Alfred restaurant holds history of ASC’s Greek councils

By MARC C. RIXFORD
Staff writer

ALFRED — The Greek organizations at Alfred State College, once a major force at the school and now at risk of being abolished, are an important part of Alfred history.

Gamma Theta Gamma was the first fraternity founded in March 1950 and was followed by Psi Delta Omega, 1988; Pi Rho Zeta, 1987; and Kappa Sigma Epsilon.

The first sorority founded in 1982 was Alpha Beta Chi and the other two sororities are Pi Nu Epsilon and Delta Chi Omega, both founded in 1954.

"The Collegiate Restaurant on Main Street in Alfred and its owner John Ninos hold a lot of history of the organizations." About 75 large Greek organization paddles fill the walls of the restaurant from as far back as 1955, when the first paddle was brought in.

The paddles were assignments for pledges and contain the names of the members of the organizations. They were placed in the restaurant each year in recognition of Ninos’ involvement with the organizations.

"I was very active with the fraternities and sororities so they were doing it more or less with my association with them and also as a means of displaying the names of the members of that particular year," Ninos said.

"When the paddles started coming in, no one realized the impact they would have because most have paddles such as the one made in 1955 with some of the names of people who have had their paddles come to the school and graduate.

"So a lot of the people come back to visit and bring their children who can see their parents name on the paddles and this is probably the only area in which the kids can relate," Ninos said.

"I was involved with a lot of their athletic activities and was given a plaque from the ASC 1967-58 student body which stated ‘To John Ninos for your constant thoughtfulness and assistance in all we.’"

Recently he received a small paddle for his 67th birthday from Phi Delta Omega and Alpha Beta Chi.

Ninos said the paddles stopped coming to the restaurant in the early 1980s for two primary reasons.

"One is the fraternities and sororities particularly those at ASC are not as strong as they used to be so they are not quite as involved in the many things they used to do in years past," he said.

"Also the walls are pretty well covered, which could have discouraged them from making more because they would feel they wouldn’t have a place to put them."

One of the most significant reasons why the organizations are not like they used to be is because each used to be housed in their own buildings, which they owned and maintained. It was where they did their own cooking and had their own social activities, said Ninos.

Now they don’t have that anymore and it has taken away from the unity they once had and also the ability to offer to a freshman some kind of an important reason to pledge and become a member.

"Another reason is that years ago when there were no bars in Alfred, fraternities and sororities were representing the only place where a student could go and have a drink at a weekend party, Ninos said. "The organizations had much more of a social importance in the lifestyle of the students.”

He said now the students have a number of outlets were they can go and drink and socialize as the campus grew bigger and the facilities became available.

This has taken away from the importance of the fraternities and the sororities to a young freshman who is coming in, he said.

"The thought of the harassment of pledging that goes along with the initiation of a new member becomes discouraging and they say why should I go through all of this," Ninos said.

"And with a lot of undesirable things that take place in the organizations today, I think there is a drive to eliminate them because they don’t feel they serve any purpose."

Ninos said he thinks they do serve a purpose, but they have weakened to the extent that they have lost some of their own pride and some of the integrity they used to have.

"If they were to restore the kind of status they had within the social level of the campus in which they exist, I think they could direct their functions to even more worthwhile activities," he said.

"In the days when they were strong, they were well accepted and were the ones who had worthwhile functions within the campus and the community, which no longer exist, he said.

Ninos noted activities such as a snow sculpturing competition which provided some "incredibly beautiful" sculptures and brought in people from all over the area. They also brought in big bands and other activities in which the local people were invited to participate in the festivities.

"There were a lot of things which were being organized by the fraternities and sororities as being the top of the student body functions," said Ninos. "As they lost their strength and importance, these things died out and are no longer existing.

"In order for them to come back and develop the kind of role they used to carry, some of the guidelines under which they are existing will have to be changed again so they will have the opportunity to become stronger and more active."

Photo by MARC C. RIXFORD

College Restaurant owner John Ninos stands in front of some 75 Alfred State College Greek organization paddles which fill the walls of his restaurant. The paddles date back to 1955 and were given to the restaurant to recognize Ninos’ earlier involvement and assistance to the organizations.