Greek Life Students come together to rebuild New Orleans

While a large majority of the University of North Texas’ student population traveled to Florida and Texas beaches to relax and have fun with friends, nine students from diverse Greek chapters came together in New Orleans to rebuild homes devastated by Hurricane Katrina.

The trip is called Alternative Spring Break. Students sign up to devote their spring break in a city far away from home doing service with other UNT students. This group’s goal was to aid in the rebuild of two homes under the St. Bernard’s project.

These students and Greek Life Advisor Paula Bearden departed early Saturday morning and arrived in the late afternoon to their living quarters. Their site leaders Brittany Lok (Panhellenic), Elizabeth Orozco (MGC) and Teague have been planning since last fall to straighten out the logistics of the trip.

The other seven students were: Jose Alvarez (MGC), Caitlin Chegwidden (Pan), Nicole Coleman (Pan), Jasmine George (MGC), Cindyh Hernandez (MGC), Gabriella Ibbarrondo (MGC), and Andrea Lefton (Pan). Of those nine students, one was a previous president and three are current presidents of their chapters. Four students currently serve on the executive board of their respective council, with two students being the current president of their council. Saying leadership is a big part of this group’s background is an understatement.

Everyone was eager to familiarize themselves with New Orleans. The first full day they were there, they devoted to sight-seeing. They took in the romantic French architecture, the sugary and savory smells of beignets and crawfish and the loud music of a city bursting with culture. They tried beignets at the famous Café du Monde. They walked around the French market, an open air flea market filled with Cajun street food specialties and voodoo dolls galore. They visited a Hurricane Katrina museum where they brushed up their history on the catastrophe and realized how much their help this week would impact the city. They ended their day with the sunset over Jackson Square and headed back home, exhausted and curious of their work tomorrow.

Their work day started at 1 p.m., giving the group an adequate amount of time to sleep in and relax. Upon arriving at their house, the site supervisors were there to hand out tasks to the group. Everyone was assigned a different task at the beginning of the week, but by the end of the week, most learned how to do everyone’s tasks. From trimming baseboard to flooring, this group was assigned to finish the final stages of the house. By the end of the week, almost all of the floors were finished, and all of the baseboard were installed. The group ended their final work day exterior painting and enjoying the sunny weather.

This August marks the 10 year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. There are still over 100 people needing to find a home. The aim of St. Bernard’s Project is to reduce that number of people who still need relocation. With the help of this year’s ASB group, two people are now not a part of that number. They can finally come home. This group of Greek Life Students can say they helped two people in New Orleans get their life back.

Cajun grub, NOLA streets, Greek Life, Swamp tours, early mornings, late nights, Ghost sightings, Hurricane Katrina. The students that went on this trip can’t fit their experience into one sentence. They learned a lot about each other and they learned a lot about themselves. They experienced New Orleans and helped victims of Katrina. All they know is that they are grateful that Greek Life offers this trip.
Greek Unity Statement from Council Presidents

Greek Life has been in the news with some frequency this semester regarding events that have taken place at various universities. In response to some of the incidence that have made the news out local Greek community leaders came together to discuss the issues and create the following statement. The Greek Life Office is very proud of the effort our Greek undergraduate leaders took and we wanted to share with you their words.

“On behalf of all the Greek organizations at the University of North Texas, the Interfraternity Council, National Panhellenic Council, Panhellenic Council, and Multicultural Greek Council do not support racism or exclusion in any way. We are a diverse Greek Life community based upon the same four pillars of scholarship, service, leadership, and brotherhood/sisterhood. We are truly saddened by the events that have taken place in other Greek communities, and while we do not believe this is a reflection upon the Greek Life community here at North Texas, we do recognize the issues of racism and the consequences it brings. Thus, we are even more committed to creating a more unified and welcoming community.”

“To elaborate more, each of our councils are very diverse and welcoming to people of all heritages. This diversity is reflected in our membership and leadership across each council. However, we do understand why some would believe Greek Life here at the University of North Texas is segregated. The incident at OU is not the norm for Greek Life everywhere, especially at UNT, but that does not mean everything here is perfect. We are all working together to help our community grow in all directions, especially in terms of diversity and community building. However, segregation transcends beyond the letters of Greek Life. In fact, some of these councils were created in response to segregation in America in times where some of these students were barred from even attending school, let alone joining organizations where they could be themselves. The opportunity to form fraternities and sororities based upon their cultural heritages allowed them to join together and to find their voices to make a difference. These same principles of advocacy and community echo the same reasons that other fraternities and sororities were originally founded. Like America, which has changed so much over the time of its founding, Greek Life is constantly progressing. There are its ups and downs in the Greek Life community here at UNT. The national spotlight on racism in Greek Life is admittedly a down for us, however we plan on going up and moving forward in different ways such as increasing the membership of Greek Life across council, providing our members with the avenue to become leaders outside of Greek Life, and continually reflecting and working on our goal of becoming a truly unified community. One step to look forward to in our progression is the Unity Fest that the council presidents are currently planning to celebrate diversity in the community.”

Sincerely,
Brittany Lok (Panhellenic President)
De’Arial King (National PanHellenic Council President)
Cindhy Hernandez (Multicultural Greek Council President)
Zach Beldon (Interfraternity Council President)

Staff Spotlight (Paula Beardon, M.A)

I am excited to be here at The University of North Texas as one of the Greek Life Coordinators working with some of the best leaders and most well rounded students on campus! I attribute Greek Life for being the most influential tool in molding my personal and professional development. I am committed to guiding students through their collegiate Greek Life experience helping them to develop more personally and professionally as well.

I am a native of Dallas, Texas and a current resident of Lewisville, TX. I have a background in Psychology with a B.S. from Sam Houston State University in Huntsville, TX and a Master of Arts in Industrial Organizational Psychology from Argosy University. My love and respect for Greek Life developed during my Undergrad at Sam Houston State University where I joined Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., as a freshman in the Spring of 2008. As a student at Sam Houston State, I worked in the Dean of Students/ Greek life Office for three years as well as became the President of my chapter, vice president of NPHC and membership chair of Order of Omega Greek Honor Society. After graduation in May 2011, I started my professional career in higher education as the DFW Regional Admissions Counselor for Sam Houston State. During those three years in my professional career I realized that I wanted to stay in higher education but move back to the Student affairs division and, more specifically, work with Greek Life. I am blessed and excited to be at service to the students, parents and alumni of the UNT Greek Community and look forward to working with you.
Director’s Corner

Greetings UNT Greek family! I hope you are enjoying this newsletter. The Greek Community is alive and well at UNT and I believe the articles found within this document provide a clear look into some of the ways our community is focusing on values driven action. I want to invite you to come visit the Greek Life Center and speak with our staff, we would love to give you a tour of the physical legacy each of you has had on the UNT campus. The Greek Life Center has been very busy and is filled with life, in its first year the building has hosted over three hundred different activities ranging from small meetings too larger regional leadership academies. One interesting fact regarding the photographs of the Greek Life Center that are included in this newsletter is that they were taken by a member of the Greek Community less than twenty four hours apart in an effort to show the unpredictability of North Texas weather. Whether Rain, Snow, or Sunshine, I would like very much to meet you all and spend some time discussing the Greek community at UNT. Please feel free to contact me personally.

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