



You can't just start a fraternity!

It all started at “Night on the Sixth Floor II” in the fall of 1977. There were almost 20 of us, who after a full year of living together on the sixth floor of Nye Hall came back for a second year. We had formed an unusual bond and displayed a true zest for college living. With a delay in finding an R.A. (resident assistant) willing to take on the infamous men’s side of the dorm, we wasted no time having a party. It was so successful that two weeks later we held the aforementioned gathering, which featured almost 400 party-goers, a live band in the laundry room, complaints from as far away as Sparks and an exciting night for the campus police. Despite all of those memorable aspects, it was the comment of one now forgotten coed who said to me in passing “This is so great up here, you guys are like your own independent fraternity!”

While I had rushed fraternities my fresh-

man and sophomore years, I did not join one, primarily due to the fact that we had formed our own “band of brothers” on the sixth floor. However there were some things that fraternities had that we didn’t. Organized intramural teams, regularly scheduled social events, fun pledge rituals, and, if you believe the ridiculous brochures, a strong study environment. All of which sounded appealing. However, it was the lack of recognition from sorority girls that reigned supreme. Thus, the journey began to give birth to a new and independent fraternity.

When I first began to float the idea to my sixth floor brethren there was almost unanimous scoffing amid multiple refrains of “You can’t just start a fraternity.” Undaunted, I inquired with the Dean of Students Robert Kinney, who said, “It’s never been done and I’m not sure it will work, but there are no rules against it.” That’s all I needed to hear. So in the

spring semester of 1978, I put posters all over the campus inviting male students to a meeting introducing the University’s first independent fraternity.

Ten minutes after the meeting was to start, a few guys came in, followed by a few more until we hit an unimpressive total of less than 20, all but two from the sixth floor of Nye Hall. But with a vision, relentless persistence and the stupidity of not knowing any better, I launched into a 20-minute speech describing what this new fraternity would be like (as I had no clue what I was talking about, I emphasized the sorority angle). Thinking I had spun a web that captured everyone’s heart, I asked for questions, knowing the first one would be, “Where do I sign up?” But alas, the first and only question was a cynical “What you described, Scott, sounds pretty good, but without a frat house it’s just a club, and a club is lame. Find us



TOP: The original Omega Xi fraternity in 1978 on the Ninth Street steps leading to Morrill Hall, on the southern edge of campus. LEFT: Omega Xi 2008 reunion (about half were present for the original photo): FIRST ROW: Glen Daily '84 (civil engineering), '08 (construction management); David Durst '81 (business management); Bruce Hicks '82 (business management); Mat Waddington '83 (business management); Greg Carry '86 (accounting), Jerry Eykelbosh '87 (geology); Karl Riebeling '86 (geology), Ed Martins '01 (civil engineering). SECOND ROW: Eric Riebeling '88 (geology); Rick Havenstrite '80 (mining engineering); Bart Fisher '81 (business administration); Patrick O'Day '81 (business), '93MBA; Scott Addison (geological engineering); Peter McAllester '85 (mechanical engineering); Curtis Ellis (biology); THIRD ROW: Mitch DeValliere (biology), Jeff Rouse '82 (business management); Roger Lancaster '82 (mechanical engineering); Guy Gansert '80 (biology), '86M.D. BACK ROW: Charlie Niggemyer '80 (mining engineering); Warren Kocmond '82 (mechanical engineering); Ken Lancaster '83 (mechanical engineering); Joe McGinley '80 (geological engineering); Geoff Williams '85 (mechanical engineering) TOP, SITTING: Jack Lyons '83 (business management) TOP, STANDING: Tyler Regan '80 (journalism) and Scott Koepf '80 (business/music).

a house and then you might have something.” Everyone else shook their heads in agreement and shuffled out, except my friend Tyler, who simply said, “They are right, but I’ll help you find a house, because this could be so cool.” With one believer I was emboldened. The search began.

We spent a few weeks looking at every house for sale or rent within a mile of the University. Not only did we not find anything remotely feasible, but even if we had found a suitable house, we had no money or credit. After about a month, things looked bleak and I was about to give up when I heard about a boarding house on Lake Street across from Evans Park, one half block from campus. When Tyler and I walked up we both knew it was the perfect house— ugly, old and the next-door neighbor was the freeway. Mrs. Young, the new owner,

was there, and somehow we convinced her to entertain our idea. She set up a breakfast meeting with her husband, who was not only an attorney but also State Senator Cliff Young.

Had I thought about how ridiculous my request was, I would have probably no-showed. Instead, I told him I wanted a one-year lease at a reduced price for a bunch of college kids with no money who would be in a fraternity that did not yet exist. No matter how much I poured on my enthusiasm and embellished the reality it was still an outrageously bad story. However, for reasons that will forever be a mystery to me (and given it was a breakfast meeting, adult beverages could not even be blamed) not only did he offer a two-year lease at a fair price with no upfront deposit, but he proceeded to draw up incorporation papers so that I wouldn’t have personal liability when I

signed the lease. Rest assured adult beverages did come into play later that day.

Against the odds we now had a house and it was time to show it off. Through word of mouth, as well as Tyler and I promoting door-to-door in the dorms, we had about 30 guys interested in a tour of the house. Expectations were high. As we walked to the house, there was universal excitement about the location. Then we went inside.

As I mentioned, this was a boarding house and, unfortunately, most people have no ability to see what could be instead of what is. However, this little tour even had me questioning if this was

indeed the perfect house. The smell inside was almost as thick as the dirt and grime on the walls—both of which caused some physical reactions in the group. In two rooms, there were at least five or six people sharing the space in pretty awful conditions. The crowning touch was answering the pay phone at the top of the stairs two times during the tour. Both calls were to check on Trixie’s availability in room 202. I don’t remember if we actually checked with her, but she had a good business going! From the more than 30 guys who took the tour, fewer than 15 could see past the disaster and actually signed up (two signed up contingent upon Trixie not being evicted when we moved in).

We did not have a big group, but it was enough to keep the dream alive. Tyler and I met in the summer, and after hours of research

came up with our fraternity name. I would love to tell you it had special secret meaning in Greek, but we just thought it sounded good. And so with the University's approval, Omega Xi was born. Little did we know that the challenges were just beginning!

On Aug. 14, 1978, we took possession of the house. Tyler and I were giddy with excitement as we walked up to the front door. It may be hard to imagine two college boys as giddy, but it only lasted a few moments. The smell and dirt we had seen during the tour had taken on lives of their own and seemed to be breeding as we watched. In some rooms the filth was over a foot thick, but the most interesting surprise was right in the middle of the living room. It seems the tenants were not too happy to have been evicted so they had tried to burn the whole house down. While they failed in that attempt, they did manage to burn a hole in the living room floor about four feet square. The fire had been set in the basement and had destroyed most of the wiring in the house. In seven days, rush would start, and we would be giving tours of this rat-infested, burned-out hovel in the hope of convincing new members and pledges to live here. Suddenly this whole idea just sucked.

We didn't really have a choice, so for the next week we put in 18- to 20-hour days joined by those few good men who had committed to live in the house. A couple of them turned around and walked out the moment they saw the place, but most simply started cleaning. Two days before rush we actually had a house worth showing. With new paneling, paint and carpet, upstairs looked good and downstairs wasn't bad either except for that pesky hole in the living room. We were feeling good until we heard pounding on the front door and it wasn't one of us. I opened the door to see the city building inspector putting the last nail in the "condemned" sign. He informed me that they could not grant a certificate of occupancy unless we had an electrician sign off on the rewiring (we had pretty much arbitrarily stuck the burnt wires back together using duct tape) and have a contractor guarantee to fix the hole



801 Lake Street, as it appeared in the original promotional brochure for Omega Xi. The house still stands today.

in the floor. We were never informed of all of the previous notices sent so he told us we had 24 hours to get the electrical done and the floor work scheduled. Smarter people would have thrown in the towel, but we had gone too far to call it quits.

We found a contractor who would guarantee the floor would be fixed in a few weeks and then after numerous phone calls we found an electrician who would sign off on the paperwork if he could get all of us to do the work. He sat drinking in a corner of the basement while barking orders to 12 of us clueless "journeymen" as we were shocked, burned and branded throughout the night. On the morning of the first day of rush the inspector came back and said he never would have believed it possible, but took down the condemned sign and allowed us to stay.

The rush tours came through all day and as we ushered them into the living room, I would launch into an eloquent speech about having vision and seeing beyond the obvious. Tyler would then, at the perfect moment, pop up through the hole in the floor and describe our plans for a hot tub sunken into the floor. A few naïve freshmen actually believed us and joined "the house with the Jacuzzi."

The house was really not much of a draw, but the word spread about a different and unique fraternity on campus. At our first Monday night meeting we had more than 35 attendees. It was at that meeting that the origi-

nal and true motivation for all of these efforts came to fruition. As we wrapped up our meeting we heard singing in front of the house. We all ran out to the front porch and stood dumbfounded as one of the sororities stood there serenading us with special sorority songs. I have no idea how many girls were there, but it had to be hundreds (age is a wonderful thing when it comes to selective memory). When they finished they stood there and looked expectantly at us to sing back to them. Once again, we had no idea we needed to have a song but I was not about to leave them disappointed. So I pulled everyone together and in what I am sure was Grammy quality, we sang "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" to them in full voice. That did it. We were now not only recognized by sororities, but known as the unique and spontaneous men of Omega Xi.

With no real plan, no national fraternity support and an almost universal chorus of "that's impossible," Omega Xi became the third largest fraternity at the University of Nevada, Reno and won the Mackay Day competition in our first year. The fraternity thrived for almost 10 years, then finally shut down. Staying independent had its price. We were courted heavily by many national fraternities, but chose to stay independent. Without a backer or mature alumni group, it did not survive. But oh, what a ride it was! More importantly, and unknown to us at the time, the men of Omega Xi are still close friends today, more than 30 years after the founding of an independent fraternity born on the sixth floor of Nye Hall. More than 30 brothers came together at Homecoming this year to celebrate the 30th anniversary of this unique fraternity. □

Scott Koepf, the founder of Omega Xi, graduated in 1980 with a bachelor of arts degree in music and a bachelor of science in business. He currently is president of an association of travel agents, having been in the travel industry for more than 25 years. He is also a motivational speaker who has shared this story and others to thousands of people all over the world.