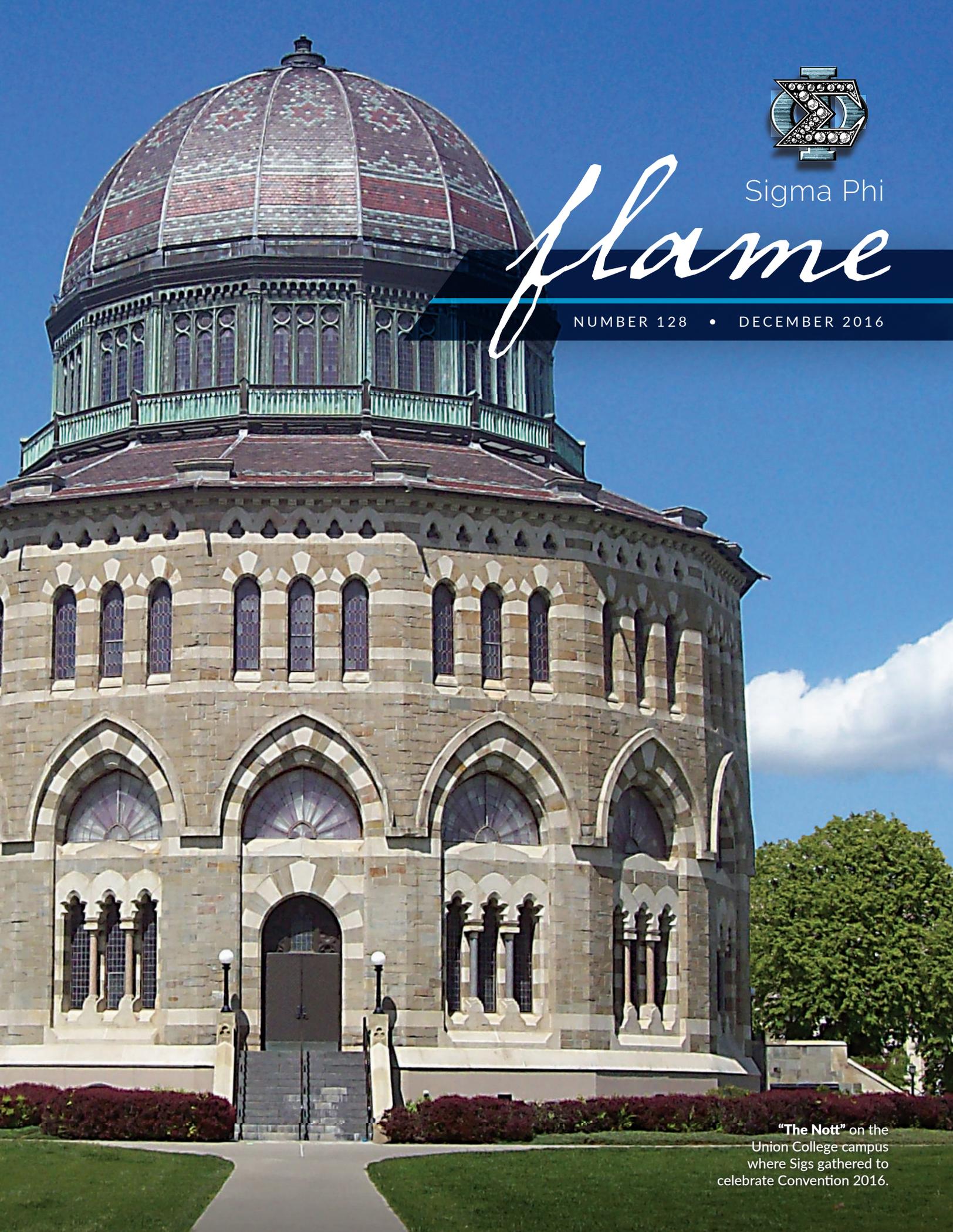




Sigma Phi

# Flame

NUMBER 128 • DECEMBER 2016



**"The Nott"** on the Union College campus where Sigs gathered to celebrate Convention 2016.

## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

by **Brendan McCurdy, H'80** [ofelixculpa@aol.com](mailto:ofelixculpa@aol.com)



Here in the USA in the year 2016, I can't help reflecting upon these pearls of ancient wisdom - and it's not the Presidential election that turns my thoughts this way.

Instead, I am pondering the state of Greek life all around this beautiful country of ours.

Fraternities are enjoying a most robust period of growth. Especially in the South, college men approach Greek letter organizations eagerly asking how they can become brothers. Sororities report heightened interest amongst the coeds as well: a 50% increase in members over the past 10 years. There are universities and colleges that welcome and work with fraternities, exerting the effort needed to build a culture appreciative of the benefits Greek life provides to its members and to the campuses where they reside.

At the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, our youngest chapter thrives. In large measure, this is due to the exceptional quality of our brothers, but such prosperity also reflects the University's embrace of the fraternal world. To me, perhaps the most startling bit of recent news was a story in an April issue of the NY Times headlined "When a Feminist Pledges a Sorority." Women at Columbia have come to discover the many benefits that can inure to members of private societies.

Rose-colored views about Greek living are not shared throughout the entire country, of course. Administrators of private liberal arts colleges in the Northeast have taken a different path, imposing rules and regulations (think the Hamilton Residential Life policy of 1998 prohibiting private societies from owning real estate) that inhibit even day-to-day Greek activities. Not allowing rush to begin until the sophomore year and compressing time frames for rush presents burdens which limit and stifle member development...and chapters' ability to function.

Harvard University made headlines this

year when it proclaimed a new rule that would ostracize any student belonging to a private society - depriving the member from belonging to any but a recognized college organization. This harsh dictate was predicated upon the belief that fraternities espoused an elitism contrary to the university's best interests. To my thinking, this dog-eared argument has always been most spurious. To call up another phrase from the past, this is too much the pot calling the kettle black.

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**The phrase "May you live in exciting times" is said to be a translation of an ancient Chinese curse. Digging a little bit deeper, the sentiment from ancient China coming closest to this expression is "Better to be a dog at times of peace than a king at war."**

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What college or university today doesn't boast of its "selectiveness" when vying for a top spot on US News' college rankings?

Of all that I reflect upon this year, a topic has come to the fore that is well beyond the historical context of my and many of my alumni brothers' formative years. So alien, perhaps, it is easily discarded as not real or, at the very least, not worth discussing. I am referring to what might be labeled "gender politics." While not omnipresent, there is no denying the ferment that is boiling in America today - especially on some college campuses - wherein the whole notion of what comprises sexual identity is under siege. He, she, him, her, it...pronouns that in my generation were used with little thought or reflection....now are viewed as identifiers that could harm, hurt or belittle the person to whom they are directed.

This missive will not attempt to explore in any greater detail the whats, whys, and wherefores of gender politics. It will, howev-

er, return to the Sigma Phi and the benefits that a single sex, all male society brings to its membership. As evident from our own long history and further buttressed by the anecdotal evidence recited above, growing numbers of college students desire to be part of a structure that clearly identifies - that is founded upon - the distinction between the sexes. This is not a case of 'separate but equal.' Rather, Greek life lives the premise of 'separate and different.'

There is an inherent value to this structure.

Our challenge today is how the Standing and Advisory Committee, the Sigma Phi Education Foundation and our alumni brothers can together improve the value that active brothers derive from the bonds of the Thrice Illustrious...and, in turn, improve the communities in which you and I live.

To that end, at the 189th convention of the Society held at Union College in October, our **100 Man Campaign** was launched. This bold initiative is designed to raise the funds necessary to launch three programs we will bring to our actives: programs described in greater detail in this issue of the Flame. These are programs for enhancing the undergraduate experience, improving the standing of our chapters where Sigma Phi is represented and providing the mentoring and career assistance our actives actively seek. They are programs which build upon our foundational values of friendship, love and truth.

Brother, will you recognize the need and participate in the **100 Man Campaign**? We do live in exciting times!

I would like to close with an encouragement that Bill Bristol, H'1913, shared with me at the convention the Beta hosted back in 1981, when I was very new to Sigma Phi. "When the call comes to give," my very senior Brother Bristol advised, "give three times over. Once for the brother who would like to give but can't, once for the brother who can give but won't and once for myself."

**Esto Perpetua.**



# ALUMNI IMPRESSIONS OF CONVENTION 2016

by Bob Shages, U'69  
robert.shages@ge.com

**Should I stay or should I go?** This tag line from a recent hotel commercial kept ringing through my head when the 2016 Sigma Phi Convention was announced. As a Union Sig, this could be a 'double hit' trip for me: Union and Sigma Phi! But it would also be 47 years since I first stepped into the Halls of the Alpha. Hmmmm. Well, I decided on the "go" and Susie (USS'73) and I headed for Schenectady from our home in Pittsburgh. This turned out to be a wonderful decision.

There were two primary motivations that got me in the car heading East. The first was to see the many alumni from sister chapters whom I have met at many Sigma Phi events, as well as to meet some new faces with the same Sigma Phi heritage. The second, and more important, was to meet and listen to the actives from many chapters and better understand how things have changed within the colleges they attend and how this has impacted Sigma Phi chapters individually and as a national organization.

We attended everything from the informal cocktail gathering hosted by Convention organizers Len (U'66) and Cara (USS'78) Kagan, to saying goodbye to many friends during Sunday breakfast at the hotel. We even got in a tour of the Union campus to see what had changed over the past 47 years. (Nothing and everything, it seemed! How did I ever make it through my undergraduate and graduate school years without an espresso bar in the Engineering building?) The Friday workshop sessions I attended were meant for the actives but I found a seat in the back to listen in. It was an impressive morning program facilitated by Mike Imirie, M'69, which was only exceeded by how attentive the active representatives were to an

in-depth discussion of our Charge and how it can be as applicable today as it was when Sigma Phi was founded, 189 years ago.

The afternoon active workshop session led by Christy Lambden, T'11, was another engaging, open discussion: this one on active/alumni relationships, chapter issues, and the many challenges facing Sig chapter everywhere. To the several alumni in the room, it was clear the college/university environments in which the Sigs now reside have evolved immensely. It is tough at times for us older folks to relate to what Sigma Phi must deal with in today's college culture. However, all agreed being focused, remembering your values, being empathetic, and getting and giving help are the vehicles to move Sigma Phi to its bicentennial and beyond.

The Hicks Oratorical Contest Friday evening saw three young Sigs give very personal and impressive speeches on their connections to Sigma Phi. It was amazing to see such expressive talent and to listen to each personal message. And it was an honor to be asked to help formally judge the competition: a very tough assignment.

At the Convention's Annual Meeting of the Members on Saturday, Chairman Brendan McCurdy, H'80, presided in such an articulate manner as to make the general business session interesting! The chapter reports were the highlight and added to what we had heard in the workshops. Each chapter enjoys its own successes and faces its own challenges but the unifying Sigma Phi spirit shone – not just to survive, but to thrive.

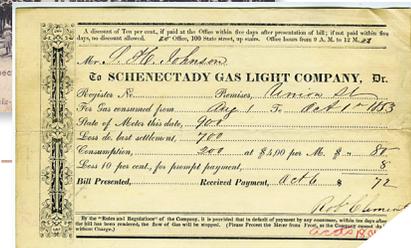
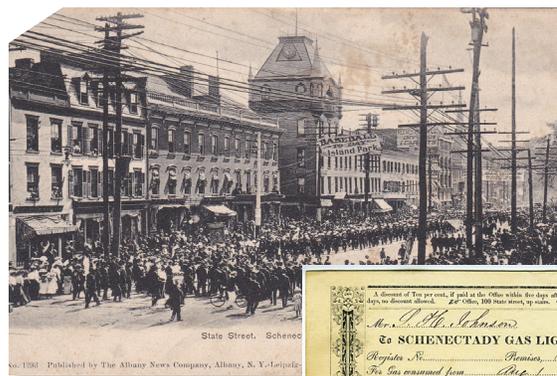
A very tender and loving Sig Sister ceremony and champagne reception on Saturday afternoon was followed by the



*continued on page 5*

# HICKS ORATORICAL CONTEST 2016

by Akin Yucel, S'15 [akinyucel16@gmail.com](mailto:akinyucel16@gmail.com)



THIS YEAR'S HICKS CONTEST FEATURED EXCELLENT ORATIONS BY THREE SIG CONTESTANTS: GENTRY FITCH, T'16, MIKE SIMONEAUX, V'14, AND AKIN YUCEL, S'15. TOP HONORS WERE EARNED BY BROTHER YUCEL, A 3<sup>RD</sup> YEAR HAILING FROM TURKEY AND DOUBLE MAJORING IN ECONOMICS AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS.

The past three years at the Alpha of Virginia has perhaps been the most revolutionary in its history. A house on the brink of death is now flourishing with brothers from all over the country, and the world. From a band of actives not much more than the number of fingers on a hand, we transitioned into a fraternity which can discuss whether or not our numbers should exceed 40 by spring semester. We are now capable of organizing alumni events, formal functions and campus philanthropies that would have been unimaginable only three years ago. Our house has successfully fended of the vulture-like propositions of other Greek organizations, who thought we were near death, to buy or rent our house. These vulture-like attempts, which sadly would have been given consideration less than only three years ago, are now being answered with a counter proposition from us: "Well, if you want a piece of our house, you better rush on spring!" I don't think we made any friends that way, but at least there no longer are any vultures around the house.

While most other Greek organizations on our grounds tend to focus on their uniformity, we find strength in our band of brothers from a variety of ethnic, national and religious backgrounds. I come from a country on the other side of the world: Turkey. For me, the graceful house on 163 Rugby Road has been a second home, just as it has for many other brothers. More

than seven thousand miles away from my country, my home, and my culture, I found another home. (I can't say the same for the food, though. I still miss the food back in Turkey!)

Before I pledged Sigma Phi, suffocated by the new atmosphere surrounding me, I



considered transferring to another institution in Europe. Today, after being a Sig for almost two years, I wish I could slow down the time to enjoy the last two years I have at Mr. Jefferson's University and under the roof of Sigma Phi. Sigma Phi has perhaps been the utmost reason I resisted giving up on UVa when I felt low....and pressed on. Today, I am in good standing with both my academic and social life, actively seeking leadership positions on and off campus.

To better explain my feelings towards Sigma Phi, if you would excuse me, I would like to resort to a word in my mother tongue. We have a word called "vefa", which sadly does not translate to English in its full meaning. The closest interpretations would be faith or fidelity. Having "vefa" to an organization means you owe to it, because of what it has done for you. And I know I will honor this notion by pledging my utmost contribution to this Society both as an active and an alumnus.

Living in a room where dozens of Sigs, some nearly as old as my grandfather, lived reminds me of an obligation. It reminds me that Sigma Phi flame is not just what we inherited from those elders, but what we owe to younger generations of Sigs who will carry our flame to higher places. This obligation, I sincerely observe, is today felt by all our brothers who had a significant part in saving the Alpha of Virginia from its demise. I pledge my promise to all brothers here and elsewhere, who has ever been, are, or ever shall be, that we will leave a legacy that will prevent this house from falling into a similar situation that it knew a few short years ago. Brothers, the very house which helped me be the man I am today - the Alpha of Virginia - is, I am proud to say, alive, strong and ready to carry the Sigma Phi flame to places only attainable and surpassable by another Sig.

# BROWN SERVICE AWARD

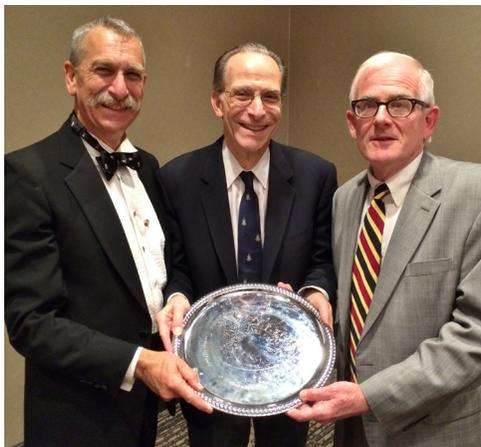
## PRESENTED IN SCHENECTADY

The David S. Brown Service Award is presented by the Standing and Advisory Committee to brothers who have demonstrated a lifetime of devotion to the Society meriting special recognition, particularly with regard to the chapter of their initiation. At the National convention held in Schenectady this past October, one steadfast brother of Sigma Phi was recognized for his lifelong participation: Steven P. Shultz, U'68. Recognition Chairman Dan Neumann, F'71, was honored to present the award to one who has contributed so much of significance to the Alpha of New York.

Steve Shultz is a practicing attorney. His home is in Gansvoort, near Saratoga in upstate New York, with his wife, Annie, a Sig Sister and a New York State Supreme Court Judge. He has always been involved in all activities of the Alpha of New York.

Steve's story is a story of faithfulness to his chapter over the long run. He has been involved with the undergraduates at the Alpha of New York since his own graduation in 1971. He meets with the new pledges every year and leads them in activities designed to coalesce individuals into a cohesive group. He is not hesitant to lecture the active brotherhood when he thinks it appropriate. Enthusiastic, engaging and imposing, Steve is one of the stalwarts leading up to and during each Schenectady Swing. He has been a member of the Alumni board and has attended every Conclave in recent memory.

In the days after Steve's graduation



**2016 Brown Service Award recipient Steve Schultz, U'68, is at left. Previous winners Len Kagan, U'66, and Mike Imirie, M'69, celebrate with Steve.**

from Union, the chapter needed to rebuild its alumni organization, and Steve was a leader in that effort. He is still serves on the Alumni Board. Over the years, his advice has been consequential and his service example has been bright. Season after season, his forte has been connecting with the active chapter; he is extremely involved in the yearly pledge process and the subsequent initiation. Steve's generosity during recent fundraising campaigns has been pivotal to the success of those campaigns.

Over the years, he has given much in time, talent and heart. In what he does with the Alpha's actives and for its alumni board, Steve is a stellar role model for all of the brothers of the Alpha of New York... and beyond.

*continued from page 3*

Convention Banquet at Schenectady's Hilton Garden Inn where about 85 alumni took part. (It's easy for me to see that we are all attracted to good food and drink!) I am always amazed in getting back together with my fellow Sigs that we can pick up our last conversation almost to the sentence where we left off, whether it was last

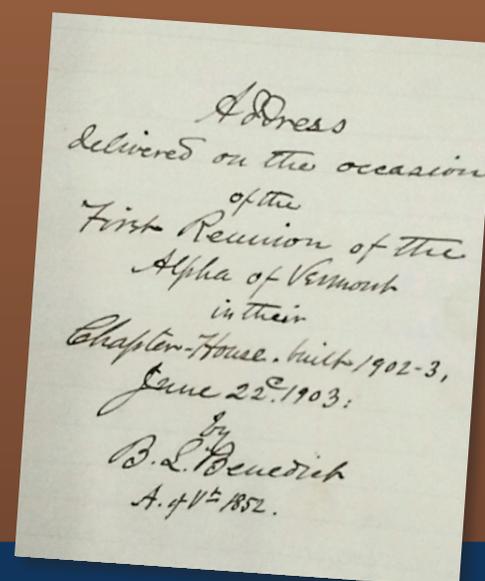
week or 10 years ago. A keynote address by *Flame* editor Mike Imirie, M'69, left us all with memories and thoughts to carry us until the next time we are together.

It turned out to be a weekend full of memories of the past, challenges of today, and hope for a bright Sig future. (Can you believe the Society's bicentennial is only 11

## leatherbound treasure

One of the subtle but truly heartwarming Convention '16 events wasn't found on any agenda. It centered around an ancient, leatherbound notebook which had come to light in Schenectady over a decade ago when the Alpha of New York moved its many books from One Library Lane to 10 Union Street. That small, old tome once belonged to Benjamin Lincoln Benedict, V'1852, and was presented to the Alpha of Vermont contingent of wandering birds by Union during convention weekend.

The notebook was a collection of reminiscences of the Vermont Alpha's earliest days. Written in a fine hand in a style which was rich in detail and even poetic, it was priceless in its description of that chapter's early history. In one place, Brother Benedict described the ideal brotherhood thusly: *"We still seek to bring together the 20 best fellows in college - those who, like scattered drops of mercury when brought together to touch each other - shall coalesce in one harmonious whole."* While Sigs know that twenty has long represented the founders' vision of ideal chapter size, I suspect that the metaphor has never before or since been used to explain...and so very well!



years away?) So, when thinking should you stay or should you go, always pick the "go." Not only will you be better for it, but those with whom you meet and interact will be better off, too.



# CONVENTION 2016

## ANECDOTES

THIS YEAR'S CONVENTION IN SCHENECTADY - LIKE ALL OF THOSE WHICH OUR CHAPTERS HOST, YEAR AFTER YEAR - PROVIDED EXCELLENT SOCIETY HOMECOMING AND HEART-STRING OPPORTUNITIES, ESPECIALLY FOR WANDERING BIRDS. HERE ARE SOME TAKEAWAYS FROM PARTICIPATING BROTHERS.

*Walking the streets of Schenectady Saturday afternoon with undergraduate brothers from California and North Carolina was an absolute delight. I wondered how our founders might feel seeing gentleman from around the country, joined together by the Sigma Phi nearly 200 years later, walking the same ground they once walked as our fledgling Society was just beginning to take flight. Who will walk the streets of Schenectady 200 years from now? What new regions of our country (or perhaps the world?) will they hail from? Only time will tell. Until then, Esto Perpetua!*  
**George Syrop, I'12** [george@syrop.com](mailto:george@syrop.com)

*Convention impressions? It's hard to narrow down to just one. The warm embrace of a Brother I haven't seen in 6 months or several years...sharing stories from different chapters...getting to know the actives at a deeper level and watching them grow as young men. But perhaps my favorite takeaway was watching my friend, Bob Guthrie S'86, who I talked into taking the reins as Treasurer by telling him he would meet some amazing Brothers, have the time of his life and never regret his decision...and realizing as I watched Bob in Schenectady that I had been 100% accurate!*  
**RJ Lackey, S'86** [rjlackey@woodsrogers.com](mailto:rjlackey@woodsrogers.com)

*Despite not being much of an orator, at Convention '16, I had the great pleasure of being a judge for the Hicks Oratorical Contest. I agreed to be unbiased, not knowing I had a horse in the race - a fellow Tar Heel who would speak first. Naturally I wanted the pride of victory to go to my chapter, but I reserved judgement. No longer a mere observer, I had to focus on every word's context, meaning and delivery with an open mind. Evaluating the speeches critically was different from just letting the prose wash over me. I had to listen for the intensity of the thoughts...and the intensity of the appreciative snaps around me. It was a great privilege to have a voice in determining a winner. I wish I could make it as clear to 'Flame' readers as it was to me which speaker most embodied the Sigma Phi values - (No, not a Tar Heel but a Serp.) - and set a standard for future Hicks Contests.*  
**Jimmy Decker, T'11** [jdecker92@gmail.com](mailto:jdecker92@gmail.com)

*While walking from the hotel to the campus on Friday morning en route to the Standing & Advisory committee meeting, I passed by the Old Blue Gate to the College with a pillar inscribed as shown in the photo below. Seeing anew the year of Sig's founding represented this way, alongside the other Union Triad members, brought an elevated sense of pride. Motivated by the desire to share the ineffable spirit of the Sigma Phi, our founders headed west to Hamilton College in 1831 and gave birth to the Beta of New York. We therefore refer to our Union chapter as the Alpha of Alphas and make the rightful claim that our Society is the oldest National college social fraternity. The pillar at Old Blue Gate shows we are in good company here at Union but our colonization in 1831 sets us apart and rings true the phrase "Lead or Die!"*  
**Brendan McCurdy, H'80** [Ofelixculpa@aol.com](mailto:Ofelixculpa@aol.com)



This was my first Sigma Phi Convention in over 25 years, it was great to catch up with old friends and make many new ones. I was impressed by the enthusiasm displayed by both the undergrads and the "old guys!" I particularly enjoyed the reports from each Head of House. These young Sigs are dealing with a wide array of issues, and each presented their situations differently. Through it all, I felt their love of Sigma Phi shone through strongly. I am already looking forward to hearing updates at next year's Convention at the Alpha of Virginia! Wahoowa!!! **Robert B. Guthrie S'86**  
[bguts123@sbcglobal.net](mailto:bguts123@sbcglobal.net)

During my time at the Alpha of all Alphas, I was welcomed warmly by Sigs that I had only heard of before. Such unfamiliarity was only temporary; through the bond of Friendship and the values we all hold dear in Sigma Phi, relationships flourished in short order. I was fortunate enough to meet Sigs from as far back as the 60s and enjoyed sharing experiences. We talked about our houses, brotherhood during active days, and how - although things around us (the college, worldlings, pop culture, etc.) have changed - Sigma Phi is timeless. She satisfies and bonds today just as in 1827, and just as she will when we celebrate at our 200th anniversary in 2027. I look forward to other Sig experiences down the road to extend my network in Sigma Phi and learn about the individual journeys all Sigs are taking. **Mike Simoneau Jr. V14**  
[msimoneau70@gmail.com](mailto:msimoneau70@gmail.com)

In Friday's workshop in Schenectady, all of us actives examined membership obligations at length. Nick Hill, F'14, compared the Society's prescription for keeping our academics, physical health, and moral wellness high to another charge I knew well: the Scout Oath. That oath was the first of its kind that I had taken, with my formal promise to Sigma Phi being the second. I hadn't made this connection beforehand, and I thanked Nick afterwards. It turned out that Nick and I were both Eagle Scouts in the days before Sigma Phi. This means I have two brothers in blood and - now - a brother in Sigma Phi who are Eagles, as well. In this Society, I suspect there are many others.... **Tim Rigotti, M'16**  
[trigotti@umich.edu](mailto:trigotti@umich.edu)

## POST CONVENTION RUMINATION

by Chris Johnson, U'74 [cjohnson@linley.com](mailto:cjohnson@linley.com)

While memory is never a trustworthy source of information - only a suggestion of partial truths - it seems to me that the conventions of yore were better attended. This year at the Schenectady convention, there were enormous gaps in pledge year representation and I'm not sure why. It's not the event promotion, which was excellent. Nor the itinerary for the weekend, which was well thought out. Lord knows, it wasn't the Mohawk Valley weather, which represented fall at its best! For many, I suspect, the loss of our former Sigma Phi Place at 1 Library Lane was the main problem. So many memories of that special address, but .... we can't go back home . . .

My Dad went to Union, too. He was in a different fraternity: Phi Sigma Kappa, no longer at Union. They lost their house back when I was an active and they, too, were moved to block housing in a dormitory. In all the years my brother, Mark (U'70), and I were on campus, our Dad never dropped by Phi Sigma Kappa because, he said, the new location held no memories for him. To add to the injury, the Schenectady high school he graduated from had been torn down, too. He used to say, "they are erasing my memories".

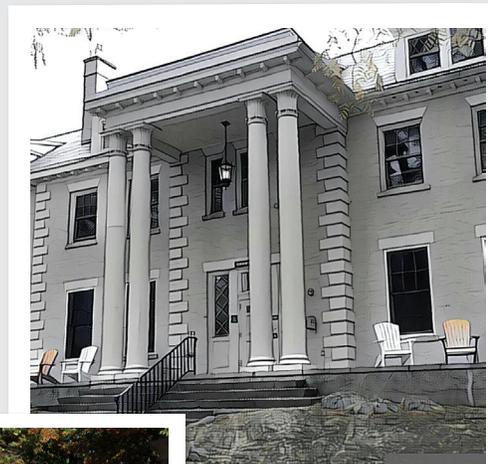
The good news is, the flame burning in today's Union actives seems un-dampened by the loss of the house. For them, it is only a rather abstract story: something they never experienced firsthand. And our pledge numbers - at least at Union - continue to be strong. So the absence of the old Place will at some point disappear into history as we old guard Sigs move on. Maybe that will help. We have to redefine ourselves from the current 'us vs. them' mentality, and stop seeing the College as the evil empire. We need a new story that unifies us. I'm sure the College administration doesn't even think about it, anymore: not big on Union's radar.

I was really pleased to hear about the many new Society programs that were lacking in my day: i.e., the focus on academics, encouragement to play positive roles in the community, sexual harassment training, etc. I think our Society is actively finding and developing ways to be a better role model than it was/we were in the past. Perhaps fraternities are doing that all over as a matter of survival in these anti-masonic times. It's wise and it's necessary, nonetheless.

I still believe the need for brotherhood in America is undiminished. And so, Sigma Phi still serves a purpose. We stand in opposition to the myth of rugged, even exclusive individualism that still persists in our country. As always, brother Elihu Root, H'1860, said it best:

***"I observe that there are two entirely different theories according to which individual men seek to get on in the world. One theory leads a man to pull down everybody around him in order to climb up on them to a higher place. The other leads a man to help everybody around him in order that he may go up with them."***

**Esto perpetua.**





# WHY DOES SPEF MATTER?

AS I HOPE ALL SIGS KNOW, SPEF STANDS FOR SIGMA PHI EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION. IT'S MY PRIVILEGE TO HAVE BEEN ASKED TO SERVE AS THE PRESIDENT OF SPEF LAST YEAR AND YOU'VE LIKELY RECEIVED AT LEAST ONE LETTER FROM ME ASKING YOU TO CONTRIBUTE. BUT DO YOU KNOW WHAT SPEF IS....AND WHY IT MATTERS?

by Jack Romaine, L'90  
SPEF President  
jack.romaine@element-id.com

## LEADERSHIP AND EDUCATION REWARDS FOR UNDERGRADUATES

Since its founding in 1985, SPEF has encouraged and rewarded the leadership and educational behaviors we want to see in our active chapters. We present awards for best grade point averages (GPA), for the largest GPA improvements, and for best newsletters. We help offset the cost of joining individual honor societies. We provide grants for educational speakers, for faculty dinners, and for education related upgrades like adding Wi-Fi capabilities to the various Sigma Phi Places. We support some undergraduate charitable activities as well. The Conger Funds, for example, were established by Michigan Sigs years ago to send additional actives to convention each year for the training sessions.

## DRIVING THE THREE INITIATIVES FOR 2016-2017

SPEF is also instrumental in driving and supporting our Society's three most recent and visible initiatives, about which you can read elsewhere in this 'Flame':

**SEXUAL ASSAULT PREVENTION** – We are helping expand the program to not only train all active chapters with curriculum initiated at the Alpha of North Carolina, but also expanding the reach to training non-Sigs at our host institutions through better training materials and videos. Survey reports put the number of women who experience some form of sexual misconduct at 1 in 5, and 1 in 33 men. Across our land, this is a serious issue. We have a head start on making a real difference to improve campus life at our host institutions.

**LEADERSHIP ACADEMY** – The executive committees of both the Society and SPEF are designing a pilot for a once-a-year, four-day training session for three undergraduates from each chapter. Sigma Phi is centered on leadership and we've always done an excellent job of leading by example. But it is time to improve what we've been doing and create a formal training program with elements which make sense and add value at every chapter.

**NETWORKING AND MENTORING PROGRAM** -- We are also creating a program to allow our seasoned members to interact and bond with undergraduates in a way that is normally only possible at conventions and alumni events. We can leverage our bonds to help Brothers in their professional lives at the same time we strengthen the Society by bringing together interested and interesting men from different generations and geographies.

## TAX DEDUCTIBLE

More good news is found in the way the Foundation was established. Because it is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, contributions you and I make are tax deductible as educational expenses. (The Society itself is a 501(c)(7) nonprofit organization, meaning that contributions cannot be deducted on personal taxes.) The Foundation's most significant success in this regard occurred this year in support of the Alpha of California's Thorsen House Renovation Projects. Over \$190,000 in tax deductible contributions for Thorsen House were made to, managed by, and dispersed by SPEF to the Thorsen House project for 2016. We are gearing up for ways to provide similar targeted assistance to the Alpha of North



## 2015 SIGMA PHI EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION ANNUAL CAMPAIGN DONOR RECOGNITION LIST

APPEARING HERE IS THE LIST OF DONORS TO THE FOUNDATION'S 2015 ANNUAL CAMPAIGN. GIVING BY THESE BROTHERS IS THE CORNERSTONE OF OUR SUCCESS. DONORS ARE SHOWN BY GIVING CATEGORY.

Carolina in its quest for a home. While it is not as visible or dramatic as some of our recent projects, SPEF provides a constant support for the Society by legally sharing those major operational expenses such as maintenance of the core Sig membership database, and a portion of the twice-per-year *Flame* that you are reading right now. In fact, the SPEF expense-sharing represents the single largest source of funds for the Society.

### SPEF IS REALLY OUR COMMITMENT TO THE LONGEVITY OF THE SOCIETY

Most of all, it's important to remember that Sigma Phi exists only at institutions of higher learning. We were founded to enrich the college experience and that is exactly what SPEF is doing - by making colleges safer, by teaching our active Brothers to be better leaders, better gentlemen, better citizens, and by passing on the knowledge of Brothers who have gone before to help younger Sigs be more successful in the house and in their careers, afterwards.

**SPEF is a powerful way the alumni of our Society give back, thereby helping our actives and - more broadly - helping keeping the circa-1827 Flame of Brothers Bowie, Bowie, Cromwell and Witherspoon alive.**

For all these reasons, Brothers, I invite you to see the work of the Foundation more clearly, to take what you see to heart, and to respond generously. Please note **your** opportunity to give to the Sigma Phi Educational Foundation using the coupon and envelope included in this edition of the *Flame*.

### SILKEN TIE (\$500 and up)

Edward Austin V'56  
Donald Beane L'64  
Henry Blagden W'59  
Derek Fredrickson V'94  
Glenn George C'82  
James Hansen V'80  
Lawrence Howell S'72  
Scott McCrae V'82  
Michael McDermott V'85  
Thomas Mullins C'95  
Roy Park C'12  
David Pauls M'65  
James Peterson M'59  
Jay Ralph F'78  
Robert Tuoriniemi M'77  
James Welsh M'39  
Milton Woodhouse F'38

### MAGIC CIRCLE (\$250-\$499)

Theodore Bahr L'77  
Christopher Bartels C'06  
Patrick Gaillard M'72  
Clifford Graffuis I'71  
John Helm F'81  
David Hess L'86  
Frederick Lamont F'72  
Richard Melbye I'52  
Samuel Moore F'70  
Perry Olson F'68  
Timothy Pickering H'78  
William Poarch S'54  
Jordan Raetz M'06  
James Ritchey C'82  
John Romaine L'90  
Roland Schroeder L'83  
Gregory Smith F'89  
Robert Taisey V'48  
Stephen VanMeter M'80  
John Walser L'90  
Gavin Watson G'63

### TWENTY PEARL (\$199-\$249)

John Allen M'67  
Graham Anthony S'83  
David Aronoff V'83

James Atchison V'59  
James Behrend F'76  
Jonathan Bergner S'03  
Frederick Bloom C'57  
John Boehmke H'75  
Peter Bolger L'66  
Heinrich Bosshard H'96  
Adam Brandt G'93  
William Brennan L'78  
Daniel Brown S'59  
Scott Brown M'81  
Anthony Bryant C'49  
William Buchanan S'78  
Matthew Carballal H'88  
Ram Chandra L'84  
Eric Chartan V'98  
Roscoe Connell L'69  
Thomas Cranmer M'69  
Steven Curtis F'96  
David Dallas S'79

Gregory Danilek M'81  
Keith Donahue U'84  
Richard Dorer L'66  
Michael Doyle G'89  
David Drake S'67  
Robert Durbeck U'53  
Ralph Edelman V'66  
Peter Flynn C'66  
Everett Fuller I'44  
John Fyfe M'46  
David Garden L'48  
Melvin Gay M'56  
Jackson Goddard U'54  
James Grant H'97  
Jean Gruss H'86  
Clinton Hall S'55  
DeForest Hardinge C'50  
Robert Harshberger I'59  
Todd Havener I'88  
Philip Henderson F'55  
Donald Hunt V'73  
Peter Hutcheon W'62  
Mark Isken M'85  
Steven Jones V'62  
Leonard Kagan U'66  
Claude Kemper S'56  
Alfred Kennedy L'83  
Edward Kirklind friend  
Andrius Kontrimas I'81

Andrew Lidral F'84  
David Loeb U'99  
Edward Mack M'62  
Peter Manus W'62  
John Martin H'89  
Carl Mehlhop M'46  
George Mercer M'68  
John Meyer V'63  
Willis Mitchell L'62  
David Moore M'80  
Timothy Moran I'76  
Frederick Mueller L'61  
Birch Mullins H'63  
Barron Nagle L'85  
Theodore Ochs L'83  
Patrick O'Connell F'89  
Casper Offutt M'47  
Brendan O'Rourke S'78  
William Parshall G'61  
Mark Patterson I'74  
John Pearson G'72  
Roger Pelli V'70  
Robert Pewett S'61  
James Pollock M'76  
Robert Pyle W'57  
Richard Reiss F'44  
Robert Ridgley C'53  
Ronald Schmaedick F'56  
Nicholas Seitanakis M'86  
Steven Sherlag M'87  
Steven Shultz U'68  
Joel Shumaker I'80  
Kyle Siettmann F'91  
Gerald Smith V'73  
Peter Smith U'67  
Marshall Solem F'79  
Barry Stewart G'56  
Lawrence Sudbay V'76  
Lindsay Suter H'83  
Robert Tank V'60  
Scott Tarmann F'87  
Andrew Torre V'88  
Robert Turner C'39  
Peter VanBrunt G'59  
Andrew Wagshul U'89

### SPIRIT OF FRIENDSHIP (up to \$100)

Gregory Abbe H'08  
Nils Apeland F'94  
Christopher Battisti L'83  
Ray Dale Bedeaux F'00  
Jon Bellona H'00  
Peter Birkel G'56  
Thomas Bleezarde H'54  
John Boardman L'51  
Edward Bosley I'73  
Matthew Boylan F'96  
Doug Bray I'69  
William Breg U'72  
John Britten V'02  
John Brough I'53  
Joseph Cebina M'88  
Moses Cesario I'89  
Brian Fiedler F'77  
Donald Fiedler L'59  
Karl Gigante M'86  
Hugh Gleason G'76  
Richard Guior L'79  
James Haberstroh F'67  
David Hamm M'65  
Jack Harned F'51  
John Hibbard M'51  
Marston Jones H'57  
Joseph Kent S'63  
Laurent Liebin S'81  
Jay Lipe S'53  
Ralph MacDonald W'60  
Richard Miller V'66  
Scott Miller F'73  
Ronald Morgan M'52  
Curtis Nelson F'75  
Daniel Neumann F'71  
Michael O'Bresly S'83  
Robert Pierson L'54  
Daniel Power I'51  
Ronald Randall V'55  
Kurt Regenber F'54  
Andrew Rochat G'85  
Gilbert Sanborn M'70  
John Shannon G'54  
David Strasburg F'85  
Richard Thickens U'70  
William Wells I'58  
Geoffrey Wood G'61

# '100 MAN' CAMPAIGN SETTING OUR SIGHTS

WHEN WE PARTICIPATE IN SIGMA PHI, IT'S WITH ONE EYE ON OUR ENJOYMENT AND ONE EYE ON ENSURING THAT THE SOCIETY CONTINUES TO FLOURISH. IT'S A TWO PART MEMBERSHIP FOCUS, WITH ONE FOOT PLANTED IN TODAY AND ONE IN TOMORROW: "ESTO PERPETUA." WITH THAT AUTHENTIC AND ENDURING DYNAMIC IN MIND, SIGMA PHI HAS LAUNCHED THE "100 MAN" CAMPAIGN.



This groundbreaking national fundraising vehicle was announced at the recent convention in Schenectady. It was paced via a video, produced by Nicholas Byrne, T'15, and narrated by Mark Holland, S'86, capturing the essence and the purpose of the Society's vision for 2017 and beyond.

The premise of the campaign is simple: We are looking for 100 men, each to donate at least \$1,000 to Sigma Phi Society or the Sigma Phi Educational Foundation.

The funds raised will purposefully expand programming provided by our national organization, including three key initiatives to be implemented in the new year:

1. **Sexual Assault Prevention** – After successfully training every chapter last year in sexual assault prevention and bystander intervention, we want to ensure that we can maintain this commitment. We will be asking each undergraduate chapter to send one brother to become a facilitator of sexual assault prevention and bystander intervention training. After formal training, these brothers will return to their campuses, provide regular training to our members, and offer such training to other Greek organizations and members of the campus community.
2. **Leadership Academy** – We will sponsor and bring together three undergraduates from every chapter to attend a three or four-day off campus leadership summit. During this workshop, Sig participants will focus on developing

leadership skills, enhancing chapters operations and - importantly - identifying how Sigma Phi can extend its impact on the world.

3. **Careers and Mentoring** – We will create a series of avenues designed to help more brothers connect with one another. At regional and local events, alumni will connect with other brothers from the same area. Additionally, we will connect alumni with undergraduate brothers to assist them both professionally and personally. We want Sigma Phi to be able to facilitate professional relationships as well as further the personal bonds of brotherhood that we have already established.

The goals that we have established for Sigma Phi break new ground. They are certainly challenging. Challenge notwithstanding, they hold the promise of extending the impact of our Society...and more purposefully connecting our members, alumni and active alike. We are excited to invite you to join us.

Our 'ask' is simple and two-fold:

- If you can help us by providing financial support, please consider doing so. There is a coupon provided in this 'Flame' with an envelope to mail back into our Headquarters.
- If you would like to help us launch the three new initiatives, or play a personal role as a mentor to undergraduates, let us know! Email us at:

[HeadQuarters@sigmaphisociety.org](mailto:HeadQuarters@sigmaphisociety.org)

You can find the video, further details about the campaign, latest updates on progress, and many other stories and resources at our website: [www.sigmaphi.org](http://www.sigmaphi.org)

Visit the website. We hope it energizes you about the intentions and scope of the "100 Man" Campaign. We suspect it will make you proud of Sigma Phi, all over again.

# TO THE PROVERBIAL 'OLD AGE'

by Christy Lambden, T'11     [lambdenc@gmail.com](mailto:lambdenc@gmail.com)

Recently, at the ripe age of 24, I came to the conclusion that I am officially old. It was on a visit to my home chapter - UNC - that this realization set in. Somewhere between realizing that the current class of seniors is the last class that I was an undergraduate brother with...and being introduced to new members who can't remember the 90's, it hit me.

## I'M OLD. I'M OFFICIALLY A SIG FROM A BYGONE ERA.

At first daunted by such accusatory truth, I've now reached a kind of equilibrium in which I'm simultaneously intimidated about learning what such age might hold in a Sig context....and looking forward to finding out.

As I reflected, I realized a new joy. I have now had the opportunity to witness the complete evolution of undergraduate brothers. I have been able to see them grow, to discover their passions, and perhaps even play a small part as a mentor or role model in their growth.

On my latest visit to Chapel Hill, I was greeted by the same brothers I had met when they rushed the house 3 years ago. Instead of the quiet and reserved boys of those days, on this trip I met the leaders of our chapter: outgoing, decisive men driven by their passions, steeled by their convictions, and mentors in their own right. To meet the new generation presents the next great opportunity for 'seasoned' Sig brothers: to get to know a new group of men, to witness their development, and to play a role.

I have taken new resolve from my recent Chapel Hill experience. Where I thought of myself as a Sig from a bygone era, I was wrong. In point of fact, we are all Sigma Phi brothers at different stages of life, going through different stages of our development, and Sigma Phi still needs us as participants in this brotherhood. Not only does Sigma Phi still need us, but we can continue to take tremendous value and joy from the personal participation from you and me on which she depends.

Within Sigma Phi, the inescapable process of "getting old" doesn't signal an end to our participation with the organiza-

tion; instead, it signifies a shift in what our participation looks like. No longer are we the brothers who makes decisions about who joins our chapters. Instead, we are the brothers who can mentor and support the Society's young men as they discover their passions. We are the brothers who can lend experience and knowledge to our undergraduate chapters to allow them to continue to flourish. The satisfaction is very different, but no less real or powerful.

## HERE'S TO OLD AGE IN SIGMA PHI!



## OUTSIDER'S UNVARNISHED OPINION

One doesn't need to be an initiated member of the Sigma Phi Society to be welcomed into its family. In my brief involvement with the Society, I've recognized there's considerable significance rooted in those Greek letters. To this outsider, Sigma Phi is a feeling, it's a place, it's family.

I'll never be Swung nor sing the words to Sigma Phi Ter Incluta, but my feelings for the Society are quite strong.

I am very proud of my own fraternal experiences, as a member of the Kappa Sigma Fraternity. The Fraternity shaped me into the successful leader I believe I've become. But, I must admit, there's something different and appealing about Sigma Phi. Though I'll always be a proud Kappa Sig, I'm inspired by the Society.

For starters, each alum and undergrad I've encountered lives by the Society's values of Friendship, Love and Truth. These leaders have welcomed me as more than a mere guest, but a member of their fraternal family. I feel they've accepted, without judgement, my beliefs, ideas, and peculiarities.

I've read the Society's strategic plan, featuring the three key initiatives, with great delight. The sexual assault prevention program is ground-breaking. No other fraternity has dared to address this common issue head-on, but Sigma Phi is proactively providing training programs to make campuses safer.

There's no other fraternity quite like Sigma Phi...and that's a great thing for its members, chapters, campuses...and communities everywhere!

**by Pete Parker, Strategic Consultant  
Fraternity Management Group**

*(Pete is working closely with Sigma Phi's national fundraising program and, although he's a proud member of another Greek house, has become keenly interested in the Society's history and values. – Ed.)*

# rediscovered!

## THE WILLIAMSTOWN ALPHA



*by Dave Williams, W'61  
bylot@vtusa.net*

Sometime before 1675, Dutch Patroon Stephen van Rensselaer II was sitting on his porch watching his tenants till and toil when he decided that a person of his wealth and position ought to have a house which reflected his success. And so he built a Dutch style "manor house" just north of Albany. The main body of the three-story manor was roughly 75' by 46', yielding 10,350 square feet of living space. The manor was occupied in succession by Stephen II, Stephen III, and Stephen IV but abandoned in the 1870s when the convergence of the Erie Canal, industrial development and the New York Central Railroad destroyed the pastoral quality of the van Rensselaer redoubt.

Sometime after the abandonment, Albany architect Marcus T. Reynolds, W'1886, acquired the property. Reynolds knew that the Sigma Phi house at his alma mater had burnt to the ground in 1893. He proposed to move the van Rensselaer Manor House from Albany, NY to Williamstown, MA. The Manor House was constructed of brick with brown stone porches, pillars, pediments, balustrades, chimney surrounds, etc. Since the brick was very soft, Reynolds had the building taken apart piece by piece, labeling all of the stone work. Because the interior was of historical significance, Reynolds removed the interior, including furniture, and donated it to the



Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York where it resides even now as a part of the museum's permanent collection.

The manor house stone work and interior framing were moved to Williamstown and reassembled (with new brick) in 1884 as Sigma Phi Place. In 1969, when Williams College adopted a policy ending fraternity life in Williamstown, the Alpha's Trustees deeded the house to the college on certain conditions. In 1973, the college determined that the space occupied by the former Sigma Phi Place would be better used for a new library. Requested by the college to waive one of the conditions, the then-Sigma Phi Trustees consented to the demolition of Sigma Phi Place: again subject to further conditions.

The building was demolished in 1973, bringing an end to the long saga and service of the van Rensselaer Manor House/ Sigma Phi Place. But, in 2016, a very small article appeared in the Williams College Alumni Magazine suggesting that the same stone which had been salvaged, moved, reassembled and demolished so long ago, may have been - against all odds! - salvaged for a

second time in 1973. The article referred the reader to a book on the architecture history of Albany, New York. That book stated that when the house was demolished in Williamstown, an Albany physician had salvaged in Williamstown the same stone which had been salvaged in Albany. It further suggested that the stone had been moved to the RPI Technology Park in Troy, NY, in contemplation of being reassembled in Troy as the RPI President's House. That contemplation was never realized.

In early October, 2016, the author of this piece and his brother, Richard Tyner, W '61, traveled to Troy. We were greeted there by Project Coordinator Keith Van Amburgh of RPI. We bushwhacked through an overgrown area to a locked chain-link enclosure.

The lock

was rusted shut but was persuaded to cooperate with a bolt cutter. Inside the fence was an area of roughly 1/3 acre covered with 236 pallets of brown cut stone. Although the area was completely overgrown with vines, ground cover and small trees, the brown stone located there was definitely that which came from Sigma Phi Place. And so my intriguing question is: Could this house, which over the past 250 years has been built, demolished, salvaged, rebuilt, demolished and re-salvaged...be rebuilt again - perhaps in Chapel Hill, North Carolina?



# ANOTHER SIGMA PHI SOCIETY?

by Marshall Solem, F'79 [marshall.solem@zsassociates.com](mailto:marshall.solem@zsassociates.com)



Flame Editor Mike Imirie, M'69, recently spied a mysterious envelope on e-Bay with a stamp of a "Sigma Phi Society" at Shurtleff College. It was postmarked Alton, Illinois, date unknown. Imirie was immediately intrigued.

Several years earlier, Brother Imirie had seen a gravestone in a Schenectady cemetery for one Hezekiah Shurtleff who died in 1802 at the young age of 29. That gentleman's life was lived prior to the founding of both Sigma Phi and Shurtleff College, of course, but it made Mike wonder if there was a family connection between the founders of Shurtleff College and Schenectady, and - because of the Schenectady link - if there was perhaps a connection to our own Sigma Phi.

Mike reached out to me, knowing that I had served as past Society Historian as well as Chairman, do a little research. Beyond the coincidental Shurtleff-Schenectady connection, my sleuthing uncovered some uncanny parallels.

Some quick web research revealed that Shurtleff College was founded in 1827 as Rock Springs Seminary in Belleville, IL, by Reverend John Mason Peck, a Baptist minister. It is the oldest Baptist college west of the Allegheny Mountains. In 1832, the

school was moved to Alton, IL, east of St. Louis. It was known as Alton Seminary and Alton College until 1836 when Bostonian Dr. Benjamin Shurtleff gave the school a \$10,000 gift and the school was renamed for him. Initially, Shurtleff offered dual tracks of college studies and seminary

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## SEVERAL INTERESTING PARALLELS TO OUR SOCIETY HAVE BEEN FOUND, SUCH AS "LUX FIAT" MEANING LET THERE BE LIGHT.

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studies. Gradually, the emphasis shifted more to the academic side. In keeping with Baptist ideas about equality among men, it accepted students of all races and - by the later nineteenth century - women students as well. It was one of the early co-ed Christian colleges of liberal arts.

Knowing that Shurtleff was located in Alton, I enlisted the help of Don Walker, F'56, who lives there. Further research showed that Shurtleff closed in 1957 and was merged into Southern Illinois University - Edwardsville (SIUE). Reaching out to the historian at SIUE, we were introduced to archived volumes of the Shurtleff Retrospect yearbook and Pioneer campus newspaper. After a bit of digging, we were able to piece together the following tidbits about a altogether different Sigma Phi organization building its reputation in the Midwest while our Society was growing our own reputation and footprint in

New York.

Sigma Phi Society was the leading literary society at Shurtleff and appears to have been founded prior to 1860. This date is corroborated by the postage stamp on the envelope, which was first issued in 1870 and was good for ½ ounce first class mail until 1883. There is a further reference in the 1911 Retrospect that the Society was founded over 50 years earlier.

Culling through various writings about the Sigma Phi at Shurtleff, we found several interesting parallels to our Society:

- The motto of that society at its founding was "Lux Fiat" - which means "let there be light." "Never thinking any good thing too far beyond her to seek, Sigma Phi has ever been seeking "new light." While this is clearly a reference to the illumination that come from being well-read, the idea aligns well with the Thrice Illustrious tenet of seeking truth. Is it just an interesting coincidence that our ritual contains an element of darkness and that every Sig hears the words "let there be light" during initiation?
- From the 1911 Retrospect: "Always keeping her standards high, she has through the years stood for "largeness" of manhood and womanhood, for breadth of culture and for the fullest development of her every member." Our Society promotes development, as well.
- The 1911 Retrospect uses a phrase familiar to every member of the Thrice Illustrious : "to be once a Sig is to be always a Sig" Sigma Phi at Shurtleff had a small membership specifically to give the members greater opportunities for developing themselves along literary lines.

*continued on next page 17*



# A TALE OF TWO (SIG) CITIES

by Greg Abbe, H'08 [greg.abbe@gmail.com](mailto:greg.abbe@gmail.com)

As a Union College sophomore in 2006, I was invited to pledge the Alpha chapter of the Sigma Phi Society. Being in an acapella group with a number of Sigs, and having been intrigued by the mystery surrounding Sigma Phi, I gladly accepted.

I soon plunged headfirst into the Alpha's process. It was intimidating, demanding, and uncompromising. I struggled at first to adapt and learn what the brothers wanted of me. Details, it became immediately apparent, were incredibly important. Busts were Jove like. My 'big' - Stephen Francis Votto, U'05 - was from Cheshire, Connecticut. The Pepperbox and 1 Library Lane and Steam and Elias Peissner and the frontispiece and the blue fairy. Names, birthplaces, majors, family makeups, hobbies, and U-years of every pledge and brother crammed into my head. The Catalogue itself became like a censor, with my brain breathing in every line of every page of its historical sketch and Union chapters, committing the smallest details to memory lest I be caught unawares by a certain Wandering Bird sipping Drambuie (his favorite).

The Alpha had a house, inasmuch as the wing of Davidson dormitory in the shadow of 1 Library Lane could be called one, and I spent many a day beautifying it. Cleaning up from the night before, helping Doc prepare a meal, or painting walls - all needed to be done with pride and attention to detail. Billy Joel's Captain Jack was a constant companion and will forever hold a fond place in my heart (thanks RCHAH).

The further I waded into the process, the more questions were raised: questions that went unanswered for a time. For reasons which I'm happy to discuss with any brother (which, I assure you, are unrelated to the merits of Sigma Phi), I de-pledged from the Alpha in October. I dropped by the house about a few weeks later just to say hello to the brothers and see how everyone was doing, and was met with

tuxedos, mirth, and hilarity. The realization of what those festive things meant in that moment stung.

In January of 2008, as a second-semester junior, I transferred to Hamilton College. During the time between my de-pledging and my transfer to Hamilton, unanswered questions about Sig ate at me incessantly. I wanted to know. I needed to understand what it all meant. Upon my arrival in Clinton, I resolved to seek out the Beta chapter. This was easier said than done, for the chapter is underground and its members known only by speculation. Fortunately for me, mentioning Charles Thorn Cromwell to a suspected brother at a party became a one-way ticket to the Beta's process. As I stood with my fellow pledges ('neos', in Beta parlance) awaiting entry into an attic, I recognized a familiar form and experienced sudden panic, realizing a lineup was imminent. Once again, I would be found woefully unprepared. "Everyone! Where are you from? Who are your siblings? What's your major?"

Over the coming hours and weeks, however, I would learn that this process of Sig orientation would be very different. Wandering Birds were replaced with cold silence and reflective eyewear, and tobacco and jerky were more important than a favorite drink. Gone were questions of siblings and birthplaces and majors and frontispieces and blue fairies; here were ruminations about the Wasteland and the Point and Leo and three-legged stools and Icarus and staring into the light. The pursuit of the finest details faded into the green smoke, as notions of "keep climbing", "keep thinking", and "where is your safety net" pierced my overconfident self. This was incredibly disorienting; all the preparation that I thought would give me an advantage in my first exposure to Sigma Phi was only barely relevant. Tasks from brothers replaced beautification of a house (there is no



*Greg Abbe, H'06, trekking in upstate New York this past October*

house: saucy!). The results of tasks, be they structures or philosophies, needed to be shared and interpreted with fellow neos immediately. Attention to detail was usurped by speaking from the heart, by thinking and building and climbing and holding on tight. And there were women around, women whose occasional questions and observations were no less insightful or challenging or encouraging than the brothers', despite never having gone through our process themselves.

When dawn broke over the Adirondacks and my nostrils filled with these scent of eggs, lettuce and champagne, three years of wondering came to their resolution. With nearly two different pledge processes under my belt, I sat in stunned silence as my questions were answered. Many years later, I can now reflect back and recognize that the two different pledging approaches had similar effects on me. They both pushed me out of my comfort zone, to both pay attention to the details and get to know my peers, and to think beyond the obvious and to get to know myself. Mine was a long climb, and it was worth each step.

## ALPHA OF VIRGINIA: CRISIS MANAGEMENT, THEN & NOW

by Bob Bradshaw, S'63, Alumni Treasurer Emeritus [bobrlb@aol.com](mailto:bobrlb@aol.com)

**AUTHOR'S NOTE:** "MY GOAL WITH THIS ARTICLE IS TO RECOGNIZE THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR VIRGINIA'S RENAISSANCE AND TO ENCOURAGE MORE ALUMNI TO BECOME ACTIVELY ENGAGED WITH THEIR RESPECTIVE CHAPTERS TO HOPEFULLY AVOID CRISIS MANAGEMENT SITUATIONS."

### **DATELINE:**

**March, 2014 Charlottesville, Va.**

The Alpha of Virginia Alumni Board soberly met to address a crisis facing operation of the active chapter. Severe economic stress due to declining membership over a number of years had brought reasonable chapter operations to what seemed a point of no return. Likely alternatives for the Board included shuttering 163 Rugby Road or leasing it to an interested outside fraternal group. Fortunately, Head of House Mac Dunmire, S'13, and his small but passionate team committed to a high energy plan to recruit a nucleus of pledges and focus on immediately rebuilding membership.

Concerned alumni stepped forward to help address the attendant fiscal crisis with generous contributions. The Board also reviewed the longstanding management contract with an outside management company. That contract was a financial drain and its other deficiencies were deemed unsustainable. Concerned alumni again stepped forward. The Board authorized a House Finance Committee (HFC) to assume responsibilities that included fiscal and operational management of 163 Rugby Road. The HFC, led by Charlottesville resident George Snyder, S'78, also committed to working closely

with active officers to mentor and encourage their fiscal and membership sustainability.

*Fast forward 2.5 years....*

### **DATELINE:**

**September, 2016 Charlottesville, Va.**

As now reported by Head of House Brandon Bernstein, S'14, "The Alpha of Virginia has experienced another tremendous year of growth. Our membership has expanded by another 12 Brothers, continuing with

the successes of the last several years." Recruiting has been led by Hunter Tice, S'14, and his team, providing a foundation for success. The Active Brotherhood now includes international members from Mexico, Turkey, and Hungary. Outstanding achievers include a nationally top-ranked mock trial attorney and a national championship competing varsity thrower.

A return to philanthropic endeavors - First Annual 'Sigs Over Charlottesville' chief among them -- benefited the Fisher House Foundation. After many absent years, the kitchen is now under the management of a very capable chef. Virginia actives are once again able to gather for dinners and Sig fellowship with plans to expand culinary services.

Success with crisis management is always challenging. Navigating those waters requires a steady compass with a long term focus on the rewards of our creed of Friendship, Love, and Truth. Support during crisis events - then and now - is a sacred Brotherhood obligation whose success will ensure that future generations can have and know the Sig experience. This brother is proud to observe that the spirit and strength of the Alpha of Virginia Brotherhood of actives and alumni again favors our illustrious band.

*Esto perpetua.*



## Another Sigma Phi Society

continued from page 14

- Similar to many of our chapters, Sigma Phi played a very active part in the athletic life of the college, being well represented in football, basketball and baseball.
- Sigma Phi is always listed first in the Organization section and Literary areas of the college yearbook. It seems to me that the local group had the same idea we salute directly in our Benedict Toast: "When she ceases to be first, then let her die."

Based on the archived *Pioneer* articles we excavated, Sigma Phi at Shurtleff seems to have existed at least until the spring of 1928. We found no reference to the organization after that date.

With all of the coincidental but inconclusive parallels, the original question still looms. Was there a Shurtleff family connection to Sigma Phi? There are no Shurtleffs listed in the Sigma Phi Catalogue, so no tangible connection is substantiable. But perhaps some deeper genealogical research one day will prove a link does exist. Did Hezekiah Shurtleff have relatives who traveled to Schenectady with him and survived him? Did one or more attend Union College, or through some other connection befriend the Bowie brothers, Cromwell and Witherspoon? If that were the case, could favorable knowledge of our Sigma Phi Society in Schenectady have traveled back to Dr. Benjamin Shurtleff in Boston and he or his descendants transplanted the concept of Sigma Phi across the continent to southwestern Illinois? It seems unlikely, but maybe.... Is there anyone out there with access to Union enrolled student archives and Ancestry.com that wants to do a little Sherlock Holmes work?

As I close, I'll offer one last quote from the 1911 Retrospect: "The heart of every Sigma Phian swells as he realizes what honors they have won and what glory they reflect upon the Society, which has had so much to do with the molding of their lives". There's a key parallel there, too. I can certainly say that Sigma Phi has molded my life. How about you?

# Never Forget These Brothers

*These deaths have been reported to the Society since publication of the July 2015 Sigma Phi Flame.*

Hobart Beck Jr., F'60 .....	January 27, 2016
Norman B. Anderson, F'46 .....	April 11, 2016
Matthew C. Bierman, I'06 .....	June 29, 2016
Robert F. Brunzell, F'42.....	July 1, 2015
Pieter P. DeKadt, G'47 .....	December 25, 2012
Eckford J. DeKay, C'42.....	January 13, 2012
V. Neil Fulton, I'47 .....	January 4, 2015
John B. Fyfe, Jr., M'46.....	August 7, 2016
Marshall P. Hoke, C'35 .....	June 15, 2015
Jason M. Jewett, M'94.....	August 30, 2013
William J. Mead, C'59.....	November 22, 2014
Edgar K. Orr, M'42 .....	June 10, 2009
Michael W. Rahn, F'69 .....	March 4, 2015
Charles D. Turgrimson, F'30 .....	July 28, 2007
Keith S. Wellin, H'48.....	September 14, 2014
James D. Winsor, G'77.....	April 6, 2015
Eugene L. Woroch, F'44 .....	June 20, 2015





*This talented brother is now working on another, more involved Sig video project. To support that work, Nicholas spent much of his time during Convention '16 either lugging or using his Nikon D810, a 3-point light kit and even a professional, camera-equipped drone to interview as well as capture sights and sounds!*

## NORTH CAROLINA, VERMONT, AND CALIFORNIA ACCORDED

# 2016 NEWSLETTER AWARDS

by Dan Neumann, F'71, Society Publications/Scholastic Chair [dca120@sbcglobal.net](mailto:dca120@sbcglobal.net)

The Society conferred its 2015-2016 annual Newsletter Awards at the National Convention hosted by the Alpha of New York in Schenectady, New York.

Although markedly different in content and appearance, the Alpha of North Carolina's T Times and Alpha of Vermont's Cat's Tale were declared co-winners of the undergraduate competition. This was the second consecutive award earned by Vermont while North Carolina earned its fifth award in the past six years.

The Sig Bear, published by the Alpha of California, took top honors in the competition involving newsletters published by alumni organizations. This is the Alpha's seventh award-winning alumni newsletter since the national recognition

## 3-MINUTE DIGITAL VIDEO PREMIERS IN SCHENECTADY & BREAKS NEW GROUND

Sigs understand that it's important to contribute to Sigma Phi. As actives and as grads, most of us do just so in predictable ways, big and small. We clean the Sigma Phi Place. We rush young prospectives. We pay housebills. We serve on alumni boards. We contribute to chapter or national newsletters. In all of these things, you and I personally give to Sigma Phi, just as she has given to us.

Nicholas Byrne, T'15, has taken a different tack. The UNC sophomore journalism major from Athens, Georgia, makes both videos and digital photo projects. A 3-minute project that he and Christy Lambden, T'11, collaborated on to launch the "100 Man" campaign premiered at the Schenectady convention banquet....and was the evening's unquestioned highlight. It brought the festive banquet crowd cele-

brating Sigma Phi 189 years to a stunned, appreciative silence.

The finished video was an inviting vehicle for launching the Society's "100 Man" Campaign. More importantly, perhaps, Nicholas' artful use of photos from across the Society combined with Christy's reflective text proved a wonderful and moving reminder of the way that Sigma Phi continues to be a home for all of us. In a Society where meaning has been shared over the years primarily via words or still images, this thoroughly modern Sig communications product broke new ground.

You can see this remarkable, groundbreaking 'pan Sig' video on the Society's homepage at [www.sigmaphi.org](http://www.sigmaphi.org). When you do, think of Nicholas Byrne, T'15, and the remarkable gift he has made to Sigma Phi.

program's 1990 inception.

The two separate awards recognize both the frequency and quality of overall communications efforts by Sigma Phi's local chapters and their associated alumni. The Newsletter Recognition Committee is grateful for the evaluation contributions made this year by Jeff Kunz, F'68, and National Secretary George Syrop, I'12.

The chapters' award-winning newsletters are available for reading on Sigma Phi's national website ([www.sigmaphi.org](http://www.sigmaphi.org)). We applaud these chapters for their efforts in communicating with their graduates to nurture the flame shared by all initiates.

The Society's Standing & Advisory Committee, in collaboration with the Sigma Phi Educational Foundation which funds

the celebratory plaques awarded to each winning chapter, encourages all chapters to communicate regularly with their members.

To ensure inclusion, chapters are asked to provide a copy of their electronic publications to Newsletter Recognition Chairman Dan Neumann, F'71 ([dca120@sbcglobal.net](mailto:dca120@sbcglobal.net)), for posting on Sigma Phi's national website and automatic entry into the competition.

All chapters and alumni organizations are also encouraged to send their printed publications for competition judging by placing Dan's name and address (120 Campbell Road, Trumbull, Conn. 06611) on their mailing list three times, thereby automatically providing sufficient copies to meet the judges' needs.

**TRIBUTE TO A BROTHER:**

*"California Ain't the Same Without You Around"*

by Josh Taxson, I'95    [joshtaxson@gmail.com](mailto:joshtaxson@gmail.com)

It doesn't have to be the New Testament translated in fifteen thousand languages. It's just an article in a newsletter. For a fraternity. An American fraternity. Yet to ME, this task is as important a task as ever there was. What makes my article so vital? So damn important?! Please let me tell you...

...because, my dear brothers and friends, THIS article is to memorialize Matthew Charles Bierman, I'06, who unexpectedly slipped away in the night on June 29. Matt was about to turn 29, and he and his fiancé had recently closed escrow on their first home. Matt had his dream job: a lead engineer position on the California high-speed rail project. Matt had the world on a string. His calm, generous, slightly mischievous smile seemed to have served him well.

And, oh my beloved brothers of the Sigma Phi, Matt's smile DID serve him well, and it can serve you just as well. Take one look at this man and I'll tell you one thing for certain: Matt Bierman loved to be at Sigma Phi. In my ten years of knowing Matt, there was no other Sig who came to more House events, both business and social. I know of none whose loyalty to

California Sigma Phi was ever more steadfast. Matt served as a reminder: a reminder that we Sigs EARN our place by being true to ourselves, and that our place in such a fantastic organization is our right to enjoy as much as we can.

After many nights of thought and days of dreaming, this brother has come to a conclusive epiphany on how to summarize and honor the tragically short life of one of the greatest human beings he has ever known. It's OK. Smile. Wait. Close your eyes.

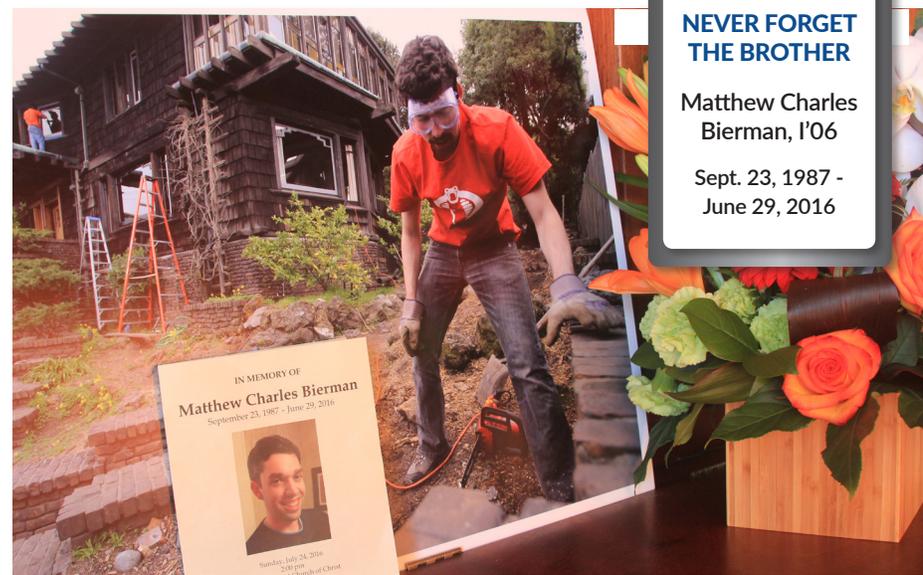
I hope you're still smiling...because that's what Matt would be doing. And I am not done writing this article until I am certain that Matt's spirit has touched us all. So keep smiling, and enjoy your place in Sigma Phi.

**KUDOS & THANKS**

...to the following Sigs for their articles, information or encouragement supporting this issue of the 'Flame': Greg Abbe, H'04, Bob Bradshaw, S'63, Chris Johnson, U'74, Christy Lambden, T'11, Brendan McCurdy, H'80, Dan Neumann, F'71, Jack Romaine, L'90, Marshall Solem, F'79, Bob Shages, U'69, George Syrop, I'12, Josh Taxson, I'95, & Dave Williams, W'61. Special thanks are due also to Scott Hekel, F'97, for capturing and sharing Convention '16 images from Schenectady.

Your contributions, gentlemen, reflect well on you. At the same time, they certainly make this issue of the 'Flame' far more representative and appealing. There is no substitute for hearing the voices of Sigs on the pages of Sig periodicals. **Thank you!**

When the time comes that you have feedback, suggestions, photographs and/or Sig stories to share, please contact editor Mike Imirie, M'69 ([mimirie@aol.com](mailto:mimirie@aol.com)).



**NEVER FORGET THE BROTHER**

**Matthew Charles Bierman, I'06**

**Sept. 23, 1987 - June 29, 2016**



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## 2016 DUES NOTICE

As 2016 draws to a close, some facets of our remarkable Society remain constant.

**Brotherhood. Sharing. Expanded horizons.** A profound and thankful awareness for the remarkable fraternal vision given birth by Brothers Bowie, Bowie, Cromwell and Witherspoon 189 years ago. And - oh, yes - an ongoing need for...your personal support.

Your dues each year enable the Society's publishing, training, and expansion efforts. Without active support from Sig alumni, there's no progress in those 'lifeblood' areas, just as there would have been no Sigma Phi at all had the Brothers Bowie, Witherspoon and Cromwell not put a brave fraternal stake in the ground in Schenectady in 1827.

If you haven't yet responded to your dues letter from Society Chairman Brendan McCurdy, H'80, please do so now.

Mail your dues check payable to Sigma Phi Society:

**Suggested - \$75 before 2006; \$50 for those initiated later**



c/o Sigma Phi  
P. O. Box 57417  
Tucson, AZ 85732-7417

Or, as always, feel free to make your dues payment online at [www.sigmaphi.org](http://www.sigmaphi.org)

**Esto!**

## SOCIETY EVENTS IN 2017 MARK YOUR CALENDAR

SATURDAY

**MARCH 4  
2017**

The Society's 2017 March 4 Flagship Banquet will be held in our nation's capital...(drum roll, please) on Saturday, March 4!

The tentative venue for celebrating the birth of Sigma Phi is the time-honored and prestigious Army Navy Club on Farragut Square.

FRI. - SAT.

**SEPT 22-23  
2017**

Sigma Phi's 2017 Convention is scheduled for Charlottesville over the weekend of September 22-23.

This annual event will be hosted by the resurgent Alpha of Virginia chapter.

*"Among so few..."*

SIGMA PHI SOCIETY · 1827-2016

