

## **The State of Phi Theta Kappa**

It is often said, that the strength of one's character is best revealed during times of pressing adversity. The same, I believe, may be said of organizations. It is during difficult times, as we find ourselves placed in this day, that our ship will be tested, our skill and discipline called upon, and our destination determined. So, our destiny as an organization will be determined as much by our actions prior to the storm as during the storm. Which organizations will survive and which will be assigned a fate of fading obscurity. What will make the difference?

During times like these, our closely held values, beliefs and principles as organization are tested. It is these times that reveal the relevancy of our mission, the measure of our stewardship, and the strength of our vision.

I stand before you to say that Phi Theta Kappa will not only survive this challenging time, but I am fully confident that we will emerge in a position of even greater strength than before the storm? Why?

First, our mission is as relevant today as it was when crafted during our founding in 1918. It is our mission that sets Phi Theta Kappa apart from any other honors organization in the world. As all honor societies, we exist to recognize and encourage scholarship among students. But it is the second component of our mission – the providing of opportunities for individual growth and development – in other words the providing of the “Phi Theta Kappa Experience” that makes us different.

As an organization, we embrace our hallmarks of scholarship, leadership, service and fellowship. Our Convention Theme, “The Phi Theta Kappa Experience: Leading the Way,” is indicative of all that Phi Theta Kappa has brought us, taught us and will continue to offer us, after we move beyond the community college.

In order for an organization to prosper, it must provide value to those it serves. So do we measure the value of the Phi Theta Kappa Experience? This Convention is one example. As we learned last evening, at a time when organizations are watching their meeting attendance dwindle to the point that many are forced to cancel, the Phi Theta Kappa Convention stands tall – a beacon of success – not just merely surviving – but lifting up hearts and minds of thousands of students from around the world who desire to make the world a better place.. We know that many of you sacrificed a great deal to come here. But you, and in many instances your chapters and colleges, know what incredibly powerful and important experience this convention provides ... the speakers, the forums, the opportunities to meet and learn from each other and open our minds to new possibilities, to choose our leaders... all to prepare ourselves to become the servant leaders our world desperately needs.

Another measure of the value of the Phi Theta Kappa Experience can be found in the level of participation in the Society’s programs and services. The numbers tell it all. Let’s review:

In 2008, we welcomed 23 new chapters into the Phi Theta Kappa. A record 99,959 new members were inducted. And, we have inducted 5,000 more members this year than this same time last year. Almost 800 chapters reported their chapter officers to Headquarters, thus making it possible for our Society to effectively communicate with

more than 5,300 of our student leaders. 642 chapters participated in the Five Star development program, with almost 50% of participants earning Five Star status.

2008 was also very strong year for our honors programming initiatives. Our 2008 Honors Institute was one of the most successful on record, with almost 500 persons registering. And, more than 230 chapters subscribed to our Honors Seminar.

Our leadership programs prospered as well – 30 colleges sent faculty to be certified to teach Phi Theta Kappa’s Leadership Development Studies course, bringing the total number of colleges with certified faculty to 663.

In 2008, our International Service Program, Operation Green, sent almost 12,000 members into the field, who volunteered 84,000 hours and affected the lives of a record 1,290,950 individuals!

Our civic engagement initiatives are also making a difference – later in this Convention we will hear all about chapter participation in Relay For Life, and get a report on the amount of money you have raised this year alone in the fight against cancer. I’m not going to take away from that moment – but I can promise that you will be impressed and inspired.

A landmark development in 2008 was the introduction of Honors in Action. Many of you have already heard about this concept that integrates the Honors Study Topic and the four hallmarks into all activities. Honors in Action is a simple process with potential for tremendous global impact, not only on chapters and communities, but on the members who participate. Honors in Action projects begin with research and investigation of Honors Study Topic issues of global scope – scholarship – then identifying needs of those in our communities related to these issues and developing solutions – leadership - and

taking action – service. Following the Honors in Action guidelines will allow both chapters and individuals to grow intellectually, embrace critical thinking, learn to develop and manage a project, and experience the rewards of service.

Survival of any organization requires taking risks and embracing innovation. Please take note of this year's Convention innovation – Honors in Action forums following our Keynote addresses by Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., and Dr. Fareed Zakaria. These forums, which will include open discussions, will be moderated by Honors Program Committee members and Honors Study Topic experts, and are designed to guide you on how to put to use the speaker presentations to the greatest advantage. This is such an incredible opportunity – to not only hear speakers of international note – but to develop plans of actions as servant leaders – based on those presentations. We expanded the number of forums to eight Forums for each speaker – but we still ask that you send only two chapter members, so as many people as possible will benefit. Consult your Convention program for exact Forum times and room.

Change is uncomfortable, but necessary if we are to grow as individuals – and prosper as an organization. Phi Theta Kappa has never cowered from challenges surrounding change – in fact we embrace change with a passion. We are not content to be good... we expect to be the best, because we serve the best. So, to ensure relevancy and fairness in our programs, we are reviewing our measures of chapter success, the Five Star and Hallmark Awards, to incorporate Honors in Action into the hierarchies and rubrics into these programs. Educational Forums with more information have been offered on both programs during this Convention, and a Hallmark forum will be held in the final round tomorrow morning. Information will also be posted on our website,

[www.ptk.org](http://www.ptk.org). And as always, we welcome and depend on your feedback to make these very crucial programs an accurate assessment of our chapters' accomplishments.

We are also examining more comprehensive programs to involve our members in Honors in Action projects exclusive of chapter involvement. We are in the final stages of refining an extraordinary new program - the Five Star Competitive Edge program. This program serves to help every member develop the essential skills – core competencies – through their Phi Theta Kappa Experience which will provide competitive advantages whether entering the job market or transferring to a senior institution. I highly recommend the Five Star Competitive Edge Educational Forums, scheduled in both remaining rounds, this afternoon and tomorrow morning. We will be looking for your ideas and comments to ensure that this program will deliver the “competitive edge” to our members and position them for success.

Another innovative program Phi Theta Kappa is launching is a tool to help all community college aspire to and plan for completing a baccalaureate degree – CollegeFish.org. Truly there is nothing like it. Even if you do not have immediate plans to transfer to a senior institution – you need to enroll in CollegeFish.org. Based on your profile and preferences, you will be matched with four-year colleges and universities that meet your specific criteria as to location, size, major, and that all-important feature, financial aid. CollegeFish.org will manage your transfer planning by alerting you to deadlines you place into your personal calendar.

You will receive advice from senior colleges on the courses you should and should not be taking toward your field of study. This program could save you thousands of dollars by making the right choice regarding the classes that will transfer and those

that will not. And, to enroll costs you nothing. If you don't enroll, it could cost you plenty. If you haven't discovered CollegeFish.org, now is the time and this is the place – you can enroll at the CollegeFish.org booth in the Academic Marketplace any time the Marketplace is open. CollegeFish.org Educational Forums are also offered in both remaining rounds of Forums, this afternoon and tomorrow morning. Advisors and advisors – we have a special CollegeFish.org Forum for you scheduled this afternoon which will reveal how your institution can increase student retention and successful transfer of your students. Best of all – no community college student, and no community college, will ever pay a fee for this service.

But if we remember 2008 for anything, it will probably be scholarships. Some very significant developments occurred in relation to Phi Theta Kappa scholarships in 2008.

Through the incredible engagement of our chapters to raise funds, through the generous support of our donors and corporate partners, the Hites Community College Transfer Scholarship Challenge was met...not within the allowed two years, but in seven months! Despite the down-spiraling economy, despite layoffs, tuition increases and all the challenges our members face, we all dug deep and met our match – and our first-ever \$1 million transfer scholarship endowment is now reality! But why stop there, why not dream big dreams, why not reach for the stars. Let us believe in ourselves and in the needs of those to follow us – and double the size of the endowment and the opportunities for our members. I believe in you, and you can believe in me when I say... Yes, we can! Yes, we will!

As we begin to build this endowment, we will not waiver in our efforts to secure additional transfer scholarships designated by senior institutions exclusively to Phi Theta Kappa members. This year, we reached a milestone as we surpassed 700 as the number of senior colleges designating more than \$37 million in scholarships for Phi Theta Kappa members.

In January of 2009, USA Today announced cancellation of all their recognition programs - the high school, community college, senior college, and teacher programs due to budgetary cutbacks. Through the darkest hours, as leaders, we must persevere and believe in our mission and ourselves. Because of the high regard that Phi Theta Kappa has earned, and because of the stellar performance of so many of our outstanding scholars, lemon turned to lemonade. Thanks to incredible behind the scenes work by some of our friends at USA TODAY, who are with us at this Convention, and the generosity of the Coca-Cola Scholars Foundation, our Academic Team programs didn't disappear, neither did they just remain intact, they expanded. An additional 300 students received \$450,000 in stipends – and coverage in USA Today was expanded from three pages to four!

And yet another exciting scholarship was added to our list in 2008! You will hear more about it later in this session, and I don't want to speak too soon ... but here's a hint: think Lizard!

I have provided you a picture of how we measure of the value of the Phi Theta Kappa Experience – adding value to what it means to be a member. At the beginning of last night's opening session and at this morning's session, you heard brief testimonies

from members explaining what Phi Theta Kappa membership means to them. I'd like to share with you more of those stories.

Jeffrey Scherer from the Alpha Tau Xi Chapter at Ivy Tech Community College of Indiana, Fort Wayne Campus, says: "Phi Theta Kappa has enabled me to be a part of a community and given me experiences I wouldn't otherwise have had. Phi Theta Kappa allows students to go outside themselves and think about something on a grander scale."

And Kay Moon Winters, from Mu Omicron, San Jacinto College here in Texas, writes: "I thought college at 55 was enough, but what did I know? Making the grades and getting involved with Phi Theta Kappa took a life-changing experience and burnished it with a gold stole. At 60, that stole declared me an honor graduate and proud charter member of the Phi Theta Kappa Alumni Association of the University of Houston."

Robert H. Gerber, from Xi Pi Chapter at Polk Community College in Florida, says "I became a member in 2005 and have taken to heart the Society's four hallmarks. My life has since blossomed into a world of endless possibilities and rewards. Joining Phi Theta Kappa has been the best decision, next to marrying my wife, I have ever made!

And finally, Amanda Marie Handley from Alpha Lambda Alpha Chapter, at Hillsborough Community College, also in Florida, said: "Phi Theta Kappa has impacted my life in many ways. I was provided the opportunity to improve my time management, leadership, and public speaking skills through experience. I am grateful to have had this opportunity."

Finally, how does the Phi Theta Kappa Experience – Honors in Action - impact our communities? In Ontario, Oregon, the Omicron Phi Chapter and their advisor Janet Asay used the Honors Study Topic and the paradox of affluence to show the impact that

people from an affluent nation can have on the less-fortunate communities of the world, and – perhaps more surprisingly – vice versa. The chapter sponsored a discussion of medical supply shortages and other needs in third world countries and sent more than \$1,000 worth of goods to agencies serving those regions.

The Alpha Tau Xi Chapter at Ivy Tech Community College of Indiana, Ft. Wayne Campus, and advisors Deana Price, Jason Anderson and Sheri Dunlavy, were curious about the large number of refugees from Burma in their area. Research not only told them why, but led to the chapter's sponsoring a cultural fair to educate other residents and draw these diverse communities closer together.

The chapters in New Mexico, led by coordinator Cindy Armijo, banded together to help combat an environment threat, the ubiquitous plastic bags. At their recent Regional Convention, attendees studied why the plastic bags present a particular threat to the environment, and collected enough bags to fill a room! All attendees received replacement canvas shopping bags.

While distance may separate our international chapters from the majority of our family, these chapters still avidly pursue our mission. The Beta Omicron Psi Chapter at Fujairah Colleges in the United Arab Republic, the first Phi Theta Kappa Chapter in the Middle East, is actively engaged in service and civic betterment programs. With advisors Sule Duzgun and Reem Khammas, they have held seminars and walkathons for Breast Cancer awareness, clean up campaigns and regularly visit hospitals and nursing homes. As part of an Honors Study Topic project, the chapter has adopted a child from Brazil. The chapter also participates in celebrations for National Day, which commemorates the formation of the United Arab Republic.

And at Butte College in California, the Beta Theta Kappa Chapter has made history – advisors Joanna Birdsall and Roger Ekins co-chaired the college’s participation in Make a Difference Day, the nation’s single largest day of volunteerism, when over 3 million people turn out to perform acts of service for others. Butte College’s effort - Extreme Community Makeovers: Butte-Glenn Edition - sent 300 volunteers into the field, and carried out 23 community service projects, ranging from a makeover at a homeless shelter, which the Phi Theta Kappa chapter undertook, to making home repairs for disabled residents. Out of the thousands of Make a Difference Day projects, Butte College’s makeover was selected one of the top 10 in the nation – they will receive a \$10,000 award, which will help fund scholarships, and are the first college to be selected for this honor.

These are but a small sample of the differences that the Phi Theta Kappa Experience – Honors in Action - can make in a community.

So I stand before you now, a proud member of Phi Theta Kappa – an organization that is alive, vibrant, and global in scope– and whose best days are yet to come. I am proud to be a part of an organization that embraces such noble and relevant mission. And, I am proud to be a member of a community which understands – what it means to be a scholar. We value learning for the purpose of sharing knowledge to help others. This is an organization whose mission you can not only believe in – but live. We choose each day to be the very best we can be. That is the Phi Theta Kappa Experience.