

Delta Sigma Phi fraternity house to become Alfred University welcome center

6/22/04

ALFRED -- A gracious Victorian-era house on the most-heavily traveled corner in the village of Alfred may soon become Alfred University's new welcome center. Delta Sigma Phi, Alpha Zeta chapter, alumni voted Saturday at their annual meeting to turn over their three-story house on the corner of Main and Pine streets to the University. The fraternity will no longer maintain a student residential facility, but it will continue to operate as an alumni group. Under the arrangement, the University will assume a small existing debt on the property. The University also agreed to allow the fraternity the right of first refusal in the event of a future sale of the property. And if Alfred University's Board of Trustees should someday allow fraternities and sororities back on campus, the University agreed to assist Delta Sigma Phi in locating suitable housing for a reconstituted chapter. "We are very pleased that the overwhelming majority of our alumni supported this decision. We now look forward to continuing as an Alfred University organization, with the hope that, one day, we will again have an undergraduate chapter on campus," said Michael Carey, a 1999 AU alumnus and president of Delta Sigma Phi's Alumni Corporation Board. Tentative plans are for the University to convert the home's first floor into a welcome center for campus visitors, and including a reception area and meeting spaces to accommodate visitors and campus groups. The house is located just off campus and directly across the street from a busy campus entrance. The home's upper two stories would house university offices. Any renovations are contingent upon the university obtaining the necessary building and zoning approvals and upon raising sufficient funds to undertake the project, cautioned Michael Hyde, vice president of university relations. "We are delighted the Delta Sigma Phi alumni have agreed to our proposal," said Hyde. "The corner is an ideal one for a welcome center, and really gives the University a great deal of visibility on Main Street. Now that the agreement has been ratified by their membership, we will roll up our sleeves and study the practicality and the fund-raising appeal of the welcome center concept. We think it will be a winner for everyone." Alfred University's Board of Trustees banned fraternities and sororities in the spring of 2002 after experiencing "persistent and increasing" problems with Greek-life organizations. Fraternities and sororities were given to the end of this academic year to cease operations. At the time of the Board of Trustees' decision, the University had eight fraternities and four sororities. Today, all of these groups have closed, or indicated their intentions to close in the near future. As their student membership dwindled and winter heating bills mounted, Delta Sigma Phi closed and boarded up its home in December 2003. It considered options for the house, including renting it, or turning it into a restaurant or bed and breakfast, but didn't want the burden of managing such ventures, said Carey. The fraternity's board was also reluctant to sell to a third party. "We were looking beyond just getting rid of it because that didn't benefit our new long-term goal: the possibility of a return to Alfred University sometime in the future," said Carey. "Our alumni are AU graduates, too, and they liked the idea of using the house for the benefit of the University." The fraternity turned to the University to find a "happy middle ground," said Carey. "All agree this is the best course of action for both parties." The hope for the return of Greek life to AU was a big factor in the decision, he added. "As the North-American Interfraternity Conference and National Pan-Hellenic Conference work with universities and colleges to clamp down on Greek systems that are "out of control," the hope is that the current attitude toward Greeks will change and the tradition will return to AU," said Carey. "For a lot of alumni, their only tie to the campus is their Greek affiliation. That is the organization we all remember and hold dear to our hearts," Carey added. "Hopefully, in time, we'll be able to present the University with a more attractive package, allowing for our return to campus. If that happens, Delta Sigma Phi will be in a very good position to move ahead swiftly." "It was a sad day when the University banned these organizations. I vehemently opposed the move and was very vocal about the decision," said Joseph Fasano, a 1954 AU alumnus and another long-time fraternity board member. "Later, I learned that the intentions of the Task Force were, at first, to try to beef up the existing, broken system. Further, I learned investigations by the committee revealed some terrible facts about some of the goings-on at some frats. I have changed my position and wholeheartedly agree that the system had to go. It was a bold decision, a sad one, but I concluded that it was necessary at the time. I do hope that some day the university considers allowing them to come back with close supervision so that they don't go astray again."