



GAMMA PHI BETA

Delta Sigma Chapter History Gamma Phi Beta Sorority

Founding Members:

Liliana (Arner) Ponader	Leslie Elizabeth Arnold
Belinda Bowden	Deborah (Cobb) Phillips
Gloria Olga Deren	Catharina (Dubbelday) Haynes
Wadad Bertha Dubbelday	Lori Lee (Dunn) Aungst
Joan E. (Galiyano) Cressman	Mary Joseph (Kirvin) Gatslick
Sylvie Helene (Langlois) Kurtz	Mary Margaret Moore
Sandra Dorothy (Oehmke) Wilson	Mary Frances Osborne
Marilou Doris Overla	Heather Lynn Rau
Alicia (Slaton) Swartz	Kelly Jean Sloan
Teresa Lynn (Tesh) Duhring	Yvonne (Vanderputten) Coogan
Nancy Elizabeth Wells	Rebecca Lynn King
Marion Eugenia Rawls	Linda Tisdale

The Delta Sigma chapter of Gamma Phi Beta was colonized at Florida Institute of Technology at the request of a local sorority. At the time, there were fraternities on campus and many women were “little sister” members of these groups, because they had no such opportunities of their own. The local sorority, originally called Omicron, was formed to provide an experience for women similar to what was seen in the male fraternities. Omicron’s founders were proud to have formed the first successful sorority at Florida Tech, an honor that is reflected to this day in the Delta Sigma chapter’s local motto, “First and Finest.”

After a few months of operation as a local sorority, the members of Omicron began to think about affiliating with an inter/national women’s fraternity. There was much debate among the membership about the idea of “going national”. A large group of women wanted to remain autonomous and others could not make the financial commitment that went along with inter/national affiliation. Finally the decision was made. The local

sorority changed its name to Sigma Omicron Phi to reflect their hope to be colonized by Alpha Omicron Pi. They singled out this specific group because Dee Dee Pannel, a Florida Tech staff member, and other AOPi alumnae were instrumental in the local sorority's founding.

Six of the original members of Sigma Omicron Phi were responsible for writing the sorority's initiation ritual. The ceremony began at midnight and usually lasted about three hours, but could go until Dawn depending on the size of the pledge class. At the completion of her journey, each initiate was given a butterfly pin to symbolize her membership in the sisterhood. Sigma Omicron Phi members participated in all of the customary fraternity traditions. They chose their big sisters, had to wear pledge pins before initiation and selected an official flower, the daisy. The women even competed against the fraternities in Greek Week. They made a real impact on the community with their tenaciousness and although they took a lot of flack from some of the men, they did not finish in last place.

With the help of Dee Dee Pannel, Sigma Omicron Phi asked the National Panhellenic Conference for expansion proposals. The women received information from Alpha gamma Delta, Alpha Omicron Pi, Zeta Tau Alpha and Gamma Phi Beta and then saw presentations and met the Inter/National Presidents from most of those groups. The women of Sigma Omicron Phi chose Zeta Tau Alpha and became the Theta Rho colony of that sorority in August/November 1979. However, it quickly became apparent from both sides that there had been an error in judgment. The "rough and tumble" personality of the colony members at Florida Tech did not mix well with the women of Zeta Tau Alpha and the colony was dissolved on February 16, 1980.

The women reopened for expansion and Alpha Gamma Delta and Gamma Phi Beta came to Florida Tech to give presentations. Sigma Omicron Phi continued to operate as a sorority and took in new members throughout the entire process. The women even initiated one last class into the local sorority before becoming a colony, for the second time. After the initiation ceremony, the entire sisterhood stayed awake to choose an inter/national sorority. The members assembled at the house of Sara Howze, a Florida Tech staff member and mentor to some of the sisters. Each woman had an opportunity to speak pro and con about the sororities and then cast their vote by secret ballot. The members agreed that the decision had to be unanimous, so they continued to discuss and revote until everyone had been convinced. Finally, at some hour of the early morning, they unanimously selected Gamma Phi Beta.

The women then became the Delta Sigma colony of Gamma Phi Beta and Becky Boyd, an expansion consultant, was sent to live among the members and guide them until the pledge period was complete. On May 30, 1981 the women of the Beta Mu chapter at Florida State University traveled to Melbourne to perform the initiation. Several alumnae members of Sigma Omicron Phi were initiated along with the colony and the Delta Sigma chapter of Gamma Phi Beta was officially installed

As the chapter grew, along with Florida Tech and the local alumnae base, the members became interested in sorority housing. At the time it was not feasible to purchase a traditional sorority house, so the women began negotiations with the university to occupy an apartment in Southgate. Lilly Ponader and Kathie Murr, a former Province Financial Director for Gamma Phi Beta, along with other local alumnae began forming the Delta Sigma chapter House Corporation Board. They filed the incorporation documents with the State of Florida, set up checking accounts, negotiated the original contract with the university and bought basic furniture. They secured donations and refinished the dining table that is still used in the chapter room, today.

Throughout its history at Florida Tech, the women of the Delta Sigma chapter have maintained the “rough and tumble” personality of the charter members. They have been fierce competitors in Greek Week and intramural sports and have shown tenacity in all of their endeavors. The collegiate members pride themselves on their history and meet with local alumnae each November for brunch in honor of the Inter/National Founders’ Day celebration.

Although there have been many changes in the university culture and inter/national policies, the members of the Delta Sigma chapter of Gamma Phi Beta continue to achieve the goal of Omicron, to provide a fraternal experience for the women at Florida Institute of Technology.