Very little information is available about many of the historic photos accompanying this story. We'd love to find out more. If you have information to share, please contact The University Magazine at umagwww@rit.edu, or call 585-475-7616.

Stephen DeVay’s most memorable RIT moment didn’t come in a classroom. It didn’t come at a party, a sporting event or a club meeting, either.

It didn’t even take place on campus.

Instead, it happened at 8 o’clock on a Saturday morning – mere hours after most of his classmates hopped into bed. But DeVay and his Sigma Alpha Mu fraternity brothers were wide awake. They had work to do.

Less than a week earlier, a few of DeVay’s brothers – who were living in an off-campus house – were approached by a neighbor. Her daughter's family had been struck by tragedy. The neighbor knew the students were members of an RIT fraternity and had seen how active they were in the community. Now, she was the one who needed help.

Her daughter’s family had gone to Disney World. While they were away, a pipe broke in their house and 44,000 gallons of water rushed through it. The entire house became infested with mold.

Upon their return, her son-in-law entered the house and saw the devastation. He was inside for only 15 minutes, but the damage was done. In a three-year period, he went to the hospital 14 times for respiratory problems.

Local charities came to the rescue, raising money for the family to build a new house. A week before the family was set to continue on page 16.

Greeks contribute to life at RIT and enjoy lifelong rewards

Brothers and sisters

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A: The 2005 annual mud-tug fund-raiser, a popular rite of autumn. (Photo by Jen Moon ’07)
B: Students ride the teeter-totter in 1987. (RIT Archives)
C: From Techmila 1983, members of Phi Epsilon Kappa make fun of winter. (RIT Archives)
D: The year is 1991; trike riding looks like fun. (RIT Archives)
E: Who will be Cinderella? (RIT Archives)
F: President Richard Rose makes a contribution to the Sigma Pi 1984 Quarters collection. (RIT Archives)
G: Colorful signs compete for attention during rush week 2009. (Photo by A. Sue Weisler ’93)
H: Co-eds prepare for an event at the Powers Hotel downtown. (RIT Archives)
I: A group of unidentified students participate in a Greek event. (RIT Archives)
J: Stephen DeVay of Sigma Alpha Mu; the 2009 Pole Sit raised $2,000 for the Make-A-Wish Foundation.
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move, the woman's son-in-law had to go back to the hospital. All of the money they had saved for the move had to be used on medical expenses.

That's where DeVay and the brothers of Sigma Alpha Mu stepped in. They moved the family into their new home.

“When we heard their story all of us immediately said, ‘We’re doing this.’ I’ve never felt so good about anything I had done in my life,” DeVay said. “The looks on the faces of those kids … they were just so excited to have a bedroom again. And we helped to make it happen.”

It’s not the scene most envision when they think about Greek life at a college or university – largely thanks to the hit movie Animal House. But community service, social networking and leadership development have become ingrained into the Greek experience at RIT.

Making a Difference
Greeks in RIT’s 30 fraternities and sororities logged 11,452 community-service hours and raised more than $32,000 for charity last year.

“Once people start getting involved in community service, most really find that they enjoy doing it,” says Jessica Wayman, a third-year physician assistant major and a member of Delta Phi Epsilon. “We’re involved in a lot of different projects and get to help so many different aspects of our community.”

Wayman is in charge of identifying and organizing community service activities for her chapter. There is no shortage of opportunities to get involved in, and Wayman says it’s not difficult to round up volunteers.

“A place to call home
Neither DeVay nor Wayman ever considered “Going Greek” before arriving at RIT. But early in their academic careers, both realized that joining the Greek community would provide the connection to RIT that they were searching for.

“It gave me the sense of community that I hadn’t been able to find anywhere else. Whether it’s out cleaning a highway, in front of the television watching movies or piling into a car to go bowling, we do things together,” Wayman says. “It’s the best choice I’ve made other than deciding to come here.”

When DeVay was approached by a resident assistant about the possibility of joining Sigma Alpha Mu, he had

“Not only are we helping people, but we’re doing it with friends. It’s never a chore,” she says.

DeVay says his chapter averages about 1,000 community service hours a year. Sigma Alpha Mu’s signature community service event, Pole Sit, takes place each fall. A 40-foot telephone pole, affixed with a crow’s nest, is set up on RIT’s Quarter Mile. For four consecutive days, a brother is stationed in the crow’s nest 24 hours a day – usually for a two-hour shift. Passers-by are encouraged to donate into a makeshift “wishing well.” This year, pole sit generated more than $2,000 for the Make-A-Wish Foundation.

Most chapters have a charity associated with their national organization that they raise money for each year. But other opportunities arise at the discretion of each chapter.
two words to say: “Absolutely not.” But the temptation of free chicken wings lured him to a recruitment event. He had a blast.

“I had the frat boy stereotype and the popped collar look in my head,” DeVay says. “But I started to see that they all had a genuine interest in who I was and what my story was. I noticed that they all had that same interest in each other, too, and that they cared about each other.

“Up until this point, I had really been struggling with finding a group of friends at RIT. I was actually considering a transfer. But at that event, I got the vibe that I had been missing. I got a sense that these were people I could connect with.”

This sense of community isn’t new. It’s something Greeks at RIT have experienced throughout the years.

“Honestly, the experience kept me in school,” says Scott Ernst ’93, (mechanical engineering technology) and member of Phi Delta Theta. “When things weren’t going great for me academically, I had a great network of people to help me out. In turn, I have helped others and I feel the whole cycle can perpetuate itself indefinitely.”

Many, but not all, of RIT’s nearly 700 Greek students (roughly five percent of the RIT student body) live together. Some chapters occupy floors in the residence halls on the east side of campus. Six other chapters – Alpha Epsilon Pi, Delta Phi Epsilon, Phi Kappa Tau, Triangle Fraternity, Alpha Xi Delta, Phi Kappa Psi – live in freestanding houses on the west side of campus, next to the Crossroads complex. The houses are known as Greek Circle, or “the mansions” to many in the Greek community.

“I love living in the house,” Wayman says. “People wonder how you can get work done living in a sorority house. I laugh. I had so much trouble living in the dorms. There is little accountability. People could run by your door at 2 a.m. screaming. In the house, we’re accountable to each other. Everyone is respectful of one another.”

Others live in off-campus apartments or houses.

Growing leaders

“I was very shy in high school,” Wayman says. “Mega-shy, actually. I wouldn’t be who I am today if I didn’t join a sorority.”

Wayman’s grade-point average hovers around a 3.5, she is a member of the Physician Assistant Student Association, serves as her sorority’s house manager and is president of the Order of Omega, an honor society for Greeks that enrolls members who excel academically, are involved on campus and demonstrate strong character.

“I’m a firm believer that leaders aren’t born, they’re made,” says DeVay, president of RIT’s Greek Council.

RIT Greeks have the opportunity to attend various leadership conferences and workshops – some on campus, others in cities across the country. DeVay has twice been flown to Texas by his national chapter to help plan its leadership initiative.

Alumni point to their Greek experience as being instrumental in their professional success.

“The leadership skills that the experience provided me gave me great opportunities professionally,” says Chris Wagner ’94 (social work), an alumnus of the National Technical Institute for the Deaf who was the founding commander of Sigma Nu. “I moved into management level positions almost immediately after my RIT days.”
Wagner is vice president of marketing for CSDVRS, a private, non-profit organization that provides social and human services programs and communications services.

Brianna Lombardozzi '07, a graphic media major and Delta Phi Epsilon member, enjoyed her experience so much that she decided to make it a career. Lombardozzi is now the coordinator of fraternity and sorority affairs at Austin Peay State University in Tennessee.

"Being Greek at RIT has truly made me the person I am today, in so many ways," she says. "I gained valuable experience leading groups to a common goal. Achieving that goal wasn’t always easy and it was the challenges I faced that truly helped to define my leadership."

**Busting stereotypes**

"I hate when people say I pay for my friends," says DeVay. Those “people” are referring to the dues students pay their chapter. The dues, which average roughly $700 a year, mostly go toward insurance coverage. When events like Pole Sit take place, students have coverage should an accident occur.

"It just really irks me when people say that. They say they won’t join a fraternity because they’re not willing to pay for their friends. I don’t pay for my friends. In fact, being in a fraternity is actually making me money. I’ve received a $1,000 scholarship from my national chapter in each of the past two years."

That’s just one of the many stereotypes facing Greeks across the country. The most prominent? That Greek life is about one thing and one thing only: parties.

At RIT, student conduct cases have declined sharply in the six years that Jessica Berner has been on campus. Berner, RIT’s assistant director for campus life/fraternity and sorority life, says that, nationally, Greeks experienced a spike in conduct cases about 15 years ago. She believes that short stretch of time, unfortunately, still influences people’s perceptions today.

"If you’re involved, you definitely see it," says Berner. "You see how people are looking at you differently. What those people don’t see are all the positives that come out of the experience."

It’s a perception that Greeks – both past and present – continue to fight.

"Clearly, the party is not the only aspect of Greek life. The support network, the lifelong relationships, the service and charity to community and many other positive aspects are probably not as visible to the critics," says Ernst. "If it was just one big booze party, how would the critics explain us still getting together 15, 20 and more years later – sharing our families, standing up in each other’s weddings, traveling on vacations together, getting each other jobs, volunteering our time with the active members, etc?"

Those things, Greeks insist, are what the experience is about.

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**You can support Greek life at RIT**

The importance of fraternities and sororities on the RIT campus is well known to Greek alumni, as are the unique funding needs of these organizations. Earlier in 2009, RIT established a new fund to support Greek life on campus. For the first time in the university’s history, alumni and other supporters of Greek life can direct gifts to Greek organizations for leadership training, travel expenses, purchase of books, scholarships, programming and capital needs.

To make a gift in support of Greek life, please visit www.rit.edu/development/giving/greekgiving.php, or contact Adam Platzer at asprar@rit.edu.