



The Sig House

A Newsletter from the Board of Grand Trustees

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Think Outside the Box

Some years back when I was a Grand Praetor, one of my chapters badly needed a chapter house but area zoning would not allow for more than four unrelated people living together. Any successful financial model made it clear that they could not afford to have a house under those restrictions. In addition, the chapter was only six years old, had minimal alumni base and no funds.

While driving a few miles off campus one day, I came upon what looked to be a deserted farm house with the land around it gone to wild. There was a sign posted "For Sale by Owner". I inspected the property. It was two miles from campus, fenced and had two acres with a small pond on it.

The house looked like something from the mid 1800s with an unfinished addition which looked like it was to be a large garage.. I contacted the owner and found that the property was still for sale and included the family home which was completed in 1855. The owner had tried to turn it into a gas station and repair facility but ran out of funds year before leaving it unfinished. The family just wanted to sell it in its unfinished condition. The price for the two acres and house was much lower that one would expect for real estate in that area.

I asked if the sellers would be willing to finance the purchase and subordinate their loan to a construction loan to finish the structure as a residential dwelling. The seller was anxious to move the property and agreed.

I then formed the local alumni from several different chapters into a house corporation. The alumni agreed to commit personal guarantees of a few thousand each and construction began.

I entered into negotiations with the president of the university offering an alcohol-free fraternity house near his campus for his students in exchange for his support to back my bid to obtain a

zoning variance allowing up to 14 men to live there. The number needed to make the financial model work was 9. I went to chapter and obtained their commitment to fill the house and keep it an alcohol free facility.

The level of excitement was amazing. Hundreds of hours of alumni and undergraduate time were spent clearing the lot, hauling away debris, painting and taking on the tasks that left the builder nothing to do but finish the house. The house allowed for several single rooms, four full bath rooms, a kitchen, a pool room and a chapter room the size of the three car garage.

Everyone involved took great pride in the work which was accomplished in less than one year from the time I saw the "for sale" sign. Provisional approval for the zoning was granted by the county government with the big push from the president of the university. The house was completed without the expenditure of a single dollar from any undergraduate and less than a \$1,000 from the alums.

The task of furnishing the house was accomplished by my contacting a local furniture liquidator. His warehouse was bulging at the seams with desks, tables, couches, chairs, lamps and all the other furniture one might want to furnish a fraternity house. I offered to receive his tax deductible donation to our 501(c)(3) corporation and sent the undergrads to his business with trucks to pick it up. The only thing missing were beds and we left that to the undergrads to furnish for themselves.

There we were with a beautiful new house, far and away the finest of any other Greek housing in the area, with the blessing of the university, great publicity on local TV for having an alcohol-free commitment from the students and alumni, and the possibility of selling off half of the land to an interested sorority who wished to build their dream house right next door. This sale would pay off the loan on the chapter house. We were leading the

Sigma Chi Fraternity's



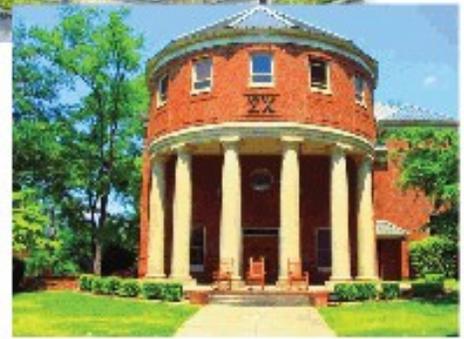
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way to a Greek Village as other land around us was also for sale. The house was dedicated and the chapter moved in, again without any significant funds having been expended.

This story illustrates that thinking outside of the box coupled with some luck can provide some significant opportunities when alumni put their minds to it. Opportunity abounds for those that are paying attention.

By Harvey Silverman IHSV

Alumni Engagement Report Fall 2018

The Grand Trustee Alumni Engagement Initiative has completed a year of engaging thousands of Sigma Chi alumni around the world. The results include new alumni chapters, reactivated chapters, new clubs and interest groups.

During the past six months we have focused on chapter town alumni groups. Since growing an alumni chapter takes about two years, we are cultivating “clubs” to mature into chapters. We are reaching out to House Corporations to assist with forming local clubs to bolster alumni support for the chapter and attract volunteers for the House Corporation Board.

There are over 1500 communities capable of having clubs and chapters including towns in target expansion campuses. To date, we have identified 600 of these communities and the 18 Grand Trustees are in the process in contacting the Sigs in those towns. From this process, we are hoping to inspire Sigs interested in starting a group locally and updating email addresses.

As of now, we have 125 Alumni Chapters, 7 Associations, 14 Clubs, 25 potential reactivations, 18 chapter town targets, 44 working targets and 599 target areas for a total of 855 contact points.

We appreciate the support of Sigma Chi Headquarters staff, existing alumni groups, Grand Praetors and other Sigs who are feeding us leads through their personal contacts.

Contact bill.robinson@sigmachi.com with any leads interested in starting a club or supporting a alumni chapter. For more Alumni Group resources, contact your Grand Trustee listed on Page One of **The Sig House**.

By Grand Trustee Bill Robinson IHSV

Connecting the Dots

Being a member of an organization like Sigma Chi that emphasizes “life long commitment” is an anomaly in a transient world. Those men that heeded that call enjoy the fruits of life long friendships and business relationships that are the envy of those that didn’t. This life long benefit doesn’t happen by accident. Sigma Chi teaches principles upon which to build mature and healthy relationships.

However, as life experiences steer brothers in various directions, fraternal connections can be strained and broken by time and distance. The busy-ness of career and family can crowd out brotherhood. But for most, these are only temporary conflicts. As brothers grow older, many find an urge to reconnect with fraternal relationships that were started long ago. Time brings richer meaning to college experiences and the friendships planted there.

House corporations are a natural mechanism to help provide these connecting points the brothers seek. While the house corp’s main purpose is to maintain the chapter house in safe and livable condition for the actives, it can’t be done without the support and contributions from loyal alums. To ensure the greatest success, every house corp needs to develop a comprehensive contact list of all chapter alums. That contact information should include email addresses since 100% of the brothers have them.

Sigma Chi Headquarters can assist with the process by providing the chapter contacts it has. Getting email addresses cannot be understated. Paper newsletters are expensive to produce and mail. The same newsletter can be emailed for free in PDF (Portable Document Format) and posted on the chapter website. Email will save thousands of dollars better spent on chapter house renovation or scholarships. Even if you have to hire someone to do the database work, it will pay off big time over the years as fund raisers are developed and launched.

And one of the side benefits of this contact information is that it can be posted on the chapter/house corp’s website so that the brothers can reconnect with each other. When these connections are made, they often lead to a reunion at homecoming and the chapter house. It’s like playing “connect the dots”.

By Grand Trustee Rich Thompson IHSV

Rental Agreement Terms

Having a written rental agreement is an absolute must for every house corporation that owns and manages property on behalf of the chapter. While there are standardized forms available in every state that conform to state statutes and federal Fair Housing standards, it makes sense to customize a rental agreement for this use which includes additional terms which relate to obligations to Sigma Chi and the host university.

Another issue is a house corporation may need to have *two* rental agreements, one between the house corp and active chapter and one between house corporation or active chapter and individual occupants. While the two reflect many of the same conditions (pay rent, maintain the property, don’t break the rules), the one entered into with Active Chapter is signed by the Consul who promises to enforce the conditions on all residents. For house corporations that allow active chapter to collect rent from the residents and pay a lump sum rent to house corp, two agreements are appropriate. If active chapter fails to enforce the terms of the primary rental agreement, house corp can rely on the secondary one to deal directly with the individuals that are in violation.

Besides the standard clauses that every Rental Agreement should have, there are others house corp should consider adding including:

Hazing Violations. Unfortunately, hazing raises its ugly head from time to time. Sigma Chi has strict rules against it but it is often house corp which is the first line of defense in detecting and dealing with it. As we all know, hazing takes on many forms but as former Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart opined about pornography “I know it when I see it”.

The house corporation has every right as a landlord to expect the residents to comply with fraternity rules which often, by the way, mirror civil code. While house corporation alums have the power to suspend and expel a brother from the fraternity, as landlord, hazing can be a cause for eviction.

Substance Abuse. Drinking and other forms of “substance” abuse are common on all college campuses and certainly not limited to Greek housing. Wherever there are young adults, there will be parties and “substances”. House corps generally do not want to play cop on this issue but evicting the worst offenders is instructive to the others that don’t want the same result.

No Pets. While having a dog or cat may be the dream of many brothers, a chapter house is not a good place to make it come true. Once there is one, there are more and the result is always the same: excessive wear and tear on the house and grounds.

No Smoking. For the health and life safety of all residents, having a mandatory No Smoking Policy should be standard. There is simply no way to control second hand smoke which has proven to damage the health of non-smokers, the house itself and dramatically increases the risk of fire. This one is a no brainer.

No Candle Burning. Candles are a frequent source of fire and have no place in chapter houses. Flameless candles are now strongly encouraged even for ritual events.

Require Parents to Co-sign. With few exceptions, most residents do not have the income to qualify for chapter house rent. Most either borrow the money or have their folks pay. Any prudent landlord like the house corp needs to get reasonable assurance that the rent will get paid. If the Rental Agreement requires parents' signatures, collections will be easier.

GPA Standard. Living in the chapter house is a privilege, not an entitlement. For some, the temptation to party or sleep in may be great so it behooves house corp to enforce a minimum standard GPA to move in. And those that fall below it no longer qualify to live in. The university will usually provide grade reports to assist in this.

Residents Must Have a Sigma Chi Affiliation. Unless the chapter house is built to segregate Actives and Pledges from other residents, it's best to allow only Sigma Chi actives and pledges as residents. It's hard enough to enforce standards on the brothers and nigh impossible to do so on non-Sigma Chis.

Firearms Prohibited. No resident needs to keep guns on the property. Those that hunt or target practice should store their guns elsewhere.

Regular Mandatory Cleaning. House cleaning should be a group effort performed on a weekly schedule. Typically, it is organized and supervised by the House Manager who assigns various tasks like vacuuming, garbage removal, mopping, yard cleanup, etc. To build team spirit, it should be executed by all at the same time, like on Saturday or Sunday when there are fewer scheduling conflicts and

every active and pledge member should participate.

Having a written Rental Agreement that reflects standard landlord concerns and those of Sigma Chi will improve communications, set high standards for performance and provide a basis for accountability. Don't leave the chapter house operation to chance. Define the terms of the rental agreement and be prepared for quick enforcement. Time is not your friend.

By Grand Trustee Rich Thompson IHSV

CCI Corner

Constantine Capital Inc. (CCI) is Sigma Chi's mortgage lender for qualified house corporations. It can finance a variety of renovation and upgrade projects up to \$250,000 such as:

1. Chapter House Purchase
2. Life & Safety Upgrades
3. New Construction
4. Renovation Projects, and
5. Loan Guaranty

CCI's current requests, approved or closed loans:

Washington State is requesting a \$250,000 loan to supplement bank financing for a new chapter house.

Does your house corporation have a chapter house financing needs? Contact Chair Ed Rammrath at Ph 832.483.8676 or eramrath@rammrathrealty.com IHSV

House Corporation Resource Directory

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