

Debutante Planning Guide

Sons of Confederate Veterans, International Convention Planning Committee, October 2011 (revision 1) Lee Millar, Chief of Protocol

A long and honored tradition of Southern society is the formal presentation of eligible young ladies to society. The Sons of Confederate Veterans, to help instill a positive memorable impression of Southern style and to encourage the maintenance of this heritage and these traditions, includes a debutante presentation and other related functions in the activities of the annual SCV Reunion.

Each Debutante will be formally presented in a ceremony immediately following the Banquet, and prior to the Grand Ball.

These guidelines shall govern the established debutante events and serve as minimum requirements for the Debutante functions. Additional activities, with approval of the Convention Planning Committee, may be added if desired.

Section A. Debutante

1. Qualifications:

A Debutant must be a descendant of a Confederate soldier, never been married or had a child(ren), cannot be engaged, must be between 16-23, be sponsored by a camp or division, and has not been previously presented at a NATIONAL SCV reunion.

It is not required that the father have Confederate lineage, just the deb. In a past case a deb's father was a first generation American, and his parents came from Germany. The mother was from the South and had Confederate ancestors. Dad was an associate member of the camp that was sponsoring her and the brothers were members of the SCV. In another case the dad was not even in the picture for whatever reason and the pastor was the one who had recommended the young lady to participate. If there is a question in this regard, please talk to the Chief of Protocol to make sure there is not a problem with the issue.

2. Registration

The Host Committee will encourage such eligible area young ladies to participate and encourage other area camps to sponsor a deb. The formal deb presentation should not be undertaken if there are not at least two debs.

The committee will establish a debutante registration fee, and create a registration form, and will include this information in the ads and announcements for the Confederate Veteran, and on a page on the host website. Some Host Committees waive the fee entirely in order to encourage our young ladies to participate.

The fee, if one is set, with an appropriate registration deadline, must be reasonable and should not be used as a moneymaker. This fee includes, but is not limited to, providing for bouquet, goody bag, special gift (usually pearls), deb luncheon ticket and banquet ticket, and at least one picture from the photographer (and usually the group picture is donated.) A general fee guideline is \$125.

The Host Committee is not limited to this amount but neither should the Host Committee set a fee that is any higher than what is absolutely needed for these deb activities. Nor should any extravagant deb activities be planned that will price out any potential deb young ladies.

The deb will fill out and submit the registration form which needs to show her pertinent information (name, address, phone, email, etc) and the number of family members who will attend with her. These other family members will have to actually register separately and pay for any ticketed events that they also wish to attend (i.e. Banquet). The deb should also indicate who her escort shall be for the Presentation and also the Confederate ancestor she wishes to honor.

3. Debutante Narrative.

The deb will write a brief biography of herself with pertinent information that she and her family would like placed in the Deb souvenir booklet, and this should be something that the young ladies are proud of. A shortened version of this bio will also be read by the Master of Ceremonies (MC) at the Saturday night presentation.

The Deb Narratives will be compiled by the Host Committee Debutante Chairwoman, and when completed, a copy of the narratives should be sent out to the debs to be checked and re-checked for accuracy. The chairwoman, with the Host Committee, will coordinate the printing of the Deb Program souvenir booklet. It is recommended that the narratives and photo be printed in the order in which the debs themselves get registered for the Reunion, so as to reward punctuality, (and not necessarily alphabetically). A copy should also be given to the MC and to the SCV HQ Archives.

At the deb luncheon it would prove helpful to have the MC come at the end to make sure that the shorter presentation narrative is correct and the pronunciation of names is right. This is a crucial part of the process. The deb and her family must be satisfied with the narrative and pronunciations. If this is messed up, parents can get very irate.

The shortened deb narrative to be read at the Presentation will consist of name, age, parents, residence (city, state), school/college attending, ancestor (w/ rank, unit), sponsoring camp, name/relation of escort.

The following is an example:

Miss Margaret Ann "Meg" Millar is the eighteen year old daughter of Mr. & Mrs. Lee Millar from Memphis, Tennessee. Meg is a freshman at Austin College in Dallas, TX. She honors her Confederate ancestor, Col. John S. Mosby, 43rd Partisan Rangers, "Mosby's Rangers", Virginia Cavalry. Meg is sponsored by the N. B. Forrest SCV Camp #215 of Memphis, Tennessee. Meg is escorted by her father, Lee Millar.
Miss Margaret Ann "Meg" Millar...

Section B. Debutante Events Chairwoman

The Chief of Protocol will, with approval of the CIC, choose a person to serve as deb chairwoman or deb coordinator, and assistant(s), to supervise the functions of the participating debutantes. This person should be familiar with deb activities at previous Reunions and have some knowledge of 1860's society and etiquette. She should also have a personality that is compatible with young women as well as parents.

Chairwoman Duties:

- When the deb registration form and fee (if assessed) is received, a welcome letter discussing all the debutante details is sent. This letter should reiterate the dress requirements for everyone again and can also include many other smaller details, like if a particular local hairdresser is going to give a percentage off for debs who use that salon. A deb event schedule, if finalized, should be attached. An additional 'welcoming letter' from the CIC should be included in this packet (or sent separately) to welcome the deb to this honored tradition. The chairwoman may suggest suitable text for this letter.
- A note or email should then soon be sent requesting the deb's photograph and bio for the program narrative. This should include suggestions on what the deb may want to include.
- Work with the Host Committee to create the Program pages for the debs, or a separate souvenir deb booklet (recommended). If a separate booklet, then additional ad pages could be sold.
- Plan the deb activities, such as the luncheon, rehearsals, and any Presentation extras, plus any other deb-specific tours or get togethers (if any).
- Assemble gift items for the deb "goody bags". These should be Southern in nature, but not expensive. Suggested items include note cards, or stationary and a journal. Locate nice bags or creative containers to put in everything.
- Purchase the traditional gift pearls (from the host camp), necklace and/or ear rings. These may be found at Wal-Mart, for instance, but it is necessary to search and price compare to get the best quality at the lowest price and quantity. Usually cultured pearls (farm grown) tend to be less expensive. Also for other items, sometimes the local UDC or OCR chapter may donate items which will drastically cut the goody bag cost. Their help should certainly be encouraged (and if they do, give them appropriate credit in the Deb Program).
- Arrange for table decorations for the luncheon. Again, the UDC or OCR may want to contribute these.
- Provide the Presentation bouquets. Silk "real looking" flowers are preferred to live ones (which require refrigeration and an on-time florist). The bouquet is to be predominately white flowers and green accents.
- Work with the Host Committee on the luncheon menu
- Music – consult with the band for any specifically-desired music for the Presentation, and for the First Waltz for the girls at the Ball.
- Meet with the Chief of Protocol on the afternoon before the Banquet/Ball to review details of each event and ensure that everything is checked off.
- At the Ball, make sure the debs are danced with the entire night

Note to Chairwoman: All of these items, above, and following, should be pre-planned and the entire Deb process needs to be worked on in some fashion all year prior to the Reunion. It is recommended that everything be in place no later than Jan 1 of the Reunion year so that the girls can be notified of the deb activities schedule because it takes time for the girls to find a modern dress or have a period dress made for any special activity during the Reunion.

Photographer: it is requested that whatever photographer is employed/contracted/donated for the banquet that he/she can not only do the deb pictures but can also stay for the ball to do “couples” pictures. The host camp can request that the photographer give a set commission amount per sale to the camp so that he makes a profit and there is a small donation to the camp.

The photographer should also have a special package deal for the debs and he should furnish to each deb a free 5x7 of the group. The photographer should have a proper backdrop or suitable location for the photos.

Have the young ladies to arrive with their escort early for pictures, usually about the time the CiC reception starts.

Section C. Debutante Activities

Deb Luncheon:

The luncheon, which is for the debs and mothers and other female relatives, is typically held on the Saturday of the Banquet. The wife and daughters of the CIC should also be invited to this, and the CIC should be invited to drop by to give a short greeting to the debs (if Reunion time permits). The location can be most anywhere but should be somewhat upscale. This can be a special room of the convention center, host hotel, nice restaurant, or historic site. This luncheon is to be a light meal. Decorations will be needed, and a guest speaker arranged for. Also typically included is an additional short talk to the young ladies about being a Southern Lady in the 21st Century. It is important to note that some of the young ladies who are presented are not always interested in history. Many times fathers, grandfathers, uncles, etc are the ones who offer the girls encouragement to enter. If a talk on history is included it should be made not only interesting, but applicable to today. It is also desired that the talk instill in the young ladies the importance of their blood line and make them desire to be proud of it. Hopefully this will encourage an interest to learn more about this period of time.

Goody bags and jewelry are given at this time. It is to be a light-hearted event and not a "meeting" setting.

Deb Rehearsal:

The Presentation rehearsal is held after the end of the luncheon, and can be held at the luncheon site. If held at a different site from the luncheon, such as back at the Banquet site, it can be in casual attire. The girls, now joined by their escorts, walk through the Presentation with the chairperson to see where they will walk, where to enter, where to turn, pause, bow/curtsey, where to exit, etc. It is important that the escort makes sure that the deb does not trip, fall or embarrass herself in any way. The MC also goes over their narrative to ensure that his name pronunciation and facts are correct.

Dance Rehearsal:

A dance class for the debs and their escorts should be scheduled sometime during their activities. Many of the dads and uncles may exhibit a bit of awkwardness because they hadn't waltzed in about 25 years. The dance class serves as a refresher so that they don't feel embarrassed when they are the center of attention in the opening waltz with their girl. This also familiarizes the girls, and escorts, with the period 1860 dances, such as the Reel, Promenade, Polka, etc so that they are comfortable and confident when dancing during the Ball.

Banquet and Presentation:**Banquet Seating:**

The Chairwoman will work with the Chief of Protocol to ensure that the debs and family members have the proper reserved seating for their party on the center aisle tables (the presentation aisle). The chairwoman and COP should meet the day prior to the Banquet/Ball to review all details. Make sure that the debs are seated and settled prior to the grand procession of officers. Work with the Chief of Protocol and the caterer so that the deb's are served their meal first (including dessert) after the CIC's table, so that, after eating, they may be excused to freshen up and change (if need be) into their formal attire for the Presentation. The chairwoman can encourage the debs to bring toothbrush, paste, makeup, and any other personal items that she may need. A secure/lockable dressing area needs to be available for these things.

Deb family seating is, of course, based on how many family members have purchased a ticket. A seating chart should be made and name cards placed at the tables, along with "reserved" signs on the tables, prior to the start of the banquet. Sometimes the chairwoman can include additional special gifts at the tables, determined by the money that is still available in the budget.

The debs should come early to find their reserved table, walk the room to get a feel for it, and go over any last minute details. The pictures are done prior to the banquet. The debs and their families are seated prior to the SCV GEC processional and the chairwoman makes sure they are cared for.

Debutante Presentation:

The presentation will be after the banquet and awards, and just before the beginning of the ball. The timetable is typically as follows: banquet begins at 7 pm., so the debutants, escorts etc. will need to be at the convention center / ballroom before then for photos. Set a time; usually at the time of the CIC reception.

At 7pm the meal is served; SCV awards are given. The Deb Presentation should begin about 8: 30 – after the conclusion of the banquet. This will be followed by the Grand Ball (and it is not referred to as a 'cotillion').

For the Presentation, as the award ceremony is coming to an end (keep in mind that on even years the outgoing CIC or the incoming CIC may give a long speech making it hard to judge when to line up) the chairwoman is to line up the debs with their escorts, and in the correct order, and ensure that everything goes smoothly when they are being announced. Tip: It is important to keep the girls calm and laughing. Remind them to not lock their knees and to smile. It is very nerve racking for many of them because they are not used to being in front of people.

When the MC starts the Presentation ceremony, he may give a brief history of the deb presentation but it is not required. The first deb is to step forward with her escort to the designated spot. Once her narrative is started, she is to start walking slowly and elegantly to the second designated spot in front of the CIC and his wife or date. The deb is to bow to the CIC and he designates if she is to turn to the right or left of him to line up in the front of the room. So on and so forth for the other deb couples. After all have entered and are facing the crowd (society) the debs will be instructed by the MC to all bow and are thus “presented” to society.

Note: If the Ball is held in a room other than the banquet room then each deb, after making her bow to the CIC, will turn and face the crowd (with her escort), walk out approximately ten feet, and make her bow to the crowd there. She will then exit by a predetermined route and go to the ballroom to await the resumption of the evening’s festivities, which will begin with the Debs’ Waltz.

At the end of the Presentation, the debs are to dance the first dance of the night (waltz) with their escorts. The dance is to be danced in its entirety with the escort. Then the Grand March and the Ball begins.

Escorts

Debutantes may be presented by their father, grandfather, brother or other relation. Boyfriends are NOT allowed to present a Debutante. It is not required that the escort is an SCV member, (but he usually is).

Her presenter (escort) must wear one of the following: black tie/tuxedo/evening attire, white tie and tails, modern military dress uniform, or period attire. White gloves are required.

Section D: Debutante Attire

The young ladies are urged to dress modestly and with style and taste.

1. For the Debutante Luncheon, a nice dress is appropriate.
2. For other deb activities, attire will be determined by the deb chairwoman and communicated to each deb ahead of time.
3. For the banquet and presentation:

Debutants may have their meals wearing one dress and then change into their presentation dresses after they eat — a precaution against food stains being on their presentation gowns. The deb “meal” dress for the banquet should be a nice one. Many debs wear formals but that is not required. After eating, the debs may be excused to change into their formal white dress for the presentation. Keep in mind that there is limited time for this as the debs must be dressed and lined up for the Presentation at the conclusion of the awards.

The main thing that is essential to the deb’s presentation is the dress gown. It **MUST** be a formal entirely white (floor length) dress. It may NOT be strapless, but CAN be sleeveless. The dress may be modern or a replica of an 1860’s dress (to possibly include hoops, which are certainly permitted). That is a personal choice to the deb. Previous Reunions have included young ladies with each type. If the young lady has a question about the appropriateness of her dress pattern or style she should contact the deb chairwoman.

Accessories: The shoes must be white, clear or opaque, with no flashing heel lights. The deb may either wear flats or heels, making sure she can walk in either style with grace. The young ladies should be encouraged to practice in their shoes and hoop (if the dress requires it.) This helps to build confidence BEFORE the debs get there in public.

Jewelry: This needs to be white pearls or clear rhinestones, no flashy jewelry. It is generally the deb's choice as to what to wear or not. However, jewelry with colors in it is not allowed. If the deb has a piece that has a sentimental value to it, like great grandma's brooch, she should discuss it ahead of time with the deb chairwoman.

Gloves: White. If the deb's dress is sleeveless then opera length gloves are appropriate; elbow length for all others, unless a long sleeve dress is worn, which would require wrist length gloves. The deb's escort must wear white wrist length gloves also.

Conclusion:

The main thing to remember about the entire debutante aspect of the Reunion is to ensure that these young ladies feel like a princess for a day and have a positive memory that will last them the rest of their lives. These young ladies are the mothers of our future SCV sons. If they are proud of their heritage, or have a pleasant memory to look back on, then they will be willing to encourage the SCV. A negative may ruin an opinion forever.

The actress Julia Roberts is an example. She was a very active member as a child of the Georgia Children of the Confederacy and loved it. But when she got beat for president of the GA Division, she turned her back on the South. Now her children are taught to disrespect the South. All of this because of a bad experience

We want to encourage a 'highlight' memory and the continuation of this grand Southern heritage.

Attachment A, a suggested script for the Presentation, follows.

Attachment A: Suggested Master of Ceremonies Introduction of the Debutante Presentation

DEBUTANTE PRESENTATION

It is an honor to act as Master of Ceremonies for the [host city] Reunion Sons of Confederate Veterans Debutante Presentations for the year 20??

I would ask that we rise for a brief word of prayer from Chaplain in Chief ???

In a world that delights in attacking the culture of all traditional Western Christian Society it is refreshing that a venerable institution such as the debutante presentation has survived into the 21st Century, yea even thrived.

The word “debutante” comes from the French word, “debuter,” which means to lead off.

Our American Debutante traditions originated in England at a time when the eligible daughters of the aristocracy were presented by their Mothers to the Monarch at the Court of St James at the beginning of the Ball season. Sadly, Queen Elizabeth II ended this centuries old tradition in 1958.

The custom seems to have commenced in the American colonies in 1748 at a dancing assembly in Philadelphia.

But not to be outdone by Yankees, and Quaker Yankees at that, Charleston, South Carolina and Williamsburg, Virginia soon held their own Debutante Balls and a great Southern tradition was born.

The significance of the Debutante ritual is that the Debutante and her family are proclaiming that she is her own socially responsible young lady, free to accept invitations to social events in her own name. It is an honorable rite of passage to which all young ladies of good family should aspire.

The uniqueness of the Debutante’s presented at this Reunion is that these young ladies are blood related to Confederate heroes. Related to ancestors who gained imperishable renown for their courage, endurance, and suffering. These men bequeathed a heritage of honor to these young Debutantes that confers a patent of nobility that is recognized throughout the world (save for a savage and barbaric wasteland north of the Mason-Dixon line).

State how debs will form up

We now present the [host city] Reunion Debutantes of the Sons of Confederate Veterans for 20??:

[deb introductions w/ escort and ancestor & short narratives...]

LADIES & GENTLEMEN: THE DEBUTANTES OF 20?? AWAIT YOUR GREETINGS

(applause)

THE BALL COMMITTEE EARNESTLY THANKS : [chairwoman ??]

[if the Ball is in a different room, then the MC announces that the dinner is adjourned and is reconvened in the ballroom. When all are present in the ballroom the MC resumes the deb ceremony by announcing the Deb waltz]

And now the DEBUTANTE'S WALTZ

AS LONG AS THIS CUSTOM HAS EXISTED THE SOUTHERN FATHER/ FAMILY MEMBER HAS EXERCISED HIS RIGHT TO HAVE THE FIRST DANCE WITH HIS YOUNG CHARGE, KNOWING THAT FROM THIS NIGHT ON SHE WILL BE ALLOWED TO ACCEPT DANCE INVITATIONS FROM RESPECTABLE YOUNG MEN of GOOD FAMILY AND WHO HOPEFULLY DID NOT MAKE A HABIT OF WEARING A BLUE UNIFORM CLOTH WHEN THEIR COUNTRY CALLED.

THE 52nd REGIMENTAL STRING BAND WILL NOW PLAY: [name of waltz]

AS THE WALTZ FINISHES, THESE YOUNG SOUTHERN LADIES WILL BE FREE TO ACCEPT A NEW DANCE PARTNER FOR THE Grand March OPENING the 20?? SCV Ball – this closes our 20?? [host city] Debutante Presentation

WALTZ IS PLAYED

THE GRAND BALL COMMENCES

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(version 1, small additions included, August 2011, approved by the GEC 15 Oct 2011)

(written by Chief of Protocol Lee Millar, with major contributions by Cassie Barrow, Kirk Lyons, and Chuck Rand)