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## BY THE NUMBERS

**\$0**

raised as of 11/16/23

**\$13,000 goal**

**3**

ways to give:

1. Make a gift online. DONATE

2. Send a check to to our processing center listed below:

**Sigma Chi**  
University of Maryland  
Alumni Relations Processing  
Center  
P.O. Box 7007  
Albert Lea, MN 56007-8007

3. Call our toll-free Donation  
Hotline at: 1-800-975-6699



# CROSSROADS

A Publication of Gamma Chi Chapter of Sigma Chi, University of Maryland

November 2023

## MIKE LUZIO '98

### Sigma Chi was the driving force

Arriving in College Park as a freshman, **Mike Luzio** knew he wanted to be at a "big school" and figured the rest out from there. Thus began a life's journey that has seen him give back continuously to his alma mater in various ways, up to and including serving as the

University's youngest trustee. Through it all, he's maintained perspective on a key ingredient to his success: "On the universal balance sheet, Sigma Chi was a huge driving force in putting me in position to be where I'm at in my life."

After graduating with a degree in government and politics, he began a sales career in the tech sector, learning the ins and outs of the industry at multibillion-dollar firms. In 2004, he was ready to go out on his own, bootstrapping a software company that eventually sold for \$60 million in 2013. "And from then on, I've been doing angel investing. I own bits and pieces of 22 companies, sit on boards for several of those companies and the University of Maryland Board of Trustees. For my sons, I coach the high school football team and coach AAU basketball, and I live that life."

Like many Sigma Chi's, Mike came from an athletic background, particularly as a standout player for his New Jersey high school football team. "I got all these Division I-AA (football) offers, and I was like, 'I want to go to a big school. I'm gonna walk on at Maryland.' That lasted about a week. I had a miserable experience my first semester, awful. I wanted to transfer. I called coaches from Delaware and Rhode Island, and said, 'Look, I'm coming up to play ball.' And they're like, 'We're ready for you.' And then at that point, there were these



Jonathan Valz '96 and Mike Luzio

guys called Sigma Chi. I remember thinking I never wanted to be a fraternity guy, ever. But I met these guys, and they were a lot like me. I said, 'Maybe I'll give this a shot.'

The choice to pledge may have been a hard pivot, but after

committing to Sigma Chi, he attacked the experience with an attitude befitting his Jersey roots, an identity in which he proclaims great pride. "Once I got in, I made the decision: 'You know what? I like this, but there needs to be changes made.' I started taking positions within the house. We had 60 guys in the house and 150 guys active. It was running my first business. I talk about that all the time. It was difficult, and it was great. That's probably what started me wanting to be an entrepreneur, because I had no entrepreneurial bone in my body. I thought I was gonna be an FBI agent like my father. But once I got a taste of that, leading young men and understanding what it took to stand up, I liked it."

He eventually rose to the position of house president during his senior year, leading the charge in obtaining much-needed funding from the house corporation to renovate the bathrooms. ("I told them, 'I got one working toilet. I need some f—king toilets!'") But before that, he cut his teeth, like many before him, contributing to the house's dominance of intramural athletics. "Sigma Chi was the house where the ex-jocks went to die. We won intramurals something like 45 out of 47 years."

His talents were put to use on various house teams throughout the year, with varying results ("I was terrible at baseball; there are great

—Continued on Page 2

## CHAPTER ETERNAL

### Waldo Howard Burnside '49

*Source Courtesy of Dignity Memorial*

Waldo Howard Burnside, husband, father, grandfather and great-grandfather, passed away peacefully on November 5, 2023, his 95th birthday, while his family surrounded him with love. Throughout his long life, he was a beacon of light for his kindness, generosity of spirit, and humble service to his family and communities.

In a life marked by business leadership and civic engagement, Waldo's major interest was his family. He met Jean Culbert, his wife-to-be, in high school. They went to the University of Maryland at the same time and after they graduated, were married on June 24th, 1950. As of this year they were married for 73 years. They were blessed along the way with four children, eleven grandchildren, and ten great-grandchildren.

Waldo was born in Washington, DC and raised in Hyattsville Maryland where he attended Hyattsville Elementary School and Hyattsville High School. He then enrolled in the Business College of the University of Maryland in 1945 and graduated in 1949. He joined the Gamma Chi Chapter of Sigma Chi Fraternity. After graduation he became a member of their alumni chapter and was the recipient of the Significant Sig Award. He was also a member of the Phi Kappa Honor Society,

After college he entered the business community when he joined Woodward & Lothrop, a department store in the retail industry in Washington DC. There he worked in various capacities including Trainee, Buyer, EVP of Merchandising and Sales Promotion as well as Chief Operating Officer and President.

In 1980 he left Woodies to join Carter, Hawley, Hale as Vice-Chairman and Chief Operating Officer, and he and Jean moved to Los Angeles. He retired in 1991 as President. They continued to live in Los Angeles until 2018 when, after 38 event-filled years, he and Jean moved back to Maryland.

Over the years, though the children migrated to various parts of the country, Waldo and Jean cherished bringing the whole family together at Christmas and, for decades, in summer to gathering at their beach house in Fenwick Island, DE, building bonds of affection, making memories,



and giving generous and gentle guidance to the younger generations on everything from education to golf.

Following his graduation from the University of Maryland, his Alumni activities included serving as a Board Member and President of the Terrapin Club, Member of the Business School Hall of Fame, Trustee of the Board of Visitors and Trustee of the Maryland C.P. Foundation. His community activities on civic and corporate boards included the Suburban Trust Company Bank, the Better Business Bureau, and Blue Shield. While he was still in California he continued to work with the University of Maryland to set up Alumni Groups in Santa Barbara, Los Angeles, Orange County and San Diego. In 2013 he and Jean received the Spirit of Maryland Award from the Alumni Association.

In California, Waldo's community activities included serving on the Board of Directors of Security Pacific Bank, the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, the Los Angeles Sports Council, the Southern California Automobile Club Association as well as the national board of the AAA.

His interest in healthcare led to a volunteer effort with Saint John's Healthcare Foundation as a Trustee as well as the Hospital Board in Santa Monica for a number of years. In 2009 he and his wife Jean received the Spirit of Saint John's Award.

Waldo was an avid sports fan and followed his beloved Terps to any number of football games (including Bowl Games) and basketball games (including ACC tournaments). Clearly his major preference in sports was golf which he enjoyed playing at Columbia Country Club in Maryland, Los Angeles Country Club (President) and Pine Valley Golf Club (NJ), as well as trips to Scotland and Ireland. He also managed to attend the Olympic Games in Montreal, Los Angeles, Barcelona, and Atlanta.

Mr. Burnside is survived by his wife Jean and his four children – Diane, Leslie (Joe), Arlene (Greg), and Bill, his eleven grandchildren, and his ten great grandchildren. His presence and mentorship will be sorely missed by all.

Memorial contributions may be made to the University of Maryland C. P. Foundation ([giving.umd.edu/giving](http://giving.umd.edu/giving)) or Saint John's Health Center Foundation ([saintjohnsfoundation.org](http://saintjohnsfoundation.org)).

## MIKE LUZIO

*–Continued from Page 1*

stories about that.”), but never to greater effect than in one particular sport: “I did have one skill, which I still have today, which is I was an insanely good ping pong player. I took the intramural ping pong championships, and that was points for the house. To this day, that ping pong championship remains very near and dear to my heart.”

Musing on all the lasting benefits of his Sigma Chi connection – from the afterglow of table tennis glory to real-life lessons from managing 60 live-in undergrads – Mike returns

to the value of relationships. “You hear the term ‘lifelong friendships,’ and I can’t say it enough. We hang out all the time, the same guys. We get together for tailgates. I still have a text with 26 guys going right now, 46 years old, and we still text back and forth on a group text, and that happens at least 10 times a day.”

For all these reasons and more, he has stayed active and involved in supporting the chapter. Beyond his duties as a University trustee, he routinely returns to campus for initiation week. When Sigma Chi was disbanded in the early 2000s, he joined a

group of alumni leaders in sparking the drive to recolonize, and he recently joined **Jonathan Valz '96** in endowing the Valz-Luzio Common Room at the house.

“Sigma Chi has been very, very instrumental to me. As a consequence, I’ve kept in really close touch. I want these young men at Sigma Chi to have the same great experience that I had. It’s all about mentoring kids and wanting to give back to the community. You’ve got to give back. I was taught that by my father and mother a long time ago, and I try to do the best I can.”

## Perpetual Brotherhood

Back when current chapter advisor Dennis O'Connell was choosing a fraternity, he knew nothing about Sigma Chi. From his perspective, that was a good thing.

"I grew up about 30 minutes away from CP, so I knew a lot of people on campus. But I wanted to join a fraternity where I didn't really know anybody. I could have pledged one or two others, but I would have already known 10 or so guys from high school or from growing up in Silver Spring. I just wanted to do something different." So Ricky Levine and I decided to board at Sigma Chi and ended up pledging.

It didn't take long before he discovered one of the fraternity's hallmarks: "Excellence in intramural athletics; we were basically a dynasty. It wasn't that we had the best athletes, but we had a large house, and we could put people in every event. Everything from badminton to wrestling, we had guys who were good enough athletes to compete. We had a number of guys who had played Division II or Division III sports and decided that there wasn't a long-term career path for them, so they actually transferred home to Maryland. I'd say



probably 15% of our guys fit that description."

The importance of that reputation hit home early when his pledge class played against the pledge class of ZBT in "touch" football.

"It was a pretty rough game," he remembers, "And we ended up beating them, and our brothers were so ecstatic that we beat these kids. They were our biggest competitors in the years that I was an active. They had a very good intramural team. So beating them in this pledge football game was a big deal, because we'd never we've never had our pledges play their pledges before."

When not representing Sigma Chi on the playing field, Dennis could often be found enjoying the campus night life at The Rendezvous, the go-to hangout for Maryland's Greek Life scene. "I personally probably went to the Vous three or four times a week. They've remodeled it, and it's no longer the Greek hangout of choice, but anyone who went there in my era, Eighties kids, specifically wore 'Vous shoes' – beat-up tennis shoes – because the floor usually had an inch or two of beer. My greatest nights as a Sig were at the Vous."

But for all the fun and games (of which there were plenty), there were also life lessons to be learned. Dennis got involved in house leadership and says that running an undergraduate chapter is a lot like running a company – sometimes tougher (you can't fire your brothers) – and those formative experiences helped him later in life.

"We normally had our executives on Thursday nights, and one night, two or three young alumni came by the house on their way to Bentleys. These guys were in their mid-twenties, and they came up to me afterwards and said, 'You know, that was one of the best-run meetings we've ever been to, and we're talking about the business world.' That always stuck with me. It meant a lot to me as a kid in college.

"I've said before that one of the best decisions I've ever made in my life was to join Sigma Chi. I learned a lot of things about myself that I didn't have the opportunity to in high school or in my first year or two in college. When I was vice president of the chapter, I learned that I could lead and manage people, which served me well in my career."

Dennis majored in marketing and has spent his career working in communications and venture capital, including executive positions with AT&T Wireless and Cellular One. He recently began a new business, Mercury Access Group, that offers advisory, consulting, investing and portfolio management in the telecom, media and technology (TMT) sector. He also gives back to Sigma Chi by serving as chapter advisor after running House Corp for 12 years.

"The chapter is doing very well. We've got a great group of undergraduates. They're good kids – generally better behaved than we were. It's a more demanding environment academically, probably, than it was for most of us back in the day. Most of our undergraduates are majoring in business or engineering. We're definitely one of the top five UMD fraternities consistently."

Above everything else he took from his Sigma Chi experience, he values the unique, lasting relationships, connections that he describes up as "perpetual."

"Just like any friendships, sometimes you agree to disagree, but these are lifelong bonds, perpetual bonds. We consider each other brothers. I would do anything for them and vice versa."

### Spring 2024 Gamma Chi Exec Board

**Consul:** Ben Konop  
Long Valley, NJ

**Pro Consul:** James Ziegler  
Forest Hill, MD

**Quaestor:** Michael Comerford  
Stony Brook, NY

**Recruitment Co-chairs**  
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**Magister:** Nathan Jacobs  
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**Risk Mgr:** Chase Schlesinger  
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Gaithersburg, MD

**Kustos/Ritual Chair:** Tim Rocha  
Olney, MD

## ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

### Gamma Chi Chapter Held Semi-Annual Scholarship Dinner

The Chapter held its semi-annual Scholarship Dinner on September 18, 2023. We recognized our members who received \$12,000 worth of scholarships and cash awards from both our Gamma Chi Education Foundation and our International Sigma Chi Foundation.

Our guest speaker in the photo below was Dr. Joseph Bailey, Associate Dean of the Smith Business School.

The winning academic fantasy draft team, led by **Gavin Nash '24**, with an avg team GPA of 3.5, is in the photo below. The team will have their names engraved in our Bell Cup.

We also awarded three scholarships to our spring pledge class for the three highest GPAs: **Danny Russell, Caleb Raheim, & Michael Comerford**. The spring pledge class had an avg GPA of 3.7.

Shout out to our Gamma Chi Education Foundation led by **Tom Burton '84** for their generous cash awards to the winning fantasy draft team & their pledge scholarship awards. Both **Greg Schaub '82 & Scott Werber '85** represented the Foundation Board at the dinner.

Congratulations to all the recipients for their outstanding academic excellence!



## RECRUITMENT CHALLENGES

### It's a Nationwide Issue

Brothers,

Fraternities nationwide are challenged by much lower numbers of young men going through recruitment, especially since the pandemic. Sigma Chi across the country and our Gamma Chi chapter specifically are being impacted by this trend.

Only 100 young men went through IFC rush last fall at the University of Maryland. Gamma Chi had four pledges last fall and just 15 last spring. Since we recolonized in 2009, we have averaged 10-12 pledges in the fall and 22-25 in the spring. These days, the spring Maryland pledge classes are much larger, since freshmen need 12 credits to sign up for rush.

These smaller pledge classes are impacting our ability to fill our chapter house. Yes, we do require every new initiate to live in the chapter house for one year, but smaller pledge classes make it a challenge to fill 33 beds. For example, this semester we have 21 Actives living in the chapter house. All Maryland IFC chapters are facing this challenge of smaller pledge classes and more vacancies in their chapter house.

So, how can the Gamma Chi alumni help the chapter with this



challenge? Send us the names of young men enrolled or transferring to the Maryland who are:

- sons or nephews or grandsons,
- neighbors,
- friends with your kids,
- sons of your friends or work colleagues, etc.

If five percent of the 1500 living Gamma Chi alumni gave us one name, that would add 75 names to our recruitment funnel. Please email me with

names and contact info at [doconnell.cc@gmail.com](mailto:doconnell.cc@gmail.com).

The chapter is very focused on recruitment this spring. We have been sharing best practices with other Sig chapters nationwide that have excellent recruitment programs. Plus, we are taking a 365-day approach to recruitment going forward versus the usual 30 days before recruitment begins. We are upping our game out of necessity.

Thank you for supporting the chapter in this endeavor. As always, we appreciate our valued alumni.

In Hoc.