



The Sig House

A Newsletter from the Board of Grand Trustees

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A Bond of Brothers

Late night phone calls. Loud pounding on the door. Certified letters. These events rarely bring good news. After a number of them, the phone, door and mail go unanswered. Who needs more bad news? Better not knowing than dealing with it.

Anyone that has served on a house corporation knows that a certain amount of bad news goes with the territory. This is entirely predictable because active brothers are men in training. Their quiver of life experiences is mostly empty and waiting to be filled.

Young brothers in this stage of life can get very creative when it comes to filling that quiver. A tour of most chapter houses reveals lofts built out of random lumber and nails, walls and doors installed where none existed before, padlocks on fire exits and flammable partitions hung randomly.

Housekeeping, of course, is seldom done other than to impress the alums and to give the illusion that it's regular. In between those times, dirty laundry is heaped next to portable heaters, shower mold grows to mutant proportions, floors go uncleaned and garbage cans overflow.

And the parties! Not satisfied with just beverages, food and good company, the addition of costumes, props and pyrotechnics can turn the chapter house into an full on firetrap along with obligatory eardrum crushing music guaranteed to bring out the worst in the neighbors and the local gendarmes.

This kind of behavior is beyond the pale! It's outrageous! It's immature! It's, well, pretty much the way you lived when you were that age. And it all seemed to be such great fun! But to mature and serious directors of a house corporation, it's all now pretty much

bad news because that's how the consequences of this lifestyle are delivered: noise complaints, arrests, fires and citations.

Before you know it, serving on the house corporation board seems like trying to ride herd on stampeding buffalo. Anyone with half a wit should get out of the way of the thundering herd, right? Sure, if you let the buffalo call the shots.

But most of the young brothers have good intentions. When they lived at home, they were given regular course corrections by their parents. But the folks don't live at the chapter house. That's where the caring and regular influence of mature brothers can go a long way.

Providing that mature influence is a tag team effort. The Chapter Advisor can't do it alone. The house corporation brothers can add their worthy influence by holding meetings at the chapter house. Alums can host special recognition events to present scholarships and certificates of achievement.

For greatest impact, schedule events at the chapter house once or twice a month. Several things will happen: The house will be cleaner. Alums will get to know the actives personally. And both of these happy events will help balance bad news.

Curiously, as a tighter bond is formed between actives and alumni, the less bad news happens. Why? True brotherhood promotes *accountability*. As active brothers better understand their responsibilities as Sigma Chis, the more they think about consequences of their actions.

So, rather than get into "the older I get, the better I was" mentality, remember that you are them, only older and wiser. You turned out pretty well and so will

most of them, especially with your help. It will all be a bit easier if you forge a bond of brotherhood. [IHSV](#)

Mining for Gold

The Sigma Chi experience is much more than the chapter house. But the chapter house is an essential component of the experience since it provides the stage where friendships are grown and the seeds of high minded values are sown. As with friendships and values, the chapter house requires care and renewal, all of which costs money...sometimes BIG money.

Every chapter house needs funds to renew, renovate and upgrade. Safety considerations drive the need for fire sprinkler systems, smoke alarms, up to code wiring, fire extinguishers and safe egress. Economic considerations dictate adequate insulation, energy efficient windows and efficient heating and cooling equipment. Recruitment considerations mandate an attractive and competitively priced housing alternative.

Weatherization and insulating work can sometimes be paid for through state grants or utility company rebates or subsidies. Search the internet for "weatherization programs" in your state for alternatives. Other types of renovation work generally require a private funding source. While private lenders may consider lending to a properly registered house corporation with adequate collateral and source of repayment, bank financing carries loan fees, high interest rates, short repayment terms and higher payments. By far, the best source of renovation funding is contributions from chapter alums.

Consider some statistics about fund raisers:

1. A 20-25% participation rate is very good. So, if you have 1,000 potential donors, you can expect only 200 to 250 contributions of *any size*. Do the math for your chapter.

2. 80% of all contributions will come from 20% of donors.

3. Your top 10 contributions typically make up 50% of the campaign goal.

4. The largest gift will be 15% of the campaign goal.

Being successful in gathering the gold requires a carefully executed plan which includes:

Defining the Donor Pool. Every house corporation should make having a complete and accurate alumni database a high priority. It is not only indispensable for raising money, it provides a mechanism for brothers to reconnect with other brothers. Sigma Chi Headquarters www.sigmachi.org can provide the information it has to begin the database building process. Since brothers move, databases are ever changing. This is especially true of many younger alumni who move frequently. Since the post office maintains change of address requests for six month, doing First Class mailings with "Return Service Requested" at least twice a year will capture many of those changes. Bottom Line: building and maintaining a reliable database is essential to fund raising and virtually every other successful house corporation endeavor.

Wield the Web. The vast majority of brothers have access to the internet and use email regularly. Use this fact to your advantage by hosting a chapter website. The cost is nominal and it's accessible 24/7. Post your database, newsletters, pictures and more. And gather and use email addresses to reduce mailing costs.

Fund Raiser Theme. Every fund raiser should be named. The theme should be carefully chosen, visionary and appeal to the heart because the heart is the key to the wallet. Some examples of successful themes include "Giving Back" which appeals to repaying the debt owed to Sigma Chi for a lifetime of value and "Second 100 Years" which uses tradition and long history as a strong foundation for the future.

How & When Funds Will Be Spent. Along with a theme goes the scheme. All fund raisers need to have a dollar goal based on specific renovation projects systematically accomplished according to a schedule. It's okay to spread the work over several years if

the projects are volunteer driven. If hiring a general contractor, most mid range renovations should be accomplished during the summer to avoid occupancy conflicts. If the work is more involved, temporary alternative housing for the chapter needs to be part of the plan.

A Picture is Worth (well, you know). Many alums have not visited the chapter house for years, sometimes decades. A YouTube video or DVD that shows the current condition and plans for renovation is very inexpensive to produce and distribute. Don't overlook the opportunity to stir the heart. Focus on fond memories and then segue into the renovation and money it will take to keep the dream alive for future brothers.

Identifying the Big Hitters. This pool is less than 5% of your total number of prospects but will yield the biggest dollars by far. Most of those who qualify will be in their fifties or older so having generational contacts who know who they are is vital. Once the Big Hitters have been identified, a personal visit is best even if that means long distance travel. Those Big Hitters that commit often know who the other Big Hitters are and may be willing to make personal calls to them. Don't forget to ask.

Name Levels of Giving. Most contributors want to know where they stand in relation to their peers. Brothers are competitive that way. Establish at least five levels of giving that allow the Big Hitters to hit big (like \$10,000 or \$25,000 or more) but still allow smaller donors to play (like \$100 and up). Name the categories for Sigma Chi symbols (Norman Shield, Jordan Standard, White Cross, etc.) or for chapter founders or achievers that are well known. Publish updated results on the chapter website and in newsletters.

Announcing the Campaign. Keep the announcement under wraps until you have gotten commitments for at least half of the goal. *This part is critical.* If announced too soon, levels of giving and numbers of donors will be much smaller. When the campaign is announced with much of the goal already committed and who committed it, others will be more inclined to contribute and match or out do their peers. Do not underestimate the

Sigma Chi Fraternity's



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power of this tactic. It is time tested and works.

Keeping the Ball Rolling. Once the campaign is announced, plan to communicate to the alums three or four times a year to show the progress and continued urgency to donate. A year end appeal in particular can be very effective since charitable giving deductions face a December 31 deadline.

Don't Start Renovation Too Soon. Even though the announced schedule indicates the renovation work will start on such-and-such a date, delay the start if insufficient pledges have been received. Starting too soon is a message to those that haven't contributed that you don't need their money. Put the responsibility for the delay on those that haven't pledged. Tell them "this train can't leave the station without YOU on it".

Aside from the hard work and excitement that comes with a chapter house renovation, the rewards to those that participate cannot be understated. Fund raising and renovation projects

give the house corporation board a series of positive long range goals to work on. As goals are accomplished, those that helped should be recognized for the effort in person and in public.

This is one of the best team building exercises there is. It gives others a desire to join a winning team. And it gives still other brothers a chance to show their financial appreciation for what Sigma Chi has meant to their lives. So, make plans to gather the gold that's waiting there to be mined.

Taming the Energy Tiger

Winter weather will soon start spiking heating costs for many chapter houses. With energy costs at an all time high, better control of heating costs is essential.

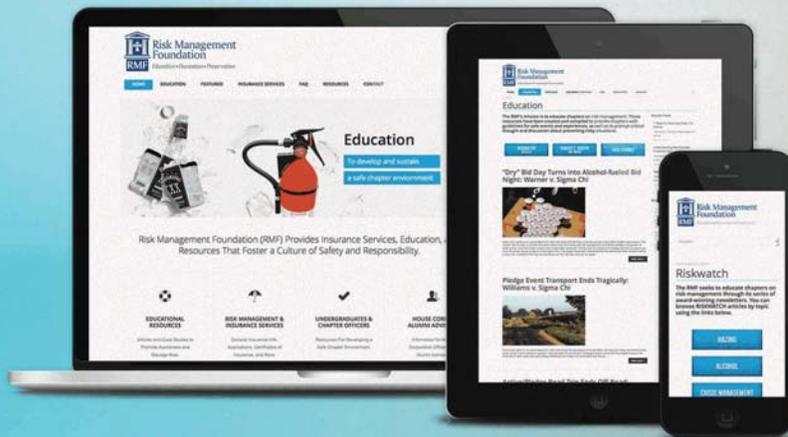
In older housing, poor insulation and HVAC equipment is often the budgetary enemy. In new facilities built to conserve energy, the culprit is residents who leave doors ajar and windows wide open. (But that issue is for another article.)

Fortunately, many states offer energy conservation assistance in the form of loans or rebates to help old housing more become energy efficient. To qualify for these incentives, an *energy audit* is done on the chapter house to determine where the building needs help. The audit will provide a priority list to determine needed upgrades and cost. Most energy upgrades pay for themselves in a only a few years so upgrading is more of an investment than an expense. If your state offers energy audits, loans and rebates, investigate the options today.

Here is a handy checklist of things to look for if you are in the self help mode:

- Check doors for proper weatherstripping. Add where needed.
- Supplement single pane windows with storm windows or replace them with thermopane windows.
- Close vents in storage areas and other rooms that do not require heat.
- Service the boiler, furnace, or heat pump to assure efficiency. Heating equipment in poor operation use more fuel and work harder. Replace air filters several times a year. If the heating or

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Know the Risks, Be Proactive, Develop a Plan



cooling equipment is old and inefficient, investigate modern replacements. The cost is often paid back in a few years by the energy cost savings.

- Use less hot water by installing low flow shower heads. Set the hot water heater at 120 degrees.
- Set daytime temperature at 68-70 degrees and 62-66 degrees at night. Set temperature no lower than 55 degrees during cold winter conditions to avoid pipes freezing.
- Install a humidistat that automatically controls the shower area ventilation fan based on humidity. Once humidity is removed, it shuts off so that excess heated and cooled air isn't being unnecessarily exhausted as well.
- Keep all exterior doors and windows closed during extreme weather. Install automatic closers on doors to help the process.

Begin the conservation process when weather is moderate so that you can enjoy the savings when costs begin to ratchet up. Tame that energy tiger. IHSV

Bylaws By Law

House corporations, like any corporation, need a legal basis and framework to work properly. The legal basis is established by filing Articles of Incorporation with your appropriate state agency, often the Secretary of State. This is usually a relatively simple and inexpensive procedure.

Every house corporation also needs "bylaws" which are the framework by which a corporation operates. Bylaws have been defined as "The document that contains the ground rules by which a corporation is run. Bylaws normally establish such matters as the titles and duties of officers, the timing and procedures for board meetings and the annual meeting." Let's further define components of this definition.

Board of Directors. House corporations typically have three or more directors. (The number of directors should be an odd number so votes aren't deadlocked.) Directors are usually elected for terms ranging typically from one to three years. The directors run the business of the house

corporation and meet periodically to discuss issues and to enact and enforce policies and procedures. From the pool of directors, officers are appointed.

Officers. House corporations have a leadership structure. At minimum, there should be a President, Treasurer and Secretary. If the number of directors permits, a Vice President position can be created. Officers are typically appointed and ratified by the board majority with a term of office lasting until the next election. Officers can step down voluntarily or be removed by the board at any time.

a. President. The President is the highest office on the house corporation totem pole. The President has authority to speak and act on behalf of the board as long as those actions conform to the approved budget and established policies and procedures. If the issue falls outside these boundaries, the President should hold a board meeting to determine the board majority's wishes before proceeding. The President runs board meetings and usually has check and contract signing authority.

b. Vice President. This officer fills in for the President when he is unavailable. He can be called on by the President to assist in scheduling and organizing meetings, compiling meeting agendas and other executive tasks. The Vice President often takes over the President's position if it becomes vacant between elections.

c. Treasurer. This officer is responsible for the financial aspects of the house corporation. The duties include reconciling bank accounts, producing financial reports, drafting the annual budget, paying bills and collecting rent and other money owed to the house corporation. The Treasurer usually has check signing authority.

d. Secretary. This officer is in charge of taking minutes at meetings and performing various house corporation communications which could include letters, newsletters and website updates.

Board Meetings. The house corporation should meet at regular intervals to review financial reports, organize fund raising and deal with routine and special issues. When properly organized, quarterly meetings will usually suffice. Ideally, meetings should be face to face but can also be done effectively by teleconference. Teleconferencing allows the inclusion of directors who may not live locally or who are out of town.

Board meetings should always have a predetermined agenda and time frame. Meetings should generally not last longer than two hours (one is better). Properly organized meetings include providing the directors with agendas and related information in advance of the meeting for review.

All meetings should be *action driven*. Agenda items should have specific recommendations for voting and not simply be rambling discussions. Volunteers value their time and running effective and efficient meetings is an important way to respect that time. It's the President's job to ensure the agenda stays focused and moving forward. One way to do this is a *timed action agenda*. Here's a sample:

- a. Open Forum. 15 minutes.
- b. Approve Minutes of Last Board Meeting. (Secretary) 5 minutes.

- c. Review Current Financial Statement (Treasurer) 5 minutes
- d. Committee Reports.
 - 1. Newsletter. 5 minutes
 - 2. Fundraiser. 15 minutes
- e. Old Business Items.
 - 1. Approve roof contract. 15 minutes
- f. New Business Items.
 - 1. Approve new bylaws. 30 minutes
 - 2. Others Items? 15 minutes
- g. Set Date of Next Meeting. 1 minute

The annual meeting agenda is similar but with the addition of Board Elections.

Bylaws provide the framework every house corporation needs. If your house corporation has not yet adopted bylaws, a sample has been developed by Grand Trustees Harvey Silverman and Rich Thompson which can be adapted for your use. It can be found at the end of this newsletter. As with any legal document, it should be reviewed by a qualified attorney in your local jurisdiction to ensure that the necessary omissions and additions are made so it complies with all applicable statutes. **IHSV**

House Corporation Resource Directory

ARCHITECTURAL & PLANNING SERVICES

Aynesworth Architects & Consultants 512.328.2272
 G. Tim Aynesworth tim@aynesworth.com
 PO Box 161434, Austin TX 78716 www.aynesworth.com
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 Mike Hug mhug@HugArchitects.com
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Reid Studio Architecture LLC 217.390.7403
 Rod Reid rod.reid@comcast.net
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CHAPTER HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

Pierce Education Properties, L.P. 619.297.0400
 Matt Marucia, VP for Acquisitions
www.PierceEducationProperties.com National developers, buyers, owners and operators of student housing with specific expertise in Greek Housing acquisition, disposition, development, finance, etc.

CHAPTER HOUSE FINANCING

Constantine Capital, Inc. 816.300.0604
 Bob Schock robert.schock.zo@sigmachi.com
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 Patrick Alderdice palderdice@penningtonco.com
www.penningtonco.com Capital campaign coordination, gift management, alumni relations programs, website development

The Laurus Group 770.903.3987
 Bill Paris bparis@thelaurusgroup.net C 404.441.9630
www.thelaurusgroup.net Fundraising consulting specializing in capital campaigns, gift management, alumni communications, annual funds

HOUSE DIRECTOR SEARCH & SCREENING

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