

{Homecoming Reunions}

Delta Sigma Theta sisters celebrate 40 years

Sisterhood and service never looked so good BY PAULA POLGLASE ('92, '96M)

James Madison is typically known to “Purple Out” for Homecoming each year, but for a special group of alumni, this year the color to wear was red — specifically, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc. red. The Iota Alpha chapter of DST, an international service organization, celebrated 40 years at JMU with a reunion that brought back nearly 100 members, including 10 of the 11 founding sisters.

Current Delta Sigma Theta president, senior psychology major T’Airra Belcher ('12), has worked on the planning committee for the past year and was excited to see the sorority sisters from the last 40 years return to campus to celebrate. “I love history. Meeting people from the '70s, '80s and '90s — it’s interesting to hear their stories and hear about the history of campus,” says Belcher.

Delta Sigma Theta Inc. has a large role in the history of campus as the first African-American Greek organization. The Iota Alpha chapter predates the JMU Center for Multicultural Student Services by 14 years. “For the Delta Sigma Theta members, it really means something to celebrate 40 years of doing service and scholastically achieving,” says CMSS Director Valarie Ghant.

Deanna Reed, who has been advising the JMU chapter for 10 years, says chapter members have consistently been campus leaders and very active in the Harrisonburg community. “They are a visionary

chapter,” she says. “It is a real legacy of Iota Alpha to be a close-knit organization but also leaders and visionaries.”

The Delta Sigma Theta reunion activities included a meet-and-greet Friday night and the football tailgate and game followed by the annual JMU Step Show on Saturday. On Sunday the “sorors,” as they call themselves, gathered for a rededication ceremony that,

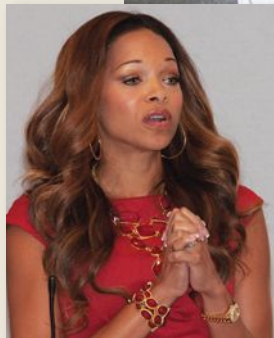
according to Belcher, “reaffirms our reason and purpose on the campus.”

The highlight of the weekend was a Sisterhood Brunch attended by 10 of the 11 founding sisters. The women who pioneered African-American involvement on campus shared their stories and marveled at the progress of the chapter and the university. “Our charter members were amazing people and still are,” says Belcher. “They took a chance for the university and it paid off with more than 250 women joining the sorority through the Iota Alpha chapter.”

The Sisterhood Brunch, while honoring the past, also focused on the future. Members of the organization announced plans to raise funds with the intent of naming a room on campus.

Francine Edwards ('91), who traveled from Delaware to reconnect with her sisters, was thrilled that she made the trip. “I’ve always been so impressed with the fortitude, commitment and genuine love from the women in this chapter. Our 40th celebration reaffirmed how important service, sisterhood and activism are, both in our communities and in our lives,” she says. “It’s the bond that will forever connect us.”

* See more Homecoming fun on Page 24.



Delta Sigma Theta sisters, including Patricia Southall Smith ('92) left, celebrate the 40th anniversary of the DST Iota Alpha JMU chapter of the service sorority.