



LATE SUMMER 2019

# OMICRON AT A CROSSROADS

## FEATURED COLUMNS

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# EDITORIAL: OMICRON AT A CROSSROADS, AND HANDING OVER THE EDITORIAL REINS

By Mark Fernau '82

**W**elcome to what has now become the Late Summer number of the *Omicron Oracle*. There are two major reasons for the delay in publication. One is the procrastination of your new editor, who has let a complicated life stage (a major upheaval at work, the loss of both my mother and my wife's mother in 2019, and the arduous process of emptying and



**Mark Fernau**  
**Editor**

selling our house of 25 years and finding a new place to live) compound his tendency to put off that which needs to be done. The other delaying factor is the events at Edgemoor since the last issue of the *Oracle* that have led to continual and ongoing uncertainty as to the fate of the current undergrad chapter and have made my originally chosen theme for this issue ("Omicron at a Crossroads") become even more relevant

and appropriate. Before I continue on that theme, I pause to extend a huge thank-you on behalf of the entire brotherhood to outgoing editor Sandy Gilbert '62 for his more than 7 years of outstanding work that have made the current online version of the *Omicron Oracle* the award-winning and successful publication that it is. Huzzah!

When I took over as editor in the fall of 2018, we had just learned that Omicron was in danger of getting kicked off the Hill. After a very successful fall rush, a courageous act by the undergraduates—deciding at the last moment not to initiate an associate member who had clearly displayed through his behavior that he was not a representative of the ideals and values of

Lambda Chi Alpha—led to grossly false accusations brought to Cornell by that same associate member, which prompted a university investigation of the chapter. That investigation debunked the outrageous allegations but did find, although it is disputed by the undergrads, that several acts of hazing had occurred. Under the current no-tolerance policy, that meant a suspension; the chapter received the light sentence of being suspended (i.e., kicked off the Hill) for the spring 2019 semester. The chapter appealed the decision, and after a lengthy deliberation that took us into the new year the suspension was upheld but the probation period under which Omicron was already acting because of previous Cornell sanctions was shortened to the end of 2019, with full rush and social functions restored for the fall 2019 semester. So Omicron was facing a challenge, but one that the alumni and undergrads had already been dealing with and working to improve for the better part of the last two years.

Then, as the spring semester drew to a close, the other shoe dropped, as they say. Lambda Chi Alpha International Headquarters (IHQ), which to that point had been supportive of the chapter and Alumni Control Board efforts to assist the chapter in overhauling its overall culture and the recruiting and education processes, decided that the undergraduate Member Review that the alumni had conducted was not sufficient (apparently because we did not kick anybody out but rather came to the conclusion that hearts were in the right place but more alumni oversight and a revamping of the chapter education process was needed) and that a new Member Review conducted by IHQ itself was necessary. Because the decision was made as the students were preparing for finals and then heading home for the summer, the unusual step of conducting it over the summer via videoconferencing and telephone would be taken. To our shock and dismay, the outcome of the Member Review was that, of 31 undergraduate members, 21 brothers were expelled from Lambda Chi Alpha, 1 was suspended until graduation, 1 was put on "probation," and 5 were "censured" (3 did not actually have hearings yet as of the time of writing), leaving a small and de-

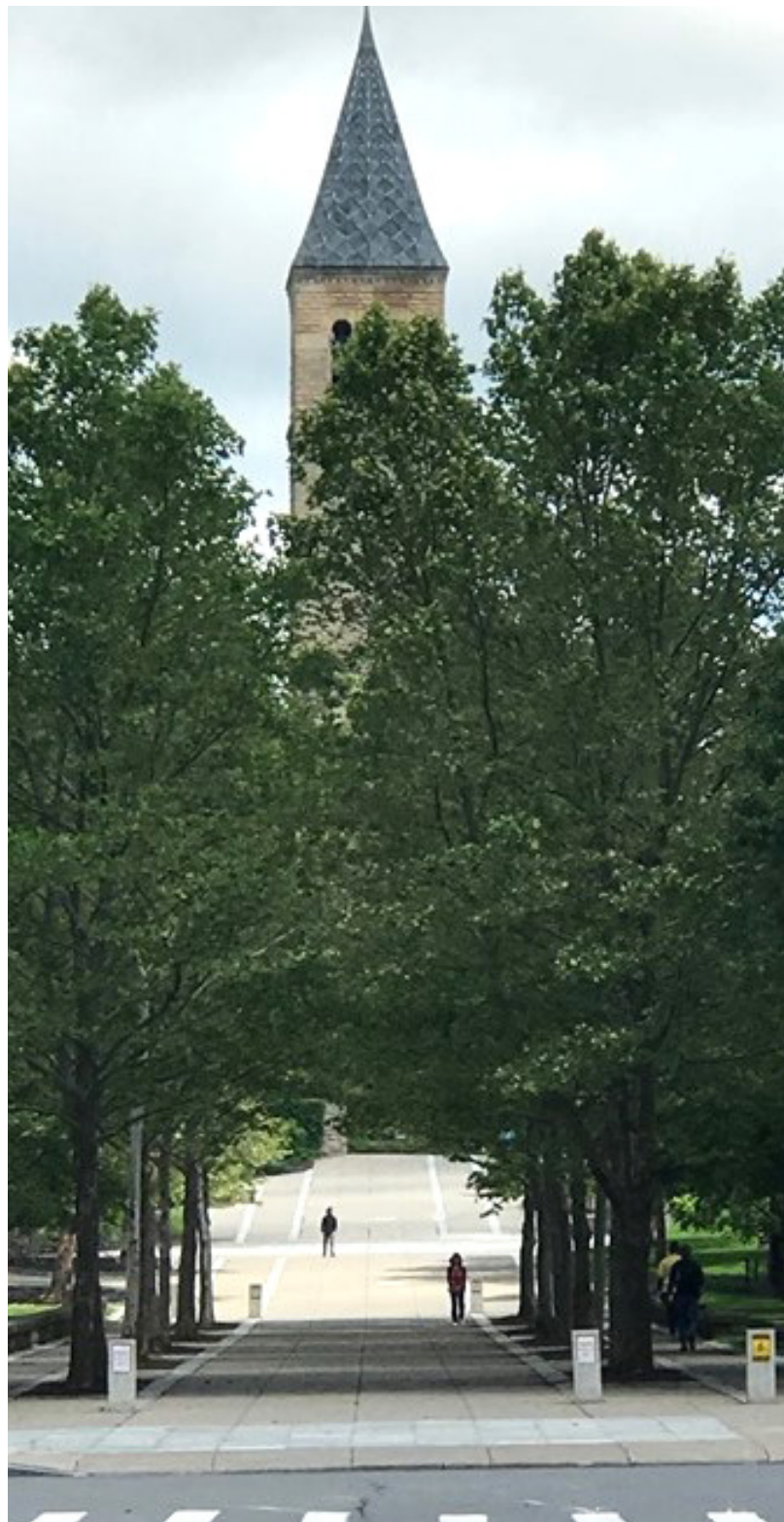


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moralized band of survivors to decide how, or even if, the chapter would be able to continue operations in the fall of 2019. A handful of brothers, including past and incoming alphas Joshua Nathanson and Terence Burke, decided to appeal their decisions, and IHQ has agreed on procedural grounds to repeat the Member Review process for at least seven of the expelled young men. At the time of writing not all of the new interviews had occurred, but some of these appeals and first-time reviews have resulted in reduced judgements that would allow a few more brothers to remain active, and plans are being made for having a viable chapter in the fall.

The fluidity and uncertainty of these events have made it difficult to know how to proceed with this issue of the Oracle, having not gotten it out before IHQ's decision to conduct their Member Review. My approach is to try to retain some normalcy as we arrive at an overwhelmingly poorly mapped and sign-posted crossroads. Regular columnists Wayne Mezitt and Alan Fridkin check in with articles on underappreciated late-winter/early-spring plantings and a favorite French village, respectively. Sandy Gilbert passes on some wine tips, focusing on value wines. Stephen Ashley once again keeps us up to date on what is happening with the Cornell administration with an article on the status of the statement on Core Values, which will have an effect on the greek system. Ralph Wilhelm submitted his article on what greek life will look like in five years before he learned of the IHQ decision to expel the great majority of the undergrads, but I have decided to publish it as is as a roadmap and a statement of hope for the future of Omicron going forward. I know that Ralph has since stated that he is in full agreement with High Pi Jason Cho and the Alumni Advisory Board that, for many different reasons, going "independent" and leaving Lambda Chi Alpha is not a realistic or sustainable option, as much as it appeals to the remaining undergraduates and the disillusioned alumni at this time. I also have retained outgoing alpha Josh's report as another take on the events of the fall 2018 semester and for its insight into the group of young men—with their dedication and desire to "move forward" into a better Omicron—that was dismembered by the judgment of IHQ that they were not fit material to do so.

I have not managed to do an organized request for alumni news and/or identify correspondents who might be responsible for obtaining news from a partic-



**Omicron - Moving down the path to regrowth**

ular decade or half decade, but I have included some news that came in with dues or was harvested from the Internet. I have not yet identified or approached potential additional new contributors on topics of in-

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terest to the alumni or been able to do in-depth interviews to highlight alumni activities, but I am able to pass on a contribution by outgoing editor Sandy Gilbert on his latest passion. These remain goals of mine, and I will strive to achieve them as I look to the next issue. The last “traditional” piece of the *Oracle* that is incomplete is the reports from the alumni officers. They have been busy trying to get their heads around our current situation and start to implement ways to move forward.

Chris Turner, president of the ISWZA housing corporation, is committed to providing housing at Edgemoor for all undergrads who were planning to live there for 2019/20, although that will present some logistical challenges for maintaining a chapter that is distinct from the tenants. If the house can’t be filled with enough brothers to manage the rent payment then we will have to take in boarders. Chris is confident that we can make the fall mortgage payment with the help of the Edgemoor Leadership Foundation, but beyond that the crystal ball is hazy. As detailed in Chris’s report in this issue, ISWZA is very interested in “buying back” our current mortgage from the bank in the near future (and thus not having to worry about how they might react to a sanctioned or nonfunctioning chapter) by gaining a critical mass of alumni brothers who would be willing to invest in the house (and the House) in the form of a “Brother Bond” that would yield a good interest rate (say 5%), with the principal returned when we can. For this to become a reality, those of us in the “younger” generations (the decades of the ’70s, ’80s, ’90s, and beyond) would have to step up, as our predecessors have already done a yeoman job in funding the renovation.

Rick Meigs, as president of the Omicron Alumni Association, is on the same page as Chris. He says that “[w]e will do whatever we can to support the undergrads through their appeal, including honoring house agreements if practical. We are committed to retaining ownership of the house and will work toward either redevelopment with the small group of remaining undergrads or recolonization, whichever way it comes out.”

Through all of this, high Pi Jason Cho has been heroic, and I do not use the word lightly; he has been an exemplar of the ideals of LXA. His dedication to Omicron is phenomenal. He is frustrated beyond words, emotionally battered, and physically worn, but he has maintained contact with the undergraduate chapter

and has done his best to try to understand IHQ’s methods and motivations and to try to effect as positive an outcome as is possible. Now that it appears that we do have enough returning brothers to try to be an active chapter this fall semester, he is using conference calls with the remaining brothers along with interested alumni to figure out how all of this is going to work and result in a chapter that avoids further trouble and begins to grow again. It is possible that most official chapter functions will have to occur away from Edgemoor in campus buildings, etc., so as to preserve the distinction between ex-LXA tenants and current LXA brothers. Officer candidates are being identified, a means for an election is being drawn up, a budget and finances are being worked out, and it is possible that some alumni will step up to provide a fund to fill in the cracks that the low membership creates. Plans for rush and chapter education are being made, and the hows and wheres of initiation are being investigated. Lines of communication with Cornell will have to be maintained. Homecoming will be a low-key affair, with alumni meetings and hospitality for those who wish to mingle or visit Edgemoor. It all adds up to a huge and uncertain undertaking, but perhaps Omicron is starting to take the branch of the road that leads to renewal.

So in summary, Omicron Zeta is indeed metaphorically at an intersection, with foggy weather in place and sketchy maps to guide us forward. As we navigate that path, please bear with me as I continue to find my voice as editor of the *Oracle*; offer your help to the *Oracle* and the chapter if so moved by the “mystic chords of memory” and brotherly bonds, and most important, continue to support our beloved Omicron chapter, whichever road it ends up taking as it passes through this crossroads of crisis.

*Yours in ZAX, “mef”*

Mark E. Fernau, Ph.D. ‘82, O-1262 ❖

## OBITUARIES

*The Omicron Oracle notes with sadness the passing of the following brothers:*

William D. Adams, ‘55.....September 16, 2018

Jeffrey N. Trovato ‘03.....October 6, 2018

William F. “Fred” Hickling ‘48.....July 17, 2019



# ISWZA FRATERNITY, INC.

By Chris Turner '94

**B**rothers: Greetings, and thank you for your continuing attentions and loyalty to ISWZA and Omicron Zeta. The current challenges of the undergraduate chapter have been described elsewhere; I will focus on ISWZA, our housing corporation, and the related financial challenges.



**Chris Turner**

To state it simply: In order to maintain control of our home in Ithaca, we need buy our house back from the bank. We are looking for a number of brothers to participate, providing loans of \$10,000 or more to ISWZA, so that we can retire the mortgage with M&T bank (approximately \$1.3M remaining), as well as the loans previously provided by some of our brothers (the “brother bonds”, with approximately \$325,000 remaining).

We completed an extensive but expensive renovation in 2015 with bank financing, and we now need to pay off that loan so that we can eliminate any risk of foreclosure. Our financial plans assumed that we would maintain a reasonable level of occupancy in our house, as we have for more than 100 years, and that we would be able to retire the mortgage in a relatively short period of time (15 years).

With our current challenges, as well as a high level of uncertainty surrounding the Greek system in general, we are facing current, and likely future, disruptions to Omicron Zeta’s membership. This affects the number of live-in brothers, and by extension our rental income stream. To weather this storm, we need to regain full control of our house, and we need to keep the financing within the brotherhood.

This gives us the flexibility to manage the rent charged to the undergrads, to help them attract members, and to encourage living in. It allows us to maintain our house more

effectively and to build capital reserves. Last, in the event of a major disruption to the Greek system at Cornell, it gives us full control of our home in Ithaca. In a doomsday scenario in which Cornell takes more drastic action regarding the Greek system, we cannot afford to have our home at 125 Edgemoor at risk.

The financial terms are relatively simple by design. We are proposing private loans to ISWZA paying 5% simple interest annually. Maximum terms offered would be 10, 20, or 30 years, to provide options for our different generations of brothers. Payments would be interest only for the first 5 years, to allow us to address some lingering maintenance issues (principally the bathrooms and the roof on the Law School side of the house).

We certainly are open to direct contributions to ISWZA, for those who are willing and able. We continue to be impressed by the loyalty and generosity of our ‘50’s and ‘60’s brothers, and their continuing attentions to the house in particular (they are considering another round of funding to install and/or renovate bathrooms). For our (relatively) younger brothers, particularly my ‘90s compatriots, our focus is on the retirement of the mortgage. We hope this an attractive savings option, especially given current market uncertainties, while recognizing that there is some risk associated with the loans. (For reference, our house was appraised in 2013 at approximately \$2.5M.)

Please contact me ([cturner@chicagobooth.edu](mailto:cturner@chicagobooth.edu) or 312-543-5657) to confirm your interest to participate, or with any questions. We are open to alternative proposals for the refinancing, as well, recognizing that many of our brothers have relevant experience in these matters. Our target is assemble the loans and to close out the mortgage before the end of the calendar year.

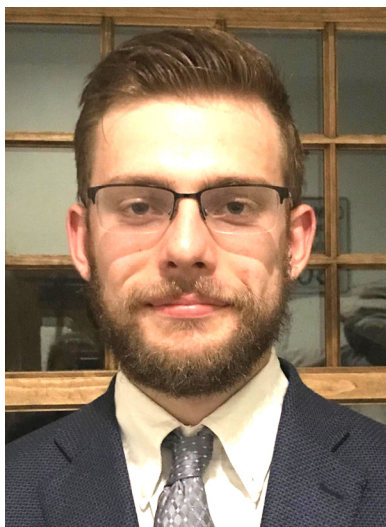
A few final items for your attention. First, please join me in thanking my fellow ISWZA Board members—Phil Prigmore and Mike Agostin—for their continuing service and attention to our home in Ithaca. Second, please consider becoming a Board member, either for ISWZA or for the Omicron Alumni Association. We need the perspectives and the efforts of both our younger and our older generations to survive these current challenges. We have always shared the load as brothers, and the same applies to our Boards. Last, a heartfelt thank you to Jason Cho for all of

*continued on page 7...*



# HIGH ALPHA REPORT

*[Ed. Note: this report was submitted earlier in the spring before the results of the IHQ Member Review were known. Josh was awarded a redo on his member review to correct procedural errors; he subsequently made the studied decision to retain control of his Omicron fate and chose to resign rather than to continue to participate in what he regards as a flawed process. As presiding officer during the time of the alleged hazing, he felt it unlikely that the initial decision to expel in his case would be reduced to a lesser category.]*



**Josh Nathanson '20**

This year, the undergraduates substantially improved Omicron's operations. In this report, I will provide a summary of our most recent initiatives and our plans for the future.

**Recruitment:** In the fall, Omicron recruited 11 new members, more than any other fraternity at Cornell. To recruit more successfully, we concentrated on pre-rush relationships. In addition, the brotherhood was divided into "rush teams," each led by a captain. Our future plans are that the teams will compete, encouraging more brotherhood involvement. Each team will be responsible for identifying and encouraging their own potential new members.

**Community Involvement:** We are now more connected to the Cornell community than we have been for a long

time. Terence Burke '21 and Steven Li '21 have been on the Interfraternity Council since the beginning of the spring 2019 semester as Vice President of Recruitment and Vice President of Finance, respectively. We are in constant communication with administrators, and we have improved our relationship with the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life (OFSL), Vice President for Student and Campus Life Ryan Lombardi, and other professionals at Cornell. In the future, we would like to invite faculty to the house more frequently. Ideally, we will regularly host faculty for dinner and possibly a lecture. In 2018, we held a charity gala for mental health. In the future, the gala will be held annually, and next year we will invite faculty and administrators (both Greek and non-Greek). Of course, alumni are always invited as well.

**Accountability:** The undergraduates have had long conversations on accountability. This year, we codified an "accountability process" so that there were clear expectations for every member as well as a consistent response from our executive committee. In plans for the future, now that there are fewer brothers in the house, all of the undergraduates will have more responsibilities, but I believe that we are well positioned.

**Kappa:** We have transitioned the Kappa process from a primarily educational process to a "bonding process." Throughout the process, we will concentrate on the closeness of the brotherhood as a whole rather than the education of any particular class. In the future, the Kappas will include life lessons in the process. There may be sessions on automotive topics, athletics, or even manners.

Unfortunately, despite our initiatives and improvements, there were also some significant challenges. This



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past fall, an associate member physically and verbally assaulted another associate member on the basis of his race. After a discussion as a brotherhood, we decided not to initiate him. That night, we respectfully informed him of our decision, and the next day he told members that he would lie to the university in retaliation.

Throughout the process, we felt that OSFL excluded exculpatory testimony and misrepresented evidence to the detriment of Omicron. Even with that, by the end of the process, nearly all of the accusations were determined to be untrue and defamatory. Nonetheless, on 20 December,

concerned with our international ritual and suspicious that three of the more minor accusations were true, the review board sanctioned Lambda Chi Alpha. On 11 January, we submitted an appeal to Ryan Lombardi. He believes in Omicron, as do many administrators on the “Hill,” and ultimately, he reduced the duration of the sanction.

Overall, I am proud of our brothers. They stood by the house, even in the most difficult of times, and as a result we will be fully operational in the near future. Nobody has deactivated, and the undergraduates, as always, are committed to the improvement of Omicron. ♦

## ISWZA FRATERNITY, INC.

*...continued from page 5*

his efforts, and over the past two years in particular. He has become our link across generations, and he remains our greatest advocate for our undergraduate brothers. Our brotherhood is immeasurably stronger because of his efforts over the past 25 years.

Jason and many others, before and after him, have shaped our brotherhood. Our home in Ithaca serves as a place to

gather, certainly, but, more important, it allows us to continue to welcome new brothers into our shared experience. For me personally, Chicago is where I was born. Wisconsin is where I lived as a child. 125 Edgemoor is where I grew up. I am grateful for those that came before me, and made that possible. I am thankful to those who shared time with me in Ithaca and helped me grow. I would like to pay that forward by making sure that shared experience at 125 Edgemoor is available to future brothers. ♦

## AN OMICRON TIMELINE

**By Jason Cho '98**

*100 years ago: Spring 1919*

With brothers only trickling back after the Great War, the situation in Ithaca is dire. Twelve actives struggle to keep the chapter alive, paying \$8/week board, \$18/month rent, and \$3/month parlor fee. Brother C.B. Fraser '19 writes every living alumni brother he can think of to ask for help, and he finds it: in June, the Omicron Alumni Association is formed to help maintain fraternal bonds among the scattered alumni base and to lend support to the undergraduates rebuilding on the “Hill.”

*75 years ago: Spring 1944*

The U.S. Naval Reserve Midshipmen School at Cornell opens in March for graduates of the V-12 officer training program, many of whom are housed at Edgemoor while brothers are away in the service. By a stroke of luck, Dick Turner '46 is among those sent back to Ithaca for V-12. He maintains a rump zeta down the street at 614 Stewart Avenue with the help of a Victrola and a little punch.

*50 years ago: Spring 1969*

Members of the Afro-American Society occupy Willard Straight Hall on 19 April after months of high racial tensions on campus. After white members of another fraternity attempt to re-take the building, the students within arm themselves—and scrawl “Kill All Fraternity Pigs” on the inside. Lambda Chi, meanwhile, is hosting families at the house for Parents' Weekend and maintains a 24-hour vigil after a rock is thrown through the window of the Mitchell Room. The rest of the weekend passes without incident.

*25 years ago: Spring 1994*

Omicron is fresh off winning its third Greek Week in a row, taking home the grand prize of a new videocassette recorder. The chapter turns its attention to a vigorous community relations program under Philanthropy Chair Trevor Connor '95, including a skate-a-thon with Tri-Delt and the Dean-for-a-Day raffle with Kappa Alpha Theta for the respective sorority charities. The biggest prize, though, was getting our name on Route 366 for the Adopt-A-Highway program—until the sign was mysteriously stolen.

# CORNELL TODAY: CORE VALUES

By Stephen Ashley '62

Over the past several years, American universities and colleges have struggled with issues that reach into the heart of what higher education should be and should mean. These struggles have tended to manifest around issues of speech, that is, “What is free speech?”; trigger warnings regarding course content that some might find objectionable; and hate speech and symbols that have been predominantly aimed at minority communities on campuses—African Americans, Muslims, and Jews. During the time period to which I

refer, Cornell has not been free from instances of the foregoing issues. These have resulted in increased tensions on campus that have prompted the leadership of the university to go beyond procedural investigation and adjudication under the terms of the Campus Code of Conduct.

Within the last year, the president of the university has led an initiative that asks the question, “What are Cornell’s core values?” I participated in a session involving College

Advisory Council members who were asked to develop responses to the President’s question. At first, the group thought “This is obvious—it’s any person, any study.” Obvious, yes—but not fully speaking to a broader set of understandings that could be used to guide and define campus climate through actions and dialogue. Also, there was a sense that Cornell needed to engage in a broader and deeper discussion that involved all constituencies—students, faculty, staff, administration, and alumni leadership as expressed through Advisory Councils and the Board of Trustees. The past year has focused on engaging these constituencies in a contemplative and unhurried manner.

At a recent meeting of the Board of Trustees, a draft of the “Core Values” was presented for consideration. Comments and critiques were offered, and the administration undertook further refinement with the objective of hav-

ing an improved statement of Core Values ready for the next full board meeting. The Core Values are grouped under six major headings, with narrative explaining each one. Although this document is still in draft form, I will briefly comment on each major heading as follows:

**Purposeful Discovery**—This speaks to the principal business of the university: discovery through learning, teaching, scholarship, and innovation with an emphasis on excellence and purpose.

**Free and Open Inquiry and Expression**—This statement places value on the basics of academic freedom and preserves the right to respectful and reasoned opposition.

**A Community of Belonging**—The statement by founder Ezra Cornell that “...any person can find instruction...” speaks to diversity and inclusion and the value of having different backgrounds and experiences enriching the learning and work environment.

**Exploration Across Boundaries**—The second half of the founder’s statement (“...find instruction in any study”) speaks to the importance of all academic fields and the inherent power of cross-disciplinary collaboration.

**Changing Lives Through Public Engagement**—As New York State’s Land Grant Institution, Cornell possesses a long history of transferring knowledge in applied form not only to New York State but to the nation and the world. This value is also about learning from other societal members as to their needs and strengths and thereby creating new knowledge.

**Respect for the Natural Environment**—The university’s role in addressing environmental and sustainability issues is in advancing solutions.

Stay tuned. Once adopted by the trustees, a statement of Cornell University Core Values will receive wide dissemination, undoubtedly will provoke comment—both pro and con, and will be used in freshman orientation and other venues to advance the principles on which Cornell stands. I will further venture that these Core Values will be fused into Greek Life with the expectation that the Greek System will not only honor the ideals of their individual charters but will embrace the values of the university of which they are an integral part. ❖



Stephen Ashley



# GREEK LIFE: WHAT WILL THE GREEK SYSTEM LOOK LIKE IN FIVE YEARS?

By Ralph Wilhelm '67

I wish I had the answer to this important question, but maybe some of the information in this article will help you to see some future glimpses of the Greek World at Cornell and in our beloved Omicron chapter. Before I move on to that big picture, let me say that this will be my last article for the Oracle. By the



Ralph Wilhelm

time that you read this, I will have stepped down from the Fraternity Sorority Advisory Council (FSAC) Chair. Most likely I will not sit on the FSAC in an emeritus position; the new FSAC Chair needs a clean break and fresh start and certainly does not need the previous chair looking over his shoulder. That new Chair will be Bob Forness, a Pi Kappa Alpha from class of 1987. He married a Cornell Kappa Delta named Lindsay, and their two children are also Cornellians, classes of 2015 and 2021. Bob has

been very active on campus, with the Alumni Interfraternity Council and with his chapter. He has been part of the FSAC since about 2011 and has plenty of experience.

Bob and I have intentionally overlapped over the last 6 months, since Cornell Vice President for Student and Campus Life Ryan Lombardi selected him to fill this role. In late March, Bob and I spent time together on campus meeting with faculty, staff, students, alumni, and, most important, student groups. Over my 10 years on the FSAC, I have always done this early- to midspring trip on a Tuesday/Wednesday to “catch” the students in their leadership roles on campus and interact with them, doing lots of listening to see how they are getting along and how we might help. Bob now has a choice, in fact lots of choices, as to how he will do the job; I have total confidence he will “hit it out of the park.” I’d recommend that

Omicron leaders make time to meet and talk with Bob to form a bond and understand how he sees the world; I know he would look forward to that.

With regard to the status of fraternity life on campus, I set up the initiatives and issues with my last article published in September 2018. I refer you back to that Oracle if you need to refresh the basic outline that was rolled out in President Pollack’s May 2018 direction and expectations. However, in this article, I can give you a summary of where Greek life is on campus today and where it might be going in the future.

As you may recall, I commented in the last article that this is truly “...a watershed moment...where the University has clearly laid out their expectations regarding the Greek Community, undergraduates and alumni alike.” This has not changed. And while the University has compromised or given way a small bit on timing here and there, the overall focus and expectations have not changed. I would not expect them to.

So, to comment on status as of April 2019:

*Hazing:* The hard focus on substantiated acts of hazing continues to result much of the time in a ruling for a chapter to close for 5 years. There have been a few rulings that resulted in only one semester of having the chapter suspended [this is the case at Omicron]; the 5-year decision is more typical and is to be expected. The number of incidents this spring versus spring 2018 seems to be about the same in frequency, sadly, but without the few that occurred last spring that were way over the top in severity. The use of 5–6 years of previous behavior history in a chapter is now completely commonplace in the Cornell adjudication process. This has been and will continue to be painful, but it will pay off in the long run in terms of handing chapters with consistently egregious behavior. This is a strong and consistent message to all Greek undergraduates and alumni.

*Alcohol:* The use and/or presence of hard alcohol in Greek houses has been forbidden since May 2018. Houses still violate those expectations: system punishments are typically harsh for these incidents. Note that more and more national fraternities are taking strong stands on the use of

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hard liquor or even any liquor at all inside chapter houses. While there are five/six “Nationals” that have taken strong stands as of now, I’d expect more in the next few years and I’d expect LXA International to also be one of them.

*Scorecard:* The system-wide chapter scorecard will be rolled out by end of the spring semester of 2019. It was used last semester, but it will now be more complete and more useful. It will be a public document.

*Event management:* A subcommittee (led by Kara Miller McCarty of the Cornell Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life, or OFSL) concerned with event management guidelines (e.g. how many parties a chapter may have per week; maximum times for social event to start, stop, and last; the type of controls on liquor; education and policies for events; training and use of sober monitors; use of Cayuga’s Watchers) is on track to wrap up most of their recommendations by end of spring semester 2019.

*Junior/senior leaders:* Having at least four leadership positions in each chapter not only be juniors or seniors (president position is always included) but also live in the chapter house has been delayed for a semester. Difficulties are more challenging with sororities because of lack of space and their large new-class numbers, but they will figure it out, with OSFL’s help.

*Live-in advisor:* The live-in advisor committee (led by Sr. Assoc. Director of Athletics Jennifer Gudaz) is making fine progress. Their customer is ALL Greek housing units for setting at least minimum expectations, contracts, issues with insurance, and so on. However, it continues to be clear that these live-in advisors will NOT be university employees and will not be selected by Cornell; the selection is up to the chapter alumni, with input from the undergraduates. Note that for decades all Panhellenic chapters have had house directors/live-in adults. Currently approximately 12–13 of the approximately 34 IFC chapters have them, mostly because they felt they needed to have one and have seen consistently positive results from having a live-in advisor.

*Judicial Review:* The Judicial System Review Committee (led by Sr. Assoc. Dean of Students Mary Beth Grant) is making excellent progress. It has input from alumni, students, faculty, and staff and has covered a lot of ground. Their first-phase report was submitted to Ryan Lombardi back in February, and the second and last phase report will be submitted before the end of April to Ryan. It is my belief that potential changes will be actively discussed

this summer, with some of these improvements taking place in the fall semester. Note that the Student Code of Conduct must be rewritten and improved upon in order to complement this overhaul of the judicial review process. The University Assembly has this task now. It will get done in the near future, with timing being a bit hard to predict at the moment.

That brief summary should keep you up to speed. I am glad to answer questions or concerns by e-mail or telephone; my contact info is at the end of this piece.

I continue to have faith in Lambda Chi Alpha and its teachings, values, and ideals. Further, I have faith that the alumni on the multiple Omicron boards will continue to reach out often to the undergraduate members seeking information, fellowship, and bonding to reduce the exposure that all chapters have to individuals or groups making poor decisions. As you know from this and previous messages, the university has run out of patience and will continue to expect consistent adult behavior. No chapter is immune from this fishbowl of attention. I continue to hope that LXA begins to flourish again and thus stays on the straight and narrow, growing and maintaining a robust, safety-conscious, fun, mature-decision-making chapter on the Cornell campus. It can be done with vigilance and constant attention to detail, behavior, and decision-making. I know that we as a chapter can do this, but we all also know that it will require consistent, focused, hard work for all parties involved.

Last, I would hope that more of us alumni decide to make time to interact with the Cornell University staff, faculty, and undergraduates to enhance communication, understanding, and trust. I listed details on the four general university events held each year (i.e., Homecoming, A.D. White Greek Leadership Summit, Trustee Council Weekend, and Cornell Alumni Leadership Conference) in the fall 2018 Oracle. Interactions and learning from these sessions can only help the local chapter with more engaged alumni and better and more learned advice being shared with the undergraduate chapter members and leaders.

Thank you all as always for your support and encouragement. It has been my pleasure and honor to have served you all for these past 10+ years on the FSAC. I give my best wishes now and into the future for the Omicron chapter.

*Ralph Wilhelm*

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# ALUMNI FEATURE: WORKING TO AVOID RED TIDE

By Sandy Gilbert '62

One of the reasons that I needed to leave my post as editor of *The Oracle* is my major involvement as Chairman and CEO of Solutions To Avoid Red Tide (START) and my work with the scientists and lawmakers who are trying to deal with the year-long red tide bloom that has been lingering off Florida's west coast, as shown in the accompanying photograph.

The blooms are caused by a dinoflagellate, a mobile form of algae called *Karenia brevis* (*K. brevis*). It normally resides in Gulf waters in small numbers,



**Sandy Gilbert**

but when it encounters an unusually large source of nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorus, it explodes into millions of cells per liter of water. *Karenia brevis* releases a cocktail of brevetoxins that kills other sea life from fish to dolphins and manatees, and when the toxins get airborne they cause tearing eyes and shortness of breath for beachgoers and shoreline residents. The environ-

mental and economic damages from this especially intense bloom are reported to be in the billions of dollars. While *K. brevis* can feed on natural nutrients in the water column like nitrogen from dead and decaying sea life, it has become increasingly obvious over the years that many of the nutrients sustaining red tide are actually a result of human activity. This includes effluent from flooded sewer systems during major rain events, seepage from septic systems, and stormwater runoff into the waterways.

After a sustained and intense outcry from the suffering public and consistent lobbying from organizations like the Sierra Club, START, and the Everglades Foundation, lawmakers have finally begun to commit the necessary funding to address the human input in the nutrient equation. A major area of focus will be



**Red tide bloom**

the cleanup of Lake Okeechobee, which fills up with nutrient-rich runoff from nearby farms and requires periodic releases to prevent its dike from rupturing. These polluted releases are cited as a major factor in the development of green algae on the east coast and red tide on the west coast. Other points of emphasis will be converting more septic tanks over to more-efficient sewer systems. Over 30% of Florida homes are still on septic systems.

START has been working locally on a natural and very cost-effective control system by seeding oysters and clams in select areas that filter nutrients that feed red tide. One oyster, for example, filters from 9 to 30 gallons of sea water every day.

I am especially encouraged by START's association with a local hydrology company that has developed a new passive nutrient media (PNM) process that is filtering over 70% of the nitrogen and 50% of the phosphorus out of stormwater holding ponds before the water is released into Sarasota Bay. This offers great potential in reducing nutrient runoff, and START is raising funding to help to subsidize the use of the process for neighborhoods around the bay.

When Sandy is not in some meeting about red tide, he still manages to squeeze in an occasional round of golf, dabble with painting abstracts, and cook up his favorite recipes for gumbo and five-bean chili. He and wife Emmy Lou also enjoy their new golf villa at The Meadows in Sarasota, seeing the nearby grandkids, and taking Caribbean cruises. You'll find him at sandem133@aol.com. ♦

# HORT SENSE: A PARADE OF SPRING'S EARLIEST FLOWERS

By R. Wayne Mezitt '64

By



Wayne Mezitt

the time you're reading this article, you're most likely reveling in the full glory of springtime or early summer. Now that the weather has warmed, our attention naturally turns to enjoying the long-awaited beauty of so many trees and shrubs coming into bloom and starting their new growth.

It's easy to forget those apprehensions we felt just a few short weeks ago as we anxiously waited for winter to release its hold on our yard and gardens. Yet to be discovered by many homeowners is that these "pre-spring" days in February, March, and April offer abundant opportunities to enjoy a substantial preview of spring's bounty, still weeks away.

These trees and shrubs add weeks of outdoor viewing enjoyment, long in advance of what most people perceive as "springtime" (when so many plants are in bloom, all at once!). Unfortunately, many garden centers have been reluctant to feature these pre-spring plants because so few customers come to shop before the weather truly warms.

Here in the Boston area the Asian witch-hazels (*Hamamelis intermedia* cultivars) surprise viewers with unexpectedly showy colors around mid-February. They are remarkable for their ability to bloom successfully despite repeated temperature fluctuations, sometimes to freezing and below. Their resiliency enables them to extend their floral appeal for days or even weeks, only fading when consistently-above-freezing temperatures ensue. Retail nurseries have begun to recognize the value of the witch-hazels and some offer a sizable selection of cultivars with flowers in astonishing shades of orange, yellow, and red.

The warming February–March sun coaxes familiar pussy willows to reveal their fuzzy silvery catkins along each branch; new selections of pink (*Salix gracilistyla*; "Mt Aso") and black (*Salix gracilistyla*; "Melanostachys") make attractive cut branches. Around this time, the pea-size, yellow-fringed bud



Flowering cherries

clusters of cornelian cherry (*Cornus mas* and *Cornus officinalis*) open their cloudlike display of golden bloom along every bare branch, often as early as March, followed by edible red fruit in summer.

Japanese andromeda (*Pieris japonica* and its hybrids) is a long-time homeowner favorite with fragrant, lily-of-the-valley-like flowers. Recent cultivar selections offer a wider choice of white to pink flowers in a broad range of growth-habit and foliage features, making them well-suited for most any garden, sun or shade. And they're also one of the most deer-browse-resistant of any woody plant.

*Forsythia's* yellow flowers may be considered ubiquitous, but now with a plethora of new cultivars (look for the Show Off® series), these reliable shrubs are more manageable in size and stature than those rangy shrubs our grandparents planted years ago. White forsythia (*Abeliophyllum distichum*) is a rarely seen 5-foot mounding deciduous shrub with a profusion of sweetly



## A PARADE OF SPRING'S EARLIEST FLOWERS



**PJM rhododendron**

fragrant, tiny white flower spikes on arching branches; it blooms concurrently with or earlier than its more familiar yellow-flowering hybrid forsythia “cousins.”

Northern spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*) is a native woodland shrub whose multiple smooth stems are clothed with tiny, greenish-yellow flowers the first warm days of spring. With fragrant flowers, leaves, and stems, it is very shade tolerant and appreciates moist soils. Above, the native shadbush (*Amelanchier*), with its white blooms, and the swamp maples (*Acer rubrum*) are opening their profuse tight clusters of red flowers along each twig, each imparting a gentle season-awakening haze when viewed from afar. Many cultivars of these are available for home landscapes.

*Viburnum bodnantense*, is one of the earliest-flowering viburnum species, with clusters of fragrant pink flowers continuing for weeks on naked branches. Korean boxwood’s (*Buxus sinica* var. *insularis*) nearly-invisible green-yellow flowers fill the air with their sweet fragrance. February daphne (*Daphne mezereum*) features pink-purple (or white) fragrant flowers clustered along bare, stiffly upright stems in April. And the flowering cherries (*Prunus*) add their pink bloom to the mix.

Opening in early April, our earliest magnolias include star (*Magnolia stellata* and its cultivars), “Loebner” magnolia cultivars “Centennial” and “Leonard Messel” (a Cary Award winner: <http://caryaward.towerhillbg.org/2017/10/31/magnolia-leonard-messel/>), and anise or willow-leaf magnolias (*Magnolia salicifolia*), with lemon-scented white flowers and leaves/bark that release a licorice-like fragrance when crushed or scratched.

And finally, the earliest rhododendrons come into bloom just before Mother’s Day. Three of the best are “Weston’s Pink Diamond” (double pink flowers), “PJM” (lavender-pink), and “April Snow” (double white). In addition to their small leaves and distinctive flowers, their foliage is aromatic when brushed.

Some of the plants I’ve mentioned here are familiar; others are not so popular. Your local public garden surely displays many of them, and that’s a great place to visit and see them for yourself. And of course, ask at your local garden center—experts there may be able to get some for you to plant this spring so you can enjoy them for many “pre-springs” yet to come!



**Melanostachys pussy willow**

R. Wayne Mezitt, O-592, is a third-generation nurseryman and a Massachusetts Certified Horticulturist (<https://www.mnla.com/page/mch>) and is now chairman of Weston Nurseries of Hopkinton and Chelmsford, MA (<https://www.weston-nursuries.com>), and owner of “Hort-Sense,” a horticultural advisory business (<https://hortsense1.godaddysites.com/>). Wayne currently serves as Trustee chairman for the Massachusetts Horticultural Society at The Gardens at Elm Bank in Wellesley MA (<https://masshort.org/>). ♦







## A NEAR-PERFECT VILLAGE

habitues might disapprove. The old town hall is now a museum, and the PTT (Poste, Téléphone et Télécommunications) is gone, as well as some of the old bars and cafes. But there is still a large petanque (a type of lawn bowling) court with a spectacular view.

We took solace and inspiration in Mr. Verge's old wine cellar, which is now a fantastic wine bar: La Cave du Mougins. You can walk into the cave and select from their collection of 3,500 bottles or choose a decent vintage by the glass. The fare is simple but extraordinary. Try a platter of their own house-cured Scottish salmon, a cheese plate with more than a dozen varieties, hand-assembled salads of great style, and the pièce de résistance: baked Camembert marinated in 20-year-old Calvados.

There is a spectacular five-star hotel just down the hill: Le Mas Candille. Or perhaps you might enjoy a luxury apartment or a more modest hotel on the periphery. In any case, a visit to Mougins will not disappoint. ♦



Mougins houses nestled in the hills

## THE WINE RACK: VALUE WINES

By Sandy Gilbert '62

**W**ine Spectator Magazine often runs a "Savvy Shopper" section that features excellent wines at affordable prices. I have chosen three reds and three whites from the December 2018 issue that are all well regarded and are priced at \$20.00 or less.

### Reds

Shiraz Clare Valle 2016: the reviewer refers to "dense plum, blackberry and black pepper" flavors. The wine is given a 92 rating and is priced at \$20.

d'Arenberg Shiraz McLaren Vale The Stump Jump 2016: This Australian shiraz is described as being "distinctive with a note of spearmint complementing the juicy core of plumb and blackberry." The wine received a 90 rating and costs only \$13.

Simone Santini Chianti Colli Senesi Tenuta La Calci-



naie 2016: This wine is given a 91 rating and is described as having tones of "black cherry and black currant." This Chianti is priced at \$18.

### Whites

Matua Sauvignon Blanc Marlborough 2017: Designated as a "best value," this wine is described with flavors of "lemongrass, Key lime and green apple" and is said to be "bright and polished."

True Myth Chardonnay Edna Valley 2016: This chardonnay carries an 89 rating and is said to taste of "rich ripe citrus, green apple and sage." It is priced at \$18.

Louis Latour Macon Villages Chameroy 2016: Described as with a taste that is "supple, delicate; spring blossom and lemon", this wine is priced at \$16 and carries an 89 rating.

Enjoy! ♦

# NEWS FROM ALUMNI

## ► 1950

Joe Dwyer of Olean, NY, tells us: “I am retired after 60 years as a trial lawyer. My wife Elaine is a Cornell Law School grad like me. I have enjoyed coaching “midget” football (12- and 13-yr olds) for 20 years. I get back to our Cornell Football team’s reunions occasionally. There are not many of us left---Jack Rogers, Frank Bradley, and Jeff Fleischmann come back regularly.”

## ► 1958

Ed “Pelly” Parazynski writes: “It is good to know that efforts to bring the chapter out of probation are approaching a positive result. I am happy to be able to follow chapter and alumni activities through the *Omicron Oracle* newsletter, since we have not been back on campus since leaving in 1959. I have been retired for 18 years, and I lived in Seattle until last December, when we moved to Houston to be close to our son and family. We are enjoying our life in Rice Village, the university college-town, with many diversions and restaurants and services in walking distance. We are also enjoying the Southern life style, which we recall from earlier residence in Arkansas, Alabama, Louisiana, and Virginia. An added advantage of Houston life in general is the influence of many foreign-born residents and visitors, which as created a remarkably diverse local culture. We frequently have contact with people from places where we lived and worked overseas and who experienced many of the same, often challenging, events. My thanks to all who are helping the chapter through these difficult days.”

## ► 1962

Jeffrey Burnam writes: “I am teaching American Politics and the Politics of Global Climate Change as an adjunct Professorial Lecturer at American University, having recently retired from Georgetown University.” A quick Google search shows that Jeff is a bit of a distinguished character: see <https://www.american.edu/spa/faculty/burnam.cfm> and <https://2001-2009.state.gov/g/oes/rls/12214.htm>.

## ► 1963

Lee “Beast” Manning of Vienna, VA, is a retired IT professional (EPA). He says: “Leslie and I are enjoying retirement and traveling extensively, this year to Scotland and Paris/Normandy. Our six grandchildren give us much pleasure. The youngest is now nearing 3 while the oldest has just turned 21 and is completing her third year at the University of Virginia.”

## ► 1967



*Submitted by your Editor:* After a decade of outstanding volunteer service to Cornell University as member and then chair of the Fraternity Sorority Advisory Committee (FSAC), Ralph Wilhelm is stepping down from that body. Ralph’s dedication, ideas, energy, and perspective were

invaluable in helping greek alumni have a strong voice in helping the administration shape the new realities of greek life in the 21st century. Some of us alumni and the undergrads at times chafed under Ralph’s “tough love” approach to passing on his wisdom and advice, but it was always given with a caring heart and a ton of real-world experience behind it, and the fact that Omicron is still on the Hill and making a go of it in our beautiful chapter house is a tremendous tribute to his efforts to have us be the best that we can be. Thank you again, Ralph, from all of us, and see you at Edgemoor! “Here’s to Brother Smitty, Brother Smitty...”

## ► 1980



Steve “Keegs B u d d y ” Keegan and his wife Anna have taken advantage of the empty nest, selling their Revolutionary War-era house in Lunenburg, MA, and moving to a nice apartment on the Charles River in





# NEWS FROM ALUMNI

Watertown. Keegs recently lost his mom Joan and then his dad Dick Keegan, who was an ardent Cornellian, an ATO, and a Big Man on Campus after World War II. Dick was a great friend of Omicron and loved partying in Cambridge with the brothers at Harvard-Cornell away hockey games. You can read about him in *Postwar Cornell---How the Greatest Generation Transformed a University: 1944-1952* by Brad Edmondson, available through the Cornell Store.

## ► 1981



T. Scot Brown tells us: “Two of our triplets just graduated from the University of Vermont, one Phi Beta Kappa and the other commissioned as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army. The third graduated from Cornell, where he was a member of Seal and Serpent, and he will commission in the U.S. Navy as an ensign and then report to flight school in the fall.”

## ► 1982

Steve Corn is cofounder and Chief Executive Officer of boutique record label BFM Jazz. He is very proud that in the 9 years that the company has existed, its small stable of artists, considered to be some of the top jazz players in the USA, has garnered 17 Grammy nominations. In 2019, BFM artists brought home 5 Grammy wins, after going 3 for 3 in 2018. For you Steely Dan fans out there, one of BFM’s winners is Steve Gadd, who back in 1977 did the phenomenal drum work on the song “Aja.”

Mark Fernau and wife Melissa have sold their house of 26 years in Clinton, MA, and are going to live their dream of ditching the 1.5-h commute to Boston that they have been doing several times per week for 20 years and become city folk. From their apartment in Cambridge near the Lechmere T station, they will have a 20-minute commute to their office at the American Meteorological Society on Beacon Street. They are looking forward to getting used to 1000 square feet and using their newfound time to explore in more detail what the Boston area has to offer. It will make the home a lot easier after those Harvard vs. Big Red hockey nights!

## ► 1992



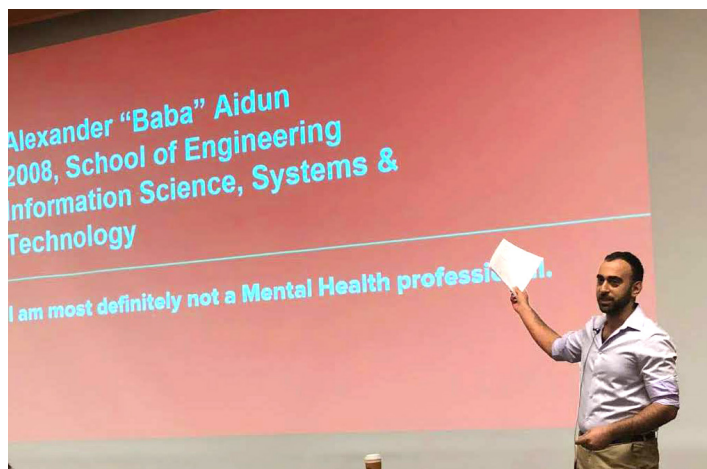
Last spring Doug Levens traveled to Pontevedra, Spain, to represent the USA in the ITU Aquathlon World Championships, which consisted of a 1-km swim in 58°F water (a wetsuit was mandatory) followed immediately by a 5-km run. In the 45–49 male age group, Doug placed 17<sup>th</sup> of 51 competitors, the second-best effort by a U.S. athlete in that group.

## ► 1996

Michael Buckler has been a lawyer, a teacher, and an author. He also spent several years mid-career as a Peace Corps volunteer in Malawi. He has a new op-ed in “The Hill” (<https://thehill.com/opinion/civil-rights/454413-peace-corps-complicated-relationship-with-the-white-savior-complex>) on the Peace Corps and “saviorism” in sub-Saharan Africa, and he also published a book, *From Microsoft to Malawi: Learning on the Front Lines as a Peace Corps Volunteer*, on his experiences there.



## ► 2008



Alex “Baba” Aidun gave the keynote address at Cornell

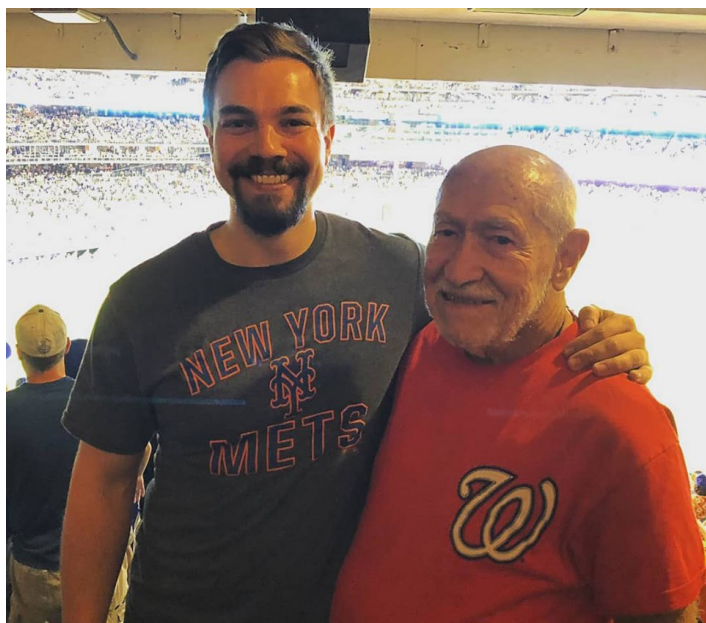


# NEWS FROM ALUMNI



last fall as part of IFC activities for Mental Health Awareness Month. In part he stated, "I am member of Lambda Chi Alpha where some of my most significant and important friendships were formed. In 2012 one of my closest fraternity brothers passed away from suicide and while writing his obituary and eulogy I was challenged to think about mental health in a way I never had before. His passing had a dramatic effect on my life, and over the years I've learned that mental health is not binary; it is something that has to be practiced. I'm coming to Cornell to share my story and my experiences in the hope that others can avoid receiving the life changing phone call that I did."

## ► 2010



Mets fan Bill Smith and erstwhile Brooklyn Dodg-

ers fan Bob McKinless '48 got together to watch some baseball, proving that our brotherhood crosses all generations, especially when it comes to the National Pastime (and rooting against the Yankees?).

## ► Other News



Our faculty advisor, Associate Dean of Students Renee T. Alexander has retired from Cornell. We cannot express enough thanks for all she has taught us over the last two years, not just through her programs and events, but from our conversations when she pops over for dinner or to watch football with the brothers. Now that her official duties are over, we hope to see even more of her at Edgemoor, because we have a lot more to learn, and because the Buffalo Bills need all the supporters they can get.





