyball team fundraiser their senior year. "Over the years, we've shared little offshoots with friends and neighbors when we moved, or they moved, so that mama plant has babies all over the country," she says.

As her son prepared this summer for the move into Tiernan Hall, the same dorm where his father had spent his freshman year, he asked if he could have one of the offshoots.

Alexander's spider plant made the trip with him to Rochester, where he hopes to establish his own legacy of the kind that he's seen grow in the lifelong friendships and connections in his family.

"Jodi's mom once said, 'I love that you two never run out of things to talk about,'" says Pavlicin-Fragnito. "We both give a tremendous amount of love, time, and commitment to each other and our friendship.

"We are ever grateful for that initial random roommate assignment." 

Robin L. Flanigan, a Rochester-based freelance writer, contributed to this story.