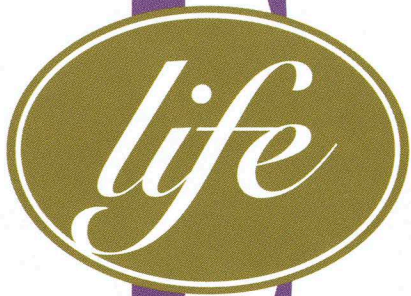


# G R E E K



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he blizzard of '66 dumped more than three feet of snow on the city of Syracuse during winter break, but Deborah Kydd Wilson '69 was determined to make it back to campus from her home in Pottersville, New Jersey. "I spent the night on a train because I didn't want to miss the beginning of rush," Wilson says.

The University didn't close, but brutal Central New York weather delayed spring-semester registration and student activities, including Greek membership recruitment. The storm temporarily disrupted Wilson's plans, but the then-second-semester freshman eventually followed in the footsteps of her mother, Jane Taylor Gretter '40, and became a member of Kappa Alpha Theta sorority. "When I was growing up, my mother shared many of her Theta memories," Wilson says. "But I didn't need much encouragement from her to join; my heart was already there."

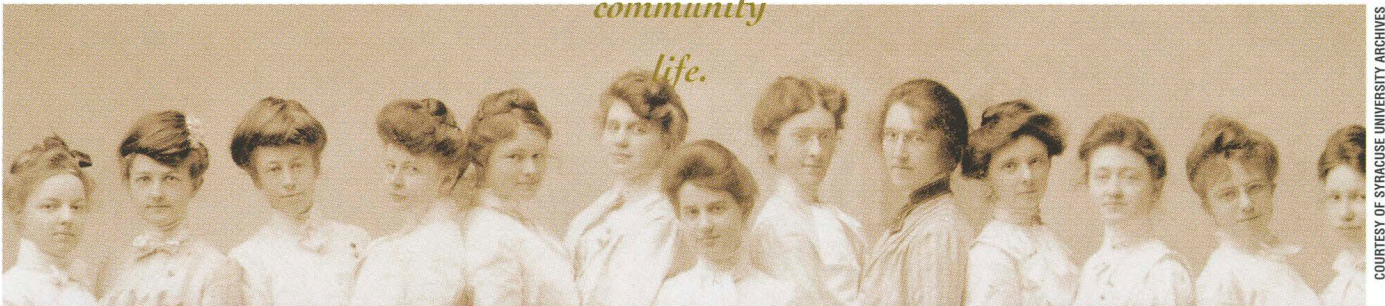
Last year, Wilson and her mother returned to campus to attend her daughter's initiation into Kappa Alpha Theta. Paige Wilson completes three generations of SU Theta women. "I enjoyed hearing about my mom's positive Theta experiences and now

I am grateful for this support network of strong women," says the junior drama major. "For me, being in a sorority makes the campus smaller and provides an escape from academic pressures."

The Greek system at Syracuse University has been part of campus life since 1871, when Upsilon Kappa fraternity—which later became the Psi chapter of Psi Upsilon—established a presence on the Hill. Alpha Phi and Gamma Phi Beta debuted in 1872 and 1874, respectively, as the first SU sororities.

Over the years, the number of Greek-letter organizations and membership at SU has fluctuated. Today, with their 18 sororities and 23 fraternities, Greeks are far from obsolete, but have seen better days. Although Paige Wilson realizes things aren't what they once were, she remains an advocate of proud Greek traditions. "Any system will be strong when a quarter of the student body participates," she says. "Still, it's a shame Greek life is not as accepted as when my mother and grandmother were here."

Bernie Fine '67, SU assistant men's basketball coach, says the Greek presence was so pervasive during his undergraduate days that a student couldn't



COURTESY OF SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES

By Natalie A. Valentine

COURTESY OF SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES

hold a leadership position unless she or he belonged to a sorority or fraternity. "Greeks controlled the University into the sixties; it seemed like half the student body was Greek," he says. "Now, with fewer chapters, it is a weaker system."

Fine, an active Sigma Alpha Mu member for more than 30 years and advisor to the SU chapter, witnessed the transformation firsthand. He believes the University has done little to foster the Greek system. "What is their view on it?"

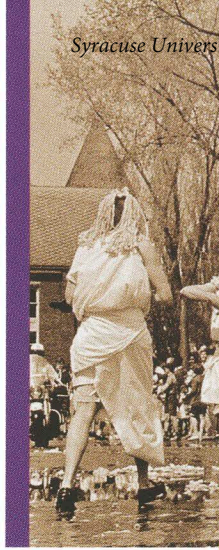
They say they want them here, but I question that at times," he says.

Barry Wells, vice president for student affairs and dean of student relations, says it is a myth that the administration doesn't support Greeks. "Part of this is due to a national trend toward a more regulatory approach to Greeks on campus," he says. "But in this era of cost containment, SU's Office of Greek Life was allocated additional staff and resources."

The Office of Greek Life keeps a watchful eye on SU's 41 Greek chapters, and its three full-time staff members and four graduate assistants are involved in everything from house safety inspections to supervising social functions. The *Statement of Relationship Between Syracuse University and Greek Letter Social Fraternities and Sororities*, an agreement between SU and Greek organizations, is distributed to all sororities and fraternities. "The bottom line is that we want students to work within the parameters of the University's core values," says Suzy Nelson, director of the Office of Greek Life. "We are committed to enhancing the Greek community through training, interaction, and leadership."

In 1995, the Board of Trustees Subcommittee on Greek Life examined SU's Greek system. The resulting report cited a 40 percent drop in the number of students participating in rush since 1992, and gave as possible reasons a 25 percent decline in student enrollment, a changing student culture, hazing of new members, and postponing rush until the spring semester. "The Greek system ebbs and flows for many reasons, but Greeks aren't going away," Nelson says. "They are very involved people and their leadership plays a major role on campus."

The review also cited retention, academic achievement, and alumni giving as three areas in which Greek students demonstrated strength and proved to be assets to the University. "Research indicates that students who are involved in activities like Greek life are more positive about their college experience, more satisfied with their social life, and more likely to graduate," says Wells. "In addition, Greeks are generally good alumni and are therefore important members of the University family."



Fraternity brothers pull a chariot through the Quad during the 1964 Greek Week.

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Starting with Phi Beta Kappa in 1776, millions of women and men have held sororities and fraternities near and dear. Founded at William and Mary College in Williamsburg, Virginia, Phi Beta Kappa was established as a scholastic honor society that also functioned as a social organization.

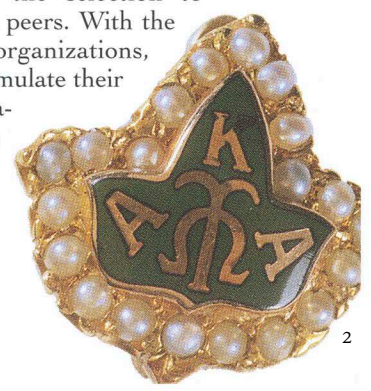
Kappa Alpha society, the first social fraternity, was founded in 1825 at Union College in Schenectady, New York, to help students develop socially and academically. Throughout the early and mid-19th century, the number of fraternities grew nationwide as university enrollment climbed. The strong presence of these organizations—and their houses—proved helpful at universities where living accommodations were inadequate to meet the needs of a rapidly growing student population.

Kappa Alpha Theta, the first women's fraternity (the generic name "fraternity" was once used for both women's and men's organizations), was founded in 1870 because women at DePauw University in Indiana desired a support system in their male-dominated environment.

Just as women organized to address special needs and concerns on campuses, so too did African Americans. Although young African American women and men attended mainstream institutions of higher learning in the early 1900s, the social climate was far from welcoming. André McKenzie, author of an article for the 1990 special edition of the *NASPA (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators) Journal*, noted that "due to the racial cleavage characteristic of the period, black students were regularly overlooked in the selection to fraternities by their white peers. With the creation of their own organizations, these students sought to emulate their white counterparts in organizational structure, while

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ORIGINS

Established in 1908, Alpha Kappa Alpha is the oldest Greek-letter organization founded by African American women.

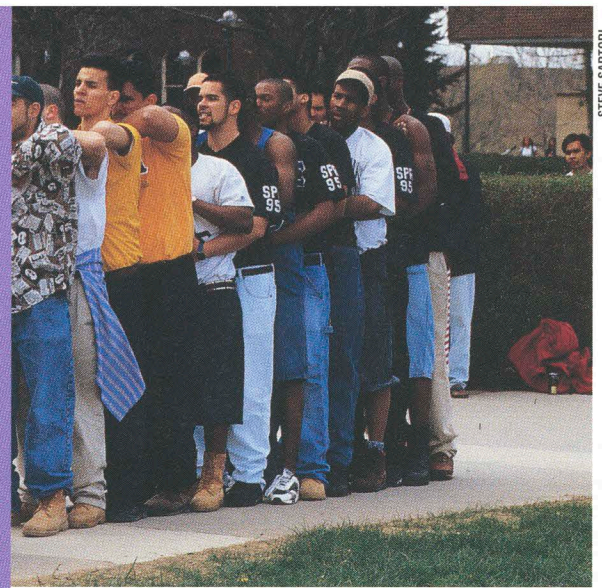
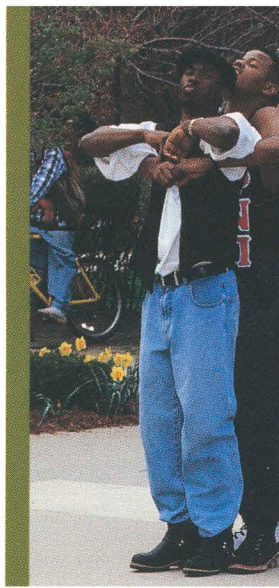


incorporating aspects of racial identification and cultural heritage.”

In 1906 at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, seven men recognized the need for a bond of brotherhood among African Americans on the predominantly white campus. They established Alpha Phi Alpha, the first intercollegiate Greek-letter fraternity for men of African descent. These founders envisioned an organization with principles of scholarship, fellowship, good character, and uplifting humanity. From this beginning, Alpha Phi Alpha now has chapters throughout the United States and in Europe, Asia, and Africa. “Manly deeds, scholarship, and pride for all mankind are our principles, and they provide a positive guide to live by,” says Steven King ’88. “I am especially proud to be an ‘Alpha Man’ because I have two distinct histories to take pride in: my family heritage, and the Alpha legacy of distinguished brotherhood.”

Cornell students weren’t alone in experiencing racial polarization. According to McKenzie, blacks at Indiana University in Bloomington were denied the use of entertainment and recreational facilities and could not participate in contact sports. Concerned for their social and academic development, Indiana students gathered in 1910 to explore these issues. The following year they formed Kappa Alpha Nu fraternity, which changed to Kappa Alpha Psi in 1915. “There were 13 African Americans at Indiana University in 1911, and 10 of them were men,” says Ronald Young G’75, national president of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Inc. “These men organized from a need to assemble for a common purpose and to improve social outlets in the college environment.” Today Kappa Alpha Psi has initiated more than 100,000 members and has more than 650 undergraduate and alumni chapters in the United States, Germany, Japan, Panama, the Bahamas, and St. Thomas. Plans to expand the organization into Africa are on the agenda for 1998.

Of the remaining six original African American fraternal organizations, only Sigma Gamma Rho sorority, founded in 1922 at Butler University in Indianapolis, began on a predominantly white campus. The others—Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority (1908), Omega Psi Phi fraternity (1911), Delta Sigma Theta sorority (1913), Phi Beta Sigma fraternity (1914), and Zeta Phi Beta sorority (1920)—were founded at the prominent, historically black Howard University in Washington, D.C. Collectively, these organizations played an integral part in the social development of African American college students at white and black institutions. “One of the greatest benefits of being affiliated with these organizations,”



Fraternities from SU’s 1995 Pan-Hellenic Council prepare for a collaborative exhibition step show at their annual end-of-the-school-year celebration, called Quad Freak.

“One of the greatest benefits of being affiliated with these organizations is that you become part of a tremendous history.”

says Young, “is that you become part of a tremendous history.”

At one time, Catholic and Jewish students attending SU were also left on the outside of Greek life, looking in. “SU started as a Methodist institution,” says Eleanor Ludwig ’43, G’45, former director of SU’s Office of Alumni Relations and a Kappa Alpha Theta sister. “That may have influenced how the Greek system developed.”

But the system didn’t remain that way. Catholic and Jewish students formed their own organizations. “We really didn’t think about it much at the time; it was just the way things were,” says Carol North Schmuckler ’57, G’85, a member of one of the then-all-Jewish sororities, Phi Sigma Sigma. “When I was in high school it was that way, so I really didn’t expect it to be different in college. Looking back, however, I remember that the University insisted that we rush all sororities. I guess they were trying to discourage discrimination even then.”

Joseph Rosenthal ’68 is a brother in the national fraternity Alpha Epsilon Pi, which was founded in 1913 on the ideals of honesty, courage, brotherhood, love of country, and faith in Jewish ethics and values. “Certain groups tend to stay together, and although this fraternity was not religious, it was comfortable for me to be with people of my faith,” Rosenthal says. “Beyond that, what I treasure most as an Alpha Epsilon Pi brother is the friendships I formed that last to this day.”

While Greeks may point with pride to their history, tradition, sisterhood, and brotherhood, outsiders point with disdain to newspaper headlines and television accounts of beer blasts, hazings, and other acts of public misbehavior that call into question the true purpose of these organizations.

As a national observer, Young confirms that serious infractions have occurred within the Greek sys-

higher PURPOSE

tem, and that steps have been taken to correct them. "College administrators have to keep in mind that not all members of Greek organizations are involved in this," he says. "Many times they are individual cases, isolated incidences."

To assist in improving relations between fraternity chapters and educational institutions where they reside, Kappa Alpha Psi hired six development leadership specialists to serve as regional contacts for college and university personnel. Opening communication in this way, says Young, leads to better understanding for all. "Most administrators still see Greeks as a liability and a high-risk issue," he says. "From our side we need to promote that there is, and always has been, a higher purpose for these chapters, and that is scholastic achievement."

The Office of Greek Life, too, stresses that the primary reason students are in college, Greek or not, is to get an education. The *Statement of Relationship* says that "each chapter must develop and maintain a scholastic program for its members that will serve to enhance and encourage their academic progress and set standards for its members." If a chapter's combined cumulative GPA slips below 2.0, it is automatically placed on probation until its standing improves. Greek organizations take the statement seriously: SU's fall 1996 grade rankings show the average GPA of all Greek students was 2.99, slightly higher than the average for non-Greek students.

The SU Subcommittee on Greek Life report also included a Student Perception of Student Life Survey. Looking at 1993 retention statistics for first-year students, the survey showed that 99 percent of Greek students returned, as opposed to 84 percent of the non-Greek population. Approximately 80 percent of Greek students, compared to 54 percent of non-Greek students, graduated in four years.

This report included recommendations regarding alcohol-related social functions, Greek housing, fiscal management, membership recruitment, new member education, and issues concerning African American fraternal organizations. All recommendations made by the subcommittee were implemented. "We had to make changes in the Greek system if it was going to survive," Wells says. "Those who are negatively affecting the quality of student life by hazing, abusing alcohol, fighting, and cheating will not welcome changes. However, those Greeks who want to facilitate positive learning experiences outside the classroom, develop true leadership and citizenship skills, and foster involvement in and loyalty to the University and community at large will be supported by the administration."

Debbie Prinz, Delta Gamma sister and president of SU's Panhellenic Council—the governing body for national sororities—feels the University community still holds many prejudices against the Greek system. "Non-Greeks are ignorant of what goes on, the faculty has limited knowledge of what we do, and the administration doesn't always give its full support," she says. "Therefore, we are often bad-mouthed." Greeks, she says, are working hard these

*"My role is to enhance their strengths and help them build on their experiences. I want to help them become better people by giving them a strong sense of who they are."*

days to bridge this gap. "Representatives from Greek organizations meet with Dean Wells once a month and are in regular contact with faculty advisors," Prinz says. "In the future, we hope to host a brunch where organization presidents and executive board members can meet with the various deans."

Earlier this year, the Office of Greek Life introduced the Academic Mentor Program, linking Greek organizations with University staff and faculty members. Mentors assist chapters in setting academic goals, identifying campus academic resources, and planning activities that allow for study time. "This is a meaningful way for staff and faculty to interact with Greeks," Nelson says. "Students govern themselves, but the mentor program gives peer leaders another resource."

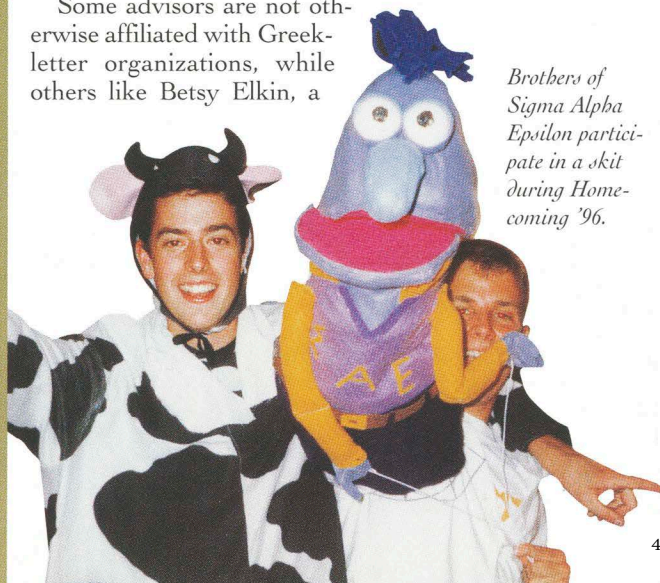
More than half of SU's sororities and fraternities are paired with mentors. There is no science to the connection—some Greeks seek out mentors, others choose from a list provided by the Office of Greek Life. In some instances, men now advise sororities, as with Sigma Gamma Rho, whose advisor is Robert Hill, vice president for public relations; and women are linked with fraternities, like Irma Almirall-Padamsee, associate dean of student relations, who advises Lambda Upsilon Lambda.

La Unidad Latina, Lambda Upsilon Lambda fraternity, is one of three SU Latino fraternal organizations. Founded at Cornell University in 1982, Lambda Upsilon Lambda is one of the first fraternal organizations on the East Coast to address the needs of the Latino community. With 20 undergraduate and four graduate chapters, the relatively young fraternity is striving to make its presence known. "White and black fraternities have been around for a long time, and we want to be accepted by them," says Lambda brother Zhamyr Cueva '93. "We are unique in that we are building an organization of different cultures that celebrates the richness of Latinos."

Lambda Upsilon Lambda found a home at Syracuse University in 1991 because none of the existing campus sororities and fraternities emphasized Latino culture. "My role is to enhance their strengths and help them build on their experiences," Almirall-Padamsee says. "I want to help them become better people by giving them a strong sense of who they are."

Some advisors are not otherwise affiliated with Greek-letter organizations, while others like Betsy Elkin, a

*Brothers of Sigma Alpha Epsilon participate in a skit during Homecoming '96.*



Gamma Delta Theta sister, and Roosevelt "Rick" Wright G'93, an Omega Psi Phi brother, are members and mentors. "All the brothers in my organization are, or will one day be, degree holders, because education is the key," Wright says. "Strong advisors for Greeks or non-Greeks keep students focused on the prize, which is education."

Dean Wells attributes some Greek discontent to sources outside the University, including the city of Syracuse. Beginning in spring 1995, the city prohibited Greeks from hosting large gatherings in their houses, citing zoning permit violations. Another source of friction is the New York State Liquor Authority, which denied a liquor license to caterers who served Greeks. "This combination changed the whole image of Greeks," Wells says.

Thanks to films like the 1978 release *Animal House*, Greeks were branded as beer-drinking party animals—but members insist this is not what Greek life is about. The Greek system extends its hand into the greater Syracuse area, and local neighborhood organizations often benefit from the community service performed by the chapters. Last year, Greeks collected \$34,000 for philanthropic causes and spent more than 10,000 hours performing community service, according to the Office of Greek Life.

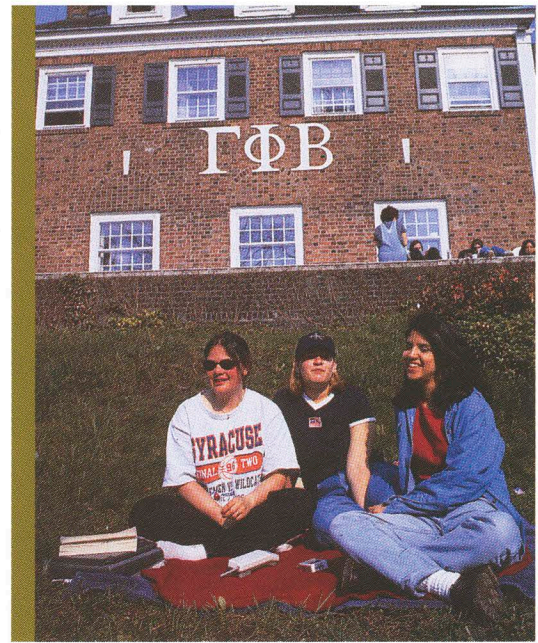
For example, on a cold Sunday night in March the women of Sigma Gamma Rho lay on the steps of Hendricks Chapel wrapped in sleeping bags. The sorority's goal was to collect money, clothing, and canned goods for the local Rescue Mission through its fifth annual Sleeping for the Homeless event. Whether tutoring students or collecting items for a food drive, service is an obligation for African American fraternal groups. "Historically, these organizations developed service endeavors that transcend the traditional character of college fraternities," says McKenzie.

Nicole Jones '93, G'97, member of Delta Sigma Theta, fondly remembers the contributions she and her sisters made to the Syracuse community. "Our undergraduate chapter provided mentoring and tutoring services for Bishop Foery and other local community centers," she says. "It was our obligation to extend ourselves, be readily supportive, and keep the lines of communication open for the younger generation."

Today, fraternal organizations at the University still place community empowerment high on their priority list. The brothers of Lambda Upsilon Lambda work with the Central New York Rotary Club Gift of Life program as Spanish translators for hospital patients from Latin American countries. The sisters of Gamma Phi Beta host an Easter party at the Southwest Community Center, a Halloween party at the sorority house, and a wheelchair square dance. They also coordinate the Color Wars, a com-

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Gamma Phi Beta sisters (from left to right) Rachel Adde-  
 ston, Naomi Froeblick, and President Stephanie Gallo  
 gather to study for finals in front of their house.

petition to raise money for their nationally sponsored summer camp for underprivileged girls in Vancouver, British Columbia. Sigma Alpha Mu focuses its efforts on raising money for pediatric AIDS patients with a basketball tournament and casino night. Kappa Alpha Theta women work as special advocates for abused children.

Because the Greek system is large, chapters combine forces for activities like Bounce for Beats for the American Heart Association, Crop Walk for hunger, Dome Day for the Salvation Army, and Habitat for Humanity. "Working together fosters a unified system," says Clarybel Peguera '97, sister of Sigma Gamma Rho, SU's 1997 Outstanding Greek Woman of the Year, and former president of the University's chapter of the National Pan-Hellenic Council—the governing body for the nine African American Greek organizations. "Aside from doing service projects together, we supported individual social events. We have a good relationship and I can honestly say it feels like we are one system."



COURTESY OF DELTA DELTA DELTA

Tina D'Orazio, president of Delta Delta Delta, rolls up her  
 sleeves at the sorority's sponge painting table during the 1997  
 Comstock Kids Fest.

People not affiliated with Greek organizations rarely hear about the community service efforts, and judge the students strictly on the bad press they receive. "Because we are always dealing with different types of people and different attitudes, our work is never done when trying to create and maintain a positive image," says Jason Davis '97, Delta Tau

## hazing TRAGEDIES & REFORM

Delta brother and former president of the Greek Council.

Hazing is an issue that looms over all Greek-letter organizations. "Hazing continues to be a challenging area, but the bottom line is that it is anti-

theoretical to fraternities," says Jonathan Brant, executive vice president of the National Interfraternity Conference—the umbrella organization for 63 fraternities. "It starts off as harmless fun, but gets out of control, often because of alcohol."

Earlier this year, eight brothers of Theta Chi at Clarkson University in Potsdam, New York, were arrested in connection with an alleged hazing-related death of a pledge. The young victim, Binaya Oja, reportedly stood in a semi-circle with other pledges and drank to unconsciousness. Later that night, the 17-year-old choked on his own vomit and died of asphyxiation.

A similar incident occurred 19 years ago at Alfred University in Alfred, New York. Chuck Stevens died from an alcohol-related pledging incident after consuming whiskey, wine, and beer while locked in the cold trunk of a car. Stevens's death was the result of acute alcohol poisoning and extended exposure to frigid temperatures.

Eileen Stevens, Chuck's mother, lived her worst nightmare. Aside from losing her son, she says, the most painful part was that "the university assumed no responsibility, local authorities deemed it an accidental death, and basically no one was held accountable."

Stevens channeled energy into positive action. She founded "Chuck," an organization dedicated to raising awareness, creating educational programs, assisting victims, and lobbying for anti-hazing laws in every state. In person or through written testimony, Stevens has been instrumental in getting anti-hazing laws passed or introduced in 40 states, including New York. She travels to colleges and universities, including Syracuse, to speak out against hazing. "Greeks were leery of my message at first because they didn't believe I wasn't anti-Greek," says Stevens. "I'm not opposed to them, just hazing. I speak as a mother and try to plant a seed that highlights the things that led to my tragedy."

Stevens says 98 percent of hazing incidents are alcohol related, and the activity is on the rise among women's groups in the Northeast. "Hazing is considered an important rite of passage that helps unify the group," Stevens says. "It comes in many forms: ridicule, scavenger hunts, sleep deprivation, and

extensive calisthenics. Some of the scars left are invisible, but permanent."

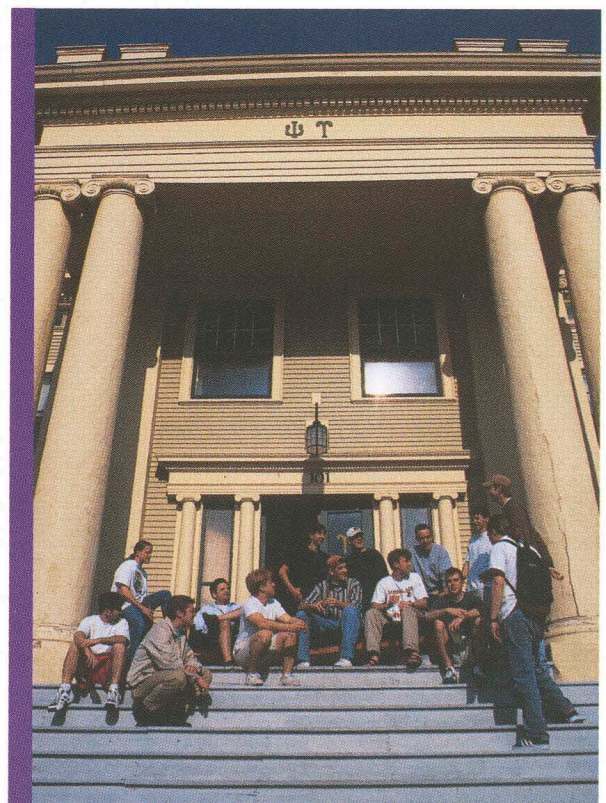
At Clarkson, a Greek review task force was formed to address concerns and strengthen the system. The national organizations of Sigma Nu and Phi Delta Theta became the first in the nation to pass policies—effective by the year 2000—banning alcohol from chapter houses. And the National Interfraternity Conference introduced *Select 2000*, a programming initiative that helps fraternities identify values, set goals, develop intellectually, and focus on positive attitudes by creating healthy environments.

Other answers came in the form of reshaping pledge processes. In 1990, the National Pan-Hellenic Council banned pledging. Young was on the Kappa Alpha Psi board of directors and participated in a meeting that changed the face of pledging. "At that meeting we all agreed to replace pledging with MIPs (Membership Intake Processes), which means you initiate and then train," he explains. Unfortunately, many members rebelled against the national organizations and violated rules and regulations, resulting in their expulsion.

On the SU campus, 10 Greek chapters were closed down because of hazing activities and three have recently been suspended. "All we ask of our Greek students is that they act responsibly," says Nelson. "We challenge our students to think: 'Are my actions relevant to the history and principles of my organization?'"

The Greek system has experienced highs and lows, and more fluctuations are likely to come. But deep-rooted traditions should allow it to continue for a long time. "The pendulum is always swinging and right now we're on the upswing," Davis says. "Our community is growing stronger and we're moving toward a more positive image."

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