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by COLLEEN JENKINS

*Tribune Media Services*

Executives at nine national fraternity headquarters are refocusing their organizations' values with one overarching resolution for the new millennium: no alcoholic beverages in any chapter facilities.

While alumni donors are supporting promises to establish alcohol-free housing, many active greeks are left questioning the motives behind the change and are quick to point out that alcohol-free housing doesn't mean they'll necessarily abstain from drinking.

"I don't think there is a reason, other than insurance, for why the national headquarters have decided to go dry," said David Rosenberg, a student at Davidson College and a member of Phi Delta Theta, the first national fraternity to set July 1 as its deadline for all chapters to be dry.

National fraternity executives concede liability insurance is a big factor behind the initiative because they face increasingly high premiums due to injuries and deaths related to their houses. Since 1970, there have been 36 fraternity or sorority deaths from falls that often involved alcohol. Alcohol-free housing is expected to lower those insurance costs.

"Most of my fraternity brothers think (alcohol-free housing) is a bad idea," said Justin Gombos, a junior at the University of Oregon and a member Theta Chi, one of the national fraternities that has pledged to enforce the policy by 2003. "If we go dry, (the national headquarters) makes more money. The vast majority of people are okay with the premium we have now."

Gombos said the initiative would force parties with alcohol off campus, which could lead to more drinking and driving. Rosenberg added that he believed the policy would encourage binge drinking.

"Students will not have access to alcohol at the fraternity, so they will drink more before they head to the function or party," Rosenberg said.

The impending pledge also has fraternity members worried about future rushes. While they understand that alcohol-free housing is not meant to put a damper on their social scene, fraternity members still fear rivaling fraternities will exaggerate its implications and use it to deter prospective members from the dry organizations.

Ben Moore, a member of Sigma Nu at Appalachian State University, said his chapter did not plan to follow the lead set by Sigma Nu's national headquarters.

"If we went dry, it would kill our rush," Moore said.

Pete Van Emburgh, a pledging member of Sigma Alpha Epsilon at Bucknell University, said he would have rushed with the fraternity even if it were alcohol free (it's not and does not have plans to yet), but he was not sure about the rest of

## Some Greek houses to go permanently dry

his pledge class.

"If you're a sophomore rushing, and one fraternity is dry and there are 12 others on campus that aren't, you're probably going to go with one of those because that's the accepted thing," Van Emburgh said. "The mentality is, if it goes dry, then it's not fun."

And that is exactly the mindset Ron Binder, director of greek affairs at UNC-Chapel Hill, said national fraternities' headquarters want to weed out. They tout results like those highlighted in a recent study from the University of Missouri at Columbia, which reported that alcohol-free housing led to higher grades, cleaner and safer facilities, lower alcohol use and increased membership.

"In other words, it's doing what everyone wants it to do," said Binder. "You're switching out people whose definition is that fraternities are one big party and gaining those who thought there was an over-emphasis on alcohol."

It's not a new idea, since the national fraternity Farm House has enforced the rule since 1905. But when Phi Delta Theta's national headquarters first began the recent push in 1997, they took a lot of slack, said Bob Biggs, the fraternity's executive vice president.

Now, the tide is changing as 22 out of 24 national sororities have embraced the pledge, vowing not to attend any functions of fraternities who are not dry by next fall.

"The momentum has shifted to support," Biggs said. "The issue is not if the fraternities will become alcohol free but when they will become alcohol free. The women are sending a strong message to the men: clean up your act."

Whether or not fraternities heed the message might depend on how strictly national headquarters enforce the alcohol-free rule, because Rosenberg said, "there are ways around everything."

It is too soon to tell exactly how alcohol-free housing will change fraternity life, which is one reason why several fraternities are waiting until 2003 to try it out. Binder said these fraternities would gauge the policy's results at the first dry nationals before finalizing their own commitments.

"A lot of people are taking a wait-and-see attitude," he said. "You've got to be a say-what-you-mean type of national (to make the pledge)."

And from what Gombos can tell, fraternities who make the pledge still break the pledge. The one "dry house" on his school's campus is only dry as far as their headquarters is concerned, he said. If that remains the case, he can continue downing a couple of brews at his fraternity house whenever he pleases.

"If my house went dry tomorrow, I know people would still drink in the house, but people would look the other way because they're probably doing the same thing," Gombos said.