



The WHITE STAR

Beta Psi Chapter of Sigma Nu

MR. BETA PSI: DAVID C. RUEGG

Dave Ruegg may not be the most famous Sigma Nu in our Chapter's lengthy history. Among highly profiled alumni are a NFL and collegiate head football coach, UC Regent, U.S. Congressman, business school dean, and a vast number of Beta Psi Brothers who have achieved prominence while receiving accolades in varied professional endeavors.

Yet, when one thinks of college years there is but one Brother, Dave Ruegg, whose contributions to our Chapter and Sigma Nu uniquely qualify him as deserving the title, "Mr. Beta Psi"! Dave will turn 90 on his next birthday and likely there are some actives and recent graduates from our Chapter who may be unfamiliar as to Dave's contributions to Beta Psi over the decades. Without exaggeration, no individual has been more indispensable and expended greater effort to assure the long-term well-being, success, and sustainability of our Beta Psi Chapter than Brother Ruegg!

Dave's devotion to Sigma Nu extends well beyond Berkeley. In the 1990's Dave was selected to assume roles at the highest levels in the National Fraternity culminating in his selection as Regent of Sigma Nu.

It may seem to all that Dave has enjoyed a life well lived! All true but Dave's path forward has been anything but conventional! For instance, who in the annals of Beta Psi became a pledge but would not be initiated until seven years later? If you guessed Dave Ruegg, you'd be correct! Fast forward to earlier this year. Knowing of the plans to celebrate Dave on December 2nd at San Francisco's Olympic Club, I jumped at the opportunity to sit-down and chat with Dave to learn more about the mystique that has surrounded his life, his remarkably successful entrepreneurial career, (my term, not Dave's) and his devotion to fraternal life.

I met with Dave at his Berkeley-based Durant Street of-

fice and upon entering took note of the absence of engaging works of art, plush oversized furniture, ottoman rugs, and the like. To the contrary, one visiting the office finds smallish, functional offices, a CCTV, assorted PC's, screens and a worktable. In other words, the office environment is reminiscent of Dave's personality: understated, efficient, modest, practical, unpretentious, and organized and boy how this office is managed as the center of a real estate development empire!

Prior to the interview I provided Dave a list of questions to review for this 'White Star' publication. What follows are excerpts from this interview...



Dave was born May 12, 1933, in Berkeley, the fourth child and only son to Ted Ruegg, an architect, Cal class 1921, and homemaker mother, Dora. Dave's three sisters were substantially older but despite the age gap he enjoyed close relationships with each. With the exception of a few years living in San Francisco and later serving overseas in the military, Dave has spent the totality of his life in Berkeley with many years of his youth spent living on Colusa Street. His hobbies included model building and assembling railroad kits. I inquired if these hobbies showed

early signs of aptitude for becoming an engineer, but Dave replied, "not really". Just my perspective but in his early career Dave was indeed a manufacturing engineer extraordinaire.

Two of Dave's sisters attended Cal and one (closest in age) Lois, became the Campus Queen in 1945 but created a minor scandal by wearing a red dress, which Dave called "strictly a no-no" and yes it was! It was Lois later working for Bayshore Construction Company who strongly encouraged Dave to consider getting into a career in real estate which he kept in the back of his mind during his formative years.

In Dave's youth he was raised Mormon which coincided with his father's occupation as a church architect. His par-

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ents divorced during Dave's youth, and he continued living at home with his mother. As to Dave's happiest memory in childhood he promptly replied, "getting my California Driver's License at 14 which was the legal in California at that time."

While at Berkeley High Dave chose a curriculum of the most advanced courses but only got Cs in most of them. He explained he took these courses because he wanted to enter Cal and knew completion of such courses were prerequisites for admission. It was fateful that Dave joined a high school social club, the Vikings, whose members had close ties to the Sigma Nu Fraternity, and he knew of several Vikings who were bona fide Sigma Nu initiates.

"A fellow by the name of Rod Hughes comes down to my office (we will get to that momentarily) and asks me if I wanted to be a Sigma Nu? I had no idea why I wanted to pledge Sigma Nu as I just wanted to be a fraternity man", asserts Dave. Upon high school graduation in 1951 Dave knew he lacked the grades to enter Cal as a freshman, so he attended San Francisco City College where he received straight A's enabling him to enter U.C. Berkeley as a sophomore.

The entrepreneurial character that would later define Dave emerged during summers spent in high school when he worked for his brother-in-law. Dave's brother-in-law owned a car upholstery shop that also manufactured convertible tops, both much in demand in the 1950's. "I spent two summers working for his business and quickly picked up the knowledge and skills to open up my own shop, which I did in the back of a barbershop, following high school graduation."

"I bought a sewing machine and started making these upholstered seat covers and was able to make a livelihood from this work", Dave observed humbly. Astonished I asked, are you telling me you have never worked for anyone but yourself throughout your lifetime? Dave paused momentarily and remarked, "with the exception of part-time work for the post office and my enlistment in the service, the answer is no, I have never worked for anybody else in my life!"

Dave entered Cal in Fall 1952, becoming a Beta Psi pledge but once again initiation was thwarted because he did not make his grades, so he dropped out of school returning full-time to his car upholstery business. Interestingly Dave managed to reside in the SNU house in the 1952-54 period even though he still had not been initiated. "I really enjoyed it when the EC would pound his fist at the conclusion of dinner and foursomes would hustle off to play bridge in the chapter room."

Dave was drafted in the US Army for two years, 1956-57. Concurrent with his deployment to Germany, Dave brought in a partner who ran the business in Dave's absence. In Ger-

many Dave learned to speak fluent German and scored high on an aptitude test which resulted in placement as a colonel's orderly. "I became proficient in knowing army and special regs" and my work was respected by this colonel. However, on a particular day I asked somebody to fill-in for me with the duty of counting G.I.s entering the mess hall. The fellow did not show up and this later became issue with a lieutenant "who threatened to have me court marshalled. "Fortunately, the Colonel intervened on my behalf!"

"Returning to Cal and the Fraternity in 1958 I lived for a short time with my mother. I decided to buy my partner out. I offered to buy him out for \$3K or sell the business to him. He chose the \$3K buyout!"

"I started installing safety belts which would not become mandatory until 1964. Finding that I could install 100 safety belts daily I employed many of my SNU Brothers at a time when the going hourly rate was \$1.50 and I paid them each \$3.00. "They loved the work and one of my star employees was long-time friend Martin McNair!"

Dave also became an expert in safety belts, developing a template sold as a car accessory while maintaining his upholstery business and in 1959 Dave finally becomes PIN number 823, a seven-year journey from pledge to active!

In 1959 Dave would marry the love of his life Eugenia who sadly passed away only months ago. In 1968 Dave and Eugenia purchased a stately Tudor home on Belrose Avenue. For a generation newly formed pledge classes would be hosted at the Ruegg Home for the 'champagne party' a gathering of not only pledges but brothers of the active chapter, alums, wives, and dates. The party was annually one of the Chapter's marquee events and continued to be so until Dave became Regent and National Sigma Nu Policy liability policy prohibited alcohol beverages.

In 1960 Dave took in a partner, Bob Ellsworth (A friend from Berkeley High) who was in the throes of completing his legal education at Hastings. "Bob's wife had \$10K to loan us and the trampoline craze is becoming a fad and I realize I can make satisfactory low-grade trampolines as I have the grommets, canvass, can build the frame and place into the ground. In six weeks, time we sold enough trampolines to turn a \$40K profit."

"We now have the \$40K profit and Bob's wife's \$10K" and we build our first apartment building in 1962 at 2131 Blake Street, a 5-unit complex. We put it on the market and made a \$10K profit." Dave would also obtain his broker's license that year. As Dave puts it "we were finally off and running!" Dave and Bob continued upon a path of buying-and-selling apartment buildings in the early 1960's until 1964 when, "we didn't have to sell" we had sufficient funds in the bank, and

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we could make real money!” And so, Rue-Ell as the firm is known, started to look to purchase commercial properties.

Over the years the two partners established a reliable reputation with Berkeley property owners to obtain properties given the honesty and credibility that warranted such trust. “We could make deals because of our reputation.” Moreover Rue-Ell built and refurbished numerous commercial properties such as Top Dog. Today Rue-Ell owns 64 properties between the Berkeley and Sacramento areas with 400 tenants.

Today while Dave still has his hands on the tiller, it is Dave’s second son, Steven and Bob’s daughter, Dana who run the company. Dave’s eldest son Scott also runs his own property development company.

So, what is the ‘secret sauce’ in making such a humble, understated, unassuming brother like Dave become the rock star commercial real estate developer he has become in Berkeley, Sacramento and Davis, Dave explains, “we would take over project management when other contractors were ineffective. Somehow, I have a keen ability to see into the future and determine if a particular property will generate a high rate of return. I can monetize in my mind and tell you if the property is workable. I also am an attentive listener.”

Dave’s Beta Psi legacy involves serving as the superintendent in charge of construction of the new House wing in 1964. He became a member of the Beta Psi BOD in 1965 serving as its Treasurer, a position he held for twenty seven years until he was appointed Division Commander in 1983. “When I was working on behalf of Beta Psi I never dictated to the House leadership but used my experience to guide them as wisely as I could.”

Dave commented the reason for his selection as Division Commander by the Fraternity High Council was based upon a shared view that Beta Psi was operating as a model chapter and by this time, he had relationship with High Council members. From 1990-1992 he served as Vice Regent, and from 1992-1994 as its Regent - the highest honor achieved with our Fraternity. Dave is the second Beta Psi to serve in this role; Brother B. Kendrick Vaughan was the first.

When asked what his hopes are for the upcoming December 2nd event, Dave spoke softly but passionately of a desire to have our alums come up with the funding to help support National’s Education Leadership Foundation dedicated to the education and skill building of chapter leaders [the Educational Foundation initiative is spearheaded by Bob Lalanne ’78]. Dave also wants the alumni to provide seed money for would be entrepreneurs in the House. Dave also seeks the camaraderie of old friends and meeting new brothers!

Fraternally,

Gary Sapiro ’73
Pin 989

For a brief period in the 1970’s I served as “White Star” editor and wrote a piece about Beta Psi’s first Regent, B. Kendrick Vaughan. I consider myself privileged to write articles about our preeminent Beta Psi’s Brothers, Vaughan and Brother Ruegg forty-five years apart!