



# THE FIREMAN



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

## FROM COVID TO COMMENCEMENT

A Truly  
Unique  
4 Years

**H**ere we are with yet another successful school year in the books. I am truly excited and honored to say congratulations and good luck to 27 young graduates! It's always a pleasure to be associated with the young men of Pi Kappa Alpha; this class was very special, as they entered college on the heels of the pandemic.

This group has led our chapter through some great times and seen many successes. Spring was one of the best semesters (and 2023-24 one of the best years) we have had. As advisor, I am so proud of where the chapter is and how much these young men have achieved. As a fellow brother and alumnus, I know this success is owed in part to the foundation laid by our alumni, both old and new.

Gamma Theta has had a long and storied history at Mississippi State University, going back to our chartering in 1927. I have been extremely fortunate to witness the growth and maturity of the chapter over the past 13 years as advisor, and I hope and pray for continued growth and success.

We hosted our annual alumni social in the fall and, as always, it was a wonderful event. This tradition has grown to incorporate awards and accolades to honor all of you, our alumni. This spring, we held separate events for parents and alumni: an alumni brunch (plus MSU home baseball game!) followed by a Parents Weekend lunch. Both spring events will continue, and we look forward to hosting more gatherings (formal and informal) at the chapter house.

Be on the lookout for news and updates on events, projects, ideas, and programming in the year to come! We hope you will get involved one way or another. Share your experiences, thoughts, and suggestions for recruitment recommendations and anything else as we strive to constantly improve ourselves. Together and across generations, Gamma Theta brothers make our chapter house a home.

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

## When Leaps of Faith Pay Off

Josh Harkins '94 on the Road from PIKE to State Politics



**J**osh Harkins '94 has been around politics his whole life. His father was always active in the Mississippi Republican Party, and their family helped numerous candidates run for statewide and federal office. Despite enjoying the political environment, Josh never pictured running himself—then his predecessor in the Mississippi State Senate encouraged him to give it a shot. So at age 35 with a wife, two kids, and a comfortable real estate career, he took a leap of faith.

Thirteen years later, Josh is starting his fourth term as a state senator, where he chairs the State Finance Committee. "I've enjoyed the opportunity to hopefully make a difference in my community and state."

### *Finding Yourself Within a Group*

Josh also took a leap of faith as a college freshman: he had friends in several fraternities, but something about PIKE just seemed

different. That choice led him to lifelong friends with no shortage of ways to have fun in their MSU years, followed by weddings and countless trips in the decades to come. Josh is even the godfather of a fraternity brother's child. "There are many levels to the bonds we fostered in four short years of college, and I wouldn't trade anything for that."

Gamma Theta helped Josh come out of his shell and discover the confidence for life challenges such as running for office. "I never pictured myself giving a political or commencement speech in front of 3,000 people as a state senator," he said. "But college and fraternity life prepare you to take charge and work toward goals (both in personal and group settings) with courage and confidence. It's nice to have an organization that holds you accountable for your grades and your commitments, helping you evolve into the man you'll become."

*(Continued on page 2)*

# BUILDING THE BONDS

## Brothers Continue to Serve

**FEBRUARY 19**



PIKE and Phi Mu sell fried Oreos to support the family of the late Noah Rhea '22.

**MARCH 2**



PIKE's intramural flag football team wins the Charity Bowl tournament at Davis Wade Stadium.

**APRIL 19**



Brothers host a raffle to support the Rally Foundation, a non-profit that works to fund treatments and research for childhood cancer.

**APRIL 20**



Spring Parents Weekend with a crawfish boil and a band. Brothers serving crawfish: Landon Saffle '21 (left) and Jackson Luscy '21.

The spring began with recruiting nine young men, all of whom we initiated this March. After recruitment, Gamma Theta had several community service and philanthropy events such as the annual Frostbite Race, several donation drives, a crawfish boil for the Greater Starkville Development Partnership, and our monthly firetruck wash for the Starkville Fire Department.

We also organized a spring raffle, raising \$7,000 for the Rally Gulf Coast Foundation. Gamma Theta even hosted a joint philanthropy event with Phi Mu to raise money for our late brother, **Noah Rhea '22**. Together, we raised just over \$6,500 to help the family cover medical expenses.

In addition to outstanding service and philanthropy, brotherhood events were alive and well. We had a great turnout for Parents Weekend, Spring Formal, PIKE Palooza, pickleball and basketball tournaments, and more. We also had the pleasure of hosting alumni for a crawfish boil and brunch, where we enjoyed catching up and meeting brothers.

On our annual international workday projects at the chapter house included installing a new trophy case, building a back deck, and creating a new study room.

Many brothers served in positions throughout campus this past semester, such as:

- **Matthew Wingerter '21** as an IFC senator.
- **Ethan Fowler '20** in Alumni Delegates.
- **Wilbur Ramos '22** and Ethan Fowler at the Entrepreneurship Center.
- **Jacob Cucullu '21** in the Student Association Cabinet.
- **Joseph Saffle '23** as a New Maroon Camp counselor.
- **Jackson Jewel '22** in Associate IFC.
- **Bryse Carlton '21** as a recruiting assistant for MSU football.
- **Jackson Campbell '20** as a fan experience assistant for MSU Athletics.
- **Ethan Gibbel '23** as a College of Business ambassador.
- Joseph Saffle and **Bates Whetstone '24** as Roadrunners.
- **Colin Markey '23**, **Brayden Shockey '23**, Joseph Saffle, and **Logan Miller '23** in Freshman Reach.
- **Robert Hubbard '22**, Wilbur Ramos, **Adam Jefferson '22**, **Nathan Smith '22**, and Brayden Shockey as Rho Chis.
- **Mason Anglin '21**, **Tanner Lunn '21**, and **Will Robertson '21** as Maroon VIPs.

To conclude a remarkable academic year, we honored our newest Gamma Theta alumni during their graduation weekend. We can't wait to see what the fall semester brings us Pikes!

Fraternally,  
**Adam Ritter '22**, Chapter President  
ar2775@msstate.edu | (228) 236-6672

## When Leaps of Faith Pay Off

(Continued from page 1)

### Making Impacts

Members of the Mississippi State Senate end up in either the appropriations or finance committee. The latter, where Josh is currently chairman, deals in policy covering everything from taxes and revenue to borrowing money—for economic development projects, higher education, and more. “It’s a delicate dance of making sure you have enough revenue for the government’s essential functions while not overtaxing the people,” he explained.

With Mississippi at one of the lowest income tax rates in the country, Josh believes the state is in the best fiscal shape it’s ever been. “We’ve managed to pay off about \$900 million in debt without borrowing new money.” Josh is also proud of passing several “Right to Try” bills to help terminally ill patients try potentially life-saving treatments before FDA approval.

Instituting the third-grade reading gate led to major educational gains, boosting the state’s graduation rate above the national average during Josh’s career. Just recently, in an effort to create more high-paying jobs, Josh helped pass the state’s largest-ever single investment to bring Amazon data centers to the metro area. “We’ve accomplished a lot!”

### Where We’re Going

“The fraternity experience doesn’t end at graduation; it gets better and more meaningful as you grow older,” Josh said. “Seeing your brothers and their families makes you appreciate the time you’ve had together. I look forward to any occasion to spend time with them, and I’m grateful that I had the opportunity to pledge and become a PIKE.”

You can catch up with Josh at [joshharkins@bellsouth.net](mailto:joshharkins@bellsouth.net).



# The Lusk Legacy

## HOW A FAMILY REMAINS CONNECTED THROUGH PIKE

Legacy connections help Pikes develop bonds that run deeper than the average college experience. For **Alan Lusk '81**, he is grateful to share the Gamma Theta bond with sons **Chad '17** and **Brandon '23**. The Lusks all weighed in on their own fraternal development and what the family legacy means to them.

### DEVELOPING THE LEGACY

When Alan was a senior in high school, he had several friends from Starkville who decided to join PIKE at MSU. Similarly, Chad signed his bid in the summer alongside a high school friend.

*"I know that the amazing young men at Gamma Theta will continue to instill sound morals into the younger classes." —Chad Lusk '17*

"It was a legacy I wanted to continue—I wanted to be a part of something my father had experienced," Chad said. Brandon shared his brother's sentiment about the house, immediately feeling welcomed as soon as he walked through the chapter house doors.

Brandon always knew he wanted to join PIKE, though time with Chad reaffirmed that commitment as he saw firsthand what Gamma Theta brotherhood entailed. The family legacy has drawn the Lusks closer than ever, and Alan is honored that his sons were so passionate about sharing the PIKE experience.

*"PIKE has given us many extra experiences that we can share together." —Alan Lusk '81*

### PERSONAL GROWTH

The Lusks all gained plenty from their PIKE membership, from Alan's friendships beyond graduation to Chad's selflessness and Brandon's maturity. Though the house itself has changed over time, Alan sees his sons making the same genuine connections he made as an undergraduate.

"Brandon's initiation last fall was the best experience because we all could share that at the same time," Alan said. Chad enjoyed personally initiating his own brother into PIKE, and the celebration continued as the Lusks all shared lunch as Pikes afterward.

*"I feel like we have become closer because of this special bond we share from our experiences as Pikes." —Brandon Lusk '23*

### FRATERNAL SERVICE

Brandon currently serves Gamma Theta as alumni chairman, allowing him to collaborate with his brother and father to plan chapter events. Chad has been proud to see his brother take on the fraternity's expanded opportunities for chapter and community service, watching Brandon do whatever he can to elevate PIKE.

"My brother and I are extremely close," Chad added. "I feel strongly that Pi Kappa Alpha has assisted in molding him into the man he is today and that he will continue to grow."

You can connect with Alan at [aluskfcr@gmail.com](mailto:aluskfcr@gmail.com), Chad at [hailstatechad@gmail.com](mailto:hailstatechad@gmail.com), and Brandon at [gammathetapike.alumni@gmail.com](mailto:gammathetapike.alumni@gmail.com).



*Brandon Lusk '23 (left) with dad Alan '81 at Brandon's initiation.*



*Chad Lusk '17 (right) joins Brandon '23 at his initiation.*

## WELCOME, SPRING NEW MEMBERS!

**Jonathan Balcunos**  
Medina, Tenn.

**Logan Browning**  
Medina, Tenn.

**Brett Cullen Lampton**  
Oxford, Miss.

**Kayden Milano**  
Covington, La.

**John Michael Moran**  
Gulfport, Miss.

**Parker Rutz**  
Edwardsville, Ill.

**Brody Sample**  
Sherwood, Ark.

**Jacob Walker**  
Rossville, Tenn.

**Bates Whetstone**  
Hoover, Ala.

## WHY PIKE?

### Hear from Our Spring Initiates

*"To find a real brotherhood where people could help me to be the best version of myself—so that I could do the same for them."*  
—Bates Whetstone

*"The atmosphere of the chapter house as well as the way members carry themselves."*  
—Kayden Milano

*"The friends I've made in the brotherhood made PIKE a home away from home."* —Parker Rutz

*"The brotherhood and the people"*  
—John Michael Moran

# PIKE Grows Through All of Us

**Send Us Your Recruitment  
Referrals Today!**

**P**lease refer any potential new members to one of our recruitment chairmen. Along with your recommendation's name, please include their phone number, hometown, and any relation to legacy and/or active Pikes.

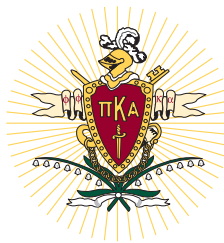
Thank you for helping to ensure Gamma Theta's continued growth!

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**Hudson Hadley '22**  
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## Alumni News

**Pete A. Lucovich Jr. '74** retired as an athletic director and head football coach at Carthage High in 2010 after 33 years of service. He was inducted into the Athletic Hall of Fame at East Central Community College in 2013 and was appointed to the Board of Trustees there in 2022. He is now retired and lives in Carthage, Miss. Email: coachluce@yahoo.com

**Steve R. Barrett '75** retired in Leesburg, Ga. He has been traveling to Savannah and Jupiter to visit his daughter and son and their families. Steve enjoys the beach (Mexico Beach), fishing, and golfing. He travels to Mississippi to visit his relatives, and every now and then, he attends a Mississippi State football game. Email: stevebarrett@bellsouth.net

### What are some of your favorite Gamma Theta memories?

*"Living in the Igloo; decorating for  
Homecoming; great bands and parties;  
wonderful brotherhood!"*

—Steve R. Barrett '75

## CHAPTER OFFICERS

President <b>Adam Ritter '22</b> ar2775@msstate.edu (228) 236-6672	Recruitment Chairmen <b>John Mark Anderson '22</b> (601) 606-5234 ja2068@msstate.edu	Campus Involvement Chairman <b>Alex Johnston '23</b>
External Vice President <b>Tanner Lunn '21</b>	<b>Hudson Hadley '22</b> (601) 941-9971 hjh179@msstate.edu	Social Chairman <b>Wilbur Ramos '22</b>
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Treasurer <b>Landon Saffle '21</b>	Risk Chairmen <b>Sean Marable '23</b> <b>Lee Pierce '23</b> <b>Joe Cappadonna '22</b> <b>Matthew Smith '21</b> <b>Keaton Cunningham '23</b>	Public Relations Chairman <b>Colin Markey '23</b>
Secretary <b>Jack Jewell '22</b>	Intramural Chairman <b>Zach Fisher '23</b>	T-Shirt Chairman <b>Zach Green '23</b>
Vice President Membership Development <b>Jackson Luscay '21</b>	Community Service Chairman <b>Joe Starr '23</b>	Fraternity/Sorority Relations Chairman <b>Ethan Strange '23</b>
Sergeant-at-Arms <b>Manuel Seymour '22</b>		Housing Chairman <b>Noah Strickland '23</b>
Member at Large <b>Rob Hubbard '22</b>		Kitchen Chairman <b>Cameron Sisson '23</b>
		Alumni Chairman <b>Brandon Lusk '23</b>