

Building the Foundation for the Future: A Love Story

The Sigma Alpha Omega Nu Endowment was created in 1991 when outgoing President Valerie Macken's family gifted \$10,000 in honor of her tenure as president. The donation was designated for the establishment of a scholarship foundation. Later that same year, an additional \$20,000 was given by another member's husband, to honor his wife and her achievements in Omega Nu. Pat Shirley, now a member of the organization for 50 years, recalls the warmth and tenderness expressed by her husband's gift; "I love Omega Nu" she stated in a recent meeting where she was recognized for her years of membership and service.

Omega Nu values reflect the goals of the endowment program; providing individuals and organizations the opportunity to build solid foundations. The Endowment has continued to grow, with both Omega Nu and community members demonstrating their love by establishing named funds in respect and gratitude to their children, mothers, and husbands; as a way to cherish, honor, and remember them.

In 1992, the first endowment committee, comprised of Omega Nu members, was formed to establish guidelines and administer the funds. The goal was to build the endowment fund to \$300,000, with the investment returns enhancing scholarship awards. Omega Nu members have a long history of many successful fundraisers; however, an endowment could build a legacy that would be self-sustaining. "We met in the office of long-time member and advisor, Mary Stagnaro, some of us sitting on the floor, and with nerves of steel, made our investment decisions. I was unaware that three years later, my family would be establishing a fund in loving memory of our son, Walt.", said Jan Alexander, a member of Omega Nu since 1975.

Lisa O'Rourke, a long-term member of the Endowment Committee, remembers "each one of us researched specific funds on our own, and then would discuss as a group and decide what would be the best possible investment to really make those gifts grow." With generous tribute and memorial donations, coupled with a percentage of fundraising profit, the committee made wise investments and reached the initial goal in only 5 years. It is worth noting that women have only been able to obtain credit cards without a male co-signer since 1974, yet 18 years later a group of intrepid women in Omega Nu were able to subsidize the education of students in our community.

The fund continued growing, and along with growth came an increased responsibility to manage the portfolio. In 1997, it was decided to turn the investing over to an established financial fiduciary, with Omega Nu Endowment Committee members continuing to oversee and review. The Endowment has grown over the past 30 years and is now able to fund multiple scholarships for local high school students every year.

The generosity of community donors and the devotion of family members have created an Endowment that continues to benefit local students through scholarship awards. In the words of Marian Wright Edelman, Founder of Children's Defense Fund, "Education is for improving the lives of others and for leaving your community and world better than you found it." The women of Omega Nu have found a way to do this by taking gifts of love and growing them for the future

