

# PI PHI & THE PANDEMIC

## *Persisting and Progressing Through COVID-19*

Pi Beta Phi was prepared — not prepared specifically for a pandemic, but prepared to rally. Preparation means we don't have to focus solely on survival, but we're able to think about the other side of the crisis. It means we get to figure out what we're losing, but not get stuck there. It means we can listen, care deeply and act with intention. It means we dig deep remembering who we are at our core and think creatively about how we can operate differently. We could just get through this, but that's not Pi Phi. Instead, because we were prepared and we act with intention and purpose, we're going to find opportunities and come out stronger.

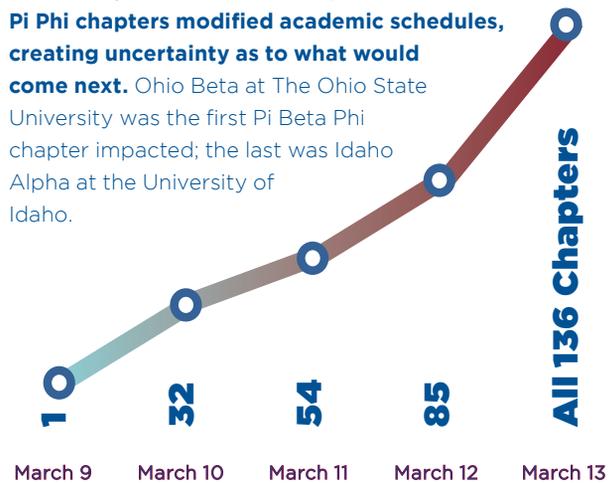
### *The First Four Days*

On Monday, March 9, 2020, at 10:28 p.m., Headquarters staff members first heard reports of universities moving to remote instruction in response to the rapidly worsening COVID-19 outbreak. On Friday, March 13 — just four days later — many sisters said goodbye to roommates and friends without knowing when they'd see each other again. Pi Beta Phi entered the weekend faced with a new, uncertain reality: all 136 campuses with Pi Beta Phi chapters had announced modified academic schedules or fully remote instruction.

### *The Critical Question*

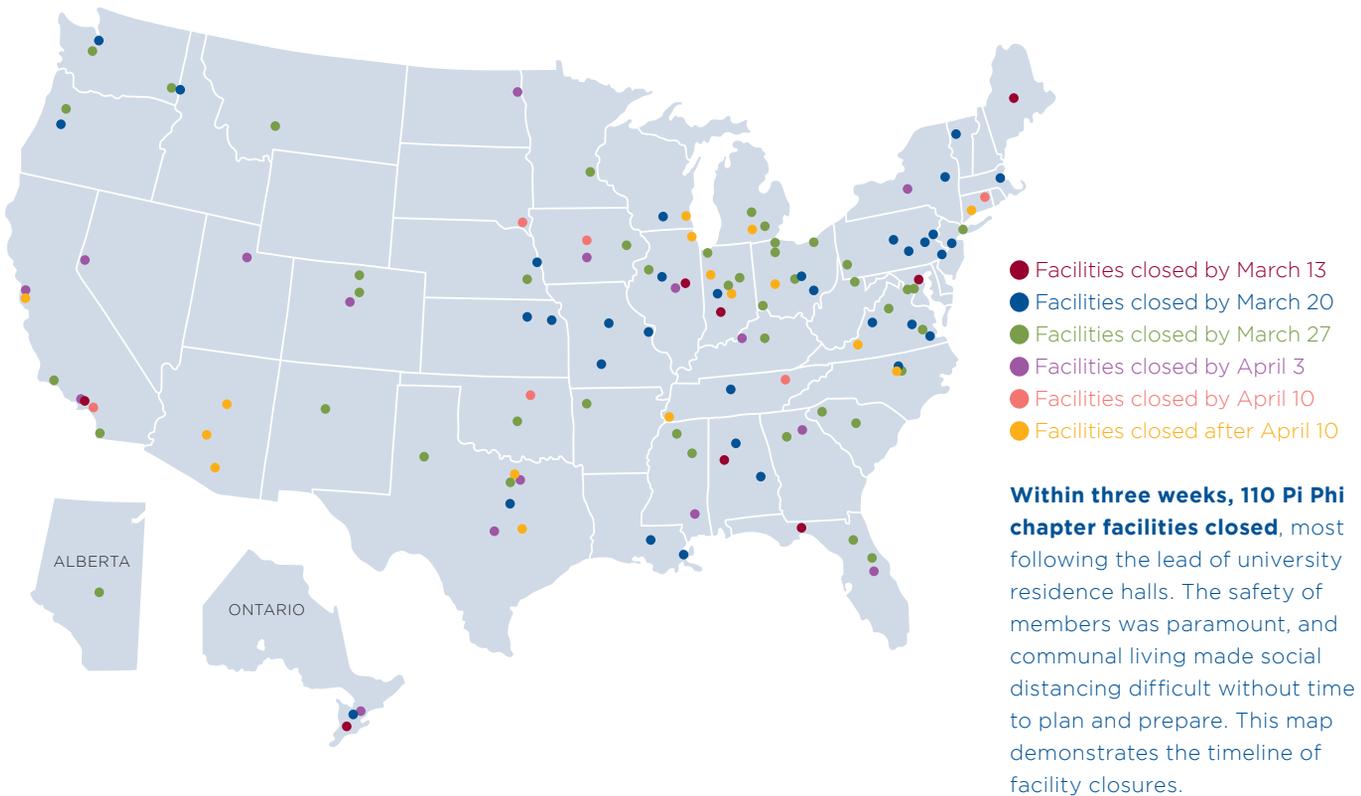
Along with the first reports of Pi Phi chapters impacted by modified campus operations came a flood of questions. We didn't fully realize we'd soon be answering those questions for all 136 chapters — or, in some cases, that we'd be trying to find answers for months. Guided by the needs of our members, Pi Phi leaders quickly assembled a COVID-19 crisis response team to coordinate immediate action. Meeting daily, this team closely monitored the pandemic and evaluated the impact for all those who rely on Pi Phi: our members, friends, employees and communities. From the first days of crisis response, as the team began to understand the scope of how many members would be impacted, it was evident Pi Phi's mission, vision and core values would become our call to action now, as they often have in times of uncertainty. Pi Beta Phi leadership was faced with a critical question: **amidst fear and loss, how can we leverage our collective strength?**

**In four days' time, all 136 campuses with Pi Phi chapters modified academic schedules, creating uncertainty as to what would come next.** Ohio Beta at The Ohio State University was the first Pi Beta Phi chapter impacted; the last was Idaho Alpha at the University of Idaho.



### *The Void of Cancellation*

For 153 years, gathering has been essential to the Pi Beta Phi experience. The significance of the pandemic on the in-person aspect of our organization has been palpable. What were first a temporary postponement of events and gatherings soon became cancellations. The spring was characterized by the loss of defining moments, such as Initiation for the nearly 1,500 New Members whose ceremonies did not occur as scheduled, or alumnae club recognition of 25-, 50- and 75-year members as Silver, Golden and Diamond Arrows. Graduating seniors had to forgo formal goodbyes and photos in front of the chapter house in their regalia on graduation day. Perhaps less momentous but just as significant, it meant the loss of opportunities to be surrounded by Pi Phi friends often taken for granted, like



sisterhood retreats or annual class reunions. Each time a stay-at-home order was extended beyond a favorite Pi Phi event, members felt the disappointment and heartache that comes from missing sisters.

Our Fraternity Housing Corporation (FHC) worked to manage Pi Phi facilities and help Chapter House Corporations navigate the risks of communal living, as health experts quickly outlined official recommendations. Following the lead of campus partners, in most cases, Pi Phi facilities closed as university residence halls closed. On March 13, eight Pi Beta Phi facilities had closed in response to COVID-19. By April 6, three weeks later, the number of closures had climbed to include 110 of our 118 facilities. Undergraduate members sacrificed their once-in-a-lifetime housing experience with the abrupt conclusion of the academic year.

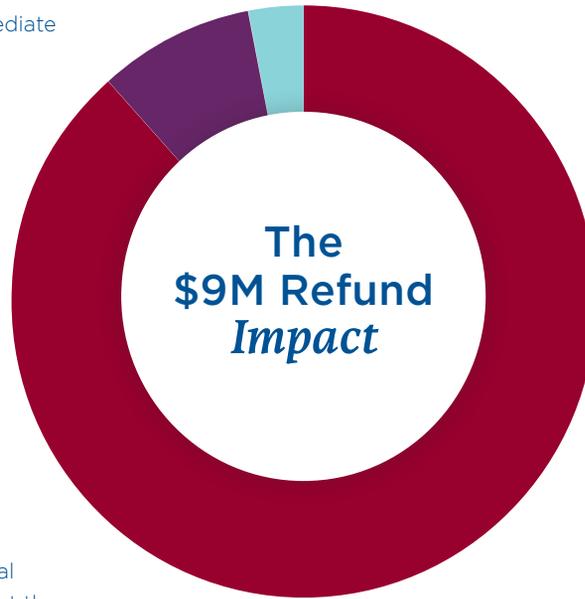
## The Desire to Help

At a time when hope seems to be one of our most valuable resources, it's common to look within to find out who you really are. For Pi Phi leadership, this meant focusing on the Fraternity's mission and translated into addressing the immediate economic consequences of the pandemic.

“We express care in this way because we are fortunate enough that we can and it's the only right thing to do,” said Fraternity and FHC Executive Director **JULI HOLMES WILLEMANN**, Iowa Beta. “It does not mean it's easy. It does mean we're leading with our heart.” In practice, leading with our heart sparked these initial efforts, announced just weeks into Pi Phi's crisis response:

- Chapters issued refunds to members for portions of chapter dues and room and board costs, putting more than \$9 million back into the hands of our collegiate

**More than \$9 million in prorated refunds for chapter dues and room and board costs were issued as the spring academic term was cut short by COVID-19.** The refunds had significant financial impact on all chapters. For most, reserve funds, which had been built over time to prepare chapters for financial crisis, absorbed much of the immediate impact. Fraternity-wide, members remained the top priority when considering refunds. What this graphic does not represent is that some of Pi Phi's largest chapters have the least amount in reserve funds after issuing refunds — a potentially significant challenge. Very few chapters would financially be able to sustain another wave of similar refunds, until reserve funds could be rebuilt. "The Fraternity is looking strategically at overall organizational finances and is prepared to provide financial assistance and guidance to support these chapters for the year or two that it will take to regain financial stability and rebuild reserves for the future," said Grand Vice President Finance/Housing **LISA GAMEL SCOTT**, Colorado Alpha.



**116 chapters** were able to provide refunds from adequate reserve funds built over time

**16 chapters** provided member refunds but **depleted their reserves**

**4 chapters** found member refunds to be **greater than their current resources**

members and their families. "These prorated refunds were costly for chapters; however, the emphasis was on supporting the needs of members while maintaining the financial stability of Pi Phi chapters," says Fraternity and FHC Finance Director **KRISTIN RUGEN**, Missouri Alpha.

- Pi Phi tripled the 2019-2020 financial commitment to our literacy partner First Book®, becoming one of the first organizations to step up and help distribute seven million books with an immediate gift in the face of COVID-19. The funding commitment was made possible through gifts to The Literacy Fund at Pi Beta Phi Foundation, which have been restricted by donors to support Pi Beta Phi's reading initiatives. Funds have built over time, preparing Pi Phi to respond in a big way when need arises. The ability to leverage Pi Phi's philanthropic focus in a time of crisis is partially what makes Read > Lead > Achieve® unique.

- FHC prioritized retaining local facility staff, including beloved House Directors, chefs and housekeepers, through the end of the academic year.

Perhaps most inspiring were the stories of Pi Phis who became the helpers in their communities — the front-line and essential workers, as the world's critical workforce became known, as well as community-focused volunteers. Pi Phi worked to share their stories and collect and preserve their experiences for the Fraternity archives.

## Coming Together Virtually

Faced with the challenges of social distancing and stay-at-home orders, the entire world sought new ways to connect and engage with others. The video communications company Zoom saw an increase from 10 million daily meeting participants in December 2019 to 200 million daily meeting participants in March

## The Questions Pi Phi Asked

2020. Thousands were Pi Phi members overcoming the frustrations of learning new technology and finding alternative ways to do the simple things that usually don't require much thought. For Pi Phi, maintaining a premier membership experience, embracing a virtual way of gathering when we needed closeness the most and conducting critical chapter business outside of formal meetings would be a true test of our sisterhood — one with the potential to make us stronger.

Ring Ching Chats, launched earlier in the year to give Pi Phis an opportunity to stay updated on what's happening in our Fraternity through a virtual conversation, helped the Fraternity convey important and heartfelt messages. It became even more clear that Pi Phis were ready to rise to the occasion when nearly 1,000 chapter officers came together through webinars to share ideas and find strength in comradery. These officers mastered agility while implementing innovative solutions to maintain essential operations, such as voting to approve their 2020-2021 budget through an online platform Pi Phi has traditionally utilized for membership selection.

**BACK IN THE DAY, FOUNDERS' DAY FELT LIKE AN IMPOSITION RIGHT WHEN THE SEMESTER'S PRESSURE MOUNTED. YET THIS MORNING I SO ENJOYED PINNING ON MY ARROW BADGE AND MY 25-YEAR PIN FOR THE FIRST TIME IN DECADES TO CELEBRATE MY LIFELONG COMMITMENT WITH THE VIRTUAL FOUNDERS' DAY EVENT.**

- Illinois Epsilon **GINA M. TABACHKI**

Months into the COVID-19 pandemic, we're asking new questions while still contending with some of the unknowns that haven't changed since March 9. At the beginning of Pi Beta Phi's crisis response, we established a commitment to providing clarity and developed a COVID-19 response webpage to aid in timely information sharing. Along the way, Pi Phi has had to become comfortable with giving and receiving the answer "we don't know." What questions was Pi Phi asking on day one, on day four as all chapters were impacted and well into crisis response efforts on day 40?

### DAY ONE: MARCH 9, 2020

- What does this mean for the chapter impacted?
- Can members self-quarantine at the chapter house?
- Can we make space in our facility for members returning from study abroad?

### DAY FOUR: MARCH 13, 2020

- What does this mean for all Pi Beta Phi chapters?
- Is this goodbye for now or for the year?
- Where will collegians live and eat if the Pi Phi house closes?
- Will collegians be able to come back and get their belongings from the house?
- Should Headquarters staff work from home?
- How do we keep chapter facility employees working if the Pi Phi house is closed?
- How do we keep local employees safe and healthy if they are high-risk?
- How do we initiate our New Members?

### DAY 40: APRIL 18, 2020

- How can collegians vote on a chapter budget?
- What if collegians cannot return to school in-person this fall?
- How will we celebrate Founders' Day?
- How will we participate in recruitment while maintaining social distancing?
- How can we celebrate our seniors leading into graduation?

## WHAT QUESTIONS WILL WE BE ASKING ON DAY 400?

In addition to repurposing programs and platforms for new functions, new initiatives were introduced. Within a month, more than 800 Pi Phis signed up for Pi Phi Pals, a virtual pen pal program launched to connect Pi Phis under stay-at-home orders. Members' enthusiasm for Pi Phi Pals demonstrates when the need for a good friend arises, Pi Phis of all ages call on their sisters.

As April 28 drew nearer, it became clear that celebrating Founders' Day in person would not be possible. Instead, Pi Phis honored our sisterhood through a Facebook Live Founders' Day event, complete with a special message about each of the 12 founders and, of course, Pi Phi songs. The virtual event, hosted by 18 Pi Phis from their homes across North America, has been viewed by more than 9,000 members. In what could have been a time when engagement waned, some Pi Phis — like one member in Alaska, 2,000 miles from a chapter and 400 miles from an alumnae club — took the opportunity to reconnect with our sisterhood.

Traditionally held on Founders' Day, Pi Phi Giving Day took on a bit of a different focus. Members were asked to reflect on what Pi Phi has given them, and to make a gift to our Foundation if they were able. Through social media, members shared the impact of Pi Phi on their lives, and our Foundation used video messages to convey personal thanks to each of the 644 Pi Phi Giving Day donors. Sisters and friends again helped us surpass the fundraising goal, with \$108,018.67 raised to support Pi Phis and Pi Phi initiatives.

This summer, collegiate leaders who hoped to attend Pi Beta Phi Leadership Institute in St. Louis were invited to participate in a virtual leadership experience, the Resiliency Leadership Series. Recognizing the inherent value of the experience, Pi Phi also extended the invitation to all interested members. Through a series of four webinars, Pi Phis explored ways to stay strong in ambiguous or trying situations. Cancelling the acclaimed Leadership Institute has not meant Pi Phi has cancelled the opportunity to build confident women leaders, but rather found a new way to empower our members.

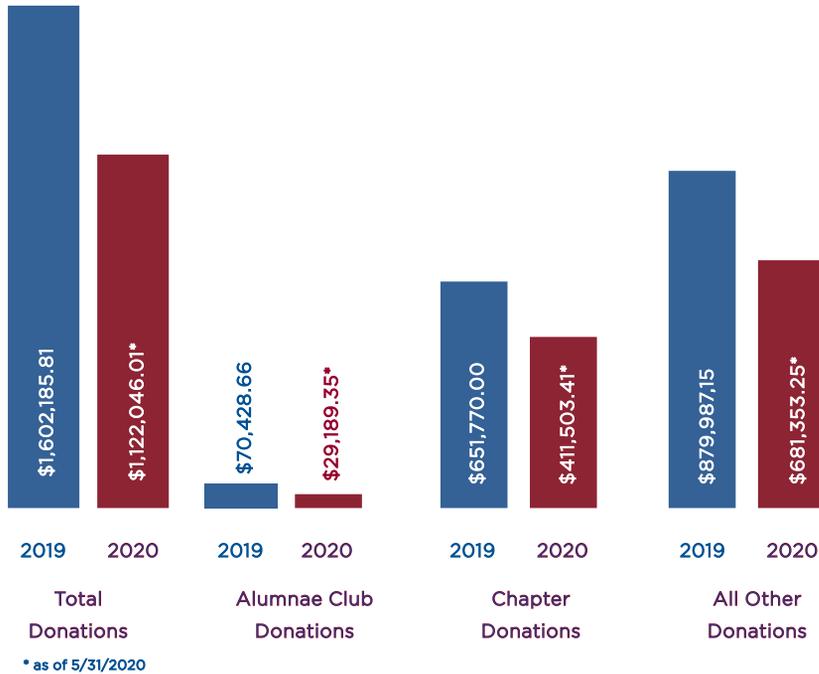
## *The Impact on Giving and of Giving Back*

Through campus-based efforts, Pi Phi collegians have prioritized philanthropy and made tremendous impact on Pi Beta Phi's charitable goals. In any given year, approximately 40% of gifts to our Foundation come from chapters. In the 2019-2020 academic year, that translated to \$1.6 million. With spring campus calendars abruptly ending, most chapters had to cancel philanthropy events and saw fundraising goals unrealized. While the **SHINE THROUGH** campaign had begun to expand support from alumnae and shift our Foundation's reliance on chapter fundraising to help make Fraternity programs and literacy initiatives grants possible, the absence of chapter fundraising this spring means a significant gap in funding.

Additionally, the **SHINE THROUGH** campaign established new endowments, in which proceeds of invested funds become available to support grants for Pi Phi priorities. Though economic downturns may limit the reach of endowments in any given year, endowments help organizations weather storms. The existence of these funds assures us that resources exist to ensure our sisterhood and critical support for members in the future; however, these new funds are not yet large or mature enough to fulfill the total current need.

Demonstrating the unique responsiveness of Pi Phi's signature philanthropy, literacy funds built by donors over the years were put to use immediately, allowing Pi Beta Phi to get books into children's homes as the pandemic was closing schools. Pi Phis in need of financial assistance due to the catastrophic effects of COVID-19 were met quickly by Sincere Friendship through sisters' support of Emma Harper Turner Fund emergency assistance grants. Because our Foundation applies no fees to gifts from these funds, the cost of administering literacy and financial assistance grants is supported by annual support to the Friendship Fund.

# Impact on the Friendship Fund



**When chapter and alumnae club spring fundraising came to a halt, the impact on Pi Beta Phi Foundation was immediate and significant: the anticipated loss of almost 38% of support to the Friendship Fund compared to Spring 2019.**

While shifting in its approach, our Foundation relies on the philanthropic work of chapters and clubs to help make possible critical grants to Fraternity programming.

Decreased individual contributions combined with decreased chapter and alumnae club fundraising will result in an estimated 25% decrease in Friendship Fund support compared to the last fiscal year.

To address the significant gap and maintain support of Pi Phi's programs, our Foundation has thoughtfully reduced expenses and invited sisters and friends who are able to support Pi Phi during this time. The incredible loyalty of donors who have maintained their commitment to Pi Beta Phi, even as the pandemic timeline lengthens, is Lifelong Commitment in action. Still, there will be a funding shortfall this year. Donors to the Friendship Fund entrust our Foundation to use their gift for the greatest Pi Phi need at any given time. Most years, a large portion of Friendship Fund donations support Pi Beta Phi leadership initiatives: *Leading with Values*®, the Leadership Development Consultant Program, Critical Conversations and other programs that make the Pi Phi member experience premier and relevant. At the time of this publication, it is projected — specifically due to unrealized chapter fundraising efforts — there will be no Friendship Fund dollars available to support leadership development programs. Instead, leadership will be funded solely by endowment dollars, resulting in as much as a 50% reduction in leadership programming support from our Foundation.

While our Foundation often encourages donors seeking advice on how to best support Pi Beta Phi to give to the Friendship Fund, the effects of the pandemic are helping

**I SUPPORT TWO CHAPTERS AS AN ADVISOR. BOTH HAD TO CANCEL THEIR SPRING FUNDRAISERS. I CANNOT IMAGINE THE IMPACT CANCELLED CHAPTER FUNDRAISERS WILL HAVE ON OUR SISTERHOOD AND WHAT WE OFFER OUR MEMBERS. I AM HAPPY TO JOIN IN INCREASING MY SUPPORT OF OUR FOUNDATION TO ENSURE WE HAVE WHAT WE NEED RIGHT NOW.**

- Ohio Eta **LEISA EBELING LOWREY**

us share the immediate impact a donor can make with a Friendship Fund gift. With virtual donor meetings held through video chats, more phone calls made to thank donors and encourage continued support, and creative ideas shared to increase support from alumnae clubs, our Foundation is working hard to — as our mission states — ensure the future of our sisterhood. For those able, now is the time to make a first gift or recommit to giving back. The world always needs Pi Phi leaders, but in times like this it's just a little clearer why smart, courageous, empowered women are so critical.

## Membership Recruitment Anew

The pandemic and its effects have significantly altered important milestones for our chapters, clubs and international Fraternity in ways that will have long-term impact. Chapters are faced with the reality that primary recruitment, a critical period in their academic year, will not happen in the ways it previously did. As of our publication deadline, most universities intend to resume in-person classes this fall; however, the timing and execution of primary recruitment will be reimaged in ways that will challenge long-existing norms. Entering the 2019-2021 biennium, Fraternity leadership identified a goal of revolutionizing the way Pi Phi approaches collegiate recruitment, not fully realizing what that would mean. Pushing the work of the project forward without acknowledging COVID-19 would be impossible. Pi Beta Phi championed the National Panhellenic Conference's (NPC) efforts to create a Recruitment Contingencies Task Force, helping to develop a road map for College Panhellenics to prepare for the Fall 2020 academic term and a disrupted Panhellenic primary recruitment. The various alternative recruitment models put forth by the task force, which included Alabama Beta **JESSIE ASHTON**, will assist our communities to continue engaging Potential New Members in the sorority experience, regardless of the environment on campus.

Building on the foundation and framework set by the NPC Recruitment Contingencies Task Force, the Fraternity formed an internal work group to

adapt our own policies and procedures to maximize growth potential. For this group, unconventional and sometimes radical solutions were favored in order to match the scale of obstacles anticipated in the upcoming year. Pi Phi developed tools to support all chapters in executing authentic, often less formal, recruitment efforts. Securing a membership large enough and committed enough to sustain a chapter through uncertainty will be critical this fall.

## We Will Get Through This

Pi Beta Phi faces the COVID-19 pandemic not only as an organization, but also as a sisterhood, uniquely positioning the Fraternity's response. The issues the Fraternity has faced cannot be solved solely from a business perspective or with only a customer service approach. They have to be solved with both considerations in mind, as well as an acute awareness that at our core, we're sisters who care for one another.

For more than 153 years, Pi Beta Phi's enduring mission has guided our membership through global hardships, world wars, economic downturns, drastic changes in higher education — and even pandemics. Pi Phis have always been there for one another and their communities, and today is no different.

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- Grand President **MARLA NEELLY  
WULF** in her March 20 email to all  
Pi Beta Phi members

## By the Numbers

**1,432**

New Members not initiated in spring

**3,181**

collegians graduated in Spring 2020

**2,035**

50-year Golden Arrow and 75-year Diamond Arrow members to be celebrated this past spring

**OVER 4,000**

Pi Phis living in chapter houses who had to return home due to facility closures

**\$9 MILLION**

Total amount of prorated chapter dues and room and board refunds issued by chapters to collegians

**OVER 9,000**

Pi Phis who viewed our Founders' Day ceremony on Facebook, bringing Pi Phis together to celebrate our sisterhood virtually

**817**

Pi Phi Pals, participants in our virtual pen pal program connecting Pi Phis during stay-at-home orders

Former Fraternity leaders prepared Pi Phi for times of crisis. Difficult budget decisions, made over decades, have given Pi Phi solid footing. Although today's Pi Beta Phi leaders had to make careful decisions in response to the pandemic, the options available to them were more expansive because of the wise financial decisions made by their predecessors.

Pi Phis are leading within their industries and communities to tackle world challenges. Members are reaching out to their networks of Pi Beta Phi friends to lift spirits and hopes. Donors are supporting sisters in need through gifts to our Foundation. For Pi Phis, our sisterhood becomes a source of strength in times of uncertainty. Our commitment to one another has gotten us through and will do so again.

### *The Flicker of Opportunity*

There comes a time in any crisis when doubt transforms into opportunity. A crisis is defined as a turning point; the people involved must decide which direction they will turn.

As the Fraternity hopes to settle into more standard operations in the coming months, chapters and clubs will start to reassemble themselves organizationally and operationally. Postponed officer elections will be conducted, contracts will be renegotiated and calendars will be coordinated. Despite the critical business to be resumed, what Pi Phi does — and must do — in the immediate future will not define the organization. Instead, our sisterhood will be characterized by how we build upon this challenge and secure our relevance into the future. Will we just “make it through,” or will we emerge stronger, more deeply connected and better equipped to fulfill our mission? ←