

ACC News You Should Know



Remembering ACC's Hellenic Past



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Higher Orbits: ACC Hosts Space Camp



Longtime Lumberjacks Retire

Toga! Toga! Greek Life at ACC



ACC's Sigma Phi Zeta Fraternity in May of 1967

It was November of 1966. Ronald Reagan was elected to be the next Governor of California, John Lennon met Yoko Ono at an art exhibition in London, and the social scene at Alpena Community College was on the verge of getting “more intense”.

At least, that’s how Lee Szczesniak, the soon-to-be-president of the newly formed Sigma Phi Zeta fraternity at ACC, described the purpose of the first Hellenic club formed at the college.

Speaking to The Timber-Cruiser student newspaper in 1966, Szczesniak is quoted as saying, “The main purpose of Sigma Phi Zeta is to promote a more intense social life.”

Considering their first official meeting, which was referred to in the press as a “smoker”, was almost raided by the police, it seems they achieved their goal—but more on that later.

The idea for the fraternity started on Oliver Street in Alpena, where Szczesniak, Dave Oliver, Ted Tinkom, and Gary Ebel lived. The roommates had been tossing around the idea of starting a fraternity for over a month when one day Oliver simply climbed up to the roof, installed a four-foot by eight-foot white sign with Greek letters painted on it in black, and declared it a fraternity house. Oliver later installed a floodlight to illuminate the sign at night, something that no doubt thrilled the neighbors. Figuring that they should actually go forward and form a fraternity to go with the sign, the housemates hatched a plan to create Sigma Phi Zeta.

Next came the paperwork and formalities. Szczesniak wrote the constitution for the group, submitted it to ACC’s student government and was told by the president of the organization at the time, Gary Davis, that Szczesniak needed to make some changes to the document before the constitution could be adopted. Once he made the stipulated improvements, Szczesniak and his co-organizers went forward with designing a crest, fraternity pins that Rene’s Jewelry produced, naming their charter chapter Omega, and getting instructors Myron David Orr and Chuck Neumann to serve as advisors.

The first official meeting of the fraternity came and so many cars were parked on Oliver Street that night that one of the neighbors called the cops.

“The police thought we were having a drinking party and knocked on the door,” Szczesniak recalled. “Three police cars were around the house. I answered the door dressed in a coat and tie (as were all others in attendance) and he asked me what was going on in the house. I told him we were having a meeting of Sigma Phi Zeta members. He asked if we were drinking. I said no, and I invited him into the house. He looked around, and promptly departed.”

And so it was that the first sanctioned fraternity at ACC was born. The group that started as a whim between four roommates became a structured fraternal organization that enlivened the ACC campus. Elections were held and Szczesniak was chosen as president, Dave Oliver was elected vice-president, and Doug Smith was treasurer. The frat held parties, yes, but they also performed hours of community service, such as

shoveling the walks and driveways of elderly residents in the winter, and acted as the unofficial JV basketball team at ACC as they took on academically ineligible basketball players and transfer students. Old editions of *The Timber-Cruiser* have reports of the fraternity fielding intramural football games with opponents from neighboring counties, sponsoring a winter carnival, and organizing a ski trip to Canada.



Sigma Phi Zeta, January 1968

By May of 1967, there were over twenty members of the “omega colony” of the charter Sigma Phi Zeta fraternity, with another 24 pledges on board by November of that year. A January 1968 edition of the *Timber-Cruiser* notes that Sigma Phi Zeta added 15 new members that school year, for a total of 28 fraternity brothers.

It’s unclear how long the fraternity lasted or when it disbanded. One thing is for sure, though: while active, Sigma Phi Zeta certainly made life at ACC more intense.

Were you a member of Sigma Phi Zeta? Contact ACC Director of Alumni Relations Mary Eagan, who is trying to piece together the history of the fraternity and plan a possible reunion in the future. Email her at eaganm@alpenacc.edu.

Picture, above:

Back Row: Ron Kendziorski, Russ Benson, Bill Muszynski, Don Mazzola, Steve Kahn, Jon Beckwith, Roger Skiba, Mike Finn, and Bill Bennett.

Middle Row: Marv Rodgers, Don Foster, Al Hoppe, Phil Glomski, Calvin Hicks, Pat Ferguson, Dave Tuomikoski, Bob Shaw, Ron Senyko.

Front Row: Wayne Christopherson recording secretary; Dave Marceau, treasurer; Doug Smith, president; Phil Ferguson, vice-president; Lauchlin MacGregor, corresponding secretary; Pete Skiba, sergeant at arms.

Missing: Joel Secrist, chaplain; Chuck McLeod, and Dick Amlotte.

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Higher Orbits: ACC Hosts Space Camp

Thirty students from 18 school districts across Northeast Lower Michigan learned that, when it comes to their future, the sky is definitely not the limit.



Team Olympus

Alpena Community College was pleased to host TRiO Talent Search students from across the area for a three-day Higher Orbits GOFORLAUNCH! day-camp in late June. Higher Orbits is a 501c3 non-profit organization that uses the study of space exploration to foster students’ interest in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and the arts.

During the ACC camp, TRiO Talent Search students were tasked with creating a research project proposal, which they then presented to a panel of judges. The winning team—Team Olympus, comprised of Ashley Anderson, Cassia Marchinski, Caleb Francisco, and Hanna Hinman—has the opportunity to compete against other

Michigan Higher Orbits finalist teams for an opportunity to launch their research project on the International Space Station.

During the ACC camp, area students developed and strengthened their skills in STEM, teamwork, communication, research design, public speaking, and leadership. Additionally, students worked side-by-side with astronaut Don Thomas for the entire event, learning, growing, and developing life skills.

TRiO Talent Search Director Sarah Prevo reflected on the impact the Higher Orbits camp had on the students her team works with.

"This was a once in a lifetime experience for students across 18 school districts in Northeast Michigan. We are so fortunate TRiO Talent Search was able to provide this opportunity for our youth," Prevo said. "With the announcement of the spaceports planned for Michigan, our goal was to broaden their interests in the STEM career fields. We couldn't think of a better way to invest in the growth and prosperity of the State of Michigan, inspire students, and create and retain the aerospace workforce we need."

Farewell, Not Goodbye: Two Longtime Lumberjacks Retire



Margaret Ricker & Garth Gapske

Two well-known, longtime ACC family members retired recently.

Margaret Ricker worked as an adjunct instructor at ACC from 1996 to 2010, when she was hired as a fulltime social science instructor, a position she held until her retirement at the end of July. An honors graduate of Michigan State University with bachelor's degrees in psychology and English

and minors in economics and French, Ricker continued to pursue her love of learning by earning a master's degree in history from Oakland University and a juris doctorate from the University of Michigan Law School. Thousands of students benefited from her expertise in a vast array of subjects during the 25 years of service she gave to the college.

Garth Gapske started working at ACC in August 2006 as a tool room attendant before being hired as a fulltime custodian in November 2011, caring for the Olin H. Joynton Fine Arts Center and Besser Technical Center. In addition to his custodial work, Gapske helped out in maintenance, grounds, and served as the Electrical Power Technology Center vehicle and maintenance repair technician during his tenure at ACC. Students and staff alike will miss their good-humored interactions with Gapske and the pride he took in his work.

