

Theta Becomes First Women's Fraternity at Harvard

Kappa Alpha Theta, the first Greek-letter fraternity for women, added to its distinguished history as a "fraternity of firsts" on Jan. 30, 1993, with the establishment of Zeta Xi Chapter as the first women's fraternity chapter at Harvard-Radcliffe, the nation's oldest university.

In addition to its prestigious academic reputation, Harvard — voted the number one university in the United States year after year — is known for its many long-standing traditions, some dating back to its founding in Cambridge, Mass. more than 350 years ago. Many of these traditions, however, are decidedly male-oriented, including finals clubs and the Hasty Pudding Show. In fact, women were not admitted to Harvard University as students until the 1970s, but attended Radcliffe College.

"Especially at Harvard, forming a group for women is extremely important," says Rachel Schlesinger, Zeta Xi Ritualist. "The University is so old and, in terms of its history, women have begun to play a major role only recently. There is a large network for men here, and we should have the same opportunity to form groups exclusively for the benefit of women."

The idea of starting a women's fraternity at Harvard-Radcliffe began more than two years ago. Several women, including current members Grace Wang and Bunnie Lempesis, felt that women at Harvard-Radcliffe needed a place where they could go for support and friendship, in addition to learning

leadership skills and being educated about women's issues. After two years and one unsuccessful petition attempt, the National Panhellenic Conference granted the women's request to affiliate with an NPC group in October 1992.

The diverse interest group assembled in the spring and fall of 1992, ranged from freshmen to seniors, hailing from California, Oregon, Indiana, Illinois, South Carolina, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and New York. The group's first step was to process the information they received from 19 NPC groups. According to the women, Theta stood out from the beginning.

Says founding member Vice-President Administration Bunnie Lempesis, "We were most impressed by the amount of money the Kappa Alpha Theta Foundation presented in scholarships each year, and we liked the idea of CASA as the Fraternity's philanthropy. In addition to that, we were impressed with the prestige of Theta, being the oldest women's Greek-letter fraternity."

Following presentations by three NPC groups in November 1992, the women met. When the votes were tallied, Theta was the fraternity of choice. Kappa Alpha Theta's new Member Orientation program, which provides the opportunity to be initiated as soon as possible, played a role in the women's decision. "At Harvard, we felt that the Member Orientation program was not only appealing to us, but that it would be

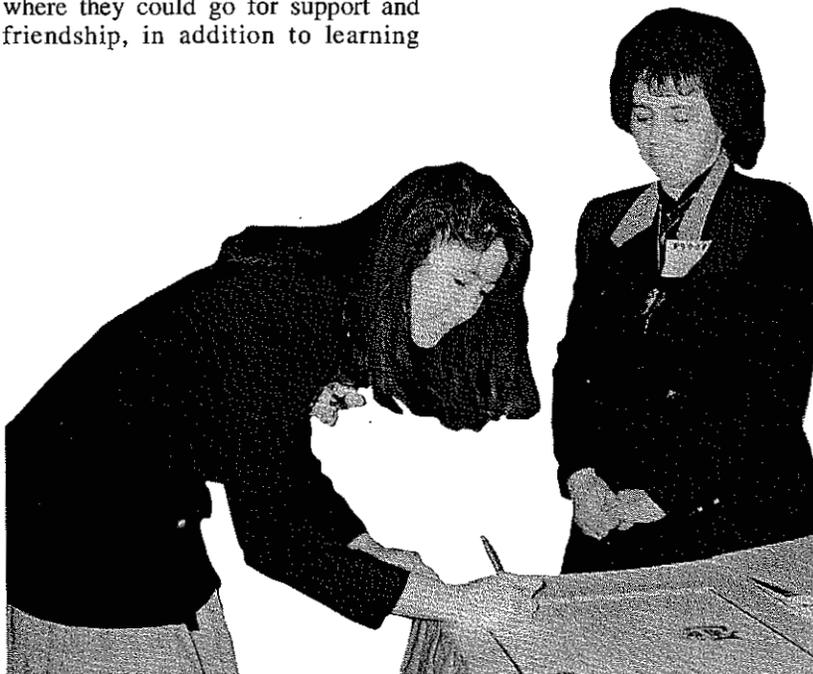


Rachel Schlesinger, Debbie Lipson and Suzie Harris spend a few lighthearted moments celebrating their new Theta sisterhood, following Zeta Xi's first initiation service, January 30, 1993.

appealing to the women who would rush in the future," explains Lempesis. "We have to totally revamp what students think of women's fraternities. Women here aren't interested in spending an entire semester playing silly games, but they'll want to be considered members as soon as possible."

Zeta Xi member Rachel Schlesinger adds, "In order to continue and establish a strong organization on campus, pledging has to be as brief a period as possible. Students are involved in so many extracurricular activities, that it might be difficult to have women commit if the pledging period was more than a couple of weeks."

The pledging service for Zeta Xi was held December 13, 1992, despite a



Kappa Alpha Theta President Carryl Krohne looks on as Zeta Xi President Grace Wang signs the charter of the pioneering chapter, the first women's fraternity on the Harvard-Radcliffe campus.

blinding snow storm, which was so severe that Fraternity President Carryl Krohne was unable to travel from New Hampshire. Eager to learn more about the Fraternity, the women took Member Orientation manuals home with them over winter break to read and study over the holidays. When they returned, Chapter Consultant Laura Barchi, based with the colony, began the education process. Although schedules were busy, the Member Orientation program was completed in two meetings, and installation was set for the final weekend in January.

On Friday, Jan. 29, the forecast called for the coldest weather to hit Boston in 20 years. While the temperature dropped to ten degrees below zero outside, friendship and excitement warmed the colony members and installation participants inside the Sheraton Commander, the installation location. The Loyalty Service, led by College District President Eileen Orscheln, began the festivities. Then Kathy Schweer, college regional director, truly fulfilled her role as installation song leader by directing a rousing sing-a-long. The assisting chapter, Zeta Mu/MIT, lent their incredible voices, and the women of Zeta Xi Colony enjoyed learning everything from rush to candlelight songs.

The day of initiation, Saturday, Jan. 30, began at 8 a.m. with the new members in awe. "Initiation was amazing. I felt so honored to go through it. I felt

Installation Team

Carryl Krohne
President
Helen Woodward
Vice-President Development
Kathy Schweer
College Regional Director
Eileen Orscheln
College District President
Suzanne Sarles
Alumnae District President
Nancy Frick
Director of Development
Kelley Hurst
Assistant Director of Development
Laura Barchi
Chapter Consultant
Piper Edmonson
Assisting Chapter Consultant



The charter members of Zeta Xi Chapter sought a women's group that would provide them with support and friendship on the Harvard-Radcliffe campus. Front row, from left: Jennifer Grove, Nicole Jampol, Suzie Horris, Melissa Fisher. Second row from left: Rachel Schlesinger, Debbie Lipson, Grace Wang, Bunnie Lempesis, Lisa Castaneda, Tanya Fenmore, Sara Thygeson.

there was a real bond, not only with the women I was initiated with, but with the women who were conducting the ceremony. I think it really hit home to all the Zeta Xi members that this was it, this is what we had been working toward all these months," explains Lempesis.

With more than 100 Thetas in attendance — including Boston Metro Alumnae Chapter members, who had graciously changed the date of their Founders Day Banquet to coincide with the installation — Zeta Xi President Grace Wang gave the Founders Toast. Fraternity President Carryl Krohne then spoke to the group about the similarities between the women at Harvard-Radcliffe University today and Thetas at Hanover College in the 1890s. She noted the likenesses in the small size of the groups, their pioneering attitudes and the quality women who comprised both. The luncheon ended with the Charter Service. "The real highlight of the weekend, besides initiation, was the signing of the charter," says Zeta Xi member Tanya Fenmore. "It made me truly realize that we would always be known as the first women's fraternity here."

The conclusion of the installation weekend signaled the official beginning of Zeta Xi Chapter as the first women's fraternity on the Harvard-Radcliffe

Charter Members

Lisa Castaneda Chicago, Ill.
Tanya Fenmore Beverly Hills, Calif.
Melissa Fisher Riverdale, N.Y.
Jennifer Grove West Lafayette, Ind.
Suzie Harris Bend, Ore.
Nicole Jampol Brooklyn, N.Y.
Bunnie Lempesis Columbia, S.C.
Debbie Lipson Ridgewood, N.J.
Rachel Schlesinger Scarsdale, N.Y.
Sara Thygeson Hatboro, Pa.
Grace Wang San Marino, Calif.

campus. Chapter President Grace Wang, the chapter's only graduating senior, says, "Although I will be graduating this May, I hope Zeta Xi will flourish. I know they will because of the dedicated women who make the chapter an exciting and dynamic group in which to be a member."

by **Laura Barchi**
Chapter Consultant