

**Dr. Peterson**

**125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Greek Life at Tech**

6 p.m. Monday, Sept. 16, 2013, Bill Moore Student Success Center, President's Box

For all but three years of Georgia Tech's existence, we have had a Greek presence. Tonight we are celebrating that milestone, as well as the contributions of the Greek community at Georgia Tech.

I'll share a bit of history that you may find interesting. In 1888 Alpha Tau Omega, of which President-elect Hopkins was an honorary member, petitioned Tech to establish a chapter. They were followed closely by Sigma Alpha Epsilon, Sigma Nu, Kappa Sigma, and Kappa Alpha, all before the turn of the last century.

In 1948 the Georgia School of Technology became the Georgia Institute of Technology under Tech's fifth president, Blake Van Leer. We can thank him for bringing women to the Institute. The year before he had presented a proposal to the Board of Regents that they change their policy and allow women in full-time programs.

The proposal was controversial and met with resistance. There were a number of letters in the Technique, opposing the idea from students —the list of reasons for this opposition it, included a need to rearrange dorms and classes - Tech might even have to install bathrooms for women, the need to maintain strict rules of attitude, speech, conduct, and appearance, the fact that girls were an "academic distraction," and the perhaps one of the most compelling reasons was that it might make it harder to get football tickets.

Tech's first lady, Ella Van Leer joined with Tech's librarian, Dorothy Crossland and worked on the issue for three years. They mobilized women's groups, and the Women's Chamber of Commerce in Atlanta formally petitioned the regents. The Tech student council adopted a resolution favoring admission of women, and the faculty and administration strongly supported the admission of women as well. On April 9, 1952 the regents finally voted to admit women on a full-time basis. Today, one third of Tech students are women. We're proud of the fact that Tech is the No. 1 producer of female engineering graduates in the country.

We can also thank Ella Van Leer for her influence in bringing Georgia Tech's first sorority to the campus. She was a member of Alpha Xi Delta at her alma mater, and was instrumental in starting a chapter at Georgia Tech in 1954.

Over the past 125 years Georgia Tech has had an estimated 55,735 fraternity and sorority members. The accomplishments and contributions of Georgia Tech's Greek community are impressive.

Almost 67 percent of fraternity and sorority members are also engaged in other clubs and organizations, and more than 900 hold a leadership position.

The Greek community has a record of consistently achieving higher than your unaffiliated counterparts in academic performance. You have a higher retention rate, and a more successful six-year graduation rate.

We are very proud of the consistent contributions that the Greek community makes to the Atlanta community. In the 2012-2013 academic year, your organizations contributed 49,000 service hours. You contributed almost \$206,000 to charities last year alone. We can only imagine the lasting impact that you have already had, and will continue to have, on the lives of thousands of people.

I value the positive impact that Greek organizations make on our campus and on the individual student members. Through your fraternities and sororities you teach leadership, responsibility, and the value of community. I challenge you as leaders of your organizations to remember that others are following in your footsteps, and to walk with integrity. You not only represent your sorority or fraternity, you represent Georgia Tech to the campus, the community, and to the alumni who have come before you. You are building on a legacy of excellence. Congratulations.