



Xi Chapter at Cornell University

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November 2017

Open Letter to all Craigielea Alumni *From the President of Craigielea Alumni Association*

Dear Alumni Brothers,

From time to time questions have been posed to me, and my predecessors, serving as president of the Craigielea Alumni Association. We welcome these inquiries because they represent a high level of interest, and while some topics have been addressed before, we always welcome opportunities to reinforce the overall understanding and participation of our alumni.

Below, I have asked and answered six of the most common questions posed to me by my fellow alumni. Hopefully, the following FAQs will not only answer these common inquiries, but also provide some helpful context to your perspective about what is currently happening at the house. Please don't hesitate to email further questions once you have reviewed this letter.

What is the Alumni Board of Craigielea?

The Alumni Board (of the Craigielea Alumni Association or "CAA") provides advocacy, and financial leverage on behalf of generations of Chi Phi alumni around the world who had felt disconnected or disenfranchised from the chapter house they still cherish. Formed in 2010, the CAA merged with the Craigielea Educational Fund and now operates as one entity, under both names.

The Alumni Board's priorities are fourfold:

1. Maintaining active alumni governance, giving voice to alumni interests, and exercising effective influence in the strategic preservation of Craigielea, its antiquities and the cultural influence it has on undergraduates at Cornell.
2. Nurturing a tripartite partnership among Cornell University, the active chapter at Chi Phi and Craigielea alumni to improve coordination and communication between all stakeholders.
3. Informing, and involving Chi Phi alumni as integral participants in fraternity and university affairs so that our presence, influence and relevance as an institution are constantly refreshed.
4. Protecting and advancing upon accomplishments made in recent years (funded by the Campaign for Craigielea) to rescue the House from imminent structural failure and embark on a multi-year process of asset restoration. This involves ongoing stewardship and continuing investment.

The board is comprised of alumni brothers who have given generously of their time and money (in most cases six figure financial commitments) to this mission. The distribution of the board membership is intended to capture the breadth of alumni across the decades, currently including brothers from every decade going back to the 1960s, including a provision for recent alumni who typically lack financial resources for large donations but have the generosity of spirit to contribute ideas and energy.

Members of the board have staggered terms and term limits to promote long-term continuity and inter-generational succession.

Are the financial details and strategic plans for Craigielea available to all alumni?

Craigielea is operated in close cooperation between Cornell (as owner) and the active chapter (as tenant, with the Chapter House Association). Recognizing that Craigielea is among many buildings owned by the university (over 600 on campus alone) and that a number of these serve competing fraternities, it is understandable that Cornell does not publicly publish detailed information about finances and planning.

Having said this, there is an extremely high level of trust, transparency, and coordination between Cornell, the CAA, and undergraduate leadership regarding Craigielea, and there is a great amount of analysis and thought invested by all parties in planning for this one building. Reflecting on our partnership with Cornell, it is clear that the CAA has strong advisory influence over all parties, and control of disbursements from campaign and educational fund accounts. It is also clear that while there may be some complexity attached to our arrangement with Cornell, the positive aspects of our relations by far outweigh any inefficiencies.

As an aside, the influence wielded by our alumni, stems both from organizational safeguards and the substantial campus-wide goodwill of our members and the Craigielea Educational Fund (aka CAA), a 501(c)(3) PF. Also worth noting, our organization maintains detailed meeting minutes and documents on collaboration with Cornell, and also keeps financial accounting records required for discoverable regulatory filings.

The efficacy of these arrangements depends on the alumni president keeping the alumni informed and aligned with the board's efforts on their behalf. In practice, both Jerry Day and I have been as transparent as possible in order to build trust and understanding across a very diverse set of stakeholders. As always, you are encouraged to stay informed, and to share questions and thoughts with any board member because your participation is helpful in charting a course for preserving Craigielea's legacy.

What was the purpose of the Campaign for Craigielea?

The focus of this capital campaign over the past seven years was to raise sufficient funds to restore structural integrity and architectural beauty to the common rooms of Craigielea while reclaiming and repairing related art and antiquities.

Over this period of time, \$2 million was invested in shoring up the foundation of the house, including placing steel I-beams behind antique wood paneling and ornate ceilings, and restoring all historic rooms and hallways on the first floor and balcony.

As Cornell owns the building, several principles informed our actions throughout:

- As owner of the building, Cornell University should be responsible for the base building, while the alumni would be responsible for tenant improvements and their restoration, including taking ownership of the art and antiquities within.
- The alumni would work in close partnership with the university for the restoration work, including project management controlled by Cornell, exclusive use of Cornell approved union labor, and adhering to both Cornell University and City of Ithaca building code standards (no small challenge in working with a 19th Century building).
- The Capital Campaign was committed to addressing our alumni's concerns regarding the rapidly deteriorating architectural and structural condition of the House, and the attendant concern that the active chapter would soon lose all remaining respect for what was left. In accomplishing this goal, there were unavoidable instances where open-wall discoveries required that the team be thoughtful about immediate remediation to protect our investment.
- The campaign's clearly defined scope NEVER committed to replacing boilers, heating systems, kitchens, bathrooms, electrical, plumbing, and seemingly limitless other infrastructure challenges, which we believe should be financed by the owner of the property and recovered over time through rents (this despite decades of deferred maintenance).

What are the immediate challenges in housekeeping?

There is little value in restoring the house if we don't improve the ongoing stewardship of Craigielea. However, many legacy practices familiar to alumni, are no longer permissible.

Key changes include:

1. The brotherhood and alumni are no longer permitted to make improvements or repairs to the house. All changes to the house beyond cleaning must be approved and performed by university-unionized labor. This is materially different from the practice that many of us remember when "sweat equity" from brothers and alumni was welcomed and encouraged.
2. There are no "housemen" roles where active brothers are paid to clean and look after assigned areas of the house. This practice was valuable to both providing strong housekeeping services, while also providing incentives for the rest of the brothers to be mindful of the mess they made since their fellow brothers were responsible for cleaning up after them. This valuable aspect of brotherhood stewardship has been lost.
3. The pledge process does NOT permit pledges to be required to perform any chores that are not being performed by the rest of the brotherhood. In practice, given the legal ramifications of any actions associated with "hazing," plus the limitation mentioned in point one above, means that new members of the house are not being inculcated with a sufficiently strong sense of stewardship. We are working with the undergraduate leadership to ascertain new ways of achieving this very important area of social responsibility.
4. The number of seniors choosing to live in the house has fallen in recent years, causing a decline in leadership and average resident maturity. Most of those not living in the house use it for social purposes, and leave their refuse behind. This has happened in fraternities across campus following progressively tighter regulation of Greek societies. In this environment, Craigielea's yet to be addressed bathrooms, heating, and other infrastructure requirements are also playing a role in retaining fewer resident seniors.

Needless to say, the changes listed above have not been helpful to the care and maintenance of the house. Adding to the challenge is the fact that there are active brothers and recent alumni who have no knowledge or memory of Chi Phi during the years when housekeeping was a priority and the upstairs bathrooms were more serviceable.

What are the long-term plans to adjust to these new realities?

In order to complement the historic restoration of the first-floor common rooms with better stewardship, the Alumni Board, in coordination with Cornell, has endeavored to alter the culture of the house over the past few years. This includes repurposing rooms to better serve a more responsible use of the first floor. The bar was removed from the "tap room" and the space is now a social area. In the library, the pool table has been replaced with a traditional library table with attached lamp fixtures large enough to accommodate between eight and ten study stations. It is beautiful and meets contemporary needs.

Next on the agenda, we are planning to restore both the medium and large heads that are currently in very poor repair, in the hopes that this will materially improve the livability of Chi Phi. Based on work completed in other fraternities, early estimates for the restoration of both upstairs bathrooms exceeds \$200,000, so continued support by the alumni remains critical.

Some alumni have questioned why the bathroom restoration is so expensive. Please keep in mind that there is over 40 years of structural issues behind the bathroom tiles, with much of the plumbing and electrical being even older, and that these facilities must be restored to a commercial grade to sustain heavy and constant use.

Finally, all this work must be approved and executed in accordance with the policies and commercial building standards of both the City of Ithaca and Cornell University. If there is any appropriate way to spend less money on the large and medium heads, we will pursue it.

How do we continue to make contributions and where should the money be sent?

The financial needs of our active fraternity and the ancient house they live in are perpetual. Your continued generosity is therefore critical.

If you have an ongoing multi-year pledge to the capital campaign, it is critical that you send your checks on time. Please note that you have two options to make your pledge payment:

- 1) make your check payable to ***Craigielea Educational Fund (CEF)*** (preferred), or
- 2) make your check payable to ***Cornell University, Campaign for Craigielea Fund (Cornell Acct. #0008544)***.

Either option allows tax deductibility for your campaign pledge payment and Cornell University annual gift and class reunion credit, but we prefer option 1)—making your gift to the CEF—as we will continue to have more influence on the renovation projects if most campaign gifts are paid to that fund.

**Please send your check to the Campaign for Craigielea
P.O. Box 1170
Pearl River, NY 10965-0570**

- If you wish to send support to restore the bathrooms as just discussed, please also send a check to the Campaign for Craigielea following the instructions in the preceding paragraph.
- You can also send donations at any time to Cornell University, directed at the Chi Phi Renovation and Repair Fund.

There is much progress over the past eight years to celebrate, and now more than ever we need to protect and preserve. The Alumni Board is hopeful that providing improved living space and enhanced facilities will beget better long-term stewardship by the undergraduates, and retain more resident upperclassmen.

We are fortunate to have such a great group of young men as undergraduate brothers. I am sure you have noticed from the Chi Phi Connections newsletter the leadership roles they play in academics, philanthropy, and athletics ... there is simply no better fraternity at Cornell. These men have also contributed significantly to our transformation by lending their ideas, and patiently living in a construction site for years on end while enduring enhanced scrutiny from Cornell and alumni during the years of protracted transition.

The future of Craigielea and Chi Phi at Cornell is bright, confidently depending upon what they have always relied upon: a partnership across generations between loyal Chi Phi Cornellians and Cornell University.

Thanks for your continued support.

Fraternally,



Brian A. Murdock '78
President
Craigielea Alumni Association