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Historic fraternity to start local chapter

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COUNTY
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Community service tops priority list of Omega Psi Phi
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Thirteen Rockland men with strong ties to their communities are launching a local chapter of one of the nation's oldest black fraternities.

The newly approved Xi Lambda Lambda chapter of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Inc. received its papers from the national organization on Sept. 25, and organizers have plans to get right to work.

"I think the black man out here really hasn't given back to his community enough," said chapter secretary Dennis McGloster, one of 13 charter members. "Every community organization in town wants us to get involved."

McGloster has been a member of the White Plains branch of Omega Psi Phi for several years, along with many of the charter members of the new Rockland branch. He said that he and other Rockland members have been watching the numbers of local fraternity brothers rise over the years, and became convinced last summer that this county could support its own branch.

"A lot of us didn't grow up in Rockland, and we thought it was time that the fraternity had a Rockland base," the Hillcrest resident said. "Right now, we're in the planning stages of doing things."

The national organization was founded in 1911 by three Howard University undergraduate students. Its initials stand for the Greek phrase meaning "friendship is essential to the soul," according to the organization's Web site. The organization promotes social justice, community participation and programs designed to promote academic excellence. Another black service fraternity, Alpha Phi Alpha, has a branch in Rockland.

All chapters of Omega Psi Phi are required to participate in 15 programs in addition to whatever the local organization plans.

Among the 15 programs are Achievement Week, to honor individuals locally and nationally who have made noteworthy contributions to improving the quality of life for blacks a national high school essay contest a South Africa project to help supply resources and necessities to people in that country Habitat for Humanity endowments to the United Negro College Fund and the Black Male Project, a summer educational and cultural enrichment program for black youth from 15 to 18 years old.

"One of the most interesting aspects of it for me is - while it's a college fraternity that most of the members join when they're in college, they have come together in Rockland primarily for community service," said nationally known education expert Edmund W. Gordon of Pomona, another of the chapter's charter members.

"From the beginning of our discussion about starting a chapter here was motivated by our concerns with what was happening primarily with people of color in the county in their educational, political, economic and social life," he said. "The brothers have pledged themselves to be a force for good and community development."

McGloster said the Rockland chapter plans several projects beginning in January, beginning with volunteering to read to young men through the Coretta Scott King Book Club, helping with voter and National Association for the Advancement of Colored People registration drives holding blood drives and creating a speakers bureau.

"We have a diverse group of men whose one goal is to improve the quality of life for men, women and children in our community," McGloster said.

The group meets the third Friday of each month in offices within the CEJJES Institute in Pomona. For information, e-mail McGloster at Lifetimeq@aol.com. Reach Randi Weiner at rweiner@thejournalnews.com or 845-578-2468.