



THE FIREMAN



The newsletter for alumni and friends of Gamma Theta Chapter of Pi Kappa Alpha at Mississippi State University

SOWING NEW SEEDS

Gamma Theta Prepares for Another Great Year

Well, the 2024-25 academic year has ended, and I would like to reflect on a year marked by growth, achievement, and unwavering brotherhood. From the heat of August to the close of this spring semester, PIKE has continued to live out its commitment to leadership, service, and excellence.

Our fall semester began with an exceptional recruitment effort that brought in a strong group of new members. This pledge class proved to be one of the most promising in recent years, integrating quickly into the chapter through involvement in campus activities, academic success, chapter leadership, and dedication to fraternity life.

Philanthropy and service were at the heart of the chapter's efforts this year. The chapter raised funds through its annual Fireman's Challenge event to benefit the local Starkville Fire Department and the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation. Brothers also volunteered for and participated in many campus-wide and community-wide events, contributing more than 1,600 collective community service hours (which was just shy of their per-member goal).

Even More Service

Some of the events this year were the Kappa Sig Charity Bowl, where PIKE helped raise over \$500,000 for the Reclaimed Project, which provides clean drinking water sources and sustainability for villages in rural Africa. PIKE and Tri Delta hosted a fundraiser for pediatric cancer research at St. Jude to honor a brother who is now battling cancer. The chapter also hosted a Greek worship night at the chapter house; every chapter on campus participated.

Academically, Gamma Theta continued to raise the bar. The chapter finished the fall and spring semesters with a collective GPA that ranked among the top fraternities at MSU. Academic support programs, including study halls and peer tutoring, played a significant role in helping brothers thrive in the classroom.

The social calendar was packed with memorable events like the annual alumni party in the fall, Homecoming celebrations, baseball game cookouts, spring parents and alumni parties, and formal in

New Orleans. These events helped strengthen the bonds within the chapter and kept alumni actively involved in PIKE life.

Leadership continued to be a hallmark of Gamma Theta's identity. Brothers held leadership positions in organizations such as the Student Association, IFC, and campus clubs. Several

alumni have joined our Alumni Advisory Board this year to help mentor undergraduates and even offer career advice to upperclassmen and graduating seniors.

As the chapter prepares for the upcoming year, there's a strong sense of pride in what's been accomplished. The 2024-25 year was not only about strengthening the fraternity internally but also about making a lasting impact on the Mississippi State and Starkville communities.



Brothers come together in support of Taze Fulford '23 (front and center), who was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma. Many brothers took part in shaving their heads in support of Taze and his battle with cancer. All the proceeds from this philanthropy event were sent to St. Jude in honor of Taze.

What's Next?

This year also marked the beginning of a significant project at the chapter house: the replacement of the two iconic oak trees that have long stood as symbols of the chapter's strength and tradition. After decades of providing shade and serving as a backdrop for countless memories, the trees were determined to have a disease that is ultimately detrimental to their survival. In their place, the chapter is looking at planting two new live oaks, ensuring that future generations of brothers will continue to share in that same sense of place and history. This will be a major undertaking to remove the existing trees and identify and move in two replacements. Work on this project is expected to begin this fall and will hopefully be completed in the summer of 2026.

Looking ahead, the chapter has begun early planning for a once-in-a-lifetime milestone: Gamma Theta's centennial celebration in 2027. With a century of brotherhood, leadership, and tradition to honor, we are hoping to put together a special committee to work on ideas for a large-scale reunion weekend, alumni recognition events, and a historical display commemorating the chapter's rich legacy at Mississippi State. The centennial will not only celebrate the past but also set the tone for Gamma Theta's future—stronger, prouder, and more united than ever.

Fraternally,
Jay Cook '02
House Corporation President
jaycook@bankcom.com
(662) 418-9605

Building on Success ❖ Gamma Theta Focuses on Community

This academic year began with great distinction, as our chapter was honored to receive both the **Robert Adger Smythe Award** and the **Raymond L. Orians Excellence Award**, recognizing our commitment to excellence in all aspects of fraternity life.

Throughout the year, we have continued to build on this momentum with several meaningful developments. We welcomed nine members through spring recruitment and officially initiated them in February. Our chapter was proud to participate in this year's Charity Bowl against Kappa Sigma, an event that ultimately raised over \$500,000 for charity. That same day, May 1, we commemorated our Founders' Day.

In January, we were deeply saddened by the news that brother **Taze Fulford '24** was diagnosed with Hodgkin's Lymphoma. In response, we organized a philanthropy event in Taze's honor in February in partnership with Tri Delta, raising \$3,000 for St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in his name.



Brothers participating in Starkville's annual Frostbite Race for charity in January. From left: Collin Ledsinger '23, Ben Wilson '23, Hastings Saffle '23, Jake Marlin '24, and Dean Patterson '24.

The spring semester was marked by strong community service efforts, including assisting with local event logistics in Starkville, contributing to canned food drives, and participating in the Frostbite 5K charity run. Our presence on campus also remained significant. **Logan Miller '23** was elected IFC director of outreach and served as an IFC new member class facilitator. Additionally, six brothers served as Rho Chis, **Bates Whetstone '24** and I were



Pikes play in the 2025 Charity Bowl Classic against Kappa Sigma.

selected to serve as Roadrunners. Academically, our chapter demonstrated outstanding performance, with 18 brothers named to the president's list and 15 to the dean's list for the fall semester.

Gamma Theta enjoyed several memorable events this spring, including a crawfish boil for the MSU vs. South Carolina baseball game, which we hosted for parents and alumni. Our social events, including the St. Patrick's Day party and PIKE Palooza, saw enthusiastic attendance and continued to strengthen brotherhood and chapter spirit.

We held several internal brotherhood events as well, such as International Workday and the New Member Olympics. The Olympics paired active members with new members in friendly team competitions that promoted unity and engagement. During International Workday, members completed a range of house projects that included cleaning, reorganizing the study and chapter rooms, pressure washing the porches, and performing necessary repairs. Our home looks great heading into the summer, and we can't wait to return for another great PIKE year.

Fraternally,
Hastings Saffle '23
Chapter President



Gamma Theta accepts the Robert Adger Smythe Award for the first time since 1974.

Notable Campus Involvement

Honors College
Carson Cardell '23
Alex Johnston '23
Jack Gregory '24

Rho Chis
Rob Hubbard '22
Adam Jefferson '22
Wilbur Ramos '22
Nathan Smith '22
Brayden Shockey '23

Associate IFC
Clinton Green '24

Roadrunners
Hastings Saffle '23
Bates Whetstone '24

New Maroon Camp Counselor
Hastings Saffle '23

IFC New Member Class
Facilitator and Director
of Outreach
Logan Miller '23

WE'RE PUTTING OUT THE WELCOME SIGN!

Know Someone Who Should Be Here?

We're always looking for promising young men to bring into Gamma Theta and would appreciate recommendations of men you know who would be a good fit.

Send their info to the recruitment chairmen listed to the right. Please include name, hometown, phone number, and any relation to legacy and/or active members.



Ethan Strange '23

ets163@msstate.edu | (662) 687-5305

Jack Hodo '23

jmh1660@msstate.edu | (601) 520-1062

Brandon Lusk '23

bdl244@msstate.edu | (901) 239-1615

Chapter Officers

President
Hastings Saffle '23

Internal Vice President
Heath Mattocks '23

External Vice President
Bates Whetstone '24

Treasurer
Zach Fisher '23

Secretary
Logan Miller '23

Sergeant-at-Arms
Camden Copeland '23

Vice President of
Member Development
John Michael Moran '24

Member at Large
Jed Stephenson '23

Recruitment Chairmen
Jack Hodo '23
jmh1660@msstate.edu

Brandon Lusk '23
bdl244@msstate.edu

Ethan Strange '23
ets163@msstate.edu

In Their Own Words

Hear from Some of Our New Members

Brayden Bouchillon '24

"PIKE stood for values that were important to me, such as brotherhood, loyalty, and courage. The brothers I met were extremely welcoming and wanted me to experience the greatness of being a Pike."

Kimbiel Kumtor '24

"I saw a group of driven, welcoming guys who pushed one another to grow. The brotherhood felt genuine, and I knew it was a place where I could build lifelong friendships and better myself."

Larson Hager '24

"I chose PIKE because I wanted to be part of something bigger than myself. The chapter's strong reputation, campus involvement, and the way the guys carried themselves made it an easy choice. It felt like the right place to challenge myself and make the most of college."



At our annual Alumni Date Party, the brotherhood named our kitchen in honor of Ms. Betty for over 25 years of service to Gamma Theta. From left: Trace Dye '23, Jay Cook '02, Brandon Lusk '23, Ms. Betty, Adam Ritter '22, and John Mark Anderson '22.

CHAPTER GOALS

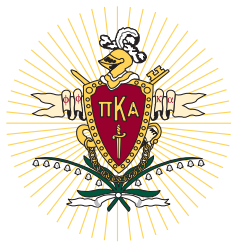
Strengthen alumni involvement and support through events and communication.

Reach 160 undergraduate members by recruiting around 50 new members each fall.

Raise our GPA.
There is still room for improvement, and a better GPA gives us a great shot at winning another Smythe Award.



At our annual Pikes for Pups philanthropy event on November 19, Hastings Saffle '23 announces our newest honorary initiate, Bully XXII, also known as Dak.



THE FIREMAN STATE

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A VALUABLE NETWORK

Seth Essner '17 on the Fraternity's Impact

Seth Essner '17 didn't know anybody at Gamma Theta in the beginning, which made his early fraternity experience exciting. He made friends with Pikes who were diverse in geography and personal interests, and his new brotherhood had the premier spot for campus tailgates. Seth went on to serve the chapter in successful terms as treasurer and president, which taught him an important lesson in managing people who were also his friends.

"You have to find a balance, and that helped me be disciplined in my actions as I've progressed in my professional career," he said.

Eager to stay involved with PIKE, Seth joined the Gamma Theta House Corporation as treasurer; he is also the financial advisor on our Alumni Advisory Board. In other words, he manages the corporation's finances and ensures a smooth operation while helping mentor the undergraduate chapter's executive committee.

"PIKE helped me shape the rest of my life, and it's been rewarding to guide the people who are in those same shoes today." As an advisor, Seth

offers suggestions as to how he might approach a task and why, while giving the brothers room to try their own approach.

Prior to Seth's age group, not many people from his home in southeast Missouri went to Mississippi State. Seth would visit the area in the summers and other breaks, encouraging friends and acquaintances to consider the university and check out PIKE. Over time, his visits made an impact on Missouri recruitment. "I think it's set a trend going forward, which has been a great experience for myself and all our members from the area."

Seth and his fellow board members welcome any and all alumni to reconnect and get involved with Gamma Theta. "Everyone can be a resource, and the more resources, the better," he said. "I've gotten to know people I wouldn't have met without staying involved. It's important to stay connected to such a valuable network."



**KEEP YOUR
CONTACT INFO
CURRENT WITH
GAMMA THETA!**

Make sure you're
receiving all things
PIKE at MSU
in your mailbox
and inbox.



Fill out the
enclosed bio update
and mail it in with
any changes.
*More instructions
are on the form!*

YOU CAN REACH SETH AT ESSNERSETH@GMAIL.COM.