



BOUNTIFUL BROTHERLY BOND

Alpha Epsilon brothers continue friendship, philanthropy

by Amanda Drumm

Collegiate years mark the beginning of the adulthood journey. The years are replete with classes, exams, activities and work. If you are lucky, that span is likewise blessed with someone who serves as a sounding board, a friend, a mentor and a lifelong guide. The Rev. Joseph Duchene, C.S.Sp., endearingly filled that role in the lives of the brothers of Alpha Epsilon, serving as their fraternity's chaplain. He plays a lasting, altruistic role in the service the brothers continue to accomplish for the University.

"The Duker" as Duchene was fondly known, was a hard-working World War II veteran. He arrived on the Duquesne campus in 1953, and for 40 years guided the brothers of Alpha Epsilon (AE) and later Alpha Tau Omega (ATO) with a mixture of heart and expectations.

"He treated us like a good biological father would. He gave us just enough rope to be on our own but made sure it was short enough to tug us back in if we got out of line," said Tony Accamando '66.

Fellow brother Robert Fragasso '67 agreed. "He wasn't just a chaplain in name. He looked out for us. He didn't preach, he demonstrated," he said.

Duchene was serious about his role to the AE fraternity. He cultivated in "his boys" a spirit of togetherness, hard work, leadership and generosity. Many of the men who joined the fraternity in the '50s and '60s were of a common thread: they came from blue-collar backgrounds.

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“A lot of the brothers who joined the fraternity were from the same neighborhood; some of these people knew each other perhaps in high school,” said Denny Brenckle ’67.

Many of these AE brothers were busy working their ways through school. Duchene employed several of them on his landscaping crew; he was known for keeping the campus picturesque. He sowed in the young men an appreciation for the campus and for maintaining it.

He was equally recognized for his love of dogs, especially beagles. His affection for animals is something well documented. “He is always seen in the archives with his beagle Duke. He even had a house installed for him,” said Fragasso.

The brothers of AE have followed in his caretaker footsteps, keeping his legacy alive through charitable endeavors.

SERVING STUDENTS

The AE fraternity was active on campus from 1951 and until 1974, but its legacy endures far beyond those 23 years. Those brothers—a total of 220—remain connected and of service today.

“It’s all because of the leadership we learned. Plus, we had leaders who really kept the organization together. We were all busy, we went to Vietnam, but their leadership kept us together,” Brenckle said.

The men were busy, but never lost touch. “Our group remained close through the years. Later, we got to talking about our homes and families and we thought, wouldn’t it be a good idea to circle back to Duquesne University and Father Duchene?” said John Callery ’65.

A life-altering way the AE brothers decided to contribute to Duquesne was through a scholarship fund in Duchene’s honor. “I thought of it one day while in the shower, called some fraternity brothers, and we took the scholarship idea to Father Duchene. Father was humbled and overwhelmed with the thought of being recognized with a scholarship in his name. Legendary brothers like Jimmy Linder ’66 became enthusiastic proponents of the scholarship,” said Fragasso.

The brothers began to fundraise for the scholarship

in the early ‘90s working the phones, dialing for dollars. They organized events, golf outings and dinners. The men worked in unison, as they did when they were in college.

Through their effort and dedication, the Father Joseph A. Duchene Scholarship was endowed in 1994. It is currently valued at more than \$1.2 million. According to Jim Miller, associate vice president and senior advisor to the president on leadership giving, during the past 25 years the scholarship has annually awarded approximately \$50,000 to five or more Duquesne students.

Innumerable students have financially benefited from the scholarship. Callery mentioned he recently spoke to a past recipient of the scholarship. She was thankful for how it assisted her education and told him she was going to send a donation to the fund. “We instill in our scholarship recipients not to forget us,” he said.

LOVELY LANDSCAPE

The AE brothers’ hallmark scholarship is one way they continue to aid the University. Recent on-campus projects were earmarked by AE brothers; most students pass many spots championed by AE brothers.

“The scholarship is our signature achievement. Almost everything [else] we do today helps the appearance of the school,” said Callery.

Among those projects is the Academic Walk West, known as Duchene Way. It was rebuilt and named in honor of Duchene. Not long after the completion of that project, the brothers of AE funded the Father Duchene Rose Garden, situated along the walkway.

Last year, Brenckle underwrote the funding of the restoration of the Our Lady of Lourdes Grotto, in memory of his mother. “When I was in Vietnam, she prayed to the Blessed Mother every day that I would come home safe,” he said.

The restoration of the Crucifix Garden, also located along Duchene Way, is under construction. This project is set to finish and be dedicated in early 2021.

“It will transform into a resting place for students with benches, flowers and a light shining on the statue,” said Rich Grattan ’68.



1. The dedication of the Father Duchene Rose Garden along Duchene Way.
2. The first Fr. Duchene Scholarship Fundraiser, at Holly Hill Golf Club, in 1994.



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1. During Homecoming 2018, the dedication of Duchene Way, formerly Academic Walk West.

2. In October 2019, the Our Lady of Lourdes Grotto dedication breakfast, at the Duquesne University Bayer Center Rotunda.

3. In April 2019, AE brothers celebrating the 25th anniversary of the Father Duchene Scholarship, in Hilton Head, S.C.

4. 2018-19 scholarship recipients: President Gormley hosting a luncheon, in the Duquesne Student Union, for the Father Duchene Scholarship recipients, their families and AE brothers.

DISTINGUISHED WORKS

The Century Club of Distinguished Duquesne University Alumni recognizes graduates who have exemplary records of professional achievement and service to Duquesne and their communities. Duquesne touts more than 100,000 alumni since 1878, and only 330 have been admitted to the elite ranks of the Century Club. According to Miller, an astounding 11 brothers of AE have been inducted into the club, with a 12th set to be inducted in 2021.

This high honor and the extraordinary number of AE brothers who received it is telling of the reach of their endeavors, both philanthropic and professional. And while it is a source of pride for them, the support they enable is the higher source of joy.

"I would say we really should be proudest of being able to help the number of students we have with the financial cost of attending Duquesne. Hopefully, we continue to raise money. I hope it [the scholarship] continues to grow because college costs do not go down and kids need financial help," Grattan said.

LASTING LEGACY

AE only lasted 23 years as a recognized fraternity on campus, but its legacy has endured far longer. Its brothers have contributed more to Duquesne than any other campus organization.

Miller shared that in addition to the AE brothers' signature Father Duchene Scholarship, other scholarship funds were created by seven AE alumni

brothers over the years, with a total cumulative balance of \$4 million.

"We support Duquesne in the name of AE because we never gave up being brothers of AE," said Callery.

Ongoing is the establishment of the Greek Memorial Recognition, celebrated during the Homecoming Farewell Mass at the Duquesne University Chapel. Grattan has led this effort of recognition with Duquesne's fraternities and sororities.

The bonds of brotherhood began with the books, lasted through the Vietnam War, through raising their families, and now into retirement. Their link is as strong today as they collaborate in service to the school.

"Through our brotherly love and the times spent together, we extend ourselves to causes greater than our own self-interests, and through those initiatives we continue our love for Duquesne," Accamando said.

As many of the brothers said, they are better people because of Duchene and AE. Both imparted leadership and service. AE brothers encourage other Duquesne alumni to consider ways to give back, too.

Fragasso said, "It's a pay it forward legacy. None of us got to where we are on our own; we had lots of people who guided us along the way. Parents, neighbors, teachers, chaplains, bosses at different jobs. They gave help by pulling or pushing along the way to help us succeed in what we have become. Why wouldn't we want to make this world a better place?" ♦