

Norwich Housing Corporation



Housing . . . the \$50 Million Dollar Question

By Jeff Anderson, Treasurer Norwich Housing Corporation (Beta Alpha/UC-LA '89)

Drive by many of our Chapter Houses and they may look "OK." Stop, go inside, and too often you find an aging facility that's in poor condition and, too often, poorly maintained. In some cases, "we," the alumni, have been neglectful in our oversight and operation of the house. We have let facility maintenance get way behind. But, in many other cases, the houses are just simply getting old.

If all the Theta Chi house corporations across the country had to rebuild their chapter houses today, we'd need more than \$50,000,000 to get the job done. The problem is that many of the houses were built in the 1920's or 1930's and they are in serious need of major renovation or replacement. For most house corporation boards, the very idea of a major renovation or replacement is daunting. In fact, too many boards just ignore the problem and hope it will go away, or they figure that the next guy on the board can worry about it. While it may seem challenging, there are some pretty basic steps that can be taken to prepare your organization to tackle a major project.

The first step to is ensure that you have a regular alumni communication program in place, shared Philip Thornton, Gamma Theta '05, Associate Development Officer with The Laurus Group, LLC. "To many house corporations don't realize how important a consistent annual communication and annual fund program is for laying the groundwork for a successful campaign," advised Philip. Consistent communication (newsletters, e-announcements, postcards) and alumni events will go a long way in building credibility and shoring up relationships prior to any major undertaking. Alumni need to be recruited and know that there is value in giving back. A consistent communication plan is the first step towards success.

Once that plan is underway, there are a number of critical questions that need to be asked and addressed. Is there an involved board that meets regularly? Does it include board members from different eras? What is the status of the chapter on campus? What is the nature of the project that needs to be undertaken? Members of the house corporation must be able to give a quick and knowledgeable answer to these questions because they will be asked. Not knowing the answer, or having an undesirable response, will create doubt in the donor.

When considering undertaking a capital campaign, the first step is to conduct a feasibility study. A feasibility study model takes anywhere from 4-6 months. Someone must literally go out and meet with a cross section of alumni to share the vision and test their interest level. It takes time, and it's not a matter of meeting just any alumni, it's important to meet with the right alumni. Once the feasibility study is complete the board can then make an informed decision about moving forward with a campaign.

"You don't want to do a feasibility study unless you think the results are going to be positive," said Philip. "You don't want to waste your time or money. But, once you do have the results, you want to be prepared to move into a campaign right away. Your key alumni are focused and motivated with regards to your project. As they say, strike while the iron is hot."

According to Kevin Murray (Alpha Nu '90), "We built our new house at Georgia Tech a few years ago now, and at the time had some brothers who thought we could raise the funds ourselves. I've spoken to several other house corporation guys about our experience and I always tell them, there is no way we'd have succeeded without professional help." While most campaigns run a similar course, each is unique and has its own set of specific circumstances. Campaign consultants can provide you with a checklist of items that should be in place well before the feasibility study and campaign begins. It must be understood that there are costs associated with conducting a campaign long before the first dollar comes in. Preparation should begin today for a project that is several years down the road.

If your house corporation is looking to implement an annual communication and fundraising program, Jereme Grinslade, Administrative Officer for the Norwich Housing Corporation, is your best first call. He will be able to refer you to those professional organizations that have worked with our other chapters and to specific brothers with experience to help you with your project.