

Thoughts on Commissioning Week

Who I Am

My wife Sally and I have 2002 and 2005 USNA graduates, so we have some Commissioning Week experiences to share. Not many of you will have two bites at the apple, so I can share two very different Commissioning Week (CW) experiences based on our 2002 (son Mike) and 2005 (son Jake) CWs.

Commissioning Week Is All About Your Mid, Sort Of

The first hurdle to clear is to figure out the expectations for the week, focusing primarily on what your Mids want. Now for some of us, this was like getting them to provide a list for Christmas: “Gee, I don’t know what I want...” So the sooner you start pounding on them for some thoughts, the better. And here are some topics you might want to ask them:

1. Are you going to want a party attended by your Mid friends? Those graduating with you? Those in classes junior to you? What about out of town friends and family? I will discuss the party issue in more detail below.
2. How unprepared is the Mid going to be for moving out of Bancroft during CW and do the parents need to bring a moving van to get the Academy stuff home? There are two big issues here: time the Mid needs to pack and wrap things up and how much time and space are you going to need to get the stuff out of Annapolis. Jake came home for that final Intersessional with nothing but a toothbrush. His car was empty; he brought nothing home. So come CW, in addition to him having to spend far too much time packing up his stuff, we used all or part of three cars to bring his mess home. Good thing we had a van for that return trip!
3. How much time are you going to need or want to spend physically on the Yard that final week: parades, Blue Angels, receptions, award ceremonies, just saying goodbye to buddies?
4. Is there a boyfriend or a girlfriend with whom some extra time is needed and some alone time?
5. Is there the expectation that the Annapolis bars will get a final goodbye visit? Or churches, libraries, etc.? When?
6. Is the Mid in or going to weddings that begin the day after Commissioning? Just another event(s) to manage around.
7. What is the budget for all social activities?
8. Can some events be shared with other families (and of course the expenses too)?
9. Saying goodbye to Sponsor parents and getting stuff moved from their residence to somewhere else (such as back to your basement or garage).
10. Coordinating wrapping things up at Navy, getting home or not and Pocket Leave?
11. Is there going to be a party at the Mid’s family home for those friends and family not attending CW in Annapolis?
12. A million other issues.

Let’s Start with the Party

In 2002, son Mike had a buddy whose family rented a sizable house to accommodate a bunch of out of town guests, and consequently, it was a good house for a party. So we

partnered with them. Since we were not having that many out of town guests and those coming to Annapolis preferred downtown Annapolis accommodations, we got two hotel rooms in a suite hotel off Riva for our immediate family that (i) allowed me to prepare our food contributions for the party, (ii) meant we could bring our crazy dog for the week, and (iii) provided ample accommodations for our kids as they came to town for graduation.

In 2005, Jake wanted to host the party and have it at a house.

Size of Party

Critical issue for a couple of reasons. If you are renting a house, one of the rental companies, Annapolis Accommodations, will tell you that the biggest disputes between owners and renters concern the size of the party. You say there will be twenty; you end up with fifty and you have a problem. You have to be honest in predicting and communicating the size. We told our owner fifty, and they were fine with that. Also, you are going to need an approximate size so that you can get a big enough place to accommodate the crowd indoors if the weather turns nasty. Remember parking can be an issue too. If the neighborhood is one that is heavily rented for CW, will the street accommodate all the parked cars if everyone has a party the same night?

And of course you are going to want to know size so you can start the menu planning and budgeting.

Menu and Budget

I am the family cook, so I came up with a menu and ran it by Jake (although he would have been happy with hot dogs and beer). The menu I decided on allowed me to make some items ahead of time. We rented a house with a new kitchen, which was nice but not necessary. But what was necessary was the spare refrigerator in the basement. By party day, I was all set to pull out the food, heat what needed to be hot and serve.

Some folks cater the event, and I know one group of three families who were going together on the party whose party quote was \$3,000. So, you can be all over the board on this.

What Day?

We picked Thursday of CW for a couple of reasons. First, our out of town guests were all in that day. Second, and of pretty high importance, was the curfew that night at USNA. I think the Mids had to be back on the Yard by 10:30 PM. I assume they do this so even those having enjoyed cocktails to the fullest will not be a total wreck the next day when they get to bake in six hours of sun at Commissioning. Also, this is good for the hosts because you know it will not be a late night. And since everyone had to be up bright and early on Commissioning Day, Thursday is a good party day.

One draw back. If you are expecting a lot of your Mid's other graduating buddies to stop by your party, that might not happen because of course the buddies too might have to remain with their families and out of town guests that Thursday night for their own party.

But discussing all these issues and options early avoids issues or “oh, I wish I had thought of that...” down the road.

Alcohol

If you are serving alcohol, that adds an issue. I won't address the issue of underage drinking and the risks associated with that. But if you have the event on Thursday and you rent a house near the Yard (see below), then you do not have to be as concerned with those issues as the Mids can walk to and from your party.

The House

This is a big decision and lots to think about. Here is a list to get you going:

1. Will you have to accommodate out of town guests staying with you?
2. What about meals? Prepared and eaten at the house, carryout to be eaten at the house or all meals out?
3. Location
4. Cost
5. What days to be there (beginning and ending dates). We went for Sunday to Sunday. It was great having two days post Commissioning to entertain out of towners when there were no USNA events to schedule around. Those not familiar with the Yard or downtown Annapolis could tour around too. We had a bunch who went into DC for the day after Commissioning. And then there was a no pressure cleanup/pack up on that Saturday with a late Sunday morning departure. Leaving on Saturday would have felt jammed.
6. If you are going to rent, do you go solo or use a firm like Annapolis Accommodations? Is there a property that has been handed down from one year to the next within a certain Navy parents club? Son Mike's buddy from Maine rented a house that was historically rented by Maine families. I am sure there is at least an informal networking among parent clubs, athletic teams and USNA club members.
7. Are you going to rely on the Annapolis classified ads for leads and for running your own ad seeking a property?
8. Will you use all the amenities of a certain property or will you be paying for something you won't use? Waterfront houses and houses with pools are two that come to mind. The folks with whom we did the party for Mike's Commissioning got a nice house with a water view, and of course they paid more for that. Come CW, no one had the time or interest to just sit there and gaze at the lovely water. And of course the night of the party, well, it was dark. No view then. As for pools, most are not ready for CW. And even if it is ready, are you really going to have time to use it?

To me, the three biggies on the house are: location, amenities for what you need and plan to do, and cost.

For Jake's 2005 CW, we nailed the housing issue. I had a strategy: wanted a house within walking distance of the Yard and the stadium for easy access to all events and no need for a car; kitchen was important for the party and feeding out of towners over the course of the week, including lunch following Commissioning; could accommodate a crowd inside in the event of rain. Our house was owned by Jack and Liz Norton and is at

311 N. Linden. While it only had three bedrooms with three beds, I brought a couple of mattresses for the master's floor, so we got six or seven in it. Again, it is all in the planning. For me, I did not need to accommodate a lot of sleepers, but instead needed a party house. Plus the neighbor next door was a USNA grad. He knew what was going on and there were no issues whatsoever. Got the full deposit back.

I would not have changed a thing with our rental. We got lucky in finding it at the last minute (had previously been taken; but there was a snafu on the length of rental commitment with another USNA family, so we were able to come upon it in March). I would not count on being that lucky. That is pushing it.

When to Rent?

I have heard that there might be some rule that precludes a commitment beyond 12 months prior to occupancy. While there are a fair number of houses, the sooner you lock in, the better. My guess is that if you wait on your Mid for all his or her requirements for a house, you will be commuting from the Motel 6 at BWI and having your party in the adjacent truck stop. Get what commitment and input you can from your Mid and just get your house. My guess is that he or she will adapt to what you rent. The same on family members. Give them a deadline for committing to attending CW if you plan on putting them up/putting up with them. If you don't know by a certain date, I would get your house based on what you know. And as far as I am concerned, since this is more about what the Mid wants versus trying figure out how many out of towners will be staying with you, I would lock into a house commitment just as soon as you and your Mid are reasonably on the same page.

Out of Town Guests

I am just bringing this up for you to think about as this issue is going to be unique for each Mid and his or her family.

I am one of six kids; we are pretty close as a family and all live in Cincinnati. I did not want any of them coming to CW. Why? Because for me, I did not want to feel like I had to entertain them instead of being able to spend time with my sons' friends, sponsor families, coaches, other USNA families I have met over the years. In a way, this was my "good by to Navy" too. Hate to sound antisocial, but it was just a whole bunch of coordinating I did not have to deal with. Some of Sally's family members came for both CWs, and it worked out fine. Bottom line: My Mid and I will see my brother next week; but we might never see Coach Smith/Sponsor Family Jones again.

I know a family whose son was an athlete, and many family members came to the final sporting event at Navy during the school year instead of planning on CW. It was a less hectic time for everyone. Then when May rolled around, it was just the immediate family for CW. Something to think about.

Remember Your Weddings!

Most of us have gone through weddings. Just remember what a busy time that was. Probably you said when it was over, "If I had the chance to do it again, I would..." Well,

while you might get married a couple of times, chances are your CW experience is a once in a lifetime one. Don't over extend yourself or your family. Make a commitment to plan now for the entire week so that when you look back on it, you will say, "Perfect. I now have fabulous memories of a great time with my Mid and family as we closed out this part of the Navy experience."

Happy to Answer Questions

Fire away with comments and questions to dkeefe@gaic.com.

Good luck.

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Jake USNA 2005

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