

HISTORY and TRADITIONS
of
EPSILON SIGMA ALPHA

SPRING LEADERSHIP
RAPID CITY, SOUTH DAKOTA
MARCH 28, 2015

and

SOUTH DAKOTA STATE COUNCIL CONVENTION
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HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Epsilon Sigma Alpha is very different today from its beginnings in Jacksonville, Texas in October 1929. Those 10 women came together to learn, grow and prepare themselves for an ever-changing world. In 1930, Epsilon Sigma Alpha chartered in Missouri.

At that time, the Roarin' 20s were giving way to the Great Depression yet ESA grew—not exploding—but not imploding. The first National Convention was held in Kansas City in 1938, and our first National President was elected at that meeting. Subsequent National Conventions were held in 1939, 1940 and 1941. Because of World War II, the next Convention was not held until 1947-48. Since a chapter had chartered in 1948 in Holland, this was our first International Convention.

World War II years saw women in large numbers, for the first time, going to work outside the home to aid the war effort (think Rosie the Riveter) and earn money to keep families “going” while the men were fighting in foreign lands. ESA women and many other women supported war-related charities like USO and the American Red Cross.

After World War II, chapters and their members became active in the March of Dimes organization and its Mother's March. It was CRITICAL because polio was robbing many youth of their ability to function and in many cases their lives.

Chapters started forming again after the end of World War II. Some had help from organizers, and others were women who wanted to make the world a better place as well as having something to call their own. In South Dakota we had a number of chapters organized ... those surviving from that era are Alpha Lambda, Vermillion, chartered in 1946; Alpha Sigma, Sioux Falls, 1947; and Alpha Phi, Winner, 1950. The South Dakota State Council was organized in 1950 and held its first State Convention in Pierre.

Society changed significantly after World War II ... the GI Bill helped returning soldiers obtain post-secondary education, the Depression was behind us, farm families were migrating into cities, returning soldiers were marrying, electricity was reaching more people, and appliances were making woman's work easier ... but many jobs women held during the War were returned to men. The ladies had some free time ... and women in town weren't isolated so they got together. Those women working outside the home couldn't enjoy the coffee clutches so

maybe they saw ESA as a counterpart to the males-only organizations like Elks, Moose and Eagles.

Jumping ahead with the ESA Story to 1970 ... Marsha Risseeuw and I were in attendance at the International Convention in St. Paul, Minnesota when Danny Thomas was introduced to ESA and made his request that ESA partner with St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. In 1972 ESA accepted that challenge and our efforts have continued to escalate. Some years later, we adopted Easter Seals as a second International Project.

ESAers – as members and chapters – have consistently shown working together for a common goal, whether St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, Easter Seals, state projects, or community projects yields GREAT RESULTS. That teamwork is obvious also in the ESA Foundation ... scholarships (7,788 applications received for the 169 scholarships available for 2015-2016), endowments, grants, and programs of interest like hoarding, pet hoarding, identity theft, insurance, and osteoporosis are available.

The first Collegiate Chapter was organized in 1988 at Ball State University, in Muncie, Indiana. Collegiate chapters are providing an increase in ESA membership. The downside is ... many upon graduating or leaving college are not transferring into traditional chapters where growth is needed.

As years have gone by, society has again changed and ESA has changed to remain an active player in making the world a better place. Today, most families require double incomes. There are more single-parent families, many living below the poverty line. Children are taking part in more activities. Many people have financial and job stresses. As well, other dynamics have altered how we use our spare time. Our world has become more "cut to the chase" so we can get to the next meeting, home to wash clothes, pick up kids, make tomorrow's lunches....

Hence, chapters have had to re-fashion themselves to remain viable. One of the re-fashionings has been opening membership to "our" men". Several husbands in South Dakota are now ESA members. Another change was revising the Opening Ritual to reflect members instead of sisters. Another was permitting members belonging to a chapter to be an Associate Member of another chapter. We have a number of Associate Members in South Dakota.

South Dakota has 130 ± members ... nine of which have over 45 years of service. As our membership ages, it becomes imperative that we GAIN and RETAIN new members—in South Dakota and organization-wide.

OUR TRADITIONS

Our ESA Rituals and Traditions molded us as members ... some of us remember the “early” years when

- Two meetings a month, one business and one social, were generally the norm
- Chapter members voted on who would be “rushed” ... and yes, blackball was an option
- The rushee ideally attended a rush party and a model meeting; then she was offered a membership application form
- A pledge ceremony was held in a candlelight room with the pledges on their knees ...while a Jewel Pin member held a candle or small flashlight for the reader
- A pledge training period took place followed by a test on the study chapters in the IDEALS. It meant memorizing the Opening and Closing Rituals, and learning the Greek Alphabet, pin etiquette and ESA’s history
- Usually six months after pledging and satisfactory completion of the pledge training, the pledge received her Jewel Pin, thus becoming a “full” member of Epsilon Sigma Alpha.

Along the six-month journey, we were

- Assigned to a committee or two, with an eye toward becoming a chapter officer
- Encouraged to recruit our friends
- Encouraged to attend State meetings and make friends from other chapters
- Encouraged to earn the First Pearl or First Pearl +1 award in the first year of membership.
- Then encouraged to start working on the Degrees of Pallas Athene. What is required to receive these recognitions is available in your IDEALS or the IDEALS online.

The Sixth Degree of Pallas Athene created later is based on participation and presentation. There are several Sixth Degree recipients in South Dakota.

My hope is each of you has a wonderful relationship with Epsilon Sigma Alpha ...that you acquire new friends, you work to make your corner of the world a better place, and you share your talents with others.

Most importantly, THANKS for being an ESAer!

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