

Missouri Alpha House Corporation Perseveres

In 1987, Housing Corp. President Jon W. "Bill" Scheidker (Stein), '66, wrote a lengthy open letter in the *MO Alphan* entitled, "What if I Told You Missouri Alpha Won't Exist in Two Years?" The letter outlined seemingly insurmountable problems the chapter and house corp. were facing. Even with a full house, it we were operating near "break even" because of the size and age of the house. Alumni donations would usually have to sustain us for extra expenses or major maintenance.

Beyond that, he cited three external factors, which almost crippled us in 1985. First, our property was reassessed and our taxes jumped from \$2,000 to \$12,000 each year. This has been overturned and reduced, but today's taxes are around \$9,000 each year. Second, Phi Kappa Psi mandated a national liability and property insurance program for all chapters. This tripled our premiums to \$15,000 each year. Lastly, due to new fire and health codes, our kitchen was closed until we made major modifications. Estimates came in near \$50,000 for this and other mandated changes. Fortunately, we negotiated a couple years to complete this work. The bottom line meant that we were looking at \$70,000 in additional charges, above normal maintenance costs.

At that same time, many other Phi Psi chapters became indebted to our National Headquarters, primarily for insurance premiums. Some refused to pay at all, stressing they could not possibly pay. Phi Psi Executive Director, Gary Angstadt, had heard enough complaints, and, on the floor of the 1988 Grand Arch Council, recounted the story above. He sighted Missouri Alpha as a shining example of how a chapter can overcome overwhelming adversity and persevere. The Corp. worked hard, developing payment plans to all of its creditors. It remained one of the few indebted chapters to maintain a vote at all Phi Psi conventions and never had its charter suspended, as other chapters did, for debts to the national Fraternity.

As Stein promised in his letter, there was a silver lining. In the ultimate fulfillment of "the great joy of serving others," Zeta Chi and MO Alpha re-founder Ray Burns '08, passed away around 1975, and named MO Alpha in his trust fund. It ultimately came to the chapter in 1986, amounting to \$70,000. Left invested, it grew to \$90,000 and was withdrawn to pay those overdue bills.

The pressure to increase income led to a push for members. Only a few years later, there was a need for a major "house cleaning." This involved removing a significant number of undergraduates who were well behind in rent, and others because of conduct unbecoming a brother. At the same time, college enrollment and fraternity membership dropped dramatically across the country. MU's undergraduate population dropped more than 30 percent and MU's Greek system lost six fraternities and one sorority.

The capacity of the house is now 49 men, due to several factors, primarily fire codes. However, chapter advisor Steve O'Rourke '74 has worked tirelessly, increasing housebills (but keeping them competitive), instituting housing contracts, encouraging the recruitment of higher quality members (paying bills and fewer dropouts), reworking the chapter budget, and tracking down decades of accounts receivables, collecting over \$35,000 to date. His efforts have lowered the "break even point" to around 40 members. Over the past eight years, the chapter has climbed from 23 members living in the chapter house to 37. Even tight budgeting has left nothing extra for anything but routine maintenance. Room renovations, new carpeting, drop ceilings in New Wing, interior painting, a new back deck, among other projects, have all been paid for, and completed by, undergrads.

In 1999, as in 1987, the house started to show wear, and the Corporation's reserves were gone. It was again faced with mandated improvements to meet city codes. This included a new roof, (\$50,000), repairs to the housemother's room and back porch (\$8,500), two new furnaces (\$7,000), a fire alarm system (\$8,000), exterior paint and wood repair (\$20,000). In addition, 1998 property taxes were still owed (\$9,000). Roughly half the money we needed came from an intensive *and continuing* fund drive headed by Bro. O'Rourke, called the "Brick" program. Alumni can have a brick with their names engraved placed around the "Grasslands" carriage stone at the front of the house for \$500 or more (See below). The remainder was funded through interest-free loans from a few alumni.

Today, we are debt free, except for debt to those aforementioned alumni. Though still close to break even, the house has 38 quality members and that number is forecast to grow with a successful rush program. Over the past few years, the chapter has won many prestigious University and Phi Psi awards.

Due to generous alumni, our Chapter Scholarship Fund (part of the national Endowment Fund) now stands at over \$85,000, allowing us to give out \$4,000 in scholarships annually to undergrads. However, it also allows us to borrow against it in hard times - all without decreasing scholarship amounts or principal (See article on back).

The dining room, TV room, bathroom and two New Wing rooms have been completely renovated through parent and alumni donations to, and volunteer work by, the newly formed MO Alpha Parents' Club, headed by Phi Psi Little Sister Becky (McCarty) Fisk and Barb Langenberg. They have also recently purchased some new furnishings and begun to replace the wallpaper in the Old Wing. On the exterior, David Hellwig '73 and Donn Yeagley '73 have kept the property pristine.

Though we are still low on funds and low on membership, we start the next decade with a chapter house in pretty good shape and spirits high.

I.T.B.,

Wynn "Wheels" Wiegand...

Wynn "Wheels" Wiegand '74
MO Alpha House Corp. President



Construction on the "Brick Project" was completed just before homecoming this past year. If you are interested in having a brick with your name engraved on it placed around the "Grasslands" stepping stone, contact Steve O'Rourke '74 at (573) 446-3602 or Tork1038@AOL.com.