



# The Sig House

*A Quarterly Newsletter from the Board of Grand Trustees - Winter 2007*

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## Forever Young

One area of continuing frustration for house corporations is the immaturity and bad judgment that periodically punctuates Active Chapter life. It's the same old story: A Quaestor's failure to collect housebills causes the chapter to default on rent. Some young brothers manage to pull a stunt that attracts the wrong attention from the police and university. Hazing raises its ugly head. Alcohol takes its toll with lasting and tragic results.

Yet, most of us were in similar shoes as undergrads. We made our share of mistakes as we tried on manhood for size. Like the boys in "Lord of the Flies", many of us made significant life changing decisions for the very first time as undergraduates. Some of us learned from our mistakes while others didn't seem to get it.

"The older I get, the better I was" reflects a common attitude among some Sigma Chi alumni. These brothers loudly decry the bad behavior of "kids these days". Time blurs memory of their own undergraduate days when actions and decisions were equally immature.

Sigma Chi always has been, and always will be a training ground for leaders. One of its core purposes is to improve individual performance by teaching standards of truth and excellence. But coming to real understanding of those standards takes time, patience and maturity.

Young men do what young men do. Maturity comes from experiences with lasting impressions. When impressions aren't lasting enough, mistakes are repeated until they are. Thankfully, most young men are quick studies and don't require near death experiences to

understand the way they should go.

Freshmen are particularly vulnerable since this is the time when most are out of the nest for the first time. Last year's high school valedictorian can easily become this year's college dropout when the folks are no longer around. Having an older brother that shows sincere interest can make a lot of difference in keeping these brothers on track. This is where older brothers can help. Getting to know actives and pledges on a personal level helps them to better focus on strengths and weaknesses.

Identifying and encouraging those with strong leadership potential is an important goal for a house corporation. Active chapters with strong leadership will be more successful and make the house corp's job much easier. If older brothers encourage key brothers into leadership positions, many disciplinary, financial and academic problems can be circumvented.

House corp should also encourage leaders and potential leaders to take advantage of the resources offered by Sigma Chi like Balfour Leadership Training Workshop (BLTW) and Horizons. Since most or all of the expense is covered, house corp only needs to promote the concept and assist with scheduling.

Remember when you walked into your first chapter house as a rushee? It was probably both intimidating and exhilarating. The Sigma Chi experience is a life long journey. It can seem at times that young actives aren't learning much along the way. They can seem forever young and dumb. But their reality is not unlike yours. They have hopes and dreams. They respond to a caring and helping hand, the kind that house corporation mentors can provide.

## Getting Legal

Like “Jello” and “Kleenex”, the term “house corporation” has a generic meaning for some alumni groups that are operating chapter houses. The typical scenario is that a couple of well meaning brothers decide to take charge of chapter housing to raise money, sign a lease or buy a property. Voilà! A house corporation is born. That’s all it takes, right? Hardly.

Corporations by definition are legal entities approved by state governments to operate for a defined purpose. Some corporations are formed to generate profit for the owners or stockholders (like Microsoft) while others are formed as “nonprofit” and all revenue is reinvested in the corporation’s purpose. House corporations are formed under the “nonprofit” definition.

Since the goal of each Sigma Chi chapter is to live long into the future, having a house corporation that outlives the volunteers that serve it is important for a number of reasons:

**Continuity.** House corporation members and officers may come and go but a corporate entity allows the purpose to continue on.

**Limiting Personal Liability.** Members and directors of nonprofit corporations are generally protected from personal liability, meaning protection for their own assets (money, real estate, etc.).

**Legal Standing.** Lenders and landlords require a legal entity to open bank accounts, secure notes, mortgage loans and leases. If there is no legal house corporation, individuals will be required to sign contracts and be personally liable for the debt.

**Identity & Credibility.** Corporations provide an identity which is valuable for fundraising and transacting business.

As far as the steps to incorporating, choose a name like “(Chapter Letters), Blue & Gold or White Cross House Corporation”. You should avoid using the name Sigma Chi as it is a link to the general fraternity which has no authority or control over the house corporation.

**Incorporate with your state.** Every state has a department in charge of this

function (often called Secretary of State, but may vary). All states have internet websites that allow the transaction to be handled online. Using one of the internet businesses to assist in forming your corporation is unwise. One size does not fit all. It’s best to use a lawyer who regularly forms corporations.

- Hold an organizational meeting to elect directors.
- The directors elect officers from amongst themselves.
- Prepare and follow bylaws and Standard Operating Procedures.
- Open a bank account to handle funds.
- Transact business.

Incorporating your house corporation is relatively simple and inexpensive and provides many benefits. A house corporation in name only is no corporation at all. It might even be construed as a partnership which can place every participant’s assets in harms way. Get legal and do it soon! If you have any questions on this process, contact one of the attorneys on the Board of Trustees: Harv Silverman or Tommy Geddings. Contact information is found on Page One of *The Sig House*.

## Out Damn Spot!

One of a house corporation’s important tasks is to perform various types of repair and maintenance on the chapter house. Painting, carpeting and roof replacement fall in this category. One critical task that is often left up to Active Chapter is cleaning. The theory is if you rent a house, you are responsible to keep it clean. Great theory.

Older alums remember the days when regular house cleaning was mandatory and often a team building event for actives and pledges. While the results of these exercises weren’t always stellar, when performed weekly (not weakly), the results were tolerable.

But as most of today’s house corporations can attest to, the standards of cleanliness at chapter houses often leaves something to be desired. In some cases, the level of sanitation borders on toxic. One chapter house actually had an incidence of the highly infectious ebola virus. There may have been dire consequences if the house corporation

had not taken immediate and intensive remediation measures.

But plague conditions aside, overflowing garbage cans, unswept floors, unvacuumed carpets and unwashed windows are common. The condition of kitchens and bathrooms often gives rise to mold and bacterial conditions that cause real health problems.

When it comes to cleaning, some things are more important than others. Keeping the kitchen and bathroom germ and mold free is at the top of the priority list. But knowing *how* to clean these areas is of critical importance:

**Use Commercial Cleaning Products & Equipment.** Treat chapter houses like commercial space and shop at janitorial supply outlets. Not only will the distributor be able to give expert advice on proper technique and products, the products come in large quantity containers that will save money. Many of these products are designed for janitorial professionals so having proper equipment (rubber gloves, rags, mops, etc.) is important.

**Establish a Regular Schedule.** Kitchens and bathrooms need thorough cleaning at least *weekly*, no exceptions. Bathrooms need tubs, shower walls, sinks, toilets and urinals to receive a proper cleaning with bacterial and mold killing products.

**List of Supplies.** Have the right products and tools makes the job easy and more effective:

- **Dusting:** Cleaning Cloths, Dust Mop, Furniture Polish
- **Trash Supplies:** Trash Cans, Trash Can Liners, Baking Soda (Odor Control), Recycling Bins
- **General Surface Supplies:** All-Purpose Cleaner, Kitchen/Bathroom Wipes, Sponges, Paper Towels, Rubber Gloves
- **Special Surface Supplies:** Liquid Hand Soap, Automatic Dishwasher Detergent, Oven Cleaner, Wood Polish, Toilet Bowl Cleaners, Soft Scrub Cleaner, Air Freshener, Window Cleaner
- **Floor Cleaning Supplies:** Broom, Dustpan, Vacuum Cleaner, Mop & Bucket, Floor Wax/Polish

**Assign Responsibility.** A statement like “All the brothers are required to clean the house” translates into “Nobody lifts a finger to clean”. The House Manager needs to be held accountable for the results.

**Spot Checks.** Regular inspections by the house corporation is essential to good results. Set up a schedule and keep it. If the cleaning is not getting done, have it done professionally and charge the cost to the chapter. If it does get done, recognize the effort

Maintaining a clean chapter house is more than just a healthy thing to do. It demonstrates pride and helps in recruiting brothers with high standards. Help the brothers help themselves and all of Sigma Chi wins.

## Exceeding the Mandate

The Mandate of the Grand Trustees is defined in the current Governing Laws as follows:

*The Grand Trustees shall be responsible for liaison with each corporation, trustee, individual, association or other person holding any property or any interest in any property for chapter house purposes or for the benefit of any particular chapter, shall from time to time report to and advise the Executive Committee with respect thereto, and shall perform such other functions as shall from time to time be prescribed by the Executive Committee.*

From this job description, one might conclude that an occasional communication to house corporations would fulfill the requirement, but the Board of Grand Trustees (BGT) has consistently exceeded its mandate. Over the years, the BGT has conceived and contributed to the Fraternity such programs as the Risk Management Foundation and Constantine Capital Incorporated. But chapter housing itself is the most visible element of Sigma Chi and the focal point of our largest liability exposures as an organization. As a result, Grand Trustees have never been content to just “liaison”. In fact, they are working harder than ever to actively assist the house corporations in grappling with the challenges they face.

Each Grand Trustee is assigned two or more Sigma Chi provinces with each

province containing five or more chapters. While each province’s assigned Grand Trustee is a great resource, they also are a gateway to the problem-solving capability of the entire BGT, whose members have many years of professional experience in law, property management, finance and other areas of expertise relevant to chapter housing.

Grand Trustees travel to annual meetings, house dedications and province conferences representing the General Fraternity without reimbursement of their expenses. This year it is estimated that two-thirds of province conferences will have Grand Trustees in attendance. Grand Trustees also serve on Fraternity committees, on the Balfour Leadership Training Workshop faculty and are being trained as Cornerstone Mentors.

*The Sig House* newsletter, edited by Grand Trustee Rich Thompson (BΔ ’73), has been widely hailed as a readable and informative instrument for our constituents. For the second year, the BGT is presenting the highly successful House Corporation Officer Training Seminar (HCOTS) under the Chairmanship of Grand Trustee Mark Burroughs (ΔE ’78). Made possible by the generous sponsorship of Risk Management Foundation (RMF), this two day session is devoted solely to issues affecting Fraternity housing issues. Last year’s HCOTS sold out quickly and demand this year resulted in the creation of 12 additional slots for a total of 32.

Some say that the Grand Trustees are the “best kept secret” in Sigma Chi and ask why we don’t spend more time calling attention to the good work we do. Our answer is that we’d prefer to spend our volunteer time doing as much as we can for those who are depending on us rather than blowing our own horn even if it means that many of our brothers don’t know or fully understand what we do.

Sigma Chi is about Values and Leadership. We are taught that unless we reach for that which is beyond our grasp we are not realizing our potential. Consistently exceeding our statutory mandate in service to our brothers is the

Grand Trustee way of practicing this important Sigma Chi philosophy.

*By Bruce Morgan Casner Epsilon ’71 Brother Casner is in his 19<sup>th</sup> year as a Grand Trustee and currently serves as Chairman of the Board of Grand Trustees.*

## 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](mailto:chris.moran@sigmachi.org) who can assist with the loan application. For more information about Constantine Capital, go to [www.sigmachi.org](http://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 the contact information on the cover page.