



# THE DRAGON'S TALE

FALL 2020

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE NEBRASKA CHAPTER, THE ALPHA TAU OF BETA THETA PI

## The Coronavirus

**C**oronavirus. COVID-19. Just plain COVID. Pandemic. Whatever term we use to describe “the virus,” it has dramatically changed the way we live. Over 1,200,000 people worldwide have died, including over 230,000 in the United States. The lives of families across the globe are inalterably impacted and changed.

And COVID-19 has changed the Alpha Tau chapter. As reported in the spring issue of *The Dragon's Tale*, the chapter did not allow any occupancy after April 11. Students returned home and finished classes through online teaching.

Over the summer, chapter executives met via Zoom every week to discuss the upcoming fall semester. The Alumni Advisory Board met with the chapter executives about once a month. Chapter Counselor **Mike Wortman '67**, District Chief **Mark Antonson '04**, and House Corporation Treasurer **Drew Stange '80** were also involved in fall semester planning. House occupancy was reduced from 72 to 66 men. Rooms were reconfigured. Additional space in the house was converted into living quarters. Bunk beds were “out.” Formal Monday night dinners were discontinued as the chapter reduced the seating capacity in our dining room to allow for social distancing. Meals are being served in carryout containers. All precautions as established by the Centers for Disease Control, UNL, Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department, and those suggested by our General Fraternity were followed.

In spite of these extensive efforts, Beta was quarantined (along with five other Greek chapters) in September after some members had positive COVID-19 test results. (Thankfully all have recovered.) We are now “up and running,” but the changes we’ve experienced have altered much of Beta and college experiences. These will be more fully discussed in the following officer reports.

WEBSITE [www.nebraskabeta.com](http://www.nebraskabeta.com)

FACEBOOK Beta Theta Pi - University of Nebraska

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LINKEDIN Beta Theta Pi, Alpha Tau Chapter

## CHAPTER COUNSELOR REPORT

**O**ne of the important experiences of being a member of a Beta chapter is the opportunity for self-governance. This year’s executive team has had more than their share of opportunities to make leadership decisions. When these 11 officers ran for their positions in November 2019 and gave their campaign speeches, little did they realize what they would be facing. While they have had the support of the members of the Alumni Advisory Board, the UNL Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life, the Beta Theta Pi General Fraternity staff, and the members of the Parents’ Alliance—they made the final decisions that would impact their day-to-day life at 1515 R Street. I couldn’t be prouder of the way they have handled the hundreds of difficult decisions that had to be made to keep the men safe while still helping the undergraduate men have a positive Beta experience.

In Erik’s article (page 3) are the results of a number of awards that were presented by the General Fraternity and won by our Nebraska Chapter. These awards were announced but were not presented in person because the General Convention originally scheduled for August in Arizona was canceled. These awards are an indication of the good work done by the men of Nebraska Beta. Congratulations!

In another example of alumni and undergraduates working together, there will again this year be a pledge class election challenge. A number of alumni organized by **Bob Thacker '67** will fund snacks for the pledge class that has the highest percentage of members voting in the 2020 presidential election. This contest was first held for the 2018 election. It is the hope that this will increase the number of Betas who use their important right to vote.

I’m very fortunate to have been able to work with the Beta men on the UNL campus for so many years. I’ve been truly blessed!

Yours in \_\_\_kai\_\_\_,  
**Mike Wortman '67**

## 181ST GENERAL FRATERNITY “CONVENTION”

*Editor’s note: As noted in reports from **Erik Goodwin '18** and **Mike Wortman '67**, Alpha Tau and its members are proud of the significant awards which reflect on both the chapter and alumni. Those of us that work on The Dragon’s Tale are especially proud of the North Dakota Award given to our publication. It is a team effort involving many alumni and active chapter members, and this is the first time in many years Alpha Tau applied for the award. A special and sincere thank-you to Erik for doing all the paperwork for our nomination, and for all the support of Pennington & Company of Lawrence, Kansas. Pennington has partnered with our chapter for almost 10 years on capital campaign efforts and our newsletter. They work with many other Greek organizations besides Beta and consistently offer a product that is awarded for excellence. This year three Beta chapters (MIT, Miami, and Nebraska) earned the North Dakota Award, and Pennington produced and published/mailed all three winners.*

NORTH DAKOTA AWARD  
FOR EXCELLENCE IN  
CHAPTER PUBLICATIONS

2020 BETA THETA PI CHAPTER AWARDS



Miami  
MIT  
Nebraska

# IN OUR MYSTIC SHRINE

*Editor's note: For years our chapter has developed leaders. We have sadly lost two prominent Alpha Tau Betas in the past five months. John Lonnquist '62 and Dave Karnes '68 are being highlighted in this issue.*



**J**ohn H. Lonnquist '62 entered Our Mystic Shrine on July 5 in Colorado. John was AT 1058 and is survived by his wife, Stephanie, two children, and six siblings. As an undergraduate, John was an outstanding

student leader at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He was vice president of Phi Eta Sigma (national freshman men's scholarship honorary); member of the Interfraternity Council; president of the All University Fund; president of Innocents Society (senior men's honorary); and was named Outstanding Collegiate Man at the annual Kosmet Klub Fall Review. He was an officer of his pledge class and president of Alpha Tau chapter during his senior year (1964-65).

John led three of his younger brothers, **Ladd Lonnquist, AT 1124; G. Eric Lonnquist, AT 1135** and Delta Kappa (University of Tennessee) roll number 1; and **Tom Lonnquist, AT 1258** to the Alpha Tau chapter. Ladd, Eric and Tom also had **leadership** positions in the Alpha Tau chapter, and Ladd and Tom joined John as members of the Innocents Society. (Eric left UNL after his sophomore year to be a founder of the Tennessee Beta chapter.) One other brother and two sisters also survive.

John suffered multiple strokes and was in long-term care facilities for three years prior

to his death. After discussions with other Betas, donations are being accepted by the Alpha Tau chapter as a fitting tribute to John and the leadership he gave to us.

Checks should be made payable to:  
**Beta Theta Pi**  
**Alumni Association of Nebraska,**  
memo: **John Lonnquist Memorial**

Mail your check to:  
**Beta Theta Pi**  
**Alumni Association of Nebraska**  
**P.O. Box 22251**  
**Lincoln, NE 68542**

Please consider recognizing John's lasting contributions to the Alpha Tau chapter.

A Zoom wake service for John was held on Saturday, August 1, with several Betas and spouses in attendance. It was an uplifting service to remember this great Beta and to support Stephanie, their children, and John's family.



**D**avid K. Karnes '68 entered Our Mystic Shrine on October 25. Dave was AT 1257 and is survived by his wife, Kris, and six daughters. He was a student leader at UNL, and chapter president his senior year (1971-72). Dave graduated from the University of Nebraska College

of Law in 1974 and spent much of his professional career in both the public and private sectors. While in law school Dave and his first wife, Liz, were houseparents for Alpha Tau for two years in 1973-74. Dave was named a White House Fellow in 1981 and during that fellowship served as an assistant to the secretary of Housing and Urban Development under President Ronald Reagan. Upon their return to Omaha, Dave was a member of the board of directors of the Federal Home Loan Bank of Topeka from 1983 to 1987. In 1988 he was appointed to the United States Senate to complete the term of Sen. Ed Zorinsky. Dave was preceded in death by his first wife Liz (Lueder) in 2003.

Dave was a founding board member of the Omaha Children's Museum and was appointed to the Omaha Airport Authority

Board in 2018—a position that had earlier been held by Liz. For his contributions to Omaha and Nebraska, Dave was honored with the Distinguished Nebraskalander Award from the Nebraskaland Foundation in 2012.

He remained active in Beta Theta Pi and was an honorary co-chair of the capital campaign to renovate our chapter house. Dave is one of the founders of The Experience Company and served on the board. His passing leaves a void for many Betas and others and the impact he had. Dave continued to work even during his battle with mantle cell lymphoma, a variant of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. At the time of his death he was employed by the Omaha office of Kutak Rock, a national law firm headquartered in Omaha. He continued serving on the boards of many companies and as an advisor to others.

*Editor's Note: additional entries for "Our Mystic Shrine" are on page 7 of this issue.*



# PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Our world has continued to be ravaged by COVID-19, and our University has been no exception. There have been over 1,300 positive cases at UNL since the start of the semester, and the Lancaster County area has remained at high risk of COVID-19 spread. With there being countless ways of contracting the virus, it was only a matter of time before our members would become ill.

Early on in the process, we took a stance as a chapter to hold our members accountable to the responsibilities we have to our fraternity, university, families, and community: **take the necessary precautions to limit the spread.**



*"Hanging out" during quarantine. For two weeks at the start of the school year (see other reports), members living in the house were confined. This provided an opportunity for actives to mix with the new members. Basketball was just one of the ways the men got to know each other better.*

In preparation for this challenge, the executive team met weekly over the summer to decide how we could still achieve our operational goals while maintaining the safety of everyone with whom we engage. I individually met with University officials, UNMC faculty, other chapter leadership, and the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department representatives to gain more insight on guiding 18- to 21-year-old minds through this endeavor.

In the effort to flatten the curve, we effectively canceled all large group events for the fall 2020 semester and have set our aim on planning events that are safe for everyone. We also implemented a wide variety of policies inside of the house to negate the spread of COVID-19. Yet, just as we assumed, we had a handful of members test positive and were recommended to quarantine our chapter house by the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department at the beginning of September.

We accepted this recommendation, realizing that this was the best action to take. During our lockdown, the Parents' Alliance graciously donated and delivered food to the chapter house for all of our live-in members, and we were also able to focus more on brotherhood activities involving our new pledge class. In reality, the quarantine we experienced was one of the most favorable situations imaginable. I mean, wouldn't you want to spend quarantine with 62 of your best friends in a beautiful mansion? (Editor's note: house capacity is 66, but only 63 living in the chapter at the present time. Total chapter membership is 117.)

On the positive side of things, the Alpha Tau chapter has accrued a multitude of accolades. In the spring of 2020, we achieved an all-chapter GPA of 3.63, which was the best fraternity GPA on city campus. We also received six different awards from our General Fraternity:

- Our record-breaking 17th John Reilly Knox award for chapter excellence
- Our 23rd Francis H. Sisson award (also for chapter excellence)
- Excellence in Risk Management Award
- The Virginia Tech Award for Academic Excellence
- Outstanding Campus Involvement Award
- The North Dakota Award for Excellence in Chapter Publications

Alpha Tau remains one of the most celebrated chapters of Beta Theta Pi, and we continue to be aggressive in our collective and individual efforts to uphold this legacy.

Overall, this semester has felt like fixing an airplane in mid-flight. Our chapter had to adjust our goals and procedures, but we continued to aim our trajectory towards the stars. It is truly amazing how high we set the bar, and I remain sincerely appreciative of our engaged alumni, our encouraging advisory team, our thoughtful Parents' Alliance, and our incredible active chapter. It's funny how a global pandemic uncovers the genuine and undying love for Beta that is shared by so many. I would like to especially thank two of my most trusted advisors, confidants, and mentors—Chapter Counselor **Mike Wortman '67** and District Chief **Mark Antonson '04**.

It goes without saying that we really have something special here at 1515 R Street, and the men that have resided in these walls have made such a profound impact in this world. I have experienced an immeasurable amount of professional and personal growth as a member of this chapter and will continue to pave the way for exceptional young men to share in this wonderful experience. I am incredibly honored to have been the president of the Alpha Tau chapter through the unprecedented year that was 2020.

Yours in \_\_\_\_kai\_\_\_\_,

**Erik Goodwin '18**  
[president@nebraskabeta.com](mailto:president@nebraskabeta.com)

## Chapter Officers

President  
**Erik Goodwin '18**  
Kansas City, MO

Treasurer  
**Nick Callahan '19**  
Kansas City, KS

Recruitment Chairman  
**Brooks Douglass '19**  
Grand Island, NE

Social Chairman  
**Will Spethman '19**  
Lincoln, NE

Vice President  
**Davis Sibbernson '19**  
Omaha, NE

Pledge Educator  
**Jack Schulenberg '19**  
Minnetonka, MN

Scholarship Chairman  
**Cole Lyons '19**  
Omaha, NE

Communications Chairman  
**Max Van Arsdall '18**  
Lincoln, NE

Secretary  
**Peter Haas '19**  
Minnetonka, MN

Risk Manager  
**Kellen Habegger '18**  
Pawnee City, NE

Philanthropy Chairman  
**Shaun Edgecomb '19**  
Lincoln, NE

## ERIK GOODWIN '18 ELECTED IFC PRESIDENT



Chapter President **Erik Goodwin '18**, of Weatherby Lake, MO (in the heart of Kansas City's northland), has been elected president of the UNL Interfraternity Council (IFC). Erik is the first Beta to hold this position in several years. The IFC is the governing body of all UNL fraternities, and Erik will work closely with the Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life and the UNL administration during these challenging times.

When asked to comment on this honor, Erik said, "I believe that my experience in Greek life, my personal characteristics, and my devotion to the Greek system will allow me to do a lot of good in the position of IFC president."

Congratulations, Erik!

## RECRUITMENT REPORT

I would like to thank our generous alumni and the active chapter for their assistance toward the incredible summer the recruitment team had bringing a great new pledge class to our chapter. We couldn't have done it without you. I was honored to serve on such a quality team; my counterparts **Sam Rice '19** and **Jack Patzner '19** did a great job and it was a pleasure working with both. I am excited to see what this pledge class accomplishes as they are molded into young men by their experience in the Alpha Tau chapter. They are a group of 31 outstanding individuals and will surely carry on the respected legacy of our great chapter. Within the group, they had an average ACT score of 28.5 and GPA of 3.78 out of high school. All come from different backgrounds and involvements.

Serving as recruitment chairman has allowed me to not only give back to Beta, but also gain valuable experience and make connections that will last me long after my term expires. We have given our chapter a strong step forward with this pledge class, but this would not be possible without the hard work and dedication from our alumni. The recommendations and input provided are great help to our team. Thank you all for granting me the privilege to be the steward for a new pledge class and allowing me to represent our chapter this summer. It was a time I will cherish.

Yours in \_\_kai\_\_,  
**Brooks Douglass '19**  
[recruitment@nebraskabeta.com](mailto:recruitment@nebraskabeta.com)

## Scholarship Report

Beta Theta Pi came in second academically among UNL fraternities this past semester with an all-chapter GPA of 3.63. This is drastically higher than our fall semester GPA of 3.442. Much of this difference does come from UNL enacting an optional pass/no pass policy for all courses in the spring semester, and all fraternities did have a GPA increase from the prior year. However, as Beta Theta Pi had both the second-highest GPA and the second lowest-increase in GPA, our members were likely much less reliant upon the pass/no pass option than other fraternities.

This past semester we had 28 men with 4.0 GPAs. On the other end of the spectrum, we had six members who did not make the requirement of 2.9. If a member gets below a 2.6 in a semester, or below a 2.9 for two out of three semesters, they are placed on an academic assistance plan (which is centered on working with the scholarship chairman during the following semester). If they fail to make grades during the semester while on an academic assistance plan, they have a trial by chapter where the active members will vote whether or not to keep the member in the house. This is the first time that these six members did not meet the GPA requirement, and we decided that no member will be removed from the chapter for academic reasons (though I will be carefully working with this group).

This semester is very different with regard to course delivery as many classes have moved to a hybrid form that is part in-person and part online. To assist in accommodating more members attending virtual class and studying around the house, we have enacted designated quiet areas during the week to be used as a place of study without needing to go to a public location such as a library.

Yours in \_\_kai\_\_,  
**Cole Lyons '19**

## SOCIAL REPORT

As far as our social scene goes, the social team has had to come up with creative ways to stay connected with our brothers and other chapters around campus. Due to COVID-19 we are unable to host formals this semester, although we have been able to set up smaller events around the house for the active members and pledges to get to know each other better. These events include pick-up basketball, touch football and golf outings. These past weeks our new member class has had the opportunity to meet some of the women in the Greek community. We are able to make some smaller events happen with the correct safety precautions of mandatory masks and social distancing. Although this semester has given us a curveball to deal with, our executive team has adapted. Betas are excited for the social aspect of this semester, as we all know the amount of hard work and dedication we must first put forth in our academics.

Yours in \_\_kai\_\_,  
**Will Spethman '19**



## NEW MEMBER EDUCATION REPORT

The 2020 Alpha Tau new member class is off to an awesome start, despite our current circumstances. The men have been adjusting well in terms of relationships, academics, and independence. Every day I see them becoming closer with one another, becoming more confident in their abilities, and becoming the young men Beta sets out to create. They are beginning to truly live by our core values, showing mutual assistance in academics and lore, responsible conduct in their actions, and intellectual growth by performing well in school. This new member class is extremely motivated to perform to the best of their capabilities in all aspects, and I am looking forward to helping them direct their passions into organizations around campus to make an impact. A handful have already set their sights on various organizations such as student

government and Big Red Investment, and I am constantly working to help them achieve their goals in that regard. In terms of our future, we will continue molding them into men of principle who uphold our core values in everything we do. Beyond personal growth, we also want to show them the importance of giving back, and learning to be selfless. Philanthropy work will be focused on going forward to help mold these boys into stand-up young men. I cannot wait to see what the rest of the year has in store for this new member class.

Yours in \_\_\_\_kai\_\_\_\_,  
**Jack Schulenberg '19**

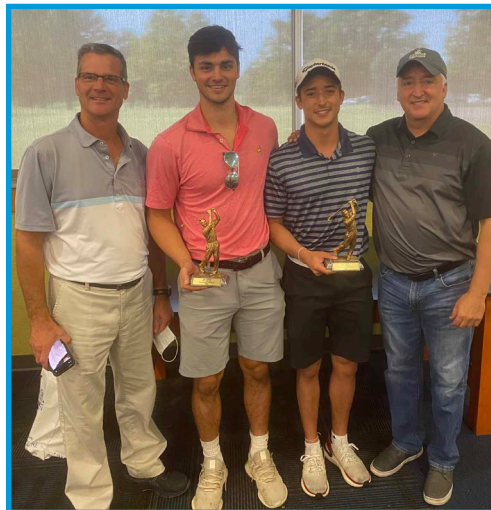
## COMMUNICATIONS REPORT

*(Formerly Alumni Relations)*

As mentioned, due to COVID-19 there have been considerable changes in the Beta house. Despite these difficulties, this executive team has pushed through to create an excellent year in the house. We had a two-week quarantine a couple weeks into school, which forced everyone to stay in or out of the house. This gave us the opportunity to spend time just with our brothers and come up with creative ways to spend time such as basketball on the back court, playing music in the pledge wing, or just getting ahead on school.

Despite not currently being able to host philanthropies and just limited social events this fall, we were lucky to be able to host two: a Dad's Day Golf Tournament at Holmes Lake Golf Course where 17 teams competed in a scramble on September 20 and our annual trap shoot on Sunday, November 8. During the golf scramble we were able to successfully social distance on the course and wore masks in common areas. Winners were **Will Spethman '19** and his father, and **Noah McCashland '19** and his father (pictured, from left: Will's father, Will, Noah, and Noah's father). The trap shoot was a good group of chapter and alumni mixing together while being mindful of the restrictions to stay safe.

I am proud to announce we have completed the sixth round of mentor/mentee pairings for The Experience Company. The sophomore class is



incredibly excited about building a relationship with their new mentors. Thank you to all of the Alumni Mentors. (See the separate article on Mentor Program Update.)

The COVID-19 crisis has disrupted the economy and has left a lot of college students unsure of their next job. The Experience Company and the interns in the house are working on providing internships and jobs for our active members. If you have any resources to help out with this cause, please reach out to us using our [alumni@nebraskabeta.com](mailto:alumni@nebraskabeta.com) email address.

I want to thank all the alumni that constantly support the Alpha Tau chapter. It has been an honor to serve as the communications chairman even during a global pandemic. I would also like

to thank **Jack Keating '18** for all his efforts helping communicate with alumni and to set up events. If you have any questions about the status of the chapter, feel free to reach out to me.

Yours in \_\_\_\_kai\_\_\_\_,  
**Max Van Arsdall '18**  
[alumni@nebraskabeta.com](mailto:alumni@nebraskabeta.com)

## Philanthropy Report

Full semester is in the works and we have adjusted to our current situation accordingly. Many of the new members are working to complete their 20 volunteer hours at Lighthouse, as well as other volunteer opportunities. Beta alumnus **Pete Allman '76** founded Lighthouse, which provides a safe and fun after-school environment for at-risk youth in the Lincoln area. Since we have had to adjust due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we are currently not planning on holding any in-

person philanthropy events. However, we still are holding a fundraiser in the house to make up for the in-person event. Although we are limited in our events, we still want to contribute to the Lincoln community.

Yours in \_\_\_\_kai\_\_\_\_,  
**Shaun Edgecomb '19**

# LIVING IN NYC DURING A PANDEMIC

*Editor's note: In April a chain of emails about "Life in the Big Apple; have you taken your Lysol today?" was circulated between a number of Betas. Interesting reading as it related to the coronavirus, and I asked one of the recipients if he would be interested in writing an article about COVID-19 for The Dragon's Tale. **Larry Johnson '64** agreed to the challenge. As we were working on this, I told "LJ" that **John Pfeifer '16** also lived in NYC. LJ suggested that he consult with John even though they did not know each other. They share some similarities; both were born and raised in Nebraska (LJ in Lincoln, and John in Grand Island). Both were Alpha Tau chapter presidents their senior years, and both lived in NYC at that time when it was the "epicenter" for concerns. With apologies to the ABC television series Naked City (1958-1963), "There are 8,000,000 stories in the Naked City, and here are two of them."*

Context helps. When the coronavirus hit New York City, we were the "epicenter"—having the worst statistics and death rate in the country. NYC and America watched as the "Good Samaritans" built a mobile hospital in Central Park to accept patients. It was strange to see huge trucks on Fifth Avenue with "Jesus Saves" messages. At first, the emphasis was physical touch, so gloves were used when outside and Clorox Wipes were used on anything brought inside—mail, groceries, and deliveries.

As to "living" in New York City: taxis or Ubers were no longer a viable option. Buses were free with entry by the back door to avoid exposing the driver. Night shift workers had to use buses since subways were shut down overnight to do extensive cleaning (this made a difference and continues today together with masks and distancing). "Essential services" such as grocery stores and pharmacies stayed open and, to mark a semblance of civilization, liquor stores. Seniors were given special hours to shop for groceries and avoid crowds. Some stores and restaurants allowed customers to order online for pick up or delivery. Church services and classes for school were remotely available on Zoom. You can't do haircuts by Zoom, so we saw shaggy people on the streets wearing masks. In half-empty apartment buildings, there was no entry without masks. Social distancing reminders were taped on the floor; a limit of how many people could be in an elevator was posted. Doormen were checking on the health of their residents. For a change in scenery, we took walks in

Central Park. There was little traffic and we breathed clean air. There was an eerie quietness **with one exception—see my last sentence below.**

My personal life: as a retiree teaching part-time at Columbia Law School, we had to switch to classes by Zoom. Our social life in restaurants, or conducting meetings in person, all ended. We are now seeing our grandchildren by remote or at a distance as now they are "mixing" with other students and teachers. TV life rotated around Governor Cuomo's mid-day press conferences giving the latest statistics, hot spots in the city, and plans for opening/closing state regions as a result of those stats. By now (October as this is written as opposed to March) much has changed with stores having limited openings, and restaurants are now allowed to have outdoor tables on sidewalks and streets. Some small shops or delicatessens have closed for good and we now see many "for rent" signs.

My best memory: at 7 o'clock each night apartment dwellers coming to their windows and banging pans or clapping to honor the health care workers. (I used my 1964 Go Big Red Cotton Bowl stadium horn!) We were waving to neighbors and New York City became a community. **Worst memory: the quiet of the streets broken by sirens...lots of sirens!**

In \_\_\_kai\_\_\_,  
**Larry D. Johnson '64, AT 1113**

It was March 15 when I got the call to not come into work. I was told to go to the grocery store, stock up on as many essentials as I could, and keep my distance from anyone else. When I arrived at the Trader Joe's a few blocks from my apartment in the lower east side of Manhattan, the line was out the door, down the street, and around the block. By the time I actually made it into the store, the shelves were bare and there was a frantic rush to grab anything that people could get their hands on. As I walked home, there was this lingering sense of fear and uncertainty in the air. The streets that were usually packed so tight with people that you could hardly move were now empty except for the few other masked individuals who were completing their last grocery run for the foreseeable future.

I transitioned to working from home, like most people did, with the constant reassurance that this would only last a few weeks. Weeks slowly turned into a month, and a month dragged into a blur of days and nights indiscernible from one another. After some time I was placed on furlough and told to file for unemployment alongside millions of other New Yorkers. Without work to keep me preoccupied during the day, the boredom began to set in. I spent days reading, cooking, talking on the phone with friends and family, watching movies, and even finished a 1,000 piece puzzle. Soon the things that I enjoyed became monotonous

and dreary. I started to become stir crazy, spending weeks at a time without stepping a foot outside or breathing fresh air. I did my best to stay active, but there's only so much living room yoga and door frame pull-ups one can do before those activities lose their appeal entirely.

After three months in this quarantine state of limbo, my patience had run thin and my mental health began to deteriorate. I had been laid off from my job and there was no indication of life returning to a normal state any time in the near future. I made the difficult decision to break my lease, rent a highly inflated U-Haul, and drive halfway across the country back to Nebraska. I'm currently getting situated in Omaha, spending some much-needed time with friends and family, and starting the process of getting my career back on track.

My New York experience had been cut dramatically short, and I still spend some time mourning the life I had that was swept away by the ramifications of COVID-19. I am, however, incredibly thankful for my good health, supportive family, and the dozens of Beta brothers who were there for me during this challenging time.

In \_\_\_kai\_\_\_,  
**John Pfeifer '16, AT 2399**



## ZOOM

Not much good has come out of COVID-19, but schools, businesses, families, friendships, organizations, and others have all been introduced to teleconferencing. For some, these changes will probably remain forever with the positive impact of video conferencing. FaceTime, Skype and other communication avenues have been and are still being used, but Zoom has “caught on” and vastly increased video contacts. As mentioned in the last issue of *The Dragon's Tale*, we are further describing some of the groups supporting our chapter—formal (as the Alumni Advisory Board) to informal coffee groups.

Every Tuesday a group of alumni would meet at The Harbor, located in the Piedmont Shopping Center in Lincoln. When the shop temporarily closed due to COVID-19, to fill the void, **Jim Rembolt '62** and **Dan Wherry '62** started a Zoom group for those active in the house in the 1950s to mid-'60s or so. All Lincoln-area alums that were invited to The Harbor were invited to the Zoom event. Instead of, however, maybe ten alumni being present at The Harbor, some of the Lincoln group as well as Alpha Tau Betas from AZ, CA, KS, MA, MN, NY, PA, TX and WY, and other states have “attended.” Pretty special!

A second group also started a Zoom event for those in the house in the late 1960s and early '70s. **David Buntain '67** has led these efforts. Perhaps other age groups might enjoy establishing a Zoom meeting with hopes of reuniting with brothers as these age groups have done? Chapter counselor **Mike Wortman '67** “belongs” to both groups and has been able to effectively communicate chapter news. The “older” group has also invited the president of The Experience Company and the immediate past-president of the chapter to talk to the groups, and both presentations were well-received. It's a great way to keep alums and the chapter connected in this COVID era.

## MENTOR PROGRAM UPDATE

Alpha Tau's mentor program remains strong with the pairing of 27 mentors with 27 sophomores. This is our sixth group of mentors, and we are grateful for the continued interest and support on the part of both mentors and their mentees—and the chapter. There will be some additional challenges this year with the suspension of Monday night dinners, as well as many events that saw attendance by both the chapter and alums. The changes in events are discussed in the officer reports—but no more tailgate parties before Husker football games or several other opportunities to connect—whether the alum is a mentor or not. Technology, however, such as Zoom, will help us maintain or even improve the relationships being built. For a complete listing of the mentor/mentee pairings, see The Experience Company section of the chapter website: [nebraskabeta.com](http://nebraskabeta.com).

## IN OUR MYSTIC SHRINE

**William E. Condon '45** entered Our Mystic Shrine on June 13 in Sterling, CO. Bill was AT 724. Bill was a native of Omaha, NE, but he and his father bought a farm near Crook, CO. When Bill was 19, his father became ill and Bill took over responsibilities of the farm. He was a rancher for 73 years. He married his wife, Sandra, in Lincoln and they were married for 68 years. Other survivors include a son and two daughters. Bill was always interested in water, and in the mid-'60s installed 15 pivot sprinklers on his farmland. Twenty years later these sprinklers were computerized. For his concern about water issues, he was named “Mr. Water” by a Colorado water conservation group. Bill was a board member of the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District for 28 years and a member of the Ground Water Appropriations of the South Platte (River) for over 20 years. In 2006, due to Bill's efforts, two stage stops along the Oregon Trail were identified on his land near the South Platte River.

**John F. McLeay, M.D. '50** entered Our Mystic Shrine on June 17 in Omaha, NE. John was a graduate of the University of Nebraska College of Medicine. His emphasis was general surgery, and in addition to his practice, he also taught surgery and was involved with research at the Creighton University School of Medicine in Omaha. John was AT 826. In high school in Edgar, NE, and Lincoln, NE, he was a sprinter and competed in state and regional competition. He also played high school football and was proud to have played against Husker legend Bobby Reynolds. John was an only child, but “wanted a large family.” At the time

of his death, he was survived by his wife of 63 years, Ruth, and eight children and 57 direct descendants. Two of his sons and two grandchildren are also physicians and extended his legacy to five generations of physicians.

**Walter W. Switzer '56** entered Our Mystic Shrine on June 19 in Phoenix, AZ, after a brief illness. Walt graduated from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 1959 with a degree in journalism. Walt was AT 936. Walt spent his entire 35-year journalism career at *The Lincoln Star* and retired in 1995 as the night news editor. Former colleagues remembered his great laugh, but that he was all business when deadline approached. Some even described him as their own Lou Grant. In 2018 he moved to Arizona where his daughter resides. He is preceded in death by his wife, Germaine “Gerry” Switzer, his sister, Lucigrace Switzer Koizumi, and his parents. He is survived by his daughter, Germaine “Gerrie” Marks (Tony), Paradise Valley, AZ. Memorial contributions may be made to The Michael J. Fox Foundation for Parkinson's Research at <https://www.michaeljfox.org/donate> or the University of Nebraska Foundation, P.O. Box 82555, Lincoln NE 68501-2555. Make checks payable to: NU Foundation, memo: in memory of Walter Switzer or visit <https://nufoundation.org/ways-to-give> to make an online gift.

**Douglas J. Cotner '62** entered Our Mystic Shrine on May 17 in Surprise, AZ. Doug was AT 1082. At the request of his family: “Doug Cotner, 1943-2020.”

## Alumni News

(News can be shared by sending an email to [updates@nebraskabeta.com](mailto:updates@nebraskabeta.com).)

**Steve Andersen '60** celebrated 55 years of providing insurance and investment products/coverages to his clients on June 30. Steve's primary business relationship is with Ameritas Life Insurance Corp., a Lincoln-based insurer. Steve remains active in Beta, serving as a mentor and as chairman of The Experience Company. Steve may be reached at [steve@insourceaic.com](mailto:steve@insourceaic.com).

**Dan Wherry '62** and his wife, Sharon, have been members of Rotary International for many years. On June 6 Rotary 14, one of four Lincoln Rotary clubs, celebrated 110 years of existence. The Rotarian motto is “Service Above Self.” Rotary 14 has long been active in service to the Lincoln community—but far beyond too. Dan and Sharon were both quoted in the Lincoln newspaper in June: “We have not only participated in many local service activities but have been very involved on the international front.” Sharon notes, “We participated in polio immunization in Bangladesh and worked at our District Orphanage/Water Well Project in Zambia. Twenty-five years of ‘Service Above Self’ has never felt

SO good!” Dan can be reached at [daniel.wherry@gmail.com](mailto:daniel.wherry@gmail.com).

**Van Vahle, M.D. '63** has been honored with the Distinguished Alumnus Award from the University of Nebraska College of Medicine in Omaha. Van is a 1966 graduate of UNL and lives in Seward, NE, where he continues his passion for family medicine by helping out at Concordia University, as well as some on-call work when needed. Van is a former physician of the Seward Clinic. Van may be reached at [vvahle@neb.rr.com](mailto:vvahle@neb.rr.com).

**Dave Johnson '80**, owner of the Lincoln architect and design firm Studio951, has sold his firm to the Cedar Rapids, IA, architect and engineering firm of Shive-Hattery. Studio951 will continue to operate under its existing name and will be a division of Shive-Hattery. Dave said, “The purchase benefits the clients of Studio951 by offering them design, project management, and business development.” Shive-Hattery has over 400 employees, and Studio951 has about 20 employees. Dave can be reached at [davejohnson@studio951.net](mailto:davejohnson@studio951.net).



On August 14, the chapter added three new members at our fall initiation. From left: Danny Vierregger, AT 2553, Sam Pickering, AT 2552, and Jack Sullivan, AT 2551. Congratulations, brothers!

## FALL 2020 ALPHA TAU PLEDGES

**Grant Auman** | Overland Park, KS  
Rockhurst

**Kyle Auman** | Omaha, NE  
Creighton Prep

**Luke Dempsey\*** | Omaha, NE  
Creighton Prep

**Carson Dettmer** | Lincoln, NE  
Lincoln SE

**James Eshleman** | Overland Park, KS  
Blue Valley North

**Carson Haas\*** | Lincoln, NE  
Lincoln SW

**Reis Jensen** | Lincoln, NE  
Lincoln SE

**Sam Johnston** | Omaha, NE  
Elkhorn South

**Will Kelley** | Leawood, KS  
Shawnee Mission South

**Tate Kiehn** | Overland Park, KS  
Blue Valley North

**Ian Kubik** | Chaska, MN  
Chaska HS

**Jack Larson** | Lincoln, NE  
Lincoln East

**Zach Main** | Omaha, NE  
Millard West

**Johnny McLeay\*** | Omaha, NE  
Creighton Prep

**Jacob McNamara** | Grand Island, NE  
GI Central Catholic

**Josh Mikus** | Lincoln, NE  
Lincoln Northstar

**Ethan Mustard** | Lincoln, NE  
Lincoln Northstar

**Cameron Niroomand-Rid** | LaVista, NE  
Papillion-Lavista HS

**Ben Pick** | Omaha, NE  
Creighton Prep

**Jacob Pilker** | Lincoln, NE  
Lincoln SE



# THE DRAGON'S TALE

Beta Theta Pi Alumni Association of Nebraska  
P.O. Box 22251  
Lincoln, NE 68542

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## New House Director

**Gage Mruz '16** is the new house director for our chapter. Gage, AT 2410, is originally from Blair, NE. He is a 2019 UNL graduate and has served the chapter as alumni relations chairman and was on the recruitment team for two years. He is a current member of the Alumni Advisory Board. Gage agreed to return to the chapter with the resignation of Robin Schmid, who served our chapter for the past three years—and who resigned due to family issues outside of Lincoln. (**Thanks to Robin for her service!**) After graduation from UNL, Gage continued his work with

Greenstain, an eco-friendly apparel brand he founded. Greenstain creates premium quality garments using industry-leading materials such as recycled plastic water bottles. He also works full-time as a field marketing manager at Archival, a Lincoln creative agency with an expertise in youth culture. Archival helps brands attract and engage young adults with insights, creativity, and influential field marketing. Gage will continue his outside employment while bringing his Beta passion and experiences to the challenges facing Alpha Tau.

**Caleb Richards** | Papillion, NE  
Papillion-Lavista HS

**Luke Rodriguez** | Hastings, NE  
Hastings St. Cecelia

**Justin Rohrig\*** | Omaha, NE  
Millard North

**Drew Samuelson\*** | Omaha, NE  
Creighton Prep

**Stone Sindelar** | Papillion, NE  
Papillion South HS

**Luke Spethman\*** | Lincoln, NE  
Lincoln East

**Carson Swartzbaugh** | Elkhorn, NE  
Elkhorn South

**Sam Thomas** | Eden Prairie, MN  
Eden Prairie HS

**Will Tolly** | Lincoln, NE  
Lincoln East

**Joe Vacek** | Lincoln, NE  
Lincoln Pius

**Rashad Woods** | Lincoln, NE  
Lincoln Parkview Christian

\*Legacy

## PIANO MAN (With apologies to Billy Joel)

The chapter house has had the same piano in its living room for over five decades. As one can imagine, the old piano is not what it used to be; a professional piano tuner said he can no longer find parts and cannot bring the piano back to its glory years. The Parents' Alliance has found a replacement, but you can still help too. If interested (11 alumni have to date donated about \$1,500 without a formal effort), send a check to our alumni association. We are looking for a proper way to "dedicate" the piano, and will look for a way to share that news with you.

Checks should be made payable to:  
**Beta Theta Pi Alumni Association of  
Nebraska, memo: Piano Fund**

Mail your check to:  
**Beta Theta Pi  
Alumni Association of Nebraska  
P.O. Box 22251, Lincoln, NE 68542**