

All-black fraternity seeks recognition

By Mary Wagoner

Kappa Alpha Psi, an all-black fraternity, is one of the lesser known organizations on UNL campus, according to its president, Dennis Stewart. But things are changing, he said.

The group is sponsoring a Sweetheart Ball Saturday at the Satellite Club, 38th St. and Cornhusker Highway, from 9 to 11 p.m.

"The ball is a special tribute to black women, with a black woman crowned queen. But the ball, which is open to the public, is an excellent opportunity to attract and inform white people that there is a black fraternity," according to Jimmy Smith, adviser to the fraternity and director of UNL's Minority Affairs Office.

The proceeds from the dance go to the Afro-American Achievement and Improvement Assoc., a nonprofit corporation. The funds to develop the corporation came from Kappa Alpha Psi, Blacks of African Descent and the Afro-American Collegiate Society.

"The purpose of the fund is simply to give minority students money which they can use to pay off expenses they've incurred while at the University.

Smith said the fraternity also sponsors food programs and gives parties and picnics for children.

"We currently are trying to set up a big brother-little brother program, in which the students will be taking time out of their lives to be a parent, sister or brother to children. The students will take them out of their environment, show them new things, and let the child feel he has somebody," he said.

Smith said "we want to make contributions to the community as a whole, and not just to the black community."

The fraternity, which has no house, suffers from financial problems. Smith said "We don't have the capital available to get a house, which is one reason most people haven't seen or heard of us. The capital we do have barely covers expenses. We depend solely on contributions from the black community to support our activities," he said.

Another problem Smith noted is the small number of blacks on campus.

"There are only around 200 blacks on campus. There's not a large enough population to choose from. And most of the Kappa's we had were athletes, because most of the blacks on campus were athletes.

"But, since the black strike in 1969, more nonathletes are coming to the University and giving us a larger population to pick from," he said. (In 1969, 25 black male athletes and five black females charged the NU administration and Athletic Dept. with unresponsiveness in dealing with minority problems.)

Lack of recognition by other fraternities hasn't helped Kappa Alpha Psi, according to secretary Michael Gaines.

"The white fraternities know we're here, but they don't really recognize us. It's like we're here, and yet we're really not."

Stewart said, "In the last two years we've sent other fraternities information about some of our activities, but they just don't respond. They say 'Well, it's just for those black folks over there, not us.' Blacks have made the effort," he said.

The fraternity, does several things with the community but little with the Interfraternity Council (IFC), Stewart said.

"They (IFC) don't really ask us to come to their meetings. One time when I was there, they were voting on whether to put up displays in front of the Greek houses. We don't even have a house, so what am I supposed to vote on?" he said.

White students would be accepted into the fraternity, Smith said.

"In fact, we've had a couple whites pledge, but they dropped out because of heavy social pressure by their peers. Too, a lot of whites think the blacks don't want them, and some just don't want to associate with blacks," he said.

Smith said UNL officials aren't sympathetic and don't understand the needs of black students.

"The Financial Aids Dept. at UNL is not giving (minority students) sufficient funds to satisfy their needs.

"Black students don't seem to be premiums or of interest to the white guy who decides who gets financial aid and how much. Most of the officials' backgrounds discriminate against the black student.

"This may sound negative, but it's just a reality," he said.

Smith said, "It's harder for a black student to stay in the University than it is for a white. Blacks need the motivation to stay in school, which the fraternity provides. We are oriented toward helping our members achieve this."

daily nebraskan

The Daily Nebraskan is published by the Publications Committee on Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday through the autumn and spring semesters, except on holidays and during vacation.

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