



The Sig House

A Quarterly Newsletter from the Board of Grand Trustees - Fall 2006

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Building Rapport

It's a bad rap. Fraternity houses are full of well meaning, well mannered members who are focused on their studies. They don't have loud parties until the wee hours of the morning. It must be someone else that is prompting the neighbors to call the cops. Right?

While house corporations and chapter advisors hope for the best, active brothers can use bad judgment from time to time and events like parties spin out of control causing clashes with the neighbors. Most of the time, the neighbors simply call the police to deal with it. The police, in turn, often make this information available to university officials who monitor such things. If the acts are outrageous enough, the local media make sure the whole community knows about them. What started as a good time can rapidly become a public relations nightmare.

While the occupant mix at a chapter house changes over time as brothers move in, move out and graduate, most of the neighbors remain the same. Some neighbors have very long memories and each time there is an "event" at the chapter house that causes them dismay, consternation or outright anger, it is added to their list of high crimes and misdemeanors. The result is cumulative: sins of past brothers are laid on the brothers of the present, guilty or not.

One of the biggest obstacles to overcoming bad press is the "island" mentality that active members can develop. This mind set is akin to "whatever happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas". But the chapter house is not in Vegas. When it's in close proximity to working people, families or seniors, there is a thin line that, once crossed, is difficult to retreat from.

It's said that good judgment comes from experience and experience comes from bad judgment. Bad judgment by active brothers creates lasting animosity with the neighbors, university and community. Besides using better judgment in the future, what can be done to improve relations *today*?

Get Acquainted. It's much easier to stay angry at strangers than friends. Why not host an Open House and invite non-Greek neighbors within a two block radius? A mid week holiday event with hot apple cider and cookies will set the tone. Clean up the chapter house, decorate a Christmas tree and pass out invitations door to door. Use this opportunity to invite key university officials like the President, Greek Advisor and others that can help or hinder your cause. This kind of positive event will reap large and long term results in the public relations department. On the flip side, the brothers will likely be more considerate of the neighbors and lessen the likelihood and number of confrontations.

Lend a Helping Hand. In every neighborhood there are seniors and disabled who could use a hand with raking leaves, washing cars, yard cleanup or shoveling snow. Active chapter could spend a few hours on a Saturday afternoon roaming the area offering to help.

Do It Yearly. Rapport building needs nurturing. Positive events fade over time and every year there are new brothers that need to be introduced to the benefits of the exercise. Make it part of a strategic plan to host annual events that leave good and lasting memories with the neighbors. Most will be much more forgiving of the occasional bad judgment.

The Order of Constantine

Sigma Chi Fraternity created The Order of Constantine at the 47th Grand Chapter in 1948. Its purpose is to recognize Brothers who have performed exemplary, long-term service to the Fraternity in a manner the Seven Founders would have commended.

Induction into The Order of Constantine is considered to be the highest honor the Sigma Chi Fraternity can bestow upon one of its members. These are the Brothers that Grand Historian Joseph C. Nate often referred to as being the "Eighth Founders".

Each year, The Order of Constantine recognizes up to fourteen Sigma Chi Brothers for their commitment, dedication and service to the fraternity. The honor of being named a "Constantine Sig" has been conferred on less than 500 Brothers since the inception of The Order of Constantine in 1948.

I recently attended the 100th Anniversary Celebration of the founding of the Beta Delta Chapter at the University of Montana. I joined with over 500 enthusiastic Sigma Chis, family and friends at the chapter's celebration.

The credit for this highly successful event goes to the Beta Delta House Corporation. In preparation for the chapter's 100th anniversary celebration, this ten member board worked for seven years to renovate the house and plan the event. They implemented innovative ways to engage both chapter and area Sigma Chis into the process.

Beta Delta House Corporation's story is truly remarkable and a model for success that can be used by other chapters. The Beta Delta House Corporation was able to get the chapter house listed on the National Registry of Historic Places and secured 501(c)(3) status from the Internal Revenue Service. This makes all donations to Beta Delta tax deductible. They were also able to obtain a property tax exemption from the State of Montana which saves the house corporation more than \$8,000 each year.

The House Corporation's recent fund raising efforts have generated \$336,000 since 2000. Another fundraiser named

Second 100 Years was announced at the 100th Anniversary Banquet for \$300,000 to raise another \$50,000 for house renovation and grow the scholarship endowment to \$400,000. This campaign will add five new bedrooms to the chapter house and the scholarship endowment will generate about \$30,000 a year in scholarships based on current investment returns. At the 100th Anniversary Banquet \$265,000 (88% of the goal) was pledged.

At that same banquet, Brother Craig Brewerton and I had the honor of inducting Brother Dan Cederberg into The Order of Constantine. Five members of The Order were in attendance that night including myself (Phil Olsen-VP of The Order), Bob Jones-Grand Pro Consul, Bruce Casner-Chairman of the Board of Grand Trustees, Craig Brewerton-Former Grand Trustee and Mike Dunn-Former Grand Quaestor. We presented Dan with his official certificate, medallion and lapel pin.



(Left to Right) Bruce Casner, Phil Olsen, Dan Cederberg, Bob Jones, Craig Brewerton

Dan graduated from the University of Montana in 1975 and from the University of Montana Law School in 1979. He currently practices law with the Cederberg Law Offices in Missoula, Montana. Dan and his wife Forey have four children, Brad (Beta Delta '06), Jenna, Breland and Dac.

Dan has worked tirelessly on behalf of Beta Delta Chapter. His fraternity service includes 27 years as a House Corporation member (20 years as President), Missoula Alumni Chapter President, Chapter Advisor and facilitator at numerous local and regional chapter conferences.

Do you know a Sigma Chi Brother who is deserving of recognition for long-term service to Sigma Chi? If so, I encourage you to nominate him for The Order of Constantine. Go to www.sigmachi.org

then **Members** then **Scholarships & Awards** then **Order of Constantine** then **Click Here to Nominate a Brother Online!**

The deadline for receipt of completed nomination forms is December 31. If you have any questions about The Order of Constantine, email constantine@sigmachi.org or call Liz Geary at Sigma Chi Headquarters (847) 869-3655.

By Phil Olsen - Vice President of The Order of Constantine

House Corporation Awards 2005-2006

House corporations own, administrate, maintain and otherwise deal with chapter house property. Due to the different forms of housing available to chapters (rental houses, university dorms, house corp owned housing) the functions of house corporations vary considerably by location. In 2006, the Grand Trustees embarked on a fact finding mission to determine the make up and functions of the house corporations serving Sigma Chi and to recognize those that were doing the job better than others.

To that end, Grand Trustee Dan Harrop conceived the award and the Board's Alumni Resources Committee developed the **Sigma Chi House Corporation Award Application** that sought information under the headings of Board Structure & Administration, Facility/Property Management and Alumni Relations & Communications.

The purpose of getting the information was to garner a better understanding of house corporation strengths and weaknesses so advice and training can be better focused to address their needs.

Based on careful review of the applications received, the Grand Trustees wish to announce that 2005-2006 House Corporation Awards go to three applicants: Eta Lambda of Virginia Tech University, Zeta Iota of Pittsburg State University and Beta Delta of University of Montana.

These applicants completed 90% or more of the application criteria. To these and the others that submitted applications, the Grand Trustees wish to express a well deserved "Thanks".

Lawyers & Victims & Lawsuits, Oh My!

A recent movie came out called *Snakes on a Plane*. You can guess what it was about. Could it happen in real life? Of course, and if it did, there would unquestionably be problems. However, you are more likely to be struck by lightning while drawing the winning lottery ticket. Being involved in a lawsuit is not all that different.

A lawsuit is always a possibility for a house corporation or active chapter. While state laws vary, it is unlikely for a member volunteer to be held personally liable unless there is a deliberate act or gross negligence. Here's an example:

A house corporation hires a contractor to build a stairway in the chapter house. The contractor uses cheap glue and carpet tacks to construct it. The carpet tears loose causing a guest to trip and get hurt. The guest sues the active chapter, the house corporation and its president.

In this scenario, active chapter would not likely have liability because it had nothing to do with the selection of contractor or the construction. The house corporation would not likely have liability if it used discretion in hiring the contractor. Using discretion means that the contractor was selected based on perceived expertise, references, etc. As long as the basis for the decision was reasonable to an unbiased observer, the house corporation and its members are protected. The president of the house corporation would have no personal liability if he was acting as the president and not as an individual.

In this example, while active chapter, house corporation and president are all sued, they all would likely be dismissed from the lawsuit.

Lawsuits can happen any time and any place. If one comes your way, consult with a knowledgeable attorney. When a lawsuit is received, don't panic. Most states have laws which are favorable to volunteers and entities such as a house corporation.

By Grand Trustee Tommy Geddings.

HCOTS 2007

Based on rave reviews of the **House Corp Officers Training Seminar** (HCOTS) held in Phoenix in June 2006, the Risk Management Foundation has generously agreed to underwrite this Grand Trustee event again for 2007.

HCOTS provides high level education for house corporation volunteers in such issues as Risk Management, Knowing Your Client, Fundraising, Attracting Volunteers, Long Range Planning and Legal Considerations, all taught by experts in the field. Break out sessions allow attendees to discuss their own successes and failures for the edification of their peers.

HCOTS 2007 is scheduled for March 2007 in a location to be determined. Hotel, travel and food costs are covered for attendees. If members of your house corporation are interested in attending, please contact Chris Moran at chris.moran@sigmachi.org or call him at 847.869.3655 ext. 227.

Timely Winter Break Reminders

In preparation for Winter Break, here are some timely reminders:

- ▶ Chapter houses are targets for break-ins, burglaries and vandalism during breaks.
- ▶ Set the thermostat at no less than 60°F/16°C in cold climates.
- ▶ Repair broken doors or windows, which cause heat loss.
- ▶ Close the fireplace flue.
- ▶ Shut off the water supply to the house and drain pipes to prevent freezing.
- ▶ Clean gutters and downspouts.
- ▶ Ask the chapter advisor, house corporation or university personnel (as appropriate) to make a weekly inspection of the chapter house during the break.
- ▶ Lock all windows and doors.
- ▶ Stop newspaper delivery.
- ▶ Arrange mail pick up or place a temporary stop at the post office.
- ▶ Arrange for snow and ice removal on chapter house sidewalks.
- ▶ Leave exterior lights on.
- ▶ Leave some interior lights on with a timer during the evening.

- ▶ Verify that the fire and security alarms are operational.
- ▶ Have the Quaestor secure cash, checks and house credit cards.
- ▶ Turn off all portable heaters, computers and appliances.

Renovation Funding

Sigma Chi offers a great alternative for funding chapter house fire/life safety improvements and renovations. Constantine Capital, Inc.(CCI) has loan programs that can lend up to \$250,000 at competitive interest rates with up to a 30 year amortization schedule.

Do you have a chapter house project that needs funding? Contact the Sigma Chi Director of Housing Chris Moran at chris.moran@sigmachi.org who can assist with the loan application. For more information about Constantine Capital, go to www.sigmachi.org then **Members** then **Housing** then **Constantine Capital**.

We're Here to Help

Your Board of Grand Trustees is here to assist Sigma Chi house corporations in a myriad of ways. Besides many years of service to Sigma Chi in various capacities, there is almost 500 years of combined professional expertise in such things as real estate development, property management, project administration, politics, maintenance, renovation, insurance, tax planning, accounting, construction, fund raising, legal, education, housing, risk management and more.

While each Grand Trustee is assigned specific provinces to oversee, this combined expertise is available to all house corporations. The key to tapping this gold mine is to contact your province's Grand Trustee with a specific request for assistance. If your request is out of your Grand Trustee's specific area of expertise, other colleagues will assist in providing real solutions.

Give us a try. The Grand Trustees are here to help your house corporation be the very best that it can be. Please use to the contact information on the cover page.