

Update from Bob Ferrara '67, Division of Student Life

June 27, 2011

Hello FSILG alums,

This is the June edition of the semiannual message regarding MIT's Fraternity, Sorority, and Independent Living Group (FSILG) community. There are many successes and a few setbacks to report. As current volunteers can attest, there are more challenges and a more competitive environment than in times past. But with our support, these groups can continue to provide, for current and future generations of MIT students, the intense shared educational and personal development experience that we enjoyed.

I. FSILG Community Highlights

SAE Finds a Home. Many of you remember Sigma Alpha Epsilon, better known as SAE, as a very important campus presence, and that is becoming the case once again. After closing the chapter in 1999 following a string of infractions, local alumni and the SAE national collaborated to restart a colony at MIT two years ago. In the fall of 2010, the SAEs were formally granted colony status by the IFC. The next milestone is finding a chapter house, since the SAE Beacon Street properties were sold not long after the chapter closed. SAE has now secured a three year lease for Alpha Epsilon Pi's annex at 165 Bay State Road. Besides negotiating a three year lease, the Alumni Corporation also committed substantial funds to upgrade the property.

Even before securing their new quarters, the SAE colony has built significant momentum, with a solid recruiting year. Other efforts included substantial fund raising for their chosen philanthropy of Camp Kasem, which serves children of parents with cancer. This May the SAE Colony was recognized with the first-ever FSILG&D Community Service Award (The D stands for Dormitories, so every living group on campus was part of this). In addition, the SAEs received the David Rogers Award, presented to the group for their pursuit of Scholarship, Leadership, Character and Service. Clearly, this new colony is off to a healthy start, on a course worthy of the best of the SAE legacy here.

Beta Theta Pi Suspends Operations. Beta Theta Pi has been among the strongest MIT fraternities for most of the almost ten decades the fraternity has had an MIT chapter. Thus it was with heavy heart that the local Alumni Corporation, the chapter Advisory team, and the National Fraternity jointly decided to close the chapter for two years and restart in the fall of 2013. They felt that, given the pattern of risk management incidents and resulting IFC sanctions and declining membership over the past few years, a fresh start is the best and surest way to restore Beta to its historic position on the MIT campus. This decision was communicated to the alumni and actives immediately after Commencement earlier this June.

From my perspective, the Alumni Corporation was as careful and deliberate as possible, given the gravity of the decision. They worked with MIT to make sure housing was available for undergraduates in the dormitories next term. On receiving the news, however, a handful of undergraduates in the chapter house reacted very poorly and even damaged some of the rooms; their energy would have been better spent on recruiting the last few years. Those familiar with the chapter the past few years, like the FSILG Office and the AILG Accreditation teams, agree that something needed to be done to create a fundamental change in direction. That has happened. Now the alumni will be tracing a path like SAE's in rebuilding a chapter. They have an invitation from MIT to return to campus in the fall of 2013, and prior to that, the Beta alumni will participate in the April, 2013 Campus Preview Weekend to identify a new founding class. We wish them the very best.

Two Successful Dinners. This past April 27, IFC President Gordon Wintrob '12 and his team went all out to invite numerous MIT faculty and administration members to their Faculty Dinner, which was held, appropriately enough, in the MIT Faculty Club. The results of their efforts were impressive, as this was the best attended such event in over a decade. Outreach to faculty is important, as both alumni and undergrads recognize, since far fewer of today's faculty were MIT undergrads and thus do not appreciate how distinctive – and positive – the FSILG community experience is on this campus. One important faculty ally is Professor Paul Lagace '78, who has assisted several chapters in recruiting Faculty Advisors.

The Annual Dinner of the [Association of Independent Living Groups](#) (AILG) also was a memorable occasion. The keynote speaker, MIT's new Chancellor Eric Grimson PhD '80, invited the assembled alumni to meet the challenges coming with the next generation of students heading to MIT. The AILG board also took the occasion to honor outgoing board member and former AILG Chair, Steve Baker '84 of Theta Xi.

The AILG dinner has a business side as well. The annual report was discussed by AILG Chair Ernie Sabine '66 of Student House, next year's budget was approved, and board elections were conducted. This year two women won election to the six-person AILG board. Sara Pierce Wilmer '03 of Sigma Kappa was re-elected to her second three-year term; currently she serves very capably as AILG Treasurer. She is now joined by Alice Leung '93 of Epsilon Theta. Steve Stuntz '67 of Sigma Phi Epsilon and Tom Yu '96 of Fenway House were also re-elected as Ombudspersons. Thanks to all of these people for taking on these additional roles in service to the FSILG community.

MIT Alumni Involved in Tau Epsilon Phi National Reorganization. This is a very unusual story, but one with a good ending. While MIT's Tau Epsilon Phi chapter has remained strong, nationally TEP has been losing chapters for a number of years. Seeking change, several chapters sued TEP's board of directors over their failure to hold an election since 1999. In response to a resulting legal order last January, the National filed for Chapter 7 bankruptcy, an action which froze all local chapter assets. Our MIT Xi Chapter alumni stepped in to provide the necessary funds, while the staff at the FSILG Office helped the undergraduates navigate recognition, insurance, and licensing issues; together they minimized any impact on the students' academic lives during the extended legal and bankruptcy proceedings.

In May a settlement was reached under which all claims against the National were dropped, the bankruptcy case was dismissed, and an interim board of directors was appointed to manage the Fraternity. The interim board includes Rob Calhoun '90 and Kyle Miller '12, the Alumni Board President and undergraduate Chancellor (president) respectively of MIT's Xi chapter. This board has already reactivated four chapters, created a new website, and scheduled a convention for next October. Rob, Kyle and the other directors here have been thankful for the outpouring of financial and moral support from TEP alumni and for the administrative support from MIT. All of us fully expect our MIT Xi Chapter will emerge from this ordeal both stronger, wiser and once again a chapter of Tau Epsilon Phi!

Phi Sigma Kappa on a Roll. In my last message, Phi Sigma Kappa's outstanding alumni newsletter was singled out for special mention. One innovation that should have been emphasized even more is the customized [Alumni Map](#) adapted from Alumni Associations "Planet MIT." This provides a searchable world view of all the MIT Phi Sigs. This tool has been used effectively in organizing regional reunions, as the fraternity just did for Southern California and then Northern California. Very Cool. They are also justly proud that three of the four national Phi Sigma Kappa scholarship award winners this year were members of the MIT chapter. Finally, the chapter received first place for the prestigious [D. Reid Weedon '41 Award](#) this year, given annually to the FSILG with the most outstanding alumni relations program. Well done!

II. Alumni Achievements.

Milestone Anniversaries for Alpha Chi Omega and Zeta Beta Tau. This past May, Alpha Chi Omega, MIT's second oldest sorority, celebrated their 25th anniversary at MIT. They have much to celebrate. The AXO chapter house at 478 Commonwealth Avenue, their home since 1994, is exquisitely maintained and the food is superb. The sisters are accomplished and active in all phases of campus life, and the organization routinely is listed on the Academic Honor Roll, as their collective GPA is among the top on campus. Last year they were chosen by their national as the most outstanding AXO chapter in the country.

Zeta Beta Tau fraternity has a similar record of accomplishment at MIT, stretching a century back to Boston Tech days. Located farthest of all FSILGs from campus in a residential Brookline neighborhood, the ZBTs have a solid record of attracting great young men to their spacious townhouse. And they, too, are listed on the Academic Honor Roll. Their 100th Anniversary Reception on the June Reunion weekend drew close to a hundred guests from all eras. It was a grand time. (Incidentally, one of ZBT's many distinguished alums is Larry Bacow '72, former MIT Chancellor. Though currently Tufts University president, Larry is still vitally interested in MIT campus life and comments periodically on these messages). Key dates, for these and all the other FSILGs are maintained on this [FSILG history website](#). If you notice an addition or correction, please let me know. My contact information is at the end of the message.

FSILG Awards Honor Alums. As usual, there was a great and deserving group of alums to honor at the annual [FSILG Awards Ceremony](#), which is held just before finals every May. Although the primary purpose is to recognize undergraduate chapters and leaders, this event has evolved into a very meaningful ceremony that includes our alumni volunteers. In any year, you could pick dozens of deserving alums to represent the efforts of the 200+ volunteers who give their time (and usually more) to our FSILGs. This year, 11 FSILG alums were selected for the Outstanding Alumni Volunteer Awards. All did yeoman work in the chapters and several contributed greatly to the community-wide efforts of the AILG. In addition, three recent alums were honored for their commitment as live-in Resident Advisors.

Two alumni were honored with the new category of "Lifetime Achievement Award. Joe Chapman '79 of Tau Epsilon Phi was recognized for his years of devoted service under extremely difficult circumstances. The TEP item in the first section of this message provides a hint of the struggles our local chapter has been through and only now are being resolved with the conclusion of legal proceedings. Denman (Denny) McNear '48 of Chi Phi was cited for his long and sustained involvement in our Chi Phi chapter and his contributions to the national Chi Phi organization, which this year bestowed on Denny its highest national recognition, the Walter Cronkite Award.

AILG Accreditation Program Wins Great Dome Award. The [Association of Independent Living Groups](#) (AILG) has been evolving the [Accreditation Program](#) in partnership with the Dean for Student Life for six years now. This alumni-run peer review effort, based on an academic Visiting Committee model, has proved its mettle with over one hundred half-day sessions at FSILGs. The first visits began with a couple of AILG volunteer reviewers and a few alumni and undergrad officers. Each year the number of attendees grows, as the participants have learned that these visits – because of the preparation that goes into them - are just about the best, most efficient means to understand how not only your own organization works but also lessons from other FSILGs. They are a terrific learning experience. Just over a year ago, the Association of Fraternity Advisors recognized this program for the "Excellence in Programming Award". Now - for its success in involving hundreds of alumni volunteers in a highly focused effort - the Alumni Association is recognizing the AILG's Accreditation Program with the Great Dome Award, its highest organizational honor. The past four Accreditation Committee Chairs - Jim Bueche '62, Susan Woodmansee '97, Herman Marshall '78 and David Hutchings '10 - will be accepting the award, which will be conferred at September's [Alumni Leadership Conference](#).

FSILGs Host Reunion Weekend Receptions. Twenty-eight FSILGs participated in the [Living Group Open Houses](#) for this past June's Reunion weekend. These events are now proving to be a permanent fixture of this busy weekend. The original idea was to afford an opportunity for alumni returning for their Class Reunions to visit their old MIT living group. This weekend is hardly an ideal time to have visitors, with most undergrads leaving for the summer while summer boarders are moving in. Nonetheless most FSILGs are now going the extra mile to welcome returning brothers and sisters. Some enterprising groups, like Delta Upsilon, also extended the invitation to local alums and turn the afternoon into a very special time. This year, especially since the house already had a good cleaning, Dave Latham '61 and his fellow DUs also invited over the parents of graduating seniors. Something like 25 family members dropped by and they really seemed to appreciate the chance to relax after the long ceremony in Killian Court. This might be a wonderful practice for the rest of us to emulate.

And for the second year in row, the Non-Resident Student Association (NRSA)/5:15 Club used the occasion for a reunion reception. This is truly amazing since this group has not existed in 25 years! This [Alumni Association blog post](#) explains the special history of this "commuter fraternity". Past NRSA Presidents Allen Clark '63, Steve Corman '58, and Dave Williams '61 planned the event. They were pleased when another former president, Ray Magliozzi '72 of "Car Talk" fame, again attended. Another notable present was Fred Salvucci '61, father of Boston's famed "Big Dig", a true civil engineering feat.

Phi Beta Epsilon Alumni Focusing on Chapter Renewal. After a lengthy negotiation concerning last fall's IFC sanctions, Phi Beta Epsilon and MIT issued a [joint statement](#) last March 4 on a resolution of outstanding issues. The alumni immediately set to work reinvigorating their chapter, scheduling an alumni-active retreat for that very weekend. Close to a hundred PBEs attended with a goal, in the words of Alumni Corporation President Steve Carhart '70, "to reboot the whole fraternity experience to address fraternity life in the 21st century and provide a lifelong intergenerational fraternal experience". While there have been bumps in the road since, PBE alumni have been answering the call for support. This is especially vital since PBE, like the ILGs and Nu Delta Fraternity, has no national and is an MIT-only fraternity.

III. MIT News

MIT 150th Anniversary Ends With a Bang! MIT's [150th Anniversary](#) celebrations concluded with an enormous free party for 8,000 in Killian Court on Saturday night, June 4. The evening included copious fireworks, an enormous cake, and lots of good cheer. It really was as good as [these pictures](#). There were many other signature events in this 150 day period. An MIT Campus Open House on April 30 attracted something like 20,000 visitors from all over. Several of us collaborated on an FSILG table; located conveniently in the high traffic zone in front of Student Center. We happily dispensed information about our remarkable FSILGs and collected stories and historical items that might be preserved in the MIT Archives or even in a planned MIT residential life Time Capsule. Led by former AILG board member Dave Burmaster '69, this FSILG historical preservation initiative will conclude in July, when items will be offered to the Archives or sealed in the Time Capsule. Dave has been communicating regularly with the MIT Archives and every one of our FSILG Alumni Corporations. If you have something special to contribute, please contact Dave at d@alum.mit.edu.

This anniversary has afforded a lot of occasions for just plain fun—MIT-style. For example, check out this [YouTube video](#) of a Flash Mob dance in Lobby 7. Certainly, this anniversary has also been a time to reflect on the Institute's special history and future. One learning moment for me was the discovery of how prescient and far-reaching is William Barton Rogers educational vision and the importance of learning by doing. At its time, his views were radical and nontraditional. This experience-based philosophy is still an important part of the MIT FSILG success, where students must take responsibility for their lives and living conditions and, in effect, operate a substantial small business.

405 Memorial Drive Readied for FSILG Occupancy. The Division of Student Life (DSL) has committed that this building, the former home of Alpha Tau Omega fraternity, will be available for FSILG occupancy by August of 2012. Since ATO transferred ownership to the Institute, MIT Facilities has been refurbishing the structure, including new windows and heating system, roof and parapets. This work has taken longer than first anticipated, but now the expectation is that this summer there will be an application process for MIT FSILGs interested in the building. It will be operated under the “Green Hall” model, with the addition of participation in the new MIT dining plan. This model was developed in conjunction with Kappa Alpha Theta sorority when they occupied an MIT dormitory at 350 Memorial Drive. In this model, MIT retains ownership and management of the building but assigns only members of the approved FSILG to the beds in the building. This arrangement has proved very satisfactory for KAT in the three years of its operation. The FSILG Office will be running the application process for 405 Memorial Drive later this summer, including scheduling building tours. The goal is to have the tenant selected by mid-August.

FSILG Office Wins MIT Award. The “Infinite Mile” awards were established a decade ago as part of a larger Institute-wide initiative to combat an MIT environment that former MIT President Jerry Wiesner characterized as a “praise-free zone”. So now colleagues in each major department nominate individuals and offices for recognition in a handful of categories. This June, the Division of Student Life singled out the FSILG Office for its “Student Life Award”, the signature group award for the division. While the students and alumni volunteers appreciate the four person team in this office, it is very satisfying that other MIT staff feel the same way. The office staff consists of Marlena Love, Lauren Wojtkun, Catherine (Cat) Sohor, and Jennifer Meredith.

A week ago Marlena and Lauren, along with Steve Baker '84, presented a webinar on “Enhancing Intergenerational Learning through Alumni Engagement” sponsored by the Association of Fraternity/Sorority Advisors (AFA). This was a fantastic opportunity to share the great alumni volunteer model we have at MIT with our colleagues across the country. The presentation recording will be available soon for anyone interested in learning more. Cat Sohor also serves the AFA as the Region 1 (Northeast) Coordinator.

AILG and DSL Collaborate on Strategic Plan. Last year, Dean for [Student Life](#) Chris Colombo asked me to organize a strategic planning effort for the Division. It has been an engaging, interesting exercise, one that has allowed many staff colleagues and me to learn about the variety of activities that go in to supporting MIT's 10,000 graduate and undergraduate students. For the last several months, we have been doing an exercise known as an “Environmental Scan” with each of our identified stakeholder groups. One such stakeholder is clearly the alumni who run and support the FSILGs, so the AILG was invited to a session earlier this June. Over a dozen highly seasoned alums shared their concerns and visions for future MIT students.

And thanks for all you do!

Alumni are absolutely essential to the continued health and vitality of MIT's FSILG community. Your continued help is deeply appreciated, whether it is connecting with other alums, advocating for your chapter and the FSILG community, doing valuable volunteer work, or helping financially. With this sustained effort, we will indeed continue to have among the very best and most varied college residence communities in the nation.

Sincerely,
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NB: This message and all prior e-mails in this series can be found on the [FSILG Archive](#) on the Division of Student Life web site.