



SIGMA RHO BULLETIN

Beta Theta Pi at the University of Illinois

SUMMER 2014

BUILDING ASSOCIATION WELCOMES NEW MEMBERS

Alumni Starting to Reconnect



Tony Johnston '90

Greetings, Betas! I certainly hope everyone is enjoying their summer and that it has been filled with family, fun, and good weather wherever you live. One of my highlights this summer was adding two new members to the Building Association from our very own Sigma Rho Chapter. I'd like to welcome **Tony Johnston '90** and **Sully Diriltan '97**, who will be key additions as we continue on with our chapter and house revitalization project. Welcome aboard, guys, and thanks for your commitment to Sigma Rho.



Sully Diriltan '97

Another highlight this summer was our inaugural Sigma Rho Golf Outing at Lake Bluff Golf Club. You can read more about that later in the newsletter, but a special thanks to **Mike Langan '82** and **Bob Wallace '79** for their leadership in organizing the event. I certainly hope this will be the start of many more alumni gatherings.

As I mentioned in the previous newsletter, this summer we were gearing up to ready the house for the new founding father class to move in, and that is exactly what we've been doing. As a reminder, we have over 40 guys moving back into 202 E. Daniel after a five-year hiatus—something we should all be proud of. So, in preparation for their move in, we did some much-needed repair to the kitchen, window replacements, painting throughout the first floor and some structural repair to the chimney and back staircase. Most of it was not too glamorous, but very much needed to preserve our great asset.

Two new faces were added to the Building Association this spring. Welcome, Sully and Tony!

In addition, come August, the house will be completely refurbished and will be quite a comforting spot to welcome all of our alumni back. But these repairs are just the tip of the iceberg as there is much more that we need to do to get it up to the standards we would all expect.

We have begun exploring our options to greatly improve our chapter house. The dorms and other fraternities are doing the same, so we must remain competitive. Please stay tuned for more information on how you can help.

I hope to see you at 202 E. Daniel on September 20 (Texas State football game) when we reopen the house to our alumni or at Homecoming on October 25.

Yours in __kai__.

Dave McMurray '81

President, Building Association

dwmcmurray1@gmail.com / (312) 375-0361

Please help us find our brothers by sending in your complete e-mail directory of all the brothers you stay in touch with. Send the addresses to either **Mike Langan '82** (mlangan@charter.net) or me (dwmcmurray1@gmail.com).

Join Us

**Sigma Rho
Open House
September 20**

**Before and After the
Illinois vs. Texas State Game**

Be sure to join us for the annual alumni/Building Association meeting as well. The meeting will take place before the game if the game is at 2:30 p.m. or after the game if it's at 11 a.m.

July 12 Alumni Golf Outing a Success

The inaugural Sigma Rho Alumni Golf Outing was held on Saturday, July 12, in Lake Bluff, Illinois. Forty Beta alumni representing each decade since the 1950s participated along with a dozen undergraduate brothers who took a break from Greek Reunion on campus to join us. It was truly a special day, and Wooglin must have been looking down on us as we dodged some major storms to get all 10 foursomes through 18 holes without a drop of rain falling during the round. The second annual event is already in the process of being scheduled for mid-July 2015. Put it on your calendars!

It was a pleasure and honor for everyone to meet and get to know the three longest tenured Sigma Rhos, **John Cartland '55**, **Wade Buckles '61**, and **Joe Vageness '65**, over lunch and on the course. We all agreed that this must become an annual event as it was a ton of fun. It was not only fantastic reconnecting with those from our own era, but also meeting other great brothers we had not had the pleasure of knowing previously.

The foursome of **Dave Nehf '84**, **Les Meier '82**, **Joe Mikes '82**, and **Pete Cook '82** won the scramble event at -9, edging out **Dick Pittman '78**, **Mike Flannery '81**, and **Mike Langan '82**. The longest drive was from **Mike Gift '01**, and the longest putt was holed by **Tim Taylor '81**, with **Doug Miller '81** and **Dave McMurray '81** earning closest to the pin honors.

A special thanks goes out to **Bob Wallace '79** for hosting and working with Lake Bluff Golf Club to organize the event. Great job, Wally!

A Legacy Inherited, a Tradition Entrusted: Illinois

John Bitzer '74

To embody the iconic image that is Chief Illiniwek is said to be the echelon of the University of Illinois. To reign supreme in this position for a decade makes the experience all the more extraordinary. But we Betas don't consider this kind of "hypothetical talk" when speaking of our historical feats: originating with John Bitzer from 1970 to 1974, we Sigma Rhos lived it.

John Bitzer '74, no stranger to U of I, Collinsville, Illinois, resident and son, father, and uncle to Beta can trace his Illinois passion through his entire family. His father, Robert, was the Chief from 1945 to 1946. From Robert's 1947 Illinois-UCLA Rose Bowl game and parade performance to the yearly Illini football and basketball games with his son, the younger Bitzer always had the Chief spirit coursing through his veins.

"Graduates from Illinois were more special than those from other schools, so I always knew I wanted to attend," John stated favorably. "And because it was such an immense tradition, meant so much too so many and my dad had done it, I knew that when I got to UIUC I would try out to be Chief."

After finishing his senior year, John's determination led him to contact then Marching Illini director Everett Kissinger, and he competed

against 30 other hopefuls and ultimately secured the Chief position. For four years, his exhilarating performances would be treasured by tens of thousands of children, alumni, and spectators as well as the student body who never diverted their attention from him. His routine—which included an homage to that of his father—was so unforgettable that it even remained unchanged for 15 years after his graduation.

Recounting his experiences, he vividly recalls a Dad's Day performance with his father showcasing both men's individual Chief routines, and a game his senior year where the crowd "just went wild" as he caught the band off guard by stepping onto the field to perform in a torrential downpour.

"About 95% of UIUC thought the Chief was a meaningful symbol of their spirit and Illinois, so crowds were always going nuts any time the Chief came out," he expressed confidently. "I was never nervous; it was exhilaration and just really fun!"

Aside from being Chief, John's Beta experience was equally important. His upbringing made him favor Beta and he knew several actives when rushing, but the idea of carrying on his father's tradition was the motivation that made Beta Theta Pi his second home. The friendship and fidelity he desired has lasted through his lifetime ever since and fostered a closeness with



John Bitzer '74 and his dad stand together as Chiefs during an event.

his brothers and own son, **Robert, University of Iowa '17**, whom just as his father did for him, he pinned for initiation at the Alpha Beta Chapter.

As his role came to a close, John taught his methods to another round of hopefuls. One student then stood out among the rest. His name was **Michael Gonzalez '77**.



Michael Gonzalez '77 leads the parade on foot and is the symbol for the university.

Michael Gonzalez '77

The decision to attend U of I always made sense to **Michael Gonzalez '77**, a central Illinois native with aspirations of joining the financial industry. But when one weekend visit during the spring of his high school senior year introduced him to the Sigma Rho Chapter, little did he know he would be beginning a journey that would initiate him into Beta Theta Pi, take him around the globe, and forever cement his name as the Chief of 1974-76.

"It was a pretty simple decision to join Beta; I met the guys that weekend and never stepped foot in another fraternity after," he says proudly. And before he knew it, he was moved into the house with the pledge class, taking part in traditional Saturday morning clean-ups, and enjoying all the advantages that came with brotherhood.

Thoroughly enjoying this newfound freedom, Michael was then presented with the customary Sigma Rho competition that pitted him against

his pledge brothers to dance as the Chief. The weeks withered away and his fellow brothers were eliminated one by one until he was the last man standing. Originally thinking it was just a pre-initiation formality, he actually caught the eye of **John Bitzer '74**.

"John was a senior when I was a freshman and, from his knowledge of Indian lore and dance, had served as Chief all four years," Michael remembers. "He asked if I was interested in succeeding him and my first thought was no, but after some convincing we spent every day together for five or six weeks grinding through music and steps preparing for the tryouts."

Inevitably, Michael prevailed.

Respectfully representing the Illiniwek confederation and Illinois, Michael and Everett Kissinger always ensured the Chief was present at all home football games and select Big Ten weekend games but was never overexposed.

(Continued on page 4)

Betas as Chief

Matthew Gawne '80

Matthew Gawne '80 remembers: "The first time I ever saw the Chief, I was very impressed! I thought it was one of the greatest traditions in all of sports and a tremendous honor to be the symbol of the University. So when I had the opportunity to try out as a freshman, I definitely jumped at the chance."

His father, two brothers, nephews, and cousins (and later his daughter) all attended the U of I. The Cincinnati resident and Oak Park native by serving as Chief from 1977-1979 didn't realize he would take his family's 30-year Illinois history several steps further. Looking for a place where he could be surrounded by a smart, competitive, and fun group of guys, he knew Beta Theta Pi was a clear choice as soon as he met the actives. Once initiated, attaining the role as Chief was next.

Attending several workshops held by the present Chief, practicing night and day, and then performing three times in front of a judging panel, Matt officially sealed the deal with his final interview and thus succeeded

Mike Gonzalez '77.



Matthew Gawne '80 leads the parade on the chief's horse during the annual Homecoming parade.

"A lot of what I learned came from Mike, so I immediately understood that you had to approach everything with extreme respect. The Chief was a personification of Native Americans at their best who embodied qualities we should strive to emulate at Illinois; it was something people could aspire to."

Acting in one of the greatest and most humbling roles of his life, Matt traveled the U.S. for three years inspiring future

Illini fans, speaking at dozens of children's and alumni events, and even performing at Soldier Field, the Pontiac Silver Dome, and Madison Square Garden. He experienced firsthand the passion alumni and students had for the tradition and developed critical leadership skills along the way, not knowing they would later prove useful while serving as Sigma Rho's chapter president.

"It was a privilege to have led such a group of guys as chapter president," Matt said. "Betas were never short on fun; we were a chapter with extremely talented guys who did well academically and athletically, and we always knew how to have a good time."

Just like John and Michael, Matt also too feels admiration and happiness that the Beta house will be alive once more and that all can now return home. After all, Beta's influence on campus didn't end with a decade of Chiefs or a campus suspension; it has always existed, ready to pick up where it left off.

So with the 2014 academic year quickly approaching, there remains one thing left to say: We Betas are back, and our return has only just begun.



Betas before their game at the AZD philanthropy football event. Left to right: Curt Olbrich '17, JR Domalewski '16, Griffin Charnas '16, Clay Wotton '16, Raim Izhar '16, and Brad Kosinski '17.

Laying a Strong Foundation for Years to Come

Sigma Rho's First Year Back on Campus

Sigma Rho is back and we have made our presence known on campus with a successful first semester at the University of Illinois. The gentlemen of the Sigma Rho Chapter have come together to lay the foundation for years to come.

Some of the spring semester highlights were:

- Our first pledge class is exceptional and we will be initiating 19 new members during the first week of school along with the pledge class from Truman State. Alumni will receive an invitation to join the ceremony.
- Sigma Rho stands at the forefront of fraternities in academic excellence and are ranked second out of 49 fraternities for the second semester in a row with a 3.38 average.
- We have a well-developed external philanthropy program and have participated in numerous events, such as Alpha Phi's King of Hearts male pageant where we placed second among nine fraternities.
- We sent eight men to the award-winning John and Nellie Wooden Institute for Men of Principle, where they gained valuable insight into the lore and rituals of Beta Theta Pi, as well as the ability to enact positive change on a chapter level.
- We are sending 13 members to Beta Theta Pi's 175th General Fraternity Convention in Oxford, Ohio, in August, where we will be joined by over 2,000 undergraduates, and many more alumni.
- We are continuing to support the Andrew Weishar Foundation and many of our members will attend Weishfest to support families who are battling cancer.

With the success we had in one semester, I am sure that you can tell we are excited to be back in the house for the fall of 2014. Some goals that we would like to achieve are:

- Begin the year off on the right foot by recruiting a strong incoming class of men.
- Continue to reconnect with alumni and provide opportunities for undergraduates and alumni to interact (specifically at the alumni tailgate before the Texas State game).

(Continued on page 4)

Michael Gonzalez '77

(Continued from page 2)

This strategy was relaxed, however, when Michael's role took him overseas with the American UN Ambassador in Geneva to Switzerland and Germany where he performed to celebrate America's bicentennial for crowds numbering over 50,000. Other remarkable events included performing the final solo dance with all former Chiefs on the tradition's 50th anniversary at Memorial Stadium and even the honor of meeting Lester Leutwiler—the Chief who started it all.

“Many asked if I would get nervous and I only remember being so the first time [I performed]. But as long as you stayed on your feet, you could just do no wrong. I'm forever glad that John convinced me.”

When reminiscing of his undergraduate years, Michael also loved that he was able to establish lifelong connections, develop skills and confidence, and meet his wife—to whom he has been married for 36 years—through Beta Theta Pi. But just as John passed the honor of Chief onto him, he would do the same once introduced to **Matt Gawne '80**.

Laying a Strong Foundation

(Continued from page 3)

- Cultivate a culture of excellence in both personal and academic pursuits for our members by encouraging them to join other organizations on campus.
- Continue to stay a top-ranked academic fraternity on campus.
- Maintain relationships with the Greek community and further integrate ourselves with other fraternities and sororities.
- Develop the undergraduate body, along with the chapter house and the housing corporation, in order to make 202 E. Daniel a place that all members of the Sigma Rho Chapter are proud to call home.

Without the support of our alumni and the consistent effort put forth by our undergraduates, we would have never gotten this far in less than a year. Thank you!

Yours in __kai__,
Jack Kalanik '16, Sigma Rho President
jack.kalanik@gmail.com

For questions or more information about chapter activities, please contact **Felix Boesch** '16 at felix.boesch@gmail.com.



SIGMA RHO BULLETIN

Beta Theta Pi at the University of Illinois

Sigma Rho Building Association
Beta Theta Pi Fraternity
P.O. Box 596
Champaign, IL 61824-0596

Address Service Requested

PSRST STD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
LAWRENCE, KS
66044
PERMIT #570

Executive Officers

President
Jack Kalanik '16
jack.kalanik@gmail.com

Vice President of
Brotherhood
Connor Murray '16
murray.connorm@gmail.com

Vice President of Education
Nihreer Matani '16

Vice President of
Programming
Andrew Ross '16

Vice President of
Recruitment
Bill Hilger '16

Vice President of
Risk Management
Raim Izhar '16

Vice President of
Communications
Felix Boesch '16

Vice President of Finance
Karim Mohammadali '16

House Manager
J.R. Domalewski '16

Turn to page 1 for more details on the Alumni Golf Outing!



Sigma Rhos gather after the 18-hole scramble at the inaugural Alumni Golf Outing at Lake Bluff Golf Club.