

The Common Good



A Periodic Newsletter For Oxford House Chapters

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Message from the Chair

I am Samantha Rykov, Chair of the World Council Chapter Committee. My responsibility as chair is to listen to and pass on suggestions on how our chapters can function better. I believe that chapters are our front line of defense against dysfunction in our houses and consider it a privilege to work with our chapter officers. I encourage you to e-mail me with questions, concerns or suggestions about our chapters at samanthawendes@hotmail.com.

I met many of our chapter officers at our world convention in New Orleans back in October. But those of you who missed it this year missed a great event— the 500 plus conventioners enjoyed hearing excellent speakers and participating in the many educational workshops and general sessions, dining on a paddlewheel boat cruise on the Mississippi, and attending the Saturday evening awards banquet.

Part of the World Council responsibility at the convention is to hold elections for new world council members and to recommend to the entire convention changes in the Oxford

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Pass the Word: Washington DC will be the site for the 11th Annual Oxford House World Convention

Where?

Hyatt Regency Hotel on Capitol Hill – Washington DC

When?

Thursday, September 3 to Sunday, September 6, 2009

How Much?

Rooms: Single/Double/Triple: \$129 +14.5% sales tax & room fee = \$147.70 per night Quadruples: \$154 (plus 14.5% sales tax) = \$176.33

Registration Fee: \$240 per resident. Residents who want to take advantage of the early bird discount can register by June 1 and only pay \$225 per resident. Information on registration procedures will be mailed to each house very soon.

Highlights:

The Annual Women's Conference is always held from 3pm to 9pm on the Thursday before the Convention starts, and there are many informative break-out sessions.

Some of the most well attended Convention Breakout sessions include:

- Oxford House and the Law
- Oxford House and State Agencies
- Attracting Chapter Participation
- Oxford House and Fundraising
- Finding a Suitable House to rent
- Reentry after Incarceration

In addition to the women's conference and breakouts, there will be the annual Friday Evening Reception where the "Directors' 100 Year" awards are presented and the Saturday Night Banquet where the Founders Awards are presented to Oxford House residents or alumni who have made a great contribution to the program. Also, the election of **new** World Council members is always an important part of each World Convention.

House operating system. This year the world council recommendations passed by the convention dealt with several important housekeeping matters that you should pass on:

1-- Chapters should obtain a P O Box and the P O Box address should be passed on to Oxford House Inc. – **Note: the reason for this resolution is that it is good to have a permanent address that will endure through the changes in officers that chapters undergo at least once a year)**

2---It is the duty of the secretary of each house to update vacancies on the www.oxfordhouse.org website once a week --- **(Note: The new website for Oxford Houses has a mechanism where houses can get a password and take control of listing their own vacancies so that rehabs and others can find out quickly which houses have open beds)**

3—It is the duty of the President to make sure house telephone voice mail messages are retrieved and answered. **(Note: Oxford House Inc and others have received calls from people looking for beds who are calling houses and not getting a return call – one of the reasons for this is the reliance on cell phones for communicating rather than the house phone)**

4—Each house should obtain an e-mail address and send that address to Oxford House Inc. **(Note: getting computers now is getting easier and at some point all Oxford Houses will likely have a house computer and will be ready to participate in Oxford House computer projects such as the website vacancy updates, receiving newsletters, etc)**

The World Council will be holding its third mid-year meeting in Arkansas in May this year and many ideas will be coming up – I will be back in touch after that meeting to share any information discussed there with regard to our chapters. Thank you. Samantha

Chapters: Please Help to Keep Our Website Accurate

The main goal in setting up the new website – www.oxfordhouse.org -- was to provide valuable vacancy and location information for those looking for beds in a particular area. In order to accomplish this goal, the houses were given control of updating their own house information and we hoped to get 100% participation from our houses which unfortunately have not happened yet.

Chapters can help get 100 per cent website participation by checking with each member house to make sure they are going online regularly to post vacancy information -- if a house does not have its password or has misplaced it, they can call 1-800-689-6411 and ask Mollie to generate a password for them.

There may be a house in your chapter that does not have a computer yet; if so, assign another house to take the password for that house and update vacancy information until the house acquires a computer of its own – reach out to businesses in the community to see if there are computers that they might donate to the house – Oxford House Inc will provide a receipt to anyone donating a computer to the house – call Mollie at the above toll free number to get information on donations.

The Chapter can also oversee the process of uploading each member house's picture to the website – if a house does not have a camera, there will surely be someone in the chapter with a camera who can take a picture of the house and upload it for them.

Another important website task Chapter officers can undertake is to check the listings of houses in your chapter to make sure each house is listed (the easiest way to check is to go to www.oxfordhouse.org, then go to houses, then to directory -- the directory listings are in alphabetical order by city). If one of your member houses is not listed, please call the toll-free number 1-800-689-6411 to report the omission.

For chapters who still are not requiring an audit when houses ask for loans from the Chapter...below is an excellent procedure enacted in 1995 by Chapter 1 DC on how its chapter handled loans to troubled houses - - it is a sample guideline only for Chapters who want to adopt a loan policy in writing to provide guidance on the house loan issue:

Chapter I DC Loan Policy

One of the reasons for belonging to a Chapter is for a house to be able to get financial assistance if it gets into trouble. All the houses in a Chapter who pay dues are eligible for financial assistance, when needed, if they meet the following requirements:

1. The house must request a loan at a Chapter Meeting and set up an appointment with the Housing Committee to review their financial books.
2. At the agreed-upon time, the Housing Committee will visit the house and take the following actions:
 - A. Check the books for improprieties (embezzlement)
 - B. Check the rent receipt book for residents who are behind in rent
 - C. Check the bills for unnecessary expenditures (excessive cable, phone, etc.)
 - D. see that the house income (individuals weekly rent from the residents) is in proportion to the house expenses and request the house to raise the rent if needed
 - E. have the house set up an emergency fund separate from House Funds; the Housing Committee will work with house on amount that should be set up
 - F. review house lease to check on Landlord and Tenant Liability for repairs.
3. If the House meets the loan requirements for the Chapter, the Housing Committee will work with the house on setting the amount of the loan and the repayment plan. The repayment plan should be in writing. The house may request that chapter dues be waived during this repayment period.
4. Houses inheriting loans from previous tenants:

A house may find itself liable for a loan incurred by previous residents. This is particularly true in the case of start-up-loans from the State. It is important to remember that it is the house that owes the money and that all past, present and future residents of that house are responsible for repayment of these loans.
5. All houses must be operating under the guidelines established in the "Oxford House Manual". This is not only necessary for a house to be eligible for financial assistance from a Chapter, but also to maintain its Charter as an Oxford House.

DRUG/ALCOHOL TESTING

Oxford House Inc gets a lot of calls from houses wanting to know about drug testing procedures, where to buy testing kits, etc. Oxford House Inc tells them that there is no national policy which means that individual houses need to come up with their own policy about testing. Below is an article written by Paul Molloy a few years ago about testing that is still timely today:

Sobriety Verification

By Paul Molloy, CEO Oxford House

Oxford House requires that the residents of the house totally abstain from the use of alcohol or drugs. One of the three charter conditions for each house is the requirement that any resident who uses any drugs or alcohol be immediately expelled – and that requirement works. About 20% of the Oxford House population is expelled each year because of return to using drugs or alcohol.

Some houses have started to rely upon drug testing to determine if a resident has relapsed. It is NOT a good idea to use drug testing *as a matter of routine* because Oxford House is not an institution. We expect testing as part of the criminal justice system but not as part of an Oxford House. Imagine if we had to be tested at the door of an AA or NA meeting! Most of us would not attend. We get sober because we want to have freedom – not supervision by Big Brother. Freedom requires responsibility. Each resident in a democratic self-run Oxford recovery house needs to assume the responsibility of making the tough judgments about relapse themselves. Before resorting to a drug test every house should try to make the judgment without looking for the kind of automatic test a correctional officer would use. We are family, not an institution.

There may be some circumstances in which a drug test is justified. For example, where some in the house honestly feel that drug use has taken place but others honestly feel that is not the case. In those rare situations a house might entertain a motion to require a drug test but we should not use drug testing a matter of routine. This is my opinion. Of course each house is autonomous and quire capable of making its own decision.

Arkansas, Here We Come!!

In May, the World Council will be going in Arkansas to meet with the Director of the Arkansas Drug/Alcohol Division to sell that agency on the value of Oxford Houses. Hats Off to World Council Chair Victor Fitz (Alum - Wichita KS) who has been working for some time to set up this important new goal for the World Council members.

The Daniels Foundation of Colorado has given Oxford House Inc a grant to expand our network in that state. Thomas Cassidy of Aurora has been hired to work with the existing houses in that state to open more beds.

The houses in Delaware are getting a workshop together for the first time in many years – it is tentatively set for the first part of May – Thomas and John who are currently working with the Delaware houses attended the recent Northern Virginia workshop and came away with a great deal of information and excitement to share with the DE houses. For information, call Thomas at 302- 423-9834.



Signs of a Sick House

Editors Note: Ran across this oldie but goodie for chapters to recognize a house that is already in or headed for trouble:

A gradual change occurs as a house moves away from Oxford House principles and moves toward individuals who believe they have a better way of doing things. Oxford Houses function best when the members follow the principles of democracy, financial self-support, and zero tolerance for using. Below are listed some telltale signs to indicate a house is not functioning well. Are one or more of these signs occurring in your chapter houses? If so, it is time to take corrective action by sending in the housing service committee to conduct an audit of finances and procedures.

Signs:

- Someone is using and not asked to leave or may leave for only a few days and the house accepts him/her back.
- Rents are not being collected; the house accepts excuses for non-payment.
- House bills are not being paid in a timely fashion.
- Monthly audits are not conducted on the books.
- House meetings are not being held regularly, or if they are, it is a race to see how fast it can be completed.
- "How goes it" or personal processing time after house meetings is being ignored.
- Every effort is not being made to fill empty beds.
- The house is dirty inside or out.
- There is no participation in chapter or other Oxford activities.
- Individuals are not working or are not practicing an active program of recovery.
- One or two individuals are running the house.

This and That

- Raffle off one week's rent to a lucky resident at the close of the chapter meeting every month (if you have the money) to increase participation. Once people start to attend chapter meetings for whatever reason, they will probably get interested in what's going on with the area houses
- Have houses bring their newcomers to the chapter meeting for an orientation session so that they will know the rights and responsibilities of Oxford House living
- Visit each house in your chapter for fire inspection periodically – any two-story houses must be required to have at least one rope ladder on the second floor if there are no outside stairs from the second floor. The house should show the chapter their plan on how residents in each room will get out in case of fire. Encourage houses to have an actual fire drill at some point to test their procedures.
- Have each house bring a bank statement along with their house financial report to each chapter meeting – bank statements always tell the truth.
- The World Council Propagation Committee is seeking e-mail addresses for houses, alumni, and friends of Oxford House to compile an e-mail directory. If you have e-mails to include, sent them to the Propagation Committee at ohworldcouncil@yahoo.com
- It's Spring Cleaning Time – encourage your houses to be the cleanest in the neighborhood, inside and out. Pull out the stove. refrigerator and sofas and clean under them. Wash windows by using up and down strokes on the outside and side to side strokes inside – that way, streaks can be quickly identified and corrected.

Published By Mollie Brown

Ideas for articles, submissions etc. welcome.

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