The Often-Hidden Help Behind Altamont's Favorite Moments

By Ali LeJeune

Come spring, Altamont community members can always find exciting events. During second semester, sports like baseball, golf, soccer, tennis, and outdoor track are back in session, and the games, meets, and matches are popular attractions. Upper-school students can also attend dances like Homecoming and Prom. Then, at the end of the semester, there's May Day: a day of fun that lets students soak up the sun and enjoy nice weather before school is out.



People often credit the Student Government Association (SGA) for these events, and while the SGA does play a large role in planning, there are others behind the scenes who sometimes don't receive recognition. Two staff members typically take charge of these events: Kimber Williams and Katie O'Neal. O'Neal is a teacher who helps the SGA with their planning and daily affairs. Williams is Altamont's Director of Student Activities. *The Acta Diurna* interviewed Williams to shed light on how all these events happen.

What would you say is the most important part of planning large school events like May Day?
The most important part of planning large school events like May Day and Homecoming is ensuring that everything we plan is appropriate, fun, and safe for all students who will be attending. Every decision, from activities and themes to scheduling and supervision, is made with these three priorities in mind. We want events to be fun and meaningful so that students feel excited to participate and connected to the experience. At the same time, it is essential that all activities are age-appropriate and aligned with the values and expectations of the school community. Safety is also a top priority, which includes thoughtful planning around supervision, clear expectations, and creating an environment where all students feel comfortable and included.

How much do students and SGA help, and how much input do they have?
SGA executive officers play a central and highly active role in planning our school-wide events, including Homecoming and May Day. As elected representatives of the student body, they are not simply assisting with logistics but are key decision-makers throughout the entire process. From brainstorming themes and generating creative ideas to organizing schedules, coordinating activities, and helping manage event execution, SGA officers are involved at every stage.

When it comes to events fully planned by the classes like Prom, Homecoming, and Roundtable, how much are teachers involved, and how much input do they have?

Class officers play a significant role in the planning and execution of these class events, taking ownership of many of the ideas and decisions that shape the overall experience. They work closely with me and their class sponsors throughout every stage of the planning process, from initial brainstorming and theme development to logistics, communication, and execution. While class officers are driving the vision and creative direction, faculty members provide support, help ensure plans are feasible, and offer guidance around timelines, budgeting, and school expectations. They also play an important role in maintaining consistency with school policies and ensuring that all elements of the event are appropriate and well-organized.

How often do last-minute changes like weather affect you and your planning?
Weather is our biggest challenge and concern for May Day, particularly because the month of May often brings a lot of rain. Because of this, we always have a backup plan in place well in advance so that we are prepared for any changes that may arise. If weather conditions are not favorable, we have an indoor plan already mapped out, including adjusted schedules, spaces, and activities. This allows us to pivot quickly without having to make decisions under pressure in the moment. If you recall, last year it rained on May Day, and we had to move everything inside. Although it required a quick shift, we were able to adapt efficiently because we had already anticipated that possibility and prepared accordingly.

How early do you start planning for such large events like Mayday? What about the Fall Festival for lower school? Does the time you spend planning change, depending on the size of the event?
The timeline for planning school events does vary depending on the size of the event. For large, full-school events like Homecoming Week and May Day, SGA executive officers typically begin the planning process at least two to three months in advance, and often even earlier. These events require significant coordination, including themes, activities, logistics, and communication across multiple grade levels, so starting early is essential. Prom in particular requires a longer and more intentional planning timeline. Because it is an off-campus event held during a busy spring season that overlaps with other school proms and weddings, securing a venue can be highly competitive. To ensure availability, we typically book the venue for the following year's prom immediately after the current year's event concludes.
For smaller or grade-level events, the timeline is slightly shorter. The Fall Festival for the lower school, which is led by the ninth-grade class, begins planning conversations in September. After Fall Project Week, those plans are finalized and continue to be developed leading up to the event. Similarly, the tenth-grade class typically begins planning for the Homecoming dance in November or December.