

UW-Madison: After successful fundraiser, construction to start on Divine Nine Garden Plaza

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MADISON, Wis. – Just over a year after launching the Divine Nine Garden Plaza Fund and campaign, the University of Wisconsin–Madison Student Affairs Office of Fraternity and Sorority Life and Advancement teams surpassed their goal of \$250,000 by raising over \$275,000 for this project that will honor all nine of the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) organizations on campus. S

Student Affairs is moving forward with construction on the plaza this spring and is planning a May 2022 unveiling.

The idea for a permanent marker on campus to honor the National Pan-Hellenic Council and its nine historically Black fraternities and sororities was prioritized in 2019 through the Student Inclusion Coalition (SIC), an organization founded by students advocating for specific ways to be seen and heard on campus.

“This project is important because representation matters,” says Israel Obey, class of 2021 and member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. “There are too many students of color, specifically Black students, who feel like imposters on their own campus, unsure if they should even call themselves Badgers. Stepping onto campus into a sea of students who don’t look like you can make you feel isolated and unsupported. This project will be a daily reminder for every student of color that walks past the plaza that they not only belong on this campus but are honored and acknowledged by the University.”

The project celebrates organizations founded as early as 1906. The earliest NPHC chapter was chartered at UW–Madison in 1946, and many of the chapters on

campus were the first undergraduate chapters in the state. NPHC members have been influential members of our campus community for years through their programming, service, and student leaders they produce. This new plaza will bring to life the rich history of the eight chapters chartered at UW-Madison.

“Having the Divine Nine Garden Plaza is a reminder of our importance on campus,” says Noah Cotton, a new initiate of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. “Our organizations have existed on UW-Madison’s campus since the 1940s, and for me, personally, being a member of Omega Psi Phi has helped me grow as a person in so many ways.”

The fundraiser included 259 individual donors from the various NPHC organizations, faculty and staff, alumni, as well as the Office of the Chancellor and a substantial contribution from Student Affairs.

“The Divine Nine Garden Plaza celebrates all the NPHC organizations in a light they deserve as influential student leaders on campus for decades,” says Lori Reesor, vice chancellor for student affairs. “This space will be a visual representation of the community our students have built here, and I am grateful for everyone who stood behind them to make this possible. The community truly supported this important project.”

The student-driven project represents aspects that many NPHC organizations uphold — community, sisterhood, brotherhood, perseverance and so much more. For the people who were initiated at UW-Madison, it is a reason to return to campus and fellowship as a proud Badger.

“The intentional celebration and observation of the rich history through the Divine Nine plots establishes our organizations as just as important as Camp Randall, Memorial Union, or any other key place on campus,” says Eryne Jenkins, president of the Epsilon Delta chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. “We are a part of Badger History.”

The official unveiling of the Divine Nine Garden Plaza in the Vilas Green at 333 East Campus Mall will take place May 7, 2022, during a celebration open to the public. More details to come.