

SIGMA ALPHA MU TEAMS UP TO FIGHT ALZHEIMER'S

Taking brotherhood and service to new levels of commitment

Sigma Alpha Mu fraternity has initiated a wide range of members into its brotherhood. Affectionately known as “Sammies,” these members have gone on to achieve considerable success. Author Phillip Roth, actors Paul Michael Glaser and Don Most and Las Vegas developer Steve Wynn, to name just a few, have each achieved recognition in their fields. Among these distinguished alumni is Marshall Gelfand, a member of the Alzheimer's Association National Board of Directors and founder of The Judy Fund, which raises money for the Association in honor of his late wife, Judy.

Marshall was instrumental in forging the relationship between Sigma Alpha Mu and the Alzheimer's Association in 2005, when the fraternity chose The Judy Fund as its national service project.

“Our mission is to guide undergraduates toward more meaningful lives, to prepare members for fraternity and community involvement and to create social and service opportunities for our alumni,” said Aaron Girson, executive director of Sigma Alpha Mu. “Marshall Gelfand's request to make the Alzheimer's Association our national charity was compelling and enthusiastically received by the board and by Sigma Alpha Mu members.”

In fact, Marshall received the fraternity's Certificate of Merit in 2005, which is awarded to Sigma Alpha Mu alumni in recognition of remarkable service and achievements in community endeavors.

Undergrads take to the courts. Sigma Alpha Mu has 59 chapters and colonies throughout the United States and Canada, with more than 3,000 student members at campuses that span the continent from Southern California to Toronto, Ontario.

Chapters host a wide range of fundraising events on behalf of the Alzheimer's Association. For example, the Epsilon Eta Chapter at Louisiana State University conducts an annual Sammy Slam Dodgeball Tournament.

The Epsilon Theta Chapter at the University of West Virginia holds a basketball tournament. Other chapters conduct barbecues, movie nights, concerts, date auctions and dance marathons.

Last year, Sigma Alpha Mu raised nearly \$25,000 for The Judy Fund. In order to make it easier for students to create effective fundraising events, the Alzheimer's Association created a special Sammy section on its Web site to highlight fundraising tools and tips, event ideas and new promotional materials.

In addition to raising money, Sigma Alpha Mu's efforts have raised awareness of Alzheimer's disease within its communities and membership. Students have come to understand the devastating effects of the disease on families. A number of students have become involved locally, participating in Memory Walk® events and volunteering at local Alzheimer's Association offices.

Universities are also recognizing the important contributions that the chapters are making to their campuses and their communities. The University of West Virginia honored the Epsilon Theta Chapter for its outstanding philanthropic work.

A challenge for more success. “As you look at our increasing levels of commitment to the Association and The Judy Fund, you need to remember our long history of service work,” said Aaron. “We are deeply committed to community involvement.”


The coming year marks a historic time for Sigma Alpha Mu — the 100th anniversary of the fraternity's founding. Today, undergraduates and alumni continue to embrace an ideal established in the early years of the fraternity: to extend their willingness to serve beyond the campus into the community and the world at large. No wonder Sigma Alpha Mu is such a growing part of the Alzheimer's Association team.



Members of Sigma Alpha Mu's Epsilon Theta Chapter at a West Virginia University basketball event held to raise funds for the Alzheimer's Association.

Marshall Gelfand wants to take that growth further. At the 2008 Sigma Alpha Mu National Convention, Marshall offered a challenge to the members for the coming year. If the group doubles last year's fundraising achievement, he will personally add \$25,000. That means a potential donation of \$75,000 or more to The Judy Fund.

"The Judy Fund was established by my family in 2003 to honor my wife, who was diagnosed with Alzheimer's at the age of 62 and lost her nine-year battle with the disease in 2004," Marshall said. "I know Judy would be proud that her philanthropic spirit has inspired an entire fraternity to rally behind this important cause."

In keeping with a cherished, century-old tradition, the members of Sigma Alpha Mu will continue to work together to lift the messages of the Alzheimer's Association to new heights. 

Five tips to get your organization involved in the cause

Aaron Girson, executive director of Sigma Alpha Mu, offers these suggestions to get your membership organization involved in the mission of the Alzheimer's Association:

1. Leverage your message and your membership. As the sixth-leading cause of death in America, it's likely that Alzheimer's disease has affected or will affect a large portion of your membership personally. Your message becomes a call to action when it hits home.
2. Let members know that progress is being made in Alzheimer research and care. A world without Alzheimer's disease is possible — with your help.
3. Make a strong case for the fact that your organization and its members can — and should — make a real difference. Demonstrate that your mission statement is more than just talk. Put your membership muscle to work.
4. Highlight the fact that the Alzheimer's Association is an excellent custodian of the funds entrusted to it. With 77 percent of its annual expenses going to program activities, the Alzheimer's Association exceeds the BBB Wise Giving Alliance standards.
5. Ask early and often. People want to help but sometimes don't know where to start. You do.

To find out more about how you might be able to engage your organization in the important work of the Alzheimer's Association, contact Amy Hubbell, associate director of organization and foundation relations, at amy.hubbell@alz.org or 312.335.5189.