

Linking Memories to Reality

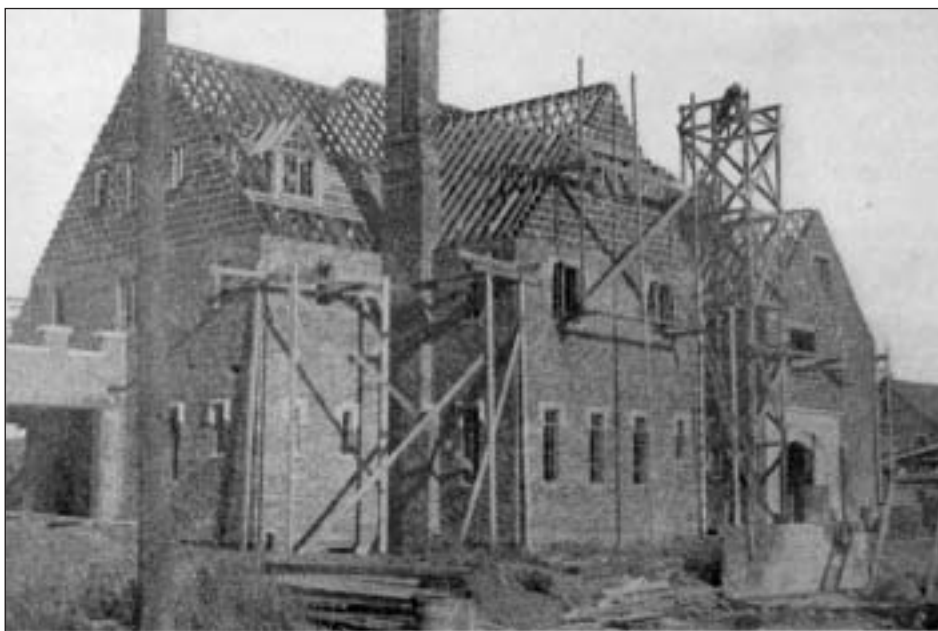
By Douglas G. Schemenauer (Epsilon Phi/Central Missouri State University '89), Secretary

Walking through the doors of your chapter house as an alumnus brother, maybe with your wife at your side, or perhaps with your wife *and* your young son, is supposed to bring back great memories of your time as an undergraduate. It should remind you of the great friendships you made, the fun times and challenging times. The time when you were invincible—or at least thought you were. The world was yours. These were some of the best days of your youth. And, the chapter house was the center of it all. It was *home*. Your home. A home where, you once thought, you knew you would always feel welcome.

Once you re-gain your senses and come back to the third millennium, you realize that the house you remember and the house you are currently standing in must only be distant cousins. The house you remember was the symbol of brotherhood. A symbol of strength. A visible symbol of Theta Chi. It was your house and you were proud of it. It was clean, the furnishings well kept, the ceilings did not show water spots from leaks, and the wood floors were in great shape. Sure, hindsight is 20/20, but it is obvious that the years have taken a toll on your chapter house.

Maybe not immediately, but certainly on the walk back to the car, as your wife bites her lip and just looks elsewhere instead of making eye contact with you, you begin to question how it happened. How did the house, *your* house, get to this condition? Is there no pride in it today? Did the Gen X'ers, Y'ers and Millennial's (or whatever they call the generation today) just not pay attention to maintenance? What happened to that symbol of your youth? What happened to the chapter house that represented brotherhood? Strength? Theta Chi? What happened to my house? You sheepishly look to that lovely lady riding shotgun in your car, and you simply say, with amazement, "wow, that sure wasn't *fun*, was it...honey?"

The fact of the matter is there are several Theta Chi chapter houses around the country where this scenario can play out. The reasons why some of our physical structures are in disre-



The Sigma Chapter house, under construction, as it appeared in the October, 1927 issue of *The Rattle*.

pair are numerous. Each chapter has its own story, its own reasons, its own excuses, and its own collection of alumni who shake their heads and quietly drive down the street, wondering what to say next

Please do not confuse the state of the physical structures to the state of our chapters. Most of our chapters are strong. They continue to be strong in brotherhood, academics, leadership, and pride. No matter how strong the chapter, their house can still be in disrepair. There is no direct correlation between the strength of a chapter and the structural condition of their house. Cleanliness, a visible symbol of pride, is another matter for another article in another issue of *The Rattle*.

A story similar to what is related above is what was told to the Norwich Housing Corporation board during a recent meeting. We were fortunate enough to hear from two alumnus members of the Sigma Chapter/Oregon State University. Roger Rollins ('62) and Gil Miller

('65) were representing their alumni corporation and seeking a loan from the Norwich Housing Corporation to help start the renovation of their chapter house.

These very dedicated alumni were looking for funds to help renovate the restrooms, which had been leaking and were in desperate need of modernization, and to help start some of the structural repair work needed to bring the house up to standards. They relayed to us that they were in the preliminary stages of starting a capital campaign to fully renovate the house. According to Roger Rollins, they needed to do something because "with today's students high expectations, and facing competition from the state-subsidized housing that is often more lavish than the dorms of my generation, it is clear the typical fraternity cannot survive without strong alumni involvement."

What they laid out as their plan and the manner in which they were approaching it is what really caught the attention of the NHC board.



From the March, 1928 *Rattle*, Sigma Chapter's new home.



A view in 2004 of the front of the Sigma Chapter house.

They knew that there was a lot of work to be done and that it would be a major undertaking. They realized that there were some things that had to be done immediately to keep the house inhabitable. That is a critical step. For this they turned to the Norwich Housing Corporation for a loan to help make the necessary and most impactful renovations. As Gil Miller stated, "NHC was an important mechanism to keep the chapter alive."

Part of the plan was to find a way to increase revenue in the Summer. They learned that if they renovated the bathrooms and put in private showers instead of locker room showers and made a few other changes, they could turn the Summer months into revenue producing months. The University has several events in the Summer and the participants are always looking for places to stay. The Alumni Corporation could lease the house for these events and turn non-revenue producing months into profitable ones. This in turn will help fund the renovations after the capital campaign.

Not only is there the financial aspect of this initial work, but there is the brotherhood side as well. By making the house more attractive and comfortable, it will help keep undergraduate brothers living in the house longer and it will be more attractive to prospective members. Jeff Jarrett, Alumni Treasurer and Chapter Advisor ('95), put it this way: "The undergraduates are excited to see the renovations and this has resulted in them really putting an effort into recruitment."

For the alumni and the future capital campaign, the hope is that when alumnus brothers come back to campus and visit the house, they will see the changes made and realize that the alumni corporation and the undergraduate chapter are serious about improving the physical structure of the house. This show of commitment will hopefully result in a more successful capital campaign.

Sigma Chapter is very fortunate to have so

many alumni involved in this project and with the chapter (my apologies to those many other alumni who were not mentioned in this article). But, having a strong alumni corporation is no accident. It takes work, a lot of work. Work over time and work done by several brothers.

Sigma's work on keeping alumni relations strong goes back several decades. Ed Jacobson ('67) served as a Field Secretary (now he would be called a Leadership and Education Consultant, or LEC) from 1967-69. His travels not only helped make other chapters strong, but also helped him see the common threads that make chapters great. One of these is alumni involvement. The easiest way to keep the most alumni informed (and, then perhaps more involved) is through consistent communication.

Knowing how critical this was, in the early 1970's, Ed contracted with an outside company to produce and manage the newsletter. Since then, the newsletter has been published professionally and consistently. That consistent communication helps the chapter in several ways: 1) it keeps the alumni in the know; 2) it helps keep the alumni involved so that if their help is needed, they feel more comfortable extending a Helping Hand when called upon; and, 3) consistent communication helps with keeping addresses fresh, so that when there is a need to mobilize the alumni they are easier to find and contact.

There are several ways to undertake renovating your house. Sigma Chapter is using a two-fold approach. First, they are securing a loan from the Norwich Housing Corporation to enable them to do the most critical work on the house to keep



The living room of the Sigma Chapter house, 2004.

it open and occupied. Second, they are embarking upon a campaign to raise the funds to make the rest of the renovations to help restore the chapter house to its glory days so well remembered by many, and so much desired by all.

The Norwich Housing Corporation welcomes loan applications from any alumni corporation that has a solid plan for the future. We offer mortgage loans for new construction and renovations. There are also low interest loans available for life safety improvements, such as fire suppression systems, fire doors, etc. To contact us for information that can be very helpful in getting such a process underway, contact Jereme Grinslade by calling him at the Fraternity's International Headquarters (317-824-1881) or by emailing him jereme@thetachi.org.

Together, involved alumni and the Norwich Housing Corporation can not only help ensure that those great memories are still standing, but together, we can ensure that your young son who walked through that door with you will have a chance to live out his Theta Chi undergraduate experience if he comes to call that chapter house 'home' too!