

Did fake fraternity 'run for the hills' after being named in Stockton U. sex assault lawsuits?

Posted August 04, 2018 at 07:05 AM | Updated August 04, 2018 at 07:08 AM

Rebecca Everett and Matt Gray | For NJ.com

Pi Kappa Phi fraternity shut down its chapter at Stockton University in 2010, but that didn't stop "fraternity brothers" from using the name and passing themselves off as a legitimate organization.

At an off-campus house on the White Horse Pike in Galloway Township, just outside of Egg Harbor City, students still used the fraternity's name continued throwing raucous parties and — according to recent lawsuits — several female Stockton students were served spiked drinks and raped during those events.

The "frat house" may have been used until spring of this year.

Among Stockton students, the renegade Pi Kapp group has even earned the nickname "Spike Kap."

Four former Stockton students filed lawsuits in recent weeks claiming they were sexually assaulted and that all of the cases had connections to the phony frat and parties hosted at the house.

In some cases, the women met their alleged assailants at those parties and were later assaulted in dorm rooms, while they said other assaults occurred at the house.

Only one case has resulted in criminal charges.

Zachary Madle, 25, of North Wildwood, who is named in two of the lawsuits, was charged with invasion of privacy in a 2017 case for allegedly posting videos online of him touching one of students' intimate areas while she was "barely conscious," according to a criminal complaint.



A student displays a poster calling out Pi Kapp during an April protest at Stockton University. (Submitted photo)

Students target 'fake frat'

Even before the suits were filed, word of alleged trouble at the frat house spread across campus in the spring.

Rumors of a sexual assault at the Pi Kappa Phi house began circulating just before the annual March to End Rape Culture, which the campus Women's Coalition organizes every April, said coalition member Lex Franklin.

Many new marchers arrived at the event, and at least five were carrying signs with slogans like, "F--- Pi Kapp" and "#fakefrat."

Several people who spoke at the rally "called them out," including a woman who spoke as a survivor, according to coalition president Samantha Kelly.

Kelly said several male students she assumed were Pi Kapp "members" heard what was being said and started yelling at the speakers. One cursed at her, she said.

Both Franklin and Kelly said it was the first time they could remember Pi Kappa Phi being referenced in such a big way at the march. "I absolutely was surprised and surprised he was OK that he was admitting he was in that frat," Kelly said of the man who yelled at her.

Cops were called many times

Records indicate police made regular trips to the Pi Kapp house, located a few miles from the Stockton campus, over the last decade.

Galloway Township police call logs include 59 responses to the house, located at 600 W. White Horse Pike, since 2008. Those calls included three "sexual assault/attempts" calls — two were reported in the early hours of March 3, 2017, and another on Feb. 16, 2018. No charges were filed in those cases, police confirmed.

Other calls include a reported assault in 2010, several noise complaints and many "disturbance" calls.

The fraternity lost its affiliation to Stockton in 2010 due to violations of campus code and campus policy, university spokeswoman Diane D'Amico said. The frat is one of several listed on Stockton's website as "unrecognized groups."

Stockton officials have not provided additional details about what violations led to Pi Kapp's demise and representatives for the national fraternity have not responded to questions on that topic.

To the school's knowledge, no groups on that list of unrecognized organizations are currently operating underground fraternities on or off-campus.



This tree sits behind the Pi Kappa Phi house in Galloway Township. (Matt Gray | For NJ.com)

'This was a rogue group'

D'Amico stressed that the group that called itself Pi Kappa Phi at the Galloway house shouldn't even be thought of as a fraternity post-2010.

"We don't even consider this an underground fraternity," she said. "This was a rogue group of people posing as a fraternity," she said.

The place where Pi Kapp called home appears vacant now.

The rundown house sits behind a wall of trees just off a sparsely developed stretch of the White Horse Pike. No cars were parked in the gravel driveway on a recent morning and no one answered a knock at the door.

A walkway overgrown with weeds leads to wooden steps up to the front porch. A hole in the wooden porch planks is big enough to swallow a foot. A blue tub on the porch is partially filled with rainwater.



(Matt Gray | For NJ.com)

Around the back, a few trash cans are overflowing with garbage under a window with a giant round hole in the glass.

The only sound is the periodic chirp of a smoke detector in need of a new battery inside the house.

A tree is graffitied with Greek letters Pi Kappa Phi and a punching bag rests at the base of the tree. Beer cans are strewn around the area, mixed with Wawa cups and other debris. Nearby are the blackened remains of a small bonfire, with several crumpled Natural Light cans mixed among the charred lumber.

A few pieces of furniture are discarded among the trees. Several mattresses are dumped in the woods toward the back of the property.

Efforts to contact the listed owners of the property were unsuccessful.

Longtime home for Pi Kapp

This house was the longtime home of Pi Kapp, even back when it was an officially recognized fraternity.

A newspaper account from 1994 described a fight involving 30 people at the house. Three students were suspended from Stockton for allegedly crashing a party at the location and assaulting two students living there.

The national Pi Kappa Phi organization acknowledged that its chapter at Stockton closed in 2010 and said the recent allegations have nothing to do with its members. In fact, the frat took legal action of its own to try and ensure its name wasn't used following the closure.

"The students were sent cease and desist letters to stop using the fraternity's name," said Pi Kappa Phi CEO Mark E. Timmes. "They are not our members."

Timmes declined to comment further, citing the recent lawsuits.



Charred remains of wood and beer cans in the yard at the Pi Kappa Phi frat house in Galloway Township. (Matt Gray | For NJ.com)



A view of the Stockton University campus. (Matt Gray | For NJ.com)

Stockton's options were limited, officials say

The school is limited in what it can do about rogue organizations operating off-campus. Stockton officials said.

The school can take action against any student who violates the Stockton code of conduct on or off campus, but simply belonging to an unauthorized fraternity does not currently violate the code of conduct at Stockton, D'Amico explained. The school is, however, looking at how these matters are handled at other schools and considering options, though no decisions have been made on possible changes.

It's not a problem unique to Stockton. The Chronicle of Higher Education reported in 2017 on institutions' struggles to deal with rogue frats, noting that it can be especially hard for public universities, as they cannot restrict a student's right to associate with whomever they like.

Robert Fuggi, attorney for the plaintiffs in all four cases, argued that Stockton should have done more to protect his clients from the alleged activities going on at the house — and he said the university "can't hide behind the curtain of freedom of association."

"If you're a university student, the university has authority over you, to some extent, and if the university knows they're serving alcohol underage ... and you have illicit conduct going on, you can discipline them," he said.

School officials work hard to educate new students about the dangers of off-campus groups not regulated by Stockton. Welcome week at Stockton includes information about the unrecognized organizations and the hazards students could face if they choose to attend social gatherings at these places, officials said.

While several legitimate Greek organizations operate at Stockton, the school has no fraternity or sorority houses on or off-campus.

"Students are warned about unrecognized groups and not to affiliate with them," D'Amico said.

Stockton and Galloway police issued a joint statement Friday pledging that the township department will participate in campus efforts to educate students about unregulated, off-campus events and groups. The statement stressed the importance of early reporting of any criminal activity "in order to prosecute perpetrators expeditiously and to the full extent of the law."

Phony frat developed a reputation

Kelly and Franklin, who are both seniors, agreed the school is doing what it can to deal with the Pi Kapp issue.

"We get emails a few times a year that say, 'don't associate with these people,'" said Kelly.

The group's members don't advertise their presence on campus, she said, noting that they don't wear letters out in public. Because of their low-key public image, most students don't even know who is in the group, she said.

Franklin recalled the first time they heard of the rogue frat, other than during orientation. "I heard that Pi Kapp is called Spike Kapp and they were throwing a party to see how many girls they could drug," Franklin said.

Kelly said she also heard the rumors about spiked drinks there, and neither have ever been to the house parties. "I know people who went there and they say you just can't drink there," Franklin said.

"I think it's more freshman who go party there because their options are more limited," Kelly said. "They're not 21."

In one of the suits, lawsuit, the young woman victim said a male fraternity member handed her a green-tinted drink, while he sipped from a red liquid. All the girls at the party were drinking green beverages, while the males had red ones.

When the woman asked a male student to try her drink, which she thought was "salty," he refused.



The Pi Kap house on the White Horse Pike appears vacant. (Matt Gray | For NJ.com)

Are they gone for good?

With the start of the new school year just weeks away, it's unclear if the group posing as Pi Kapp has left for good, is just gone for the summer or has found a new place.

Given the condition of the house, Fuggi believes they have abandoned that location.

"After the first lawsuit I think they ran for the hills," he said, noting that it seems more like an exodus than just leaving for the summer. "I don't think they're coming back."