

Fraternity members shatter 'frat boy' stereotype

IMPRESSIONS: A fraternity shows there is another side to Greek life than just weekend parties

It was a hot Saturday afternoon, really hot. Joe Fleischmann and some of his fellow Delta Tau Delta brothers had just gotten back from playing away the long school week's stress through a game of softball. On the fraternity's front lawn, some "Deltas" were suggesting ways to beat the heat by riding the Slip 'n' Slide or battling it out with Super Soakers. But Joe was tired, thirsty and ready for a beer. So the guys busted out the half-rack, and soon things got a little wet and wild.

By the time the sun had gone down, that half-rack was well gone, and the party had moved inside the house. Joe, who normally wasn't a big dancer, had offset his insecurities with enough alcohol to put him in what he likes to call "the mood," the state of mind where he feels relaxed enough to have a good time. Actually, Joe's brothers usually found that "mood" a little humorous and poked fun at him from time to time for being so "happy" — constantly laughing and smiling — when he'd had a few. But even if he looked a little silly sometimes, Joe was

feeling good. He was dancing, meeting lots of new people, and drinking it up, while telling stories about the tough week that seemed like it would never end.

Joe partied hard that night and spent most of Sunday simply trying to recover. In fact, the disheveled post-party house looked hungover itself.

That weekend, Delta Tau Delta probably did its best imitation of the "Animal House" image most people have in mind as the typical frat house, and Joe probably came as close as he can come to being the stereotypical "frat boy."

Monday, however, is another story. In the morning, Joe, a business major, gets up early and goes to class. As soon as that lets out, he heads straight for Harris Elementary School, where he spends the next two hours working with first and second graders. Usually he reads to them or helps with daily activities like building or painting. Although activities may change from week to week, he always concludes his visits by coaching a recess kickball or basketball game.

And Joe isn't the only one. More than 90 percent of Delta Tau Delta members participate in the Adopt-A-School program, with most visiting Harris Elementary twice a week. Some, like Joe, help out with the youngest children, and the others tutor

COMMENTARY

Evan Denbaum

fourth and fifth graders in math or computer science.

The Adopt-A-School program, which is just one of the ways Deltas try to contribute to the community, has become an integral and very special component of Joe's life.

"I find working with the kids at Harris, in one word, fulfilling," Joe says. "We go to school, and I do my own work and my own thing. But once a week I get to go reach out and help some kids, and that's very fulfilling to me."

Maybe the best way to illustrate the significance of Delta Tau Delta's presence at the school is through Joe's experiences with one particular first grader named Chase. Joe and Chase have a real connection. Each week, they tend to seek each other out to take on such projects as building spaceships or buses out of blocks. One day they were making bead necklaces. When Chase finished his necklace, he turned to Joe and said, "This is for you." In turn, Joe gave Chase his necklace, and they each put them on. Joe knows that a bond was formed through the exchange. Joe knows another thing: When

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Chase looked up at him and made that gesture, it wasn't a beer-guzzling "frat-boy" that he saw.

There's another image of Joe that doesn't quite fit the "frat-boy" mold: One of him in oversized, ugly overalls, a blinding, neon-orange vest, and big, bulky gloves, trudging up the side of I-5 in a single-file line. No, it wasn't a chain gang, but a garbage pick-up, as part of the "Adopt-A-Highway" program.

Winter term, Delta Tau Delta "adopted" a two-mile stretch of the interstate, which they pledged to keep clean. And as Joe was quick to point out, "It was both sides of the highway, and there was a lot of trash." Joe even remembered one fraternity brother stumbling upon a roadkill, and holding it up by the tail for a picture, like the fishing trip's big catch. One wonders how hot the winter weekend parties would

have gotten if everyone had known where these frat boys had been!

More fun, and certainly less smelly, are the greek philanthropies in which Delta Tau Delta also frequently takes part. Recently, the Deltas fielded a team for the Gamma Phi Beta sorority's volleyball tournament. In most cases, participation in tournaments like this one has a price tag, and that playing fee goes to a chosen charity. Once a year, Deltas even swallow their pride and take part in Anchor Splash, which can only be described as the greek system's version of a talent show. The proceeds of that event also go to charity.

So, while Joe doesn't deny that the Deltas' weekend antics can sometimes be indicative of the "frat" stereotype, he would argue that there's a much bigger picture.

"While on Friday and Saturday there's drinking and partying like in the typical 'frat house,' in fraternities, and our house specifically, there's more than just that," explains Joe. "A lot of people just don't get to see the community-service side of things."

Evan A. Denbaum, a sophomore majoring in journalism, is a columnist for the Emerald. His views do not necessarily represent those of the newspaper.



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