Aftermath: Alpha Chi Omega Sorority: progress materializes from adversity

M. Monica Gillen
It is such a blessing to have a network of Alum in the area who not only helped us rebuild at the 828 location, but are still able to help us transition into our new home.
—Lauren Tegrootenhuis, Sigma Chapter President, Alpha Chi Omega

Right: A tornado ripped through Iowa City on April 13, 2006. The resultant damage required that the Alpha Chi Omega sorority be razed.
Below right: The entry way and turret are focal points from the street.
Below: An exterior walkway provides exterior shelter for residents and visitors.

The role of an architect on any project is some combination of design, coordination and consultation. Every project is different as are the circumstances which surround them. In the case of the Alpha Chi Omega sorority, on the campus of the University of Iowa, Iowa City, the house was destroyed by a tornado that tore through town on April 13, 2006. Razing and rebuilding in the aftermath would require close coordination with the architect, builders, local building authorities and the Sigma Chapter members in effort to satisfy the various recovery criteria specific to the locale, including budget constraints, current building safety requirements and a need to be attentive to the historic nature of building in such neighborhoods.

The original structure was Tudor style, while the new house employs an “eclectic” Arts and Crafts method. Four levels with a finished walkout basement, the first floor includes the public spaces, a circular stair and balcony. The second and third floors include sleeping rooms and living suites. The lower level houses non-public community spaces, and an outdoor deck and terrace are located on the east side. The new house is 1,700-square-feet bigger but occupies close to the same footprint as the old structure.

$200. The budget for rebuilding ended up at about $3.5 million dollars, due in large part to stricter code criteria and historic preservation requirements.

From adversity comes progress. The members of AXO wasted no time moving out what they could and preparing for the challenges of rebuilding. A fundraising campaign began and generations of women who had gone before in the house stepped up to help fund the rebuilding.

According to McDonald, “We studied many options but were limited in what we could do, particularly by the 38-
The transition from the old to the new excites the members, past and present, according to Marsha Grady, Rebuilding Project Manager for the House Corporation Board. "They like the fact that it has a similar look and feel to the old house, even though it doesn't replicate the old house. They miss the history. They like that we reused some of the materials and furnishings. We used wood from the gingko and Kentucky Coffee Bean trees that blew down in the tornado in the woodwork in the new house."

—M. Monica Gillen lives and works in Ames.