

The late 1980s by Randy McDaniel, #2033

The late eighties was a period of transition for the Beta House. It was a time that challenged the pledges, active members and alumni alike. But in the final analysis, the brothers of 800 Chautauqua meet the challenges and set the stage for the future growth and success of the house.

Every pledge class thinks their duties and experiences as a pledge were more difficult than the classes that followed. That view could very well be right. But a major shift in how pledges are rushed and treated took place during my time in the House. My pledge class followed the traditional path to membership. The Rush team recruited us primarily over the summer. Going through Rush use to be great. Every night strong candidates would have invitations to dinners, movies and parties.

There were even overnight trips that allowed everyone to get to know each other in an informal setting. By the end of each summer, the rush team would have almost all the new pledges committed and the formal rush in the fall was used to pick up a few out-of-state members.

My pledge class was strong in number and qualifications, but by Christmas Break, my pledge class had dwindled down to 14 pledges. Several strong houses got in trouble with the University for hazing, including the Beta House. The House was on the verge of being kicked off campus, but like Betas have always done for decades, the brothers rose to the occasion. The University mandated drastic changes and the membership immediately responded. Alumnus offered their support and got directly involved in the day to day operations of the House. In short order, the University recognized our efforts and our suspension was removed.

The following Rush was completely different. Gone were the days of parties and trips. Rush turned into an event where candidates toured the different houses and formal bid cards were used by all parties involved. The more formal setting at first was resented by the membership because it did not allow the Rush Team to really get to know the prospects. But soon it became apparent we had a competitive advantage; decades of superior accomplishments by the men of Beta Theta Pi. No other house could compare to the documented scholastic and leadership achievements of the past members. Formal rush turned out to be a great positive for the House because we had a remarkable story to tell whereas competitors were left with trying to highlight intangibles such as being cool or having big parties. As expected, the Betas once again started attracting the very best pledges in large numbers.

Since several successful alumni members had gotten so involved during this period of time, they realized a major refurbishment was needed for the House, especially since so much of Rush was now being conducted in the House. The rooms were in bad shape. The alumni raised the money to gut the upstairs and put in lofts. The updated interior coupled with long-standing impressive exterior gave the active members an additional advantage over the competition in recruiting new members.

By the time I was a senior, the House was basking in the glories that it has been accustomed to for many decades. We were winning grades and sports, holding most of the top leadership positions, actively engaged in every aspect of college life and fielding the top pledge classes. While the Rush and Pledge process had changed, the outcomes were the same. The fellowship amongst Beta brothers was still strong and few could dispute the fact that once again, we were simply the best.