

Success In Expansion



Behind the Decisions

By Joe Wachs (Delta Kappa/Ball State '99), Director of Chapter Services

For a brief duration in the early 1950s, Theta Chi Fraternity boasted 100 active chapters out of 100 installed chapters; a feat not accomplished by any other men's national fraternity at that time. Much of the rapid and successful expansion of Theta Chi to colleges and universities across the country in that era can be attributed to former Executive Director George Chapman (Omega/Penn State '32). Our expansion efforts have continued since that time, bringing us a total of 213 installed chapters. However, we no longer are able to boast our 100% active chapter ratio. In these days, the term "recolonization" exists in our Fraternity.

In Theta Chi, we currently have almost 80 inactive chapters. A list of those chapters, along with our active chapters and colonies was published earlier this year in the Spring issue of *The Rattle*. Fraternity-house doors are closed and chapters shut down for various reasons; risk management violations, low membership, abolition of campus Greek organizations, lack of alumni support, etc. Whatever the reason for a chapter closing, it is always a special event if we are able to one day make a proud return to that campus. In my role with our expansion program, it is a top priority to make sure that we have as many opportunities as possible for a "proud return" of Theta Chi Fraternity to some of its previous homes; recolonizations are always a top emphasis.

I receive many inquiries from alumnus members as to how we determine where it is that Theta Chi Fraternity will recolonize a chapter. While some may envision a giant map of North America with me taking aim with a handful of darts, I can assure you there is more method and factors involved than the skill of my dart game. So how is it that we decide?

As I have mentioned in previous *Rattle* articles, for a fraternity expansion effort to be successful, we need to have the support and cooperation of three entities: 1) The college or university; 2) the International Headquarters; and most importantly, 3) alumnus members. Let us take a look at those three components.

The College or University

Remember our maxim, "Alma Mater First, and Theta Chi for Alma Mater." During my travels as a Leadership and Education Consultant, I came across several undergraduate members who interpreted this as "I can't meet with you. I have a test next week; you know, 'alma mater first...'" That is not the meaning. The meaning is that for Theta Chi to exist at a host institution, we must live up to the mission statement of that institution. We exist because they allow us to exist. If Theta Chi is not going to better that campus in some way, then we have no business being there.

If we are not welcomed to colonize on a campus, we will not attempt to start a new group. I have heard the phrase "Who cares if they don't want us to start? They cannot stop us." Some may be quick to point out our "freedom to associate" at a public institution under authority of the

Constitution. While this may be true, I can assure you that our chance for a successful colonization will decrease significantly if we do not have the assistance and support of the Greek advisor, other campus fraternities, and administrators. We will not "crash" a campus uninvited.

Sometimes, we must also face the reality that perhaps the Greek system is struggling and is not strong enough to support yet another Greek organization. We need to put ourselves in the best position to succeed.

The International Headquarters

As the overall fraternity system has changed, so has the process of starting new chapters. Universities are asking for more stringent standards to be in place in order for a fraternity to colonize on their campus. More aggressive recruitment standards, higher minimum scholastic averages, and alcohol-free living environments are some of the most common requirements for colonization. As staff members, we must help facilitate that process.

The start-up process of a colony is one that takes time and a great deal of work. In order to effectively support each of our colonies and interest groups, we are careful not to overextend our staff resources when scheduling our expansion projects. We currently plan our expansion efforts up to two years in advance. Sometimes when a chapter is closed, a return timeline of even three or four years is put into place.

We will not be successful in an expansion effort if we cannot allocate enough staff time to the project.

Alumni Support

Often, this is what tips the scales in terms of deciding factors for expansion campus selection. A recolonization effort looks considerably more favorable if we have a group of dedicated alumnus members willing to put forth the time necessary to be successful. While it takes the IHQ staff support to get the expansion effort started and men recruited to the colony, it takes the guidance and wisdom of alumni to ensure the longevity of that group. Likewise, many campuses will not consider an expansion invitation if we cannot demonstrate that we have a considerable amount of alumnus support. Please note that involved alumni do not need to be *only* from the former Theta Chi chapter at the campus to which we are trying to return. Theta Chi alumni living in the general area of the college or university are needed. Theta Chi alumni from the former chapter who live anywhere and who can offer support in time, talent, resources, and involvement, no matter how limited, are all desired to become involved.

There are many ways for alumnus members to get involved in an expansion effort, such as serving on the Alumni/housing board, providing student referrals, serving on the Advisory Board, donating to a scholarship fund, and so on. If you want to volunteer, we'll find a way to get you involved!

My intent for describing these three main components of a recoloniza-

tion effort is not just an opportunity to tell you how we do our jobs the International Headquarters. I want to educate and inform each who may be willing to step up and help our Fraternity grow to new levels. You, as an alumnus member, are more important to the success of our organization than you may realize. You joined Theta Chi for life not just for four years, and there are countless opportunities for you to become reinvolved with Theta Chi as an alumnus with real world experience, priorities, and a desire to once again extend a Helping Hand.

Is there a nearby campus where you feel Theta Chi should be represented? Do you want to see Theta Chi return to a familiar home, perhaps even your own chapter? If so, then you can take action.

Reconnect with those chapter brothers with whom you may not have touched base in years. Do some research. What happened to the former alumni corporation? Do they still own the house? Pick up the phone or e-mail me at the International Headquarters. Who knows? I may have already had contact with the institution or some of your fellow alumnus members who are interested in the same thing as you. **Communication is the key.**

While it is often not possible for us to recolonize a chapter the following semester or two upon receiving an alumnus correspondence possible for us to start working with you or a group of other alumnus members to secure a recolonization invitation for the future. It takes patience, but we can, and often do, succeed in getting the ball rolling.

Brothers, our Founders Freeman and Chase envisioned our Fraternity to be an international organization. Because of their vision, the Theta Chi flag has flown proudly at more than 200 academic institutions in the United States and Canada, following its founding on April 10, 1856, expansion to a second campus, MIT, in 1902, and subsequent growth. Because of the effort of you, our alumnus members, we will continue to grow to an even greater number of college campuses, thereby allowing more young men to become better because of Theta Chi! They may include your son or sons, the sons of your friends, or other young men who desire to wear our Badge and aspire to the same ideals you did as a young adult in college.

Expansion Update!

While we will not turn our back on a new expansion opportunity where Theta Chi has never been represented, a majority of our focus in recent years has been on the recolonization of our inactive chapters. Much of this is due to the obvious interest that we have with each respective campus, as well as the connection of our alumnus members. In the last two years, we have returned to the following campuses:

Epsilon Kappa/University of Idaho
Epsilon Zeta/University of Tampa



Theta/University of Massachusetts (current colony)

Lambda/Cornell University (current colony)

Beta Tau/University of Southern California (current interest group)

For the upcoming semester, we have received an invitation to work with, or have been working with, administrators on an upcoming return to the following campuses:

Eta/University of Rhode Island (Spring 2004)

Gamma Mu/Bowling Green State University (Spring 2004)

If you would like to contact me to discuss these, or inquire about any other potential expansion projects for Theta Chi Fraternity, please feel free to contact me at joe@thetachi.org or via telephone at 317.824.1881.