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Sorority gets a house on OU campus

By **Jeff Samoray**, *OU Web Writer*

Oakland University's **Phi Sigma Sigma** sorority has become the first Greek organization to have a house located on OU's campus.

On August 21, seven members of the sorority moved into a university-owned home located on OU property east of Adams Road near the west campus entrance.

The two-story, 2,000-square-foot residence makes an ideal sorority house, said Sue Padden, Phi Sigma Sigma house manager.

"Every sorority wants to have a house to strengthen the sisterhood and to provide a 24-hour central meeting point," Padden said. "However, to find a house for a sorority is just about next to impossible. A portion of our dues every year went to a 'hopeful house' fund, and we did actually look a couple of years ago, but we couldn't afford anything in Rochester and didn't have a lot of other options.

"When this house became available, we jumped at the chance to move in. It's very spacious and never cramped. The number of girls living here is ideal. Having the house really bonds our chapter. It gives us something to be proud of."

The house, built around 1918, once served as a residence for staff of the Meadow Brook farm. The university acquired the home and others in the neighborhood around 1957, when Matilda and her second husband, Alfred Wilson, donated their Meadow Brook estate and \$2 million to found Oakland University. The neighborhood is now known as the "cottage district," which houses graduate assistants and faculty members.

The Phi Sigma Sigma house became slated for use by a student organization after it was vacated two years ago. Two organizations submitted housing proposals, and **University Housing** selected **Phi Sigma Sigma** based on its explanation of why its members wanted a house and how the sorority would benefit by establishing residency.

The remaining homes in the cottage district will be made available to other student organizations as they are vacated, said Eleanor Reynolds, director of University Housing.

Phi Sigma Sigma is acting as a pilot in this program, Reynolds said. The sorority has use of the house through the end of the 2001-2002 academic year with the option to renew their agreement with the university for another year.

"This is a work in progress with no timelines," Reynolds said. "But we've been very pleased with Phi Sigma Sigma. They've been wonderful to work with, very cooperative and helpful. We've been so impressed by their maturity. It gives us the incentive to make more of those houses available in the future to other student organizations."

Phi Sigma Sigma still holds its regular meetings in the **Oakland Center**, but uses the house for recruitment events, study nights and other group activities. The sorority gave its executive board priority for residency, followed by senior members. But the house is open to all Phi Sigma Sigma members. Each of the seven residents pays \$2,941 per academic year to live there – the same housing cost for the residence halls. The funds the sorority has collected in its 'hopeful house' fund now will be applied toward the purchase of dishes, a television for the living room and other items for future use.

The university spent about \$85,000 this summer to renovate the home for the sorority. The major work included gutting and remodeling the kitchen and two bathrooms; replacing the roof, carpet and storm doors; painting inside and outside; paving the former gravel drive and creating additional parking spaces; and installing new appliances including a stove, refrigerator, washer, dryer, furnace and hot water heater; A third bathroom also is being installed in the basement.

The university purchased new furniture for the home, except for the beds and dressers, which were previously used in the residence halls.

To ensure safety, the university installed a fire suppression system including smoke detectors, sprinklers and an alarm system. OU Police also regularly patrol the area.

It didn't take long for the sorority residents to realize the advantages of having a house. After having lived there for only two months, several of its residents said they're already becoming attached.

"The house has brought the family aspect of sisterhood into the chapter," said senior and Phi Sigma Sigma Member at Large Heather Whitfield. "I'm also an only child, so living here is like being with a family. There's always someone home or someone to talk to. And it's not just us tenants, but the house is open to all of our sisters. Leaving this house would break my heart."

SUMMARY

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