

My big fake Greek fraternity

Students found their own fraternities and sororities for social and rebellious fun

By Lisa Merryman
THE BATTALION

The members of the fraternity Phi Chi never want to join official Greek life. Phi Chi, one of a handful of "fake" Greek organizations at Texas A&M, began as a group of friends and has advanced to an official "unofficial" fraternity.

Ryan Shipley, a self-proclaimed "founding father" of Phi Chi and a junior construction major said there are many benefits to participating in unofficial Greek life.

"We want to build relationships with people, going beyond just being acquaintances," Shipley said. "The great thing about having a fake frat is the ability to claim ownership over it. The flexibility and freedom we have allows us to do so much more with it."

Shipley said Phi Chi stands for "followers of Christ," which is based on the biblical verse Romans 12:10.

Ryan Couch, another original member of Phi Chi and a junior information systems major, said the fraternity originated as a group of friends meeting on a regular basis.

"Phi Chi began as four roommates in Aston Hall getting together on Sunday nights for prayer and accountability," Couch said. "A couple of weeks later, on Sept. 13, 2001, we named it Phi Chi."

Building relationships with others is key to Phi Chi's purpose, said John Gilbert, a member of Phi Chi and a junior speech communications major.

"Phi Chi is all about brotherhood," Gilbert said. "The Phi Chi house is definitely the hot spot for meeting people and hanging out. Our door is always open for whoever wants to stop by."

A major part of official and unofficial Greek life is social functions.

Phi Chi has already had two functions, "Back to School Bash" and "Pajama-Rama" since school began. Allen Duty, one of Phi Chi's original members and a junior marketing major said Phi Chi is becoming well-known on campus.

"We made shirts, and people really came in their pajamas," Duty said. "We had a great turnout (at our parties), and it's cool because now I see

people around campus with our Phi Chi shirts on," he said. "One of the best things about being in Phi Chi is when people come up to me on campus and say, 'Hey, aren't you a Phi Chi guy?' I love it."

Storey Wilkes, a sophomore political science major, attended the "Back to School Bash" and said she was impressed with the wholesome atmosphere Phi Chi provided.

"The party was great because I got to see a lot of my friends I hadn't seen all summer and in a clean, welcoming atmosphere," she said. "There was no pressure to drink at all."

Fake greek life is not reserved for just Aggie men, however.

Sarah Carpenter, a junior marketing major, and Katie Peterson, a junior industrial distribution major, said they are proud members of Lambda Gamma, a fake sorority.

"Lambda Gamma comes from our lunch group that we started doing last year," Carpenter said. That's where we came up with the idea to begin our sorority's name with the letters 'L' and 'G.'"

Carpenter said Lambda Gamma's reputation reaches beyond College Station.

"Last year we went to Lubbock for the Tech game and after the game we went around to a bunch of the different parties," Carpenter said.

"All the girls, it seemed, were in a sorority that we met and we were tired of answering 'no' when asked if we were in a sorority at A&M. Finally we said, 'Yeah, we're in Lambda Gamma at A&M.' Ever since then, the name, and group, has stuck."

Lambda Gamma's members agree that "fake" greek life is a lot cheaper and establishes lasting relationships.

"We meet once a week, all four of us, to have dinner together and hang out," Peterson said. "We met our freshman year because we were in the same FLO (Freshmen Leadership Organization) and our dues were \$60. We knew how expensive a real sorority would be if we ever wanted to be in one, so we coined the phrase, 'Sixty bucks, friends for life.'"

Although cheap "dues" and the promise of lasting friendships may convince other women to pledge, Carpenter said Lambda Gamma membership is closed.

"I guess we're like a real sorority in a sense that we're very selective. It's just the four of us," Carpenter said.

Although panhellenic sororities may throw crush parties with each other, fake sororities have the same advantage. On Oct. 23, Lambda Gamma will team up with another fake sorority, Tri Zeta, for its first official formal date party.

Amy Puente, a junior kinesiology major, is one of six girls in Tri Zeta, and said she is pumped about the date party.

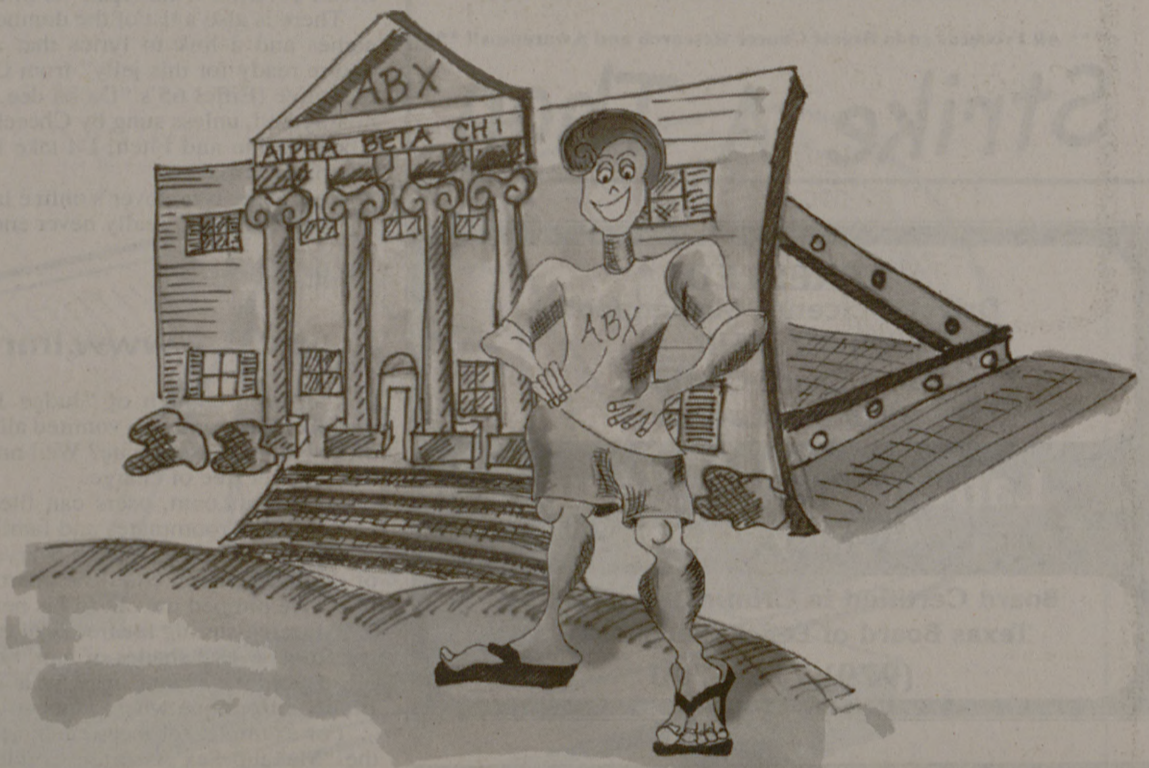
"This is our first official date party, so these 10 guys who get to be our dates are pretty lucky. We're definitely making shirts for the occasion and are planning some great stuff for the night," Puente said.

Puente said the Tri Zetas officially started this year and had its first party on Sept. 20, 2002. Puente said two of Tri Zeta members turned 21 on the same day, so they threw a "Birthday Bash," complete with T-shirts.

"Fake greek life is the way to go," Puente said. "There are no 'have to's,' and it's a great excuse to all get together and do something because it's an official Tri Zeta thing."

Puente said one of the best reasons to create a fake fraternity or sorority is for the wardrobe incentives.

"It's always a good reason to make random shirts," she said.



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