

Old Gal Celebrates 164th Anniversary

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NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT - Our Brotherhood will recognize the Old Gal this Sunday, celebrating her achievements and the achievements of our Brothers. In honor of our founding, Brothers are encouraged to wear their badge. This year the Fraternity asked an alumnus to share his thoughts on the significance of this anniversary - here in his words is our 2009 Founders Day message.

When I recently learned that the Fraternity's theme for the coming year is aggressive growth – growth in number of chapters, and in number of members – my first reaction was confusion. How could we be focusing on growth in the midst of such great loss? After all, this past year witnessed the worst economic recession that many of us have ever experienced, with skyrocketing unemployment and foreclosures. Many students can no longer afford to continue their enrollment at colleges and universities, and many baby boomers have lost much of their retirement savings. In my own work as a city councilman in Maryland, I have been forced to slash budgets and imperil important services.

In times like these, we just hunker down and try to survive; we don't try to grow, right?

Wrong. It is times of hardship that offer the greatest opportunities for growth. As our fraternal tradition teaches, when we are faced with our own limitations—our own mortality—we do not throw in the towel and give up. Rather, we harness these insights to inspire us to come together and build something greater and more lasting than any one individual can accomplish alone.

Anyone can lead when things are going well; anyone can thrive in a season of bounty. But the rigorous challenges of difficult times present a special chance for personal and spiritual growth. These times help us to set aside materialistic distractions and petty concerns, to remember what's truly important and to recommit ourselves to our core values. Indeed, with so many more people in need, we are presented with even more chances to serve others.

Ancient Greek scholarship, from which many of our symbols and ceremonies originate, tells of the myth of Hercules and the Path of the Hero. Only by laboring and struggling through the most trying of circumstances did Hercules earn the title of "hero." Similarly, in many of our religious faiths, only by suffering and sacrifice and service to others do we achieve enlightenment and spiritual reward.

And so, perhaps ironically, it is when things are toughest that we are most able to fulfill the high purposes of our sacred oath as brothers of Alpha Sigma Phi. There is no shortage of people in need, no dearth of good causes to assist. In our current epoch of struggle and adversity, the demand for leadership, compassion, and service is enormous. Our great Pinnacle of Fame may ascend endlessly heavenward, but we must never forget that it begins right here on the ground, reminding us that our task of Bettering the Man is a "bottom-up" endeavor. Our majestic Phoenix teaches the same lesson, by rising from the ashes before it can fly. Only by starting at the lowest point do we reach the highest heights.

So, in the midst of such dire straits, I am proud to see that our visionary Fraternity leaders refuse to squander this extraordinary opportunity to grow. Let us come together and rededicate our time and resources to helping our families, our Brotherhood, our communities, and our planet. Let us be a welcoming haven for men of good character who seek to

do and be more, to rise above the troubles they encounter. Let us grow not only our membership but also our hearts and minds, and let us grow the presence of kindness and wisdom and peace in the world. That is my wish for you and your loved ones this holiday season.

Don't be daunted by the magnitude of the task before us. Even small gestures will go a very long way for the countless people who are desperately in need. Bankers and politicians and generals and academics will study the troubles of our day and try to determine the causes of the many challenges we now face. Those causes may never be truly understood. But when we act, my brothers, the results will be well-known.

I am honored to share my reflections with you on this Founders Day, as I have done with the brothers of my Epsilon Delta Chapter at the University of Maryland for over ten years. I look back on the last year with a sense of relief that some of our worst struggles are behind us. But more importantly, I look forward to the year ahead with optimism and hope that despite ongoing challenges—or perhaps because of them—it will be a wonderful time for all of us, and especially for the Old Gal, to grow.

Happy Founders Day.

Yours in the Mystic Circle, Ryan Spiegel, Maryland '98

Alpha Sigma Phi Fraternity, Inc. was founded at Yale University in 1845, and currently recognizes 70 chapters and colonies across the country. The Fraternity aims to be the co-curricular organization of choice for discerning young men through the provision of an enriching brotherhood experience and a full range of character and leadership development opportunities. The national headquarters of Alpha Sigma Phi Fraternity is located in Carmel, Indiana.