



# THE ILLINOIS SIG

Sigma Chi Fraternity at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign | Fall 2025 | Alumni Relations Office | P.O. Box 876, Ithaca, NY 14851-0876 | [www.illinoissigs.org](http://www.illinoissigs.org)

## PRESIDENT'S LETTER

OCTOBER 2025

### 410, Our Next 100 Years



First, I would like to apologize for this “late” edition of our coveted Illinois Sig that so many of you enjoy reading to stay informed of our grand fraternity here at 410. Your Board continues to work tirelessly on your behalf, and we have some exciting news to share with you.

But first let us walk together down 410 East John Street. Our Chapter is the oldest chartered fraternity here on the U of I campus. We have been here since 1881. In the fall of 1889, the members rented a house located at 410 East John. Finally, in 1904 the house at 410 was purchased for \$7,000 from Professor Tomkins, and Charlie Kiler '92 was named treasurer of the “Kappa Kappa Building Co.” Yes, the same Charlie Kiler who donated the table that now resides in our library. Our original chapter house was built in 1909 for \$20,000. The formal dedication was on October 30, 1909. There was an annex in the back of the original chapter house, and we owned the property where the ATT building now stands. My father “Ruck” Steger lived in the annex, and his roommate was Merrill “Boz” Prichard '48; both went on to become Constantine Sigs. In 1959 the chapter house was renovated for \$253,000 as it stands today and was dedicated on October 1, 1960. In the early 60's the Kappa Kappa Corporation established their initial scholarship awards, among the first on campus. There have been three setbacks for our chapter due to fire with the last one in the early '70s, which many of you may remember. Our alumni rose to the occasion once again to help sustain our Chapter house.

410 was, for many of us, our first home away from home, and from that location and within those walls we all became the men we are today. How lucky are we: the gratitude we must all feel to have experienced the different “talents, temperament, and convictions” of all the brothers that crossed our paths over our years at 410.

410 OUR HOME Now, for the news we want to share. Since the beginning of the 2024-2025 school year, your Kappa Kappa Board has been planning a campaign to raise funds for several purposes including

President's Letter (continued on page 3)

## Alumni Spotlight

## IN MEMORIUM

### Doug Sasso '83



Doug Sasso College

Doug Sasso was a member of the Kappa Kappa class of '83. Doug died on September 17, 2024, at his home in Laguna Hills, California after a courageous, nine-month battle with stomach cancer.

Doug grew up in Joliet, Illinois where he attended Joliet Catholic High School and was an Executive

Member of the Student Council and elected to the Homecoming Court. Throughout his life Doug was passionate about football and proud of the fact that his beloved Hilltoppers won a state championship each of his four years of high school. Doug was a defensive back on two of those championship teams, including his senior year team that outscored its state playoff opponents 106-0.

As a member of Sigma Chi, Doug always had a welcoming joy about him that was genuine, deep, and inspiring. He laughed easily, took his responsibilities seriously, but never took himself too seriously. He was impossible to anger and wore his fun-loving ways on his sleeve. Doug was a fraternity faceman who appeared on the cover of Panhellenic's Men of Illinois calendar. He famously led his fraternity brothers on maybe the last of the sorority “Kong raids.”



Doug Sasso Marine Photo

As a 19-year-old sophomore at Illinois, Doug surprised his family and Sigma Chi brothers by making an incredible, life-changing decision when he walked two blocks from the fraternity house and enlisted to become a commissioned officer in the United States Marine

Corp. His decision to join the Marines was driven by his lifelong dream of learning to fly. Doug explained that his dream was inspired by what he described as “man's greatest achievement on a summer evening in the most imaginative year of our life, 1969.” He shared his memory of sitting with his family around a small

black-and-white television in a motel room while on vacation when he was seven years old, as they watched the Apollo 11 astronauts land on the moon on July 20 of that year.

After graduating from U of I, Doug began his active service with the Marines by completing rifleman training in Quantico, Virginia. He was then sent to flight school in Pensacola, Florida and learned to fly planes and helicopters. When basic flight training was completed, Doug had to choose whether he wanted to pursue advance flight training with jets or with helicopters. Doug chose helicopters and soon learned that he was a natural at flying helicopters. Upon completion of his advanced flight training, Doug was stationed in California where he flew with the Flying Tigers Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 361.

Doug rose through the ranks with the Marines and was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel. He had become an exceptional leader who led by example and inspired others to work together as a team. He had an extraordinary ability to earn the respect of troops through his authenticity and sincerity. At the start of the Gulf War, Doug was sent to Saudi Arabia where he served as the Airfield Operations Officer for operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. For two years he was the officer in charge of all coalition forces airfield operations (other than air traffic control.)

From 1992 until 2001, Doug flew with the famous Roadhog Heavy Marine Helicopter unit. In early 2001, Doug decided to focus on his career as an American Airlines pilot. But that decision did not last long. On September 10, 2001, Doug had landed his commercial flight late at night on the West coast and gone to bed. He woke up the next morning to an American Airlines jet headed for Los Angeles being crashed into the North World Trade Center Tower in New York. Doug got to a television in time to see a second jet crash into the South WTC tower and a third jet crash into the Pentagon. By the time a fourth hijacked jet crashed into a field after passengers overpowered the hijackers, Doug was already on the phone with the Roadhogs squadron leadership saying “I'm here and ready if you need me.” He then reunited with the Roadhogs in Afghanistan in the hunt for Osama Bin Laden. His squadron's performance in Afghanistan was so exemplary that it was in and out in only seven months and named squadron of the year for their combat performance. By the time Doug retired from the Marines in 2007, he had earned numerous honors including the Air Medal with flight numeral 1, the Navy Commendation Medal, the Southwest Asia

Alumni Spotlight (continued on page 3)



# Chapter News

## CONSUL LETTER: COLIN AZUSE '27



Colon Azuse

*Brothers,*

Hello, my name is Colin Azuse. I am a '27 from Downers Grove and am the current Consul for the Kappa Kappa Chapter. I am very excited to continue my term for the rest of 2025. In the past, I have been the Scholarship Chairman, a Derby Days

Chair, and have held multiple assistant positions within the fraternity. I am currently double majoring in Finance and Information Systems and plan on pursuing a career in real estate finance. I am honored to hold such a prestigious position.

This past year has been nothing short of a huge success for the Kappa Kappa Chapter. We welcomed 35 new brothers to the fraternity between our fall and spring pledge classes. We raised over \$20,000 for the Huntsman Cancer Foundation for the first time and have plans to raise that by nearly 50% this upcoming year. As a chapter, our GPA currently ranks in the top three among all chapters within the University of Illinois Interfraternity Council. Among all the success, we continue to hold our values close and share experiences any Sigma Chi would cherish for a lifetime. Every brother plays a role, and none of us would be here without each other.

*In hoc,*

Colin Azuse '27

## WRITE-UP: Leo Perez '28.5

After the first semester of my freshman year, I felt that I was missing a "community" on campus, so I decided to rush. I immediately felt I found my home at Sigma Chi, and this feeling grew stronger each day of pledging. I had the pleasure of initiating in the spring of 2025, and since then I've continued to share wonderful experiences with my brothers. This summer I went camping in Minnesota with three members of my pledge class, a trip I'll never forget. I am extremely grateful to Sigma Chi for the lifelong family I've found, and I can't wait for my first full semester as an active. I am super excited to live in the house and grow closer with each of my brothers!

## 2025 SPRING CLASSIC HOCKEY GAME RECAP



A highly successful philanthropic event in Spring 2025 was the Spring Classic. Hosted each spring by the Sigs in partnership with ATΩ, the philanthropic hockey showdown brought together fierce rivals Pike and ΣAE for an unforgettable battle on the ice. With bragging rights and a great cause on the line, the energy in the rink was electric from puck drop to the final goal.

After trailing 3-1 in regulation, the Sigs-ATΩ squad mounted a gritty comeback to force overtime... and

then another. In double overtime, freshman Peter Thompson etched his name in Spring Classic history, netting the game-winning goal and sending the packed house into a frenzy.

The event wasn't just a win on the scoreboard; it was a win for our community. Fueled by a rowdy, enthusiastic crowd, we raised just under \$1,200 for Huntsman Cancer Foundation. Thanks to everyone who came out and supported, and congratulations to our boys for bringing home the victory in classic Sigs fashion. We look forward to more success in the new school year.

## STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: PETER THOMPSON '28

### *What led you to join Sigma Chi?*

I was drawn to Sigma Chi because of the strong sense of brotherhood and the opportunities for leadership and personal growth. Growing personally is something I value, especially in college, and I found that very natural among active members.

### *What have you enjoyed most as a member?*

The social events that the Kappa Kappa Chapter has held are always memorable. Everyone's company makes the time worthwhile. From tailgates in Grange Grove to Sigs mas, it's always a good time at 410.

### *What position with Kappa Kappa do you feel most accomplished in?*

Having the opportunity to be a rush chair has been a very rewarding experience. Having the privilege of spreading a strong brotherhood to the future class makes the position of a rush chair very fulfilling.

### *What would you like to do after graduation?*

I'm currently studying Finance and Information Systems and plan to pursue a career in either corporate finance or commercial real estate.

## SCHOLARSHIP WRITE-UP

*Brothers,*

My name is Jimmy Johnston, and I am a '28 from Park Ridge. I currently serve as one of the Scholarship Chairmen for the Kappa Kappa chapter and am excited to report that our scholarship program has once again proved to be one of the best on campus! At the conclusion of the 2025 spring semester, Sigma Chi ranked second among all fraternities in GPA rankings, our highest ranking in the past five years. This shows not only our ability to succeed in the classroom, but also our dedication to being "students of fair ability." Above all of this, however, it is important to note how many of our brothers are involved in organizations around campus, working to get experiences

outside of the classroom, which they will apply to their careers post-grad! Many of our brothers have leadership positions within these organizations and are committing time to doing great work within our school, as well as the community at-large. It is incredible to see the dedication our brothers have to their interests. Without question, Kappa Kappa's scholarship program will work tirelessly to maintain our GPA ranking and continue to hold daily study hours for our brothers to attend. Our commitment to promoting our fraternity's ideals in the classroom is stronger than ever and wouldn't be possible without the support of the whole chapter.

*In hoc,*

Jimmy Johnston



## Alumni Spotlight DOUG SASSO '83

(continued from page 1)

Service Medal with two Bronze Stars, the National Defense Service Medal with one Star, the Sea Service Deployment Ribbon with two Stars, and Meritorious Unit Commendation with one Star.

Never forgetting his fraternity and alma mater, upon return from active service, Doug called Eric Meyer '85 and said "Oskie, you going to be at work Tuesday? Be outside Kam's at exactly 10 hundred. Be sure to look heavenward." Eric came out at 10:00 am. The windows were shaking, and about 500 feet above Kam's was a huge double-bladed transport helicopter. Eric remembers: "Sasso said he always wanted to buzz campus. He parked the helicopter at Willard and brought his crew in for drinks."

In 1993, Doug was married to his wife Cindy, whom he adored as his best friend and the love of his life. They enjoyed driving along the Pacific coast every Sunday and taking frequent walks along the beach. They tried to travel to Hawaii every year (sometimes twice) and enjoyed their favorite trips to see Germany's Christmas markets, Italy, Australia, and Ireland.



Doug Sasso Celebrations x 2, transformed

Doug's life was remembered by his pledge brothers as best defined by his faithfulness. He was faithful to God, to his cherished wife Cindy, and to his family. He was faithful to his country, to the Marines, to his friends, his teammates, his classmates, and his fraternity brothers. He was faithful to his core values, including integrity, charity, honesty, and determination. He was faithful to his dream, and when he looked back, as the end of his life was near, he could truthfully say that he had fought the good fight in every imaginable way. He had finished his work, discharged his duties, and, above all, he had kept the faith.

## Doug Michels '78: "It is never too late to reconnect."

In September 2024, the 1974 pledge class of the Kappa Kappa Chapter hosted a reunion to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of their pledging. The planning committee (**Frank Herold '78, Leif Houkom '78, Jeff Kiolbasa '78, Doug Michels '78, Jim Novaria '78, and Bill Runzel '78**) met monthly over Zoom for a year to plan the weekend.

"We wanted to use it as a precursor to the fiftieth anniversary of our graduation," said Doug. "We also thought that we're entering our golden years and wanted to take advantage of the opportunity, because we don't know how many anniversaries we will get to see."

"When we were rushing at Illinois, we rushed in the spring of our senior year of high school and we were one of the last classes to have that experience," Doug said. "The IFC ran things in those days, and when college acceptances went out in January or February, the IFC reached out to ask if students wanted to explore the Greek system. IFC sponsored a rush weekend. Our class rushed, accepted bids, and pledged Sigma Chi when we were seniors in high school. In August, when we arrived on campus, we all moved directly into the fraternity house. It was a unique experience and gave us four full years of being together as a fraternity."

"A year or two before we pledged, in the early '70s, the chapter had a pretty significant fire at 410 E John. Fortunately, no one was hurt, but a good portion of the house was damaged due to the fire, smoke, and water damage. When we rushed, they were still living in another fraternity house that was vacant because the renovations were ongoing. One of the rush receptions was at Tri-Delt Sorority. The renovations were complete by the time we moved in, so we thought the house was really nice."

All six members of the planning committee were officers during their undergraduate years. "We all contacted brothers, helped with local arrangements, and planned the events and activities," Doug said. Bill donated the use of his planes to help transport brothers from Chicago to Champagne and back for the event, and there was a box at the game for the use of brothers and spouses.

The planning committee decided to host several of the events in Chicago where most of the members lived. There was a welcome reception and dinner on Thursday night, golf and dinner on Friday, and then the football game, reception, and banquet in Champagne.

It's never too late to reconnect (continued on page 4)

## PRESIDENT'S LETTER

(continued from page 1)

the following: physical plant improvements, HELOC and mortgage reduction, maintenance fund, scholarships, and leadership programming. Our last renovation in the late 90s, called Restore, Unite, Renew, was made possible with a \$1.1 M bequest from the estate of Jeanne and Edwin C. Fisher. Steve Sarovich '75 headed up an additional raise of \$700,000 for the planned renovation. Yes, the same Steve Sarovich who is on our Board and a Constantine Sig! He has made a tremendous contribution over his lifetime of his talent and treasure to our Kappa Kappa Chapter, and I want to personally say thank you, my brother. Proud to be a Sig.

We are in need of capital to support our next 100 years and the many facets of "life" that exist at 410. Not only our physical structure but leadership programming through the Bell Chapter Endowment, scholarships to support our brothers with the rising cost of education, debt reduction accumulated through some needed renovations and maintenance issues over the last few years, long term maintenance funding, and most of all, our illustrious history as not only being a leader on campus but within our own worldwide  $\Sigma$  community. We have been blessed with 42 Significant Sig awards and 26 Order of Constantine Awards—I believe the most of any chapter. We have three Constantine Sigs on our board in Mark Anderson, Steve Sarovich, and as of 2025, I was inducted into the Order; this is quite rare in the annals of Sigma Chi.

Recently, we hired Pennington & Co. for a feasibility study, and based on the tremendous response from our alumni, your Board has asked Pennington to delay moving forward so that we can reassess our project scope and options. We have been overwhelmed with your feedback and desire to support our chapter, and prudence dictates we take the necessary steps internally to ensure that the next 100 years are our best.

More information will be forthcoming as we progress in the evaluation of our options dictated by your support in the feasibility study for the future of our order at the University of Illinois.

We are thankful and grateful for your commitment to our chapter.

Fraternally Yours,

Peter F. Steger '79  
President, Kappa Kappa of  
Sigma Chi House Corporation



# Chapter News

## It's never too late to reconnect (continued from page 3)

In addition to events, the group gathered to reminisce. "Members brought artifacts of our time in college, including yearbooks, composites, photos, memorabilia, in a suite in Naperville where members could gather during the weekend," Doug said. "It was a great walk down memory lane."

For the Saturday night reception and banquet, the planning committee invited four brothers who were special friends of the pledge class of 1974. Each of them had a special relationship to the members of his class.

**Steve Sarovich '75** was the Consul of the chapter when we were rushing and when we pledged," Doug said. "He's the one that was in charge and largely responsible for things when we joined.

**Mark Anderson '77** was the Consul of the chapter while we were pledges and new initiates. **John Wunderlich '77** is a very dedicated Sigma Chi and is dedicated to philanthropy. He impressed upon us the importance of character and contribution to the university and society. **Tim Schneider '77** was a couple of years older than we were and was a great role model for our class. He always took the time for us as pledges and has remained close to our class over the years.

"They all joined us on Saturday evening for the event, and it was really special," Doug said. "At the conclusion of dinner, we went around the room and shared stories from our time at 410 E John Street. our lives as alumni, and what Sigma Chi has meant to us. Frank served as emcee for the Saturday banquet, and the evening concluded with the singing of 'The Sweetheart of Sigma Chi' in a serenade of the women guests in attendance."

"Thank you for including us in your '78 reunion," said **Tim Schneider '77**. "Eileen really enjoyed meeting everyone. We had a wonderful time and an evening we won't forget."

"Judy and I both had a wonderful time at the reunion, and it is nice having the pictures as a reminder," **Grant Cape '78** said.

"It was very special for me to connect with so many of our pledge class brothers after all these years," **Doug Steger '78** said. "We looked a few years older, but so much wiser!"

Doug Michels said the reunion "renewed the spirit of brotherhood for our class and set things up really well for the fiftieth anniversary of our college graduation. Hopefully we can rope in the others to maximize attendance for that event."

"There's been a core of us from our class who have stayed close over the years, and we get together for golf, dinner, and our annual 'Christmas shop' in Chicago," he said. "These aren't exclusive, so we would love to have other brothers join us."

"Tim Schneider and his brother own a golf course in the suburbs of Chicago and host an annual golf tournament, which is another wonderful opportunity to connect."

Doug encouraged brothers to take advantage of these times to fellowship.

"The minute that you see one of your pledge brothers from 50 years ago, who perhaps you haven't spoken with in years, it takes about 30 seconds to reconnect, because you have that special bond," Doug said. "You catch up, reminisce, and it is a special connection. Don't hesitate to reconnect. Don't miss the opportunity because you might not have it again."



1974 Reunion

*A picture of the 1974 pledges that attended the Saturday evening dinner. Graduated 1978.*

*Front row: Jim Lynch, Grant Cape, Bob Kramer, Frank Herold, Steve Piercy, Rich Burns, Kirke Machon Back row: Bill Runzel, Doug Michels, Jim Novaria, Doug Steger, Leif Houkom, Ned Buddell and Rob Doty.*

*Missing from Friday night were Dwight Kett, Jeff Kiolbasa and Fred Wich each of whom attended Thursday.*

## THE CHICAGO RIVER SWIM



Steve Sarovich '75 (glasses) and Doug Wilson '75 (white shirt) with Doug McConnell '79

A fantastic human interest story happened today in Chicago, with a Sigma Chi at the heart of it all! What happened in Chicago on September 21, 2025? The Chicago River Swim orchestrated by our own Kappa Kappa Sig, **Douglas McConnell '79**. For nearly 100 years the Chicago River was not clean enough to swim, and the City of Chicago has been on a long path to clean up the river. The last Chicago River Swim was in 1926. Over 300 swimmers participated in the event to benefit ALS. It took a decade of hard work by Doug McConnell to put it together to benefit ALS. Doug's father succumbed to the disease, and he has made it his life's mission to raise money for ALS. He established a Foundation called A Long Swim (ALS) that has raised over \$3,000,000 to benefit ALS research. His passion and commitment have been remarkable.

Doug was a swimmer for the University of Illinois

and was quite a "butterfly" machine. His passion for swimming and his father's passing due to ALS, this combination propelled him to his phenomenal success in raising money for ALS. So, what has Doug accomplished to feed ALS research:

Douglas McConnell is a cervical disc recipient who successfully completed a crossing of the English Channel in August 2011 and the Catalina Channel on September 27, 2012 in 12 hours and 41 minutes to complete two of the seven channels in the Oceans Seven. Both of his channel crossings elevated him to membership in the Half Century Club and were part of the Triple Crown of Open Water Swimming and Grand Slam of Open Water Swimming.

The 67-year-old investment banker of Barrington, Illinois who owns Vissant Capital (the phonetic

*The Chicago River Swim (continued on page 6)*



## DOUG MCCONNELL '79: SWIMMING IN SERVICE TO OTHERS

**Doug McConnell '79** loves swimming. Actually, that is an understatement.

"I swam my whole life," he said. "I started when I was a little boy. My high school didn't have a pool, so I swam at the YMCA. I was a walk-on for the Illinois swim team. I ended up becoming captain of the team during my senior year and was gratified that I did well with that."

Doug graduated college, started a career, started a family, and still enjoyed time in the water. Eventually, he moved from swimming in pools to open water.

"I was introduced to open water swimming by a cousin-in-law who was a triathlete, and I started swimming with him," Doug said. "Open water swimming is a whole different ballgame from pool swimming. You have to deal with currents, water temperature, things bite you. It's totally different."

"In 1994, my father David announced to us that he had amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or ALS. Other than the baseball player, I didn't know anything about it," he said. "My dad was a veterinarian, so he was very clinical about it. He told us, 'In three to five years, my muscles will give out, and I will starve to death.'"

Doug and his sisters wrestled with what this meant for their father and their family.

"This was a lightning bolt," Doug explained. "It was rare, something that was isolated. It wasn't hereditary, so it wasn't something my sisters and I needed to worry about having, but it was something our dad would just have to deal with."

"He survived 12 years post-diagnosis, which was a mixed blessing. My kids got to know him and that was wonderful, but they will always remember him in a wheelchair, which is heartbreaking to me."

"My dad passed away in 2006. A few months later, my sister Ellen was diagnosed with ALS. Now, even though this was not something that was supposed to touch our family again, here was this second diagnosis," Doug explained. "A second lightning bolt. Was there something in our family that caused that?"

Doug and Ellen decided that they needed to know more and do more for people with ALS. "One of the top ALS research centers in the world is in Chicago at Northwestern University. We met the researchers and were fascinated with what they were doing there, but we were blown away by one of the researchers, Dr. Hande Ozdinler," he said.

"She works at Northwestern in the Feinberg School of Medicine as an assistant professor of research. I told her that I didn't know if we were going to end up raising any money or anything, but, if we did,

we were pushing all of the chips across the table to her."

The McConnells' interest in Dr. Ozdinler's research has started showing dividends. "One compound we provided money to in the early time of supporting the research is now going through the FDA approval process as a drug that could be a treatment. For people with a degenerative disease, this has huge potential."

Doug and Ellen were invigorated by what they were seeing at Northwestern. "We thought, 'Wouldn't it be cool to build a bridge from ALS, where people lose their muscles, and swimming, where you have to use your muscles all the time and have to breathe deeply?'" Doug said. "Ellen came up with the name 'A Long Swim' to line up with ALS."

The siblings founded A Long Swim in 2011, and Doug rattled off an impressive and astounding list of swims he completed for the organization: Tampa Bay, the English Channel ("It's 22 miles but swims like 30," he quipped.), the Catalina Channel, the loop around Manhattan island, from Molokai to Oahu in Hawaii, Evanston to Chicago, and Nantucket to Martha's Vineyard, among others.

"When I finished swimming the English Channel, it was the middle of the night when I arrived in France, but I knew I had to call Ellen. I called her and she celebrated with me." Like their father, Ellen outlived the initial life expectancy she was given at the time of her diagnosis. She passed away in 2018, 12 years after doctors told her that she only had three to five years left.

The mission of A Long Swim resonated with people, and the organization has raised over \$3 million for ALS research. "One of the things we thought of to raise more money for the charity," Doug explained, "was to host for other people and they were popular. Most of the swimmers in those events are triathletes who are trying to improve their time on the swimming portion."

The cofounders continued to dream about the future of the organization and looked for ways to scale up the events and the organization's profile.

"Thirteen years ago, Ellen and I heard about a swim they were doing in the canals in Amsterdam as a fundraiser for an ALS charity in Europe," Doug said. "We got in touch with the organizers and they sent us a lot of videos and we thought, 'Boy, this looks like the Chicago river!' and wondered, 'Can we do this?'"

Doug and Ellen set to work to make a Chicago River swim happen. "The organizers in Amsterdam were so helpful and sent us safety plans and so much information," he said. "We thought, 'How difficult could it be to get this approved?' Well, it

took thirteen years, but we finally got there."

As they explored planning a Chicago River swim, Doug and Ellen learned about the history of their city and the river that shares its name.

"Along the way, we found out there were competitive swims in the river 100 years ago," Doug said. "In the 1800s, the Chicago River was a sewer and fed into Lake Michigan. It was so bad. It was poisoning the drinking water of the city. They reversed the flow of the river in 1900, so Lake Michigan is the source, and the river flows eventually into the Mississippi. In 1908, the river was clean, and everyone was excited about it, and they held competitive swims to celebrate. They held those until 1927. I grew up swimming around Chicago and knew nothing about any of this."

"Over time, the water quality decreased, so the swims had to stop, and the river became an industrial waterway. All these factories dumped into the river. The world's biggest stockyard was in Chicago, and they dumped all the animal waste, byproducts, body parts, even hides, into that part of the river, which is still called Bubbly Creek today. In the 1970s, the EPA came in and worked to improve the river, and the river cleaned itself."

"Over 50 years, the turnaround in the river is miraculous. You talk to old-timers, and you mention swimming in the Chicago River, and their heads practically explode," he laughed. "They cannot imagine why someone would do something like that."

A Long Swim had their work cut out for them when it came to public opinion. "We needed to reassure people that the water is clean," Doug said. "In the last year, we glommed onto the water testing procedures they use for the beaches on Lake Michigan. That was something people knew about and was consistent with EPA guidelines. The University of Illinois Chicago campus tests the water every day and then puts up flags to indicate the level of cleanliness: red, yellow, green. We jumped on that."

"From the second of September to the twentieth, we had nine locations with daily water testing along the course, and all of them were in the green flag range. It was gratifying to show those results to our swimmers and the city leaders to reassure everyone."

After years of dreaming and working diligently to make it happen, A Long Swim's Chicago River event happened on September 21, 2025. "We had 300 swimmers gather, and they were thrilled to be there," Doug said. "Half did a one-mile swim and half did two loops of the course. It was a well-produced event, if I do say so myself. We hired the

**Doug McConnell '79** (continued on page 6)



# Alumni News

**Thompson A. Dyke '56:** I am still enjoying life at Morning Park, which is a retirement community (CCRC) in Naples, Florida, ranked eighth in the nation by US news and world report. I have organized a 25-member golf group called the Dykestars and have changed the rules to make it easier and more fun. I also still play tennis and am the oldest player on the court. I also organized a mixed chorus here at MP. The days when I was song leader in the house gave me enough experience to lead the group.

**Cyrus Nichols '56:** I am 90 years old now. Defeated cancer twice and live one day at a time with the Good Lord's blessings. My wife and I enjoy our family: three sons, five grandchildren, four great-grandchildren.

**R. Grant Smith '57:** Still crankin' along at 88!

**Richard G. Fletemeyer '59:** On September 7, our class of '59 had their 65th graduation anniversary at U of I. Five brothers and their wives attended: Dick Fletemeyer and Dave Powell, Mike Walters, Don Tjarksen, and Sig Sig Dr. Derald Brackmann, and our Illinois beat Kansas 23 to 17. A great reunion: Dick Fletemeyer with Deb, Dave Powel with Deb, Mike Walters with Peggy, Don Tjarksen with Jane (Janet), Sig Sig Dr. Derald Brackman with Char.

**Bob Cornelisen '61:** Presently living in and taking care of family home on the shore of Lake Michigan in Pentwater, Michigan. Fly fishing the Michigan rivers, model boat building, and following world events and fighting Illini teams provides interesting times. Wife Carol, Illinois Chi Omega, former music teacher, and first chair in the Chicago Symphony Chorus resides in

Assisted Care in Hart, Michigan. Son Chris is a marine biology scientist employed by Cawthron Institute in New Zealand. Chris and family have lived on the South Island for many years. Son Dana and family live in San Antonio, Texas, where Dana is a top sales exec. for SEW Inc. Daughter Erika was lost to metastatic breast cancer a few years ago. She worked as an executive director for a Chicago non-profit family fund.

**John Rooney Jr. '61:** I became a Significant Sig in 2023. I am spending a great deal of my time as a board member and fundraiser for the Folds of Honor Foundation. Partnered with several investors and Jack Nicklaus to transform our Grand Haven, Michigan golf course into the American Dunes Club. Check us out at AmericanDunes.com.

**James Reed '67:** Enjoyed following our granddaughter Caroline Kerr, as she led her Tennessee volleyball team to the "Sweet sixteen" where they were beaten by eventual champ Texas in five games! As a setter, she ended up third in the nation in assists and made second team All-American in her freshman year. Great fun!

**Lester Detterbeck '69:** Best wishes, Les Detterbeck.

**James French '69:** After living in the same house in the village of Dakota for 36 years, Gwynne and I are building a new three-bedroom home in Freeport. It will be ready by Christmas and have the master bedroom and laundry room on the main floor.

**Charles Groebe '83:** Working in commercial real estate in Chicago. Enjoying volunteer activities, such as Rotary Club, Chamber of Chicago Southland, church,

## The Chicago River Swim (continued from page 4)

spelling of the Bay where he completed a English Channel crossing), became the 48th person over the age of 50 to swim across the English Channel when he reached France after swimming 14 hours and 18 minutes. McConnell started in Dover, England about 1 p.m. local time and finished at 3 a.m. He swam in memory of his father David, who passed away from ALS, and to raise money for the Les Turner ALS Foundation's research program at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine.

For more information, A Long Swim contact information is: [longswim.org/our-team/](http://longswim.org/our-team/)

\*More information about Doug and his significant swimming successes: [https://www.openwaterpedia.com/wiki/Doug\\_McConnell](https://www.openwaterpedia.com/wiki/Doug_McConnell)

"After losing both his father and sister to ALS, Doug turned grief into action. His father was first diagnosed in 1994 and described the disease as a "lightning bolt," rare and non-hereditary. Though told he had just three to five years, he lived for 12, allowing his grandchildren to know his sharp humor. Tragically, months after his passing, Doug's sister Ellen was also diagnosed and endured the

same 12-year struggle. Together, they pledged to raise funds for ALS research. "She had all the good ideas," he said. "We miss her like crazy."

## Doug McConnell '79 (continued from page 5)

guys who did the Chicago triathlon, and they are just top-notch."

Of course, there are some Sigma Chi connections to work done by A Long Swim and the Chicago River swim. "Kirk Hartley '79.5 participated in some of the organization's swims. I got a call from a guy who was four years ahead of me, Steve Sarovich '75. Even though he had graduated by the time I arrived on campus, he was around Champagne and was always underfoot while I was in school," Doug laughed. "He and his wife Sheila came to the Chicago event. Doug Wilson '75 came in from Denver to kayak and help with the event. The fact that Dougger wanted to come in and help, that was really special."

Just a week after the successful, inaugural Chicago River swim, Doug and A Long Swim are focused on the future. "We are already planning for 2026."

etc. Hobbies are golf, running, basketball and fitness at UIC Club in Chicago. Active travels: visit my son, Ted, in Seattle, who is flying the P8 jet patrolling the oceans for enemy subs and my younger son, Tom, who works in Chicago at the Pendry Hotel on Michigan Ave. My wife Lucy and I live good on Lake Michigan.

**David J. Gordon '86:** Just celebrated my 60th birthday with a trip to Scottsdale with several of my fraternity brothers, fantastic time. Interesting note is that eight different pledge classes were represented.



## Leave a Legacy!

Consider a lasting gift that will support the brothers of Kappa Kappa Chapter long after you are gone. By including Kappa Kappa in your estate plans, you ensure the long-term health and success of our fraternity. Here's what you and/or your adviser might need to know.

The most common ways to include Kappa Kappa Chapter are through your will or by naming Kappa Kappa of Sigma Chi Foundation as a beneficiary under a life insurance policy.

### Sample language for your will or estate plan:

"I leave the sum of (\$XXXXXX.xx or XX% of my estate) to Kappa Kappa of Sigma Chi Foundation, tax ID# 20-3901938 for their general purposes."

\*This information is not presented as legal or tax advice. Always consult with your advisers for questions or clarifications.\*

**Your brothers and those following in their footsteps thank you!**

## CONNECT WITH US

ILLINOISIGS.ORG



**Sigma Chi Kappa Kappa Network**  
[www.linkedin.com/groups/12032790](https://www.linkedin.com/groups/12032790)



**Search for: University of Illinois Sigma Chi-Kappa Kappa Chapter**

## Have Alumni News?

**We want to hear from you!** Send your personal updates, accomplishments, adventures, and photos to our account manager, **Melissa Stanton** at [MStanton@elevateims.com](mailto:MStanton@elevateims.com), or simply fill out the back of the enclosed gift form and return it in the mail. We want to share it in the next issue of *The Illinois Sig*!