

HOMENETMEN LONDON

30TH ANNIVERSARY



This year marks Homenetmen London's 30th anniversary. Though a lot has changed around the globe since the late 70's, the underlying ethos of Homenetmen has remained the same. We can look to see why this organisation exists, the ways in which it functions and why, above all else it must remain in this community for generations to come.

Homenetmen London started with the collective, determined will of young Armenians and that drive and passion continues to this day. Homenetmen London's enduring presence has little to do with Baden Powell and everything to do with the people in the community who have worked tirelessly to get it to the present day. It is this voluntary, community spirit that has had a positive effect on the thousands of people who have passed through its doors. Generation upon generation have taken up the mantle to ensure that this organisation continues to grow in relevance and importance, in the London Armenian community.

Homenetmen across the globe has worked to bring together young Armenians, centred on the international scouting movement. However, Homenetmen is much more than scouting. It is about maintaining and preserving community; something which is inherent in the consciousness of Diaspora Armenians. Homenetmen has always aimed to teach discipline, patriotism and a sense of duty to all its members, and Homenetmen London is no exception. Outside of the school environment, members aged 5-18 are guided and taught about Armenian history, geography, customs and increasingly they learn practical skills that go on to help them in their future careers. Homenetmen also promotes physical well-being alongside intellectual advancement. Basketball, football and self-defence are but a few of the teams that have been set-up under the Homenetmen sporting umbrella. Scout and athletic members have learnt the importance of camaraderie, team work and the pride that can be associated with representing Homenetmen on a national and international stage.

The Homenetmen London community exists in the broader Diaspora community in London. During these 30 years Homenetmen has been the most active and visible force in the community. One need only look at the annual calendar to see how many events are undertaken by the volunteers acting on behalf of the Executive Committee. Volunteer leaders give up time every week to act as young mentors to children growing up in the Homenetmen system. This commitment is not limited to Saturdays, indeed these students and young adults often give up time during the week to ensure that plans are in place for their designated groups. The discipline of these meetings, the management of conflicting priorities and the fundamental leadership qualities that transpire, are arguable more beneficial to the young volunteers than any corporate training seminar could ever be.

In these last 30 years Homenetmen London has accomplished so much. The third generation is actively engaged in the weekly activities that have been modernised to fit in with the technological advances of 2009, whilst still maintaining the customs and traditions that people have come to expect of Homenetmen London. Camps/Banagooms remain at the core of activities, in particular the week-long summer camp which is the highlight of the year. Our sporting teams continue to work to perform well in local leagues and represent Homenetmen. Most recently Homenetmen London has established itself as a registered UK charity, cementing its importance in the local community.

The Homenetmen experience is not for the faint-hearted, as a member or as a volunteer you must give a lot of yourself, your time and your patience; but the rewards more than make up for any feelings of frustration that people can experience from time to time. The association with Homenetmen is not fleeting; people who become active members of Homenetmen usually do so for life. The experiences, the friendships and the memories all exist to tie us together in one community and it is that connection which makes sure that Homenetmen endures.

The community spirit must not be underestimated. Strong friendships and courtships have come about as a result of Homenetmen events. Liaisons with other countries have often created trans-Atlantic and cross-channel relationships. Perhaps one of the most significant changes in these last few decades has been the establishment of an independent Armenia and the affect that this has had on Homenetmen. Now, every four years, members spend over a week in the motherland with Homenetmen-agans from across the globe. For most, Homenetmen acts as a gateway to their history and ancestry and one that is accessible and experienced with like-minded young adults.

The challenges of any charity organisation are well documented and the changing attitude of today's youth is also often discussed with regard to the apathy that exists. Homenetmen London must remain to preserve passion; passion for one's own intellectual and physical enhancement, passion for one's culture and heritage and passion for the greater good, for the cause that keeps Armenians together – our preservation.

Source: Huby Saroukhanoff