

Remodel: Sigma Phi Epsilon sets precedent for rest of the Greek system

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its the support of family and friends with helping him to recover.

"It was their support that made things easier," Markt said. "It just made things so much easier having someone to talk to and help me deal with things rather than trying to go through it on my own."

Markt soon learned that his fraternity brothers were working on a plan to remodel the house so he could live there when he returned to school.

"I was blown away that they would do this," Markt said. "To go through this much trouble and allow the house to be torn up just so one guy can come back. It meant an incredible amount."

"In my opinion, it destroyed all negative stereotypes of fraternity guys being shallow. This has been incredible," he said.

The project, which will cost about \$30,000 when completed, involves installing a wheelchair ramp at the front and back entrances, a wheelchair lift that will give Markt access to three floors of the house and a bathroom complete with a wheel-in shower.

Donations of money, supplies and equipment have been pouring in, but Chapter President Tim Broderick said, "We're still going to owe a lot of money on this, but the Alum Board felt that this was a good thing to do. They said we'd find the money somehow."

Oregon Remodelers Association has donated \$5,000, and Copeland Lumber has donated lumber for framing. Divers Window and Door donated skylights and doors. Ivy Hi-Lift donated the use of rental equipment. Some funds have also come from a housing corporation loan from the fraternity's corporate headquarters in Virginia.

Many of these donations have been possible because of Markt's family. His family has also played a part in making this plan become reality. Bill Markt, Jess' father and a remodeling contractor, has taken off about a month of work to come and help with the project.

"There's passion surrounding this project," Bill Markt said. "The reason this is happening is



MICHAEL CRISP/Emerald

Construction on the Sigma Phi Epsilon fraternity house is being done to accommodate Jess Markt.

because of his brothers' [fraternity] ties and feelings toward him and wanting him to come back."

Bill Markt said being able to do this project has meant a lot.

"This is one of the best parts, I guess, of this whole experience encompassing Jess' accident-rehabilitation and being able to come back to school.

"The guys in this house, they've definitely made [the project] happen. And from a very per-

sonal standpoint [working with them] was one of the best parts of getting to know them, to be here with them."

Broderick said the remodeling and fund raising for this project has brought the house together.

"Just the fact that one of our brothers is facing something like this, and is going to have to continue to face it, is enough to bring the rest of us together to try to help out as best as possible," he

said.

Broderick said Markt's accident has made him realize how quickly a person's life can change.

"For me, I joined the house the same time as Jess," Broderick said. "I knew him before the accident, and he was a tall, very athletic jock. He was a red shirt on the track team.

"And in the space of a few seconds, something life-changing happened. But to me, Jess is still Jess. He's the same person he was before; he's just sitting in a chair now."

Markt said he has faced challenges in adjusting after the accident, but his goals in life haven't changed.

"I'm still looking at being successful after college," Markt said. "I want to get a job, maybe internationally, using my Japanese."

"As far as life goals, they haven't really changed at all because they're still within reach. Obviously physical goals are different, but as far as what's really important, that hasn't changed."

Markt said he has tried to concentrate on adjusting to his life rather than his disability.

"This is how this situation is going to be, and I really can't do anything but deal with it," Markt said. "There's really no point in having a bad attitude or letting depression get to me. I really put all my energy into learning how to deal with it rather than feeling bad about it."

With the remodeling of their house, the Sigma Phi Epsilon will be the only Greek house at the University that is wheelchair accessible on residential floors. Sigma Kappa sorority, the only other house with wheelchair access, is accessible on the main floor. Broderick said the remodeling of their house will help with more than just Markt's situation.

"Now if someone wants to join a house but is in a wheelchair, they can look at our house," Broderick said. "We hope this will make it easier for someone who wants to be in a fraternity, but because he's in a wheelchair, probably won't be able to."

Greek houses are not required under the Americans with Disabilities Act to be wheelchair ac-

cessible because they are privately owned and do not receive enough money from the University to be under the government guidelines, University planning associate Fred Tepfer said.

Lack of accessibility is a major question surrounding the availability of the Greek system to those with disabilities. Broderick said accessibility, to his knowledge, has never been an issue in his house until Markt's accident.

Patti Gallagher, Chi Omega sorority president, also said it has never been an issue in her house. However, Gallagher said, "In the future, because of heightened awareness of accessibility to wheelchairs, I think it will become more of an issue."

Both Markt and Broderick hope the remodeling of their fraternity will be a model for other Greek houses.

"I would hope [other Greek houses] would look at this, and hopefully it will open up a new avenue," Markt said, "that they could actually do this and try to allow people with physical handicaps to enter their house."

"There's a lot of quality individuals out there that, as a result of being physically impaired, can't even think about joining a Greek house because they can't even get in to see what it's like."

The remodeling of Sigma Phi Epsilon not only opens the door to those with disabilities, but it has proved to be a changing point for those already within its doors.

"I think things are more under in terms of the fact that we have Jess back, and that's great," Broderick said. "We have to realize that Jess is not going to be able to do this or that like he used to. And that alone brings us together, the fact that we need to help him."

Markt doesn't pretend that any of this has been easy.

"It's been challenging mentally and emotionally," he said. "But I definitely have a better grasp on it now than I did."

However, Markt said being able to come back to school so soon has been a "bonus, rather than being hard." He also said the remodeling and the willingness of his brothers to do it is "incredible."

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