

## {Sisterhood}

# Seventy years of sisterhood

*ASA and SSS sororities mark 70th year* BY MARTHA BELL GRAHAM

**1939.** A banner year for Madison. It was the first full year for the newly minted Madison College. Enrollment topped 1,000 for the first time. The campus opened its first dedicated library, Madison Memorial (now Carrier) Library. And, as if to crown the year, the faculty — after three decades of refusals — finally acquiesced to students and approved sororities. On Valentine's Day.

Within weeks, 39 students petitioned to form a chapter of Sigma Sigma Sigma. Alpha Sigma Alpha followed close behind. In May, both sororities were chartered in a three-day celebration that drew both organizations' national presidents to campus. Seventy years and more than 3,000 members later, these pioneers of Greek life still enhance the campus and community, while enjoying bonds that last a lifetime.

ASA member Helen Warren Tuttle ('59) says, "It's an overused term, I think — sisterhood — but it truly was like having a number of sisters."

ASA Blair Batemen ('07), who teaches in Northern Virginia, agrees. "I have so many wonderful memories of JMU, and the vast majority of those are associated with the sorority. ASA gave me a sense of purpose. Whether it was attending weekly chapter meetings, social events or philanthropy, I was a part of something."

Tuttle remembers collecting and painting seashells for rush. Rush parties always involved imaginative themes. In 1944, ASA created a dude ranch, and SSS organized a canteen for pledges. ASA's 1963 rush party was a luau replete with hula girls, and SSS transformed Sprinkle House into Sigmayoki, Japan, with lanterns and cherry blossoms.

When Tuttle joined ASA, she and her sisters lived three-to-a-room in Carter House, an old Victorian home on the edge of campus. When told the structure had been razed in the mid-1960s to make way for Duke Hall, Tuttle says with a smile, "it needed to be." Later ASA moved to Baker House.

While Carter House was home to ASA, Tri-Sigs lived first in Lincoln House and later in Sprinkle. During the 1940s, 1950s

and 1960s, as more sororities and fraternities were chartered, members lived at various times in houses that fenced the west and north borders of campus: Zirkle House, Baker House, Messick, Shenandoah, Nicholas — all now gone from campus.

In the mid-70s, sororities and fraternities moved to Greek Row, along Newman Lake. While Greek life was waning at most other colleges, it was growing at Madison.

Although their digs changed, dedication to the community did not. Service has always been a significant part of the ASA and SSS experience — often benefiting local children. Sisters made clothes, curtains and bedspreads for the Harrisonburg Children's Home and taught crafts, reading and nutrition to

the children. In 1946 Tri-Sigs conducted a tuberculosis information drive, prompted in part when one member was confined to a sanatorium for the disease. That year, ASA also collected clothes to send to Europeans recovering from the aftermath of World War II. In 1961 Tri-Sigs contributed to the Robbie Page Memorial, a national charity established by SSS that has remained a constant beneficiary of JMU Tri-Sigs for decades. In 1997, ASA sisters held holiday parties for special education students and contributed to a camp for exceptional children.

Today's ASA continues to give. "In addition to our annual 'ASA Madness' week to raise awareness of the risks associated with alcohol and drinking," Bateman says, "we are connected to Special Olympics."

Although much is the same for today's ASA and SSS, some things have changed. In 1943 Tri-Sig sisters took a "charm school" exam. Presumably, they passed. Never changing, however, are the friendships.

After 70 years, ASA and SSS still hold rush parties, and the word "sisterhood" is still appropriate. Bateman says: "ASA gave me a deeper connection to JMU. You become part of a legacy that you share with those who came before you and will come after you. A sense of shared purpose and sisterhood solidified our friendships."



A copy of an 1809 medal, featuring James Madison and struck to symbolize friendships for Indian tribes, is displayed on the 1939 yearbook. The Blue-Stone Cotillion Club presented a copy of the medallion to the Madison Memorial Library Museum and devoted the yearbook to President Madison, since it was also the first full year of Madison College. Friendship was a big theme in 1939 as ASA (above) and Tri-Sigma sororities were formed.

