

Life in the Frat House – Not what you Think

Driving past the large A-frame house at 2719 East Main St., it looks just like any other 1970s house.

Pulling up the drive, rusty rocking chairs line the porch under the shade of a forty foot pine. Large Greek letters on the face of the house might not catch the eye. The flag pole on the back porch flying the skull and cross bones is also not likely to spark recognition of the amazing family inside.

The magic of this home is the students inside and the bonds they develop.

Kevin Nipper, a new member of this brotherhood, opens the door. Composite photos of the family welcome visitors from both sides of the hall as far as the eye can see. The doors to most rooms stand open, even though the students are not in them. This is normal says Kevin, “our house is safe.” As we walked this hallway, everyone we passed asked Kevin how his day was going.

This home is the Tennessee Theta chapter of Sigma Phi Epsilon. Sig Ep, as it is affectionately called, is one of many social fraternities at Middle Tennessee State University.

This chapter was founded in 1977, on 14 acres of land only a few miles from MTSU campus.

The house has 16 rooms that are available for rent by the membership. “It is cleaner than the dorm” says Kevin who just moved into the house three weeks ago.

Kevin says that it is cheaper than a house or apartment, but that is not why he desired to move in.

“Living here, I don’t feel like I am missing everything. I can focus because I am not always wondering what my friends are doing.” Kevin admits his parents are not too thrilled about the move, but he is positive it will help his GPA.

It is noon at the house and Kevin says it’s quiet during the day; yet, from the chair in the center of the room you can clearly make out the music next door, the television across the hall, and the resident poker champion honing his skills on the internet two doors down.

Ravioli, chips and bread sit on a shelf beside the compact refrigerator, fully stocked with Sam’s Dr Thunder soda. A bed, computer, desk, television and three-foot tall construction cone, furnish this one room monument to personal expression and brotherhood.

Down the hall, past 2 billiard tables and a fireplace mantle covered in trophies, is the room of Matt Young, chapter president. Matt, originally from Chattanooga, also moved from the campus dormitory environment to be a part of the family.

“If I want to go to the gym, there are two other guys who want to go. If I want to go swim, at least two other people want to go. There are always close friends here joining or asking me to be part of what they are doing.”

Matt’s room shows obvious signs that he has been here for years. Photos cover most of the wall, except for the parts covered by a “Stop” sign and his pledge paddle.

He inherited the Stop sign and added a street sign “YOUNG RD. 2900.” That along with a dresser, desk chair and an entertainment center came from the previous

resident. But the pride of the room is a small two-foot entry way covered in messages, signatures and quotes; it reminds Matt of every visitor who signed the guest registry.

Most of those guests were female, he admits proudly.

“The dorm was a crazy place to live” Matt explains. “It was fun, but here we take ownership and we are responsible for our house.”

The president and the director of finance are required to live in the house. “I touch base with all the other officers during the week. We keep in touch on the phone or email if we don’t see each other. We get things done.” Within the membership they have computer techs, a mechanic, even a welder.

Matt explains that being part of the leadership of the fraternity is like running a business. He has learned a great deal about responsibility and delegation, things he will use when he graduates with a degree in concrete management.

“Here we get to see all aspects of our friend’s lives” Matt explains.

“We don’t just leave when our roommate is upset or having an argument with his girlfriend, we are here for each other. If someone needs notes for a class, or help with homework they have that here” adds Matt, as another brother knocks on the door to tell him he moved his laundry into the dryer in order to wash his own clothes. “Use a fabric softener sheet dear” Matt says, taunting his friend.

The Fraternity has a diverse group explains Kevin, “We have a Vietnamese brother and two Persian members. You feel like it is OK to be you here.”

The week is planned out, starting on Sunday, with the membership meeting. They discuss the upcoming week’s schedule, decide who will do what and also go over campus related programming and sports.

Tuesday and Wednesday are intramurals nights, Thursday is reserved for parties and Friday and Saturday are left open for ballgames or whatever comes along.

Matt says that it can't all be work, "this is our last chance to let go and have fun."

Going to a university restricts your freedoms and makes you start the hard process of growing up, explains Matt. "We have decided to do it together, one day at a time."

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