

RA Alumni Newsletter

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Good question! It has been nearly 25 years since I was a resident assistant. Yet, I still vividly remember some great experiences, friendships gained, and funny anecdotes. Being a resident assistant was the reason that I became a housing professional. It helped pay for my schooling, plus it provided me with a wealth of transferable skills.

Resident assistants are a special breed, whether you were an RA in the 70's or the 90's. The job has gotten progressively harder over the years, with mental health issues, AIDS/HIV, restrictive alcohol policies, and increasing parental involvement. The resident assistants must balance academics, their job responsibilities, and any semblance of a social life.

I like to think that former RAs can help current RAs. I also think that many other resident assistants are like me in that they wish to keep in contact with their peers who were RAs with them. Finally, you had interest in Residence Services as a resident assistant at one time; I hope your interest is still there and you'd like to learn more about what is going on in the RA ranks now.

Some of you may simply be curious what is going on at the University. Others may want to know where their peers are and what they are doing. Still others may wish to share their "story" with current staff in this newsletter or by appearing before the RAs during training. A few of you may have done well financially and may wish to assist current RAs by funding a

scholarship program for them. Regardless of what current resident assistants pursue, there is likely at least one RA alumni who is already in that field. A job opportunity for these graduating students is yet another way that current RAs can benefit from your participation.

I hope you enjoy reading the newsletter and will participate by writing articles or simply giving feedback. I promise there are no strings attached to this. If you are in Iowa City and have a few minutes, stop by our office in the basement of Burge or the second floor of Stanley Hall and introduce yourself. Happy reading!

Von Stange, Ed.D

Director, Residence Services

von-stange@uiowa.edu**In The Summer of 1967 . . .**

. . . I made what I now call a "life-changing trip" when I first visited Iowa City. It was at that time when I enrolled as a graduate student in the School of Music at the University. My intent was to pursue a graduate degree in music and return to the teaching profession. As of today, my stated intent is half-filled—that is to say, I successfully completed my mission and graduated from the School of Music in the area of Choral Literature and Organ, but I did not exactly make it back to teaching as I had intended. "Why not?" Well, I became involved in working in residence halls and thus the beginning of my "life-changing trip."

In 1967, the climate of Iowa City and that of the University of Iowa was much different from the serenity of what is presently found. Driven by an unpopular war being fought in Vietnam, American college campuses (Iowa being no exception) were in a state of unrest. Some of you may recall the experience of being a

student during this period. Lyndon Johnson was the U.S. President at this time and many college-aged students were being drafted into the military. Prior to the ending of the Draft, many colleges and Universities experienced turbulent years with numerous student demonstrations protesting U.S. involvement in the war and other social issues.

Recalling from the 1960's some of the activities that relate to the UI residence halls one remembers first that:

- All of the halls were single-sex halls with all female students being housed in the Clinton Street Halls and male students in the Grand Avenue Halls.
- Mayflower Hall was a privately-owned housing complex which catered to the general public.
- South Quadrangle housed our first "live and learn" center for men.

● Rienow Hall was our newest hall. In 1968, a "sister" hall was completed and the buildings were called Rienow I and Rienow II. It wasn't until several years later that Rienow II became Slater Hall, and Rienow I dropped its Roman numeral.

- The approximate enrollment was slightly above 19,000 (current enrollment is 29,745).
- Residence halls operated 4 dining facilities: Burge, Currier, Hillcrest, and Quadrangle. Quad also operated a public dining facility, and snack shops were available in the forms of the Currier Soda Shop and the Burge Carnival Room.
- To facilitate social programming activities, female and male floors were paired off as "brother & sister floors."
- Each building was staffed with a "matron-like" older female to [let's say] "oversee things."
- There was No Cambus!

See 1967, page 4

Residence Life Today

Times have changed if you were an RA (or even if you weren't) at Iowa in the 70's—but then again, the issues have probably stayed the same. So, I am thrilled to write to you about the Residence Life program as it is today. I joined the Department of Residence Services in March, 2003 and have enjoyed every moment I have been here. The Office of Residence Life is now housed in 260 Stanley, where a new office complex was built in what was once the Stanley ITC (Instructional Technology Center, or computer lab, and before that, where the vending machines in Stanley were located). Our office is in the "round" and houses the program staff (manager of programs, student development coordinator, 2 grad students), manager of operations, myself—the Assistant Director, and of course Peggy Schoonover and June Severson—our two most important staffers. We are developing the neighborhood concept at Iowa, and so we now have three neighborhoods where staff work collaboratively in those areas.

Those neighborhoods are West Campus (Hillcrest, Quadrangle, Rienow, and Slater), East Campus (Burge, Currier, Daum, and Stanley), and North Campus (Mayflower and Parklawn).

Student issues are probably the same as they have been for years—too much alcohol consumed (although all halls are designated as alcohol free), some issues of depression, eating disorders, and a recent increase in sexual misconduct with the possibility that misconduct could involve drugging victims. Safety of residents is always important and so we are moving toward a key card access in the halls—with public space separated from student living space.

Programming is always the best part of residence life and our staff has been planning some phenomenal events. ARH (Associated Residence Halls—our student government) students just hosted their second Iowa Idol contest.

Daum students are planning a prom, and Hillcrest is doing care packages for the military. Additionally, the West side is

planning for the annual Block Party—a day of music, games, and food. Not to be outdone, the East side is planning May Daze—a similar event on East Campus. We are also about to begin a shoe drive—collecting shoes to send to the people of Afghanistan. The residence halls are also planning on a major Homecoming involvement for fall 2005.

New initiatives include a 2-credit class for RAs to gain training and academic credit, a six-week program to acclimate new students to campus and college life, an RA council that has been successful in lobbying for Hawkeye Dollars for all RAs, and numerous learning communities with faculty involvement.

As we prepare for August training, 2005, I welcome letters and stories about how being an RA impacted your life and how you made a difference. I think it would be great to share them with the current 115 RAs as inspiration!!

Kate Fitzgerald
Assistant Director,
Residence Life
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"Times have changed . . . but then again, the issues have probably stayed the same."

Did You Know?

- ◆ Mayflower was purchased from a private company in 1983 to become a suite-style residence hall.
- ◆ Parklawn was converted from "Married Student Housing/Family Housing/University Apartments" to a residence hall with suites for fall 2002-03.
- ◆ The old Currier Dining area has been renovated and is now called the Van Oel Multipurpose Room, named for Maggie Van Oel. When this space was remodeled, the original stage was renovated with new lighting and internet connections for high-tech performances. Study space and exercise facilities are also housed in this area.
- ◆ Hawkeye Dollars are a fairly new concept whereby all students receive \$100 per semester as a part of their residence hall meal plan to use either in the residence halls food services, convenience stores, or at many food service locations on campus, including the Iowa Memorial Union and its satellite operations.
- ◆ Learning communities currently offered in the residence halls include: Health Sciences, Honors, International Crossroads (the old Foreign Language House), Iowa Writers, Leadership Community in Business and Entrepreneurship, Men in Engineering, Performing Arts, Transfers Honors, and Women in Science and Engineering.

1973

It was the spring of 1973 and I had decided to go back to graduate school in Nursing at the University of Iowa but I needed something to do to pay my bills. Nursing jobs at either University or Mercy Hospital were scarce so I turned to the residence halls and interviewed for a job as a head resident within the residence hall systems.

In the fall I found myself moving my possessions into the small two-room apartment in Slater Hall as Pat Philpott, the hall manager, had the larger front apartment in the building. It really made no difference where I stayed as I was back in school, was in a great hall that was close to all of my classes, and had a whole building full of people that I was going to have the opportunity to meet.

There were six head residents at the time with Jim LaRue, Ed Thomas, and I in the West side halls and Maggie Van Oel, Toby Tomash, and Toni Prout holding down the East side of the river. My own staff

consisted of Ernie "Deacon" Robison, Cindy Edge, Norton, Helen, Chuck Malloy, Karr, Doug "Mad Dog" Eblen, Gretchen Shull, Kevin (Buster) Koester, Diane Heimbuch, Roger Stone, and Gayle Bowman. At that time the residence hall was arranged so that the bottom three floors of Slater ate at the Quadrangle dining room and fourth through twelve ate at Hillcrest.

We were a diverse group of good people who cared about the students who were our residents. We as a staff had to get to know and trust each other and that evolved as the weeks went by in the semester. One of my first encounters was with my first floor RA who came into my office, looked me right in the eye, and said that he didn't want to be working for some "straight-laced rule-laden nurse" as his boss. I told him that I wasn't real crazy about

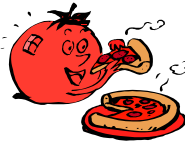
See 1973, page 4

No Matter The Age, Food's Always The Rage

EATING—OK, now that we've gotten your attention we'd like to talk about students' nutrition and eating habits. We've seen it all—Weight Watchers, Atkins, and South Beach. Still, whether it was back in 1973 or just this last fall, there are many questions asked regarding nutrition: *"What can I eat?"* *"Will I gain the dreaded Freshman 15?"* *"I don't have time to eat"* *"There isn't anything that I like"* *"I'm allergic"* *"There isn't anything I can eat"* Do any of these questions sound familiar? These are just a few of the comments and concerns we hear annually from students.

In Residence Services Dining, we make every effort to accommodate the needs and desires of each student. We regularly solicit student input through food tastings and surveys and we welcome their comments via email, telephone, or in

person. In response to student requests for more variety and greater flexibility in hours of service we have transformed Hillcrest and now Burge dining centers from traditional "straight-line" cafeterias with set times of service to state-of-the-art-dining Market Places that provide continuous service—on weekdays—from 6:45 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. These Market Places offer a wide selection of foods from "home style" foods of roast beef and mashed potatoes to salad bars with daily featured entree salads. In addition, Asian stir-fry, specialties of Southwestern Cuisine, "made to order" deli sandwiches, international foods, traditional "grill" menus, and the always popular pizza and pasta are offered. Our goal is to offer something for everyone at any time of the day. And, it's all you can eat!



The Always Popular Pizza

While it is not always possible to meet the particular dietary desires of every student, we encourage students with special requirements to meet with our dining staff professionals to discuss and work out a plan to meet their nutritional needs. Vegetarian and Vegan foods are available daily. Extra care is also taken to label foods containing nuts or nut products.

We take the responsibility for providing good nutrition for our students very seriously. As in the past, you can rest assured we will do everything we can to make our customers' dining experiences as healthy and enjoyable as possible.

Greg Black, Director
Campus Food Services
gregory-black@uiowa.edu

Hillcrest Hall, 1970-1975

So sad, so fresh, the days that are no more.

Alfred Lord Tennyson

The Vietnam war was chewing up thousands of young American men in 1970, and universities were safe zones that protected draft-age youth from the military grinder. I took a different path and left college to volunteer for the infantry in 1967. It cost me two years, a few bumps and six months on ambush patrols in a Korean kill zone the Army was saturating with Agent Orange.

I was discharged in May 1969, and arrived three months later at the University of Iowa to complete my undergraduate degree in Exercise Science. I came home from the Army with a brown belt in Judo, and the Department of Physical Education asked me to teach it in their skills program. I was soon teaching weight training, Hatha yoga, and other "exotic" skills while still an undergraduate. The Physical Education Department offered me a teaching assistantship when I graduated in 1972, and I

taught there until my Master's Degree was completed in 1975.

As an off-campus student, my first impressions of residence life at the UI came from my physical education students. The majority were unhappy with their living environments. Like many young men during that time, I was looking for some good battles to fight. I reasoned that most of a student's time was spent in his living space, and the residence halls should be an ordered and healthy refuge from the social turmoil that seemed to be swallowing us.

I applied for a resident assistant position and was selected to serve in Hillcrest Hall beginning in fall 1970. At that time, it was probably the least popular residence hall on campus. That year we had fifty false fire alarms and thousands of dollars in vandalism to the building. It was common for entire floors to have keg parties with widespread underage drinking. The chaos of the Vietnam war had given young men and women a new freedom, and many were unprepared for it. It was a very

sad situation.

Joining forces with some of the other Hillcrest resident assistants, we launched an offensive to make it a decent place to live. Our weekends were often sleepless as we hid in custodians' closets waiting to ambush the morons who were pulling our fire alarms. We started hall-wide programs designed to help our residents grow up. Vandalism and other behavioral deficiencies decreased steadily, but it would take a few more years to make Hillcrest Hall the hippest dorm on campus.

The following year I was appointed head resident, and we put together an outstanding team of dedicated resident assistants. We were responsible for programming, discipline and related matters. Martha Van Nostrand supervised the maids, building maintenance, and other physical plant issues. Area Coordinator David Coleman kept us on task and gave us the freedom to create. Over thirty years have passed, but I have never worked with finer people than these two.

"Resident assistants at Hillcrest Hall signed on for a mission, and we were fortunate to attract the best and brightest. They made it a great place to live and learn during some of the UI's most chaotic and turbulent years. It was a great battle."

The Hillcrest chain-of-command was lean. One head resident and twenty resident assistants supervised 1,000 students. We pulled rotating all night duty, and resident assistants were expected to be available on most weekends. Hillcrest's population was larger than many Iowa towns from which our students came. We had all the problems of a small urban community. When students slit their wrists, we cleaned up the flood. When water mains broke, we climbed into the ceiling and put on the clamps. Then we spent hours

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1973 (continued from page 2)

having a “big dumb football player” on my staff either. His response was that football players weren’t all dumb and I responded that all nurses weren’t “straight-laced and rule-laden” so we agreed that we’d give each other a try, and it worked!

A residence hall is a cross-section of Americana from any way you choose to look at it. There were students who were of a single mind with clear direction, knew exactly who they were, what they wanted from their collegiate experience, and predictably there were students on the other extreme of the continuum.

Being a head resident or an RA meant being able to respond to a variety of situations. On one hot fall day I was sitting with several of my RAs in Hillcrest dining and we were watching two young women a couple of tables away that were engaged in angry conversation. Suddenly, one reached over and ripped the other’s hoop earring out of her ear, tearing the ear lobe as she did it. In a flash the other young woman took her fork and raked it across the other’s chest deep enough to draw blood. Two of my RAs went over to prevent the situation from escalating any further and I went to the phone

to call campus security to tell them that there had been a “forking” in Hillcrest dining. A short time later two campus security officers came running down the hall saying that they had just gotten a really strange call about a “forking.” I told them that their information was correct as that was the case and turned the situation over to them.

As with any diverse community we had a large number of the “usual” complaints from our 460-person community that ranged from noise, overnight guests, roommate incompatibility, the smell of burning “rope” when walking down the hall, broken waterbeds, and students who had severe problems. One of the saddest duties I had during the fall term was to pack up the belongings of a young lady who had come to the University from Arizona. We had not seen her for about a week, had talked to security, and finally as a last resort called her home in Arizona to tell her parents we didn’t know where their daughter was—which was a daunting task. When her mother picked up the phone she told me her daughter was home on fall break (there was no fall break). What evolved was the discovery that the young lady had a significant problem with alcohol and her family elected for her to enter treatment at home in Arizona. Her RA and I packed up her belongings with the exception of a large quantity of alcohol we found in her room.

“... two campus security officers came running down the hall saying that they had just gotten a really strange call about a ‘forking.’ I told them that their information was correct as that was the case...”

As the year continued we became a “family” of sorts and that was apparent by the actions of a group of guys who often went downtown on Friday or Saturday night. When they came back late at night they always woke me up because they would pound loudly on the back door of my apartment (which happened to be across from the men’s bathroom) with the words “Mom, we’re home!” They would continue pounding until I said, “I’m glad you’re home my sons—go to bed!”

At the conclusion of the year I had almost completed a Master’s degree and my experience within the residence halls could be summed up in a few words. If I had known all that being an HR entailed, I probably wouldn’t have done it—but at the same time I wouldn’t trade all those experiences for anything!

Dr. Jo Eland
Professor of Nursing
University of Iowa



Dr. Ed Thomas

1970-1975

(continued from page 3)

vacuuming the water. We met our residents and their parents at the door in the fall and moved their belongings in for them. We moved them out in the spring. Resident assistants at Hillcrest signed on for a mission, and we were fortunate to attract the best and brightest. They made it a great place to live and learn during some of the UI’s most chaotic and turbulent years. It was a great battle.

Dr. Ed Thomas
thomasschool@earthlink.net

Dr. Ed Thomas is currently the Iowa Department of Education Health and Physical Education Consultant, and he teaches in the Division of Health and Movement Science at Graceland University in Lamoni, Iowa. Thomas has taught physical education for over twenty-five years at numerous schools including the University of Iowa, Northern Illinois University and Emory University. He is a Fulbright Scholar who has lived and worked in Burma, Thailand, South Korea and West Germany. Thomas has published over fifty articles on physical fitness and has been widely quoted in numerous media including The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, and Army Times.

1967 (continued from page 1)

Now that the conception of the “RA Newsletter” is the reality, I feel that I should share that the Newsletter has become another milestone in the “life-changing trip” that started for me in 1967. It brings closure to my 36+ years of employment with the University of Iowa. My retirement officially begins June 5, 2005. One can hardly imagine how fast the time has passed since I was first employed (as an RA) in 1968! A warm-felt “thank you” goes to all of you who through the years contributed in making our department and our University a great organization! We have achieved so much through the years, and we have impacted thousands of lives of the students that we

have served. Our current and future RAs will continue on the all-too-familiar and critical path of serving and assisting students who choose to live in our halls. Thanks to our current staff!

It is my hope that this newsletter will evolve as a tool in keeping all of us connected in some way to Residence Services and to the University of Iowa. I am reminded of such a connection where a father in the 1960’s and a son in the 1980’s both served as RAs. The father shared his college experiences of being an RA, and the son followed in his footsteps. Perhaps there are many such connections that will be shared in future editions of the RA Alumni Newsletter!

David Coleman
Assistant Director, Residence Services
Departmental Administrative Liaison

“One can hardly imagine how fast the time has passed since I was first employed (as an RA) in 1968!”

Want To Receive The Newsletter via Email?

Send email addresses, change of addresses, personal stories, story ideas, etc. to:

karla-thordsen-hanrahan@uiowa.edu

The Dummies Guide to Residence Hall Nostalgia

By Amy Hildreth, Current Currier RA

I often refer to my residents in East 100 of Currier as my “kids” or my “children”. In turn, they joke that it must have been difficult to give birth to 47 children, and even worse to become a mother at two years old! In reality, my residents are more like my younger brothers and sisters. As an only child, I admit I really enjoy this aspect of the position. I love that I have people to say hello to as I struggle down the hall with my twenty pound bag of books; I love that my floor walks around

downtown in packs and chimes in unison “Hi, Amy!” when they see me; and I love that when I walk out of my room grumpy at two o’clock in the morning, my residents still smile at me even when I tell them to turn down their TVs.

There are many reasons why I enjoy being a resident assistant. I admit, the past two years haven’t always been idyllic, but the occasional two a.m. duty calls are always outweighed by the satisfaction of successful events or a good conversation with one of my staff members at the Currier Front Desk. For example, when Jill (our learning community’s graduate assistant) and I attended a discussion at the International Writers Workshop with our residents, I had an amazing time not only listening to the stories of authors who had lived in Croatia, Africa, and Israel, but also watching how our first year students could challenge and engage even experienced writers. Leaving that event, I was just as excited by our students’ enthusi-

asm as the writers themselves. Also, I’m impressed at the diversity and dedication of my co-workers. After working on a staff that includes a professional magician and two non-native English speakers, as well as people who study everything from film to Spanish to medicine and engineering, I know I am among the brightest undergraduates at the University of Iowa. The opportunity to work with such gifted and inspiring individuals has kept me returning to this position for now what will be my third year.

I believe my experiences in the residence halls will be some of my strongest memories from college. The smell of microwavable popcorn will always remind me of weekday evenings in Slater; the sound of the “Sex and the City” theme music will remind me of Saturday afternoons in Hillcrest, and the sight of students crowded around a poem will always remind me of my time in Currier. While working as an RA is a full-time

job more than delivering pizza ever could be, it is also much more rewarding. I now know how to put out a fire, do basic hula steps, climb through a rope course, and get 47 people to listen to me (hint: hand out stickers)—all because of this position. Who knows what I’ll learn next year? No matter . . . from square dancing to nonfiction writing, resident assistants and the students in our halls can do it all!

Amy Hildreth
Currier RA, 2004-05

“I admit, the past two years haven’t always been idyllic, but the occasional two a.m. duty calls are always outweighed by the satisfaction of successful events or a good conversation with one of my staff members at the Currier Front Desk.”

Send Us Your Ideas!

So you’ve been away from campus for a few years. Do you have any questions you’d like to ask, or any specific topics you would like us to cover in future issues? Please submit any ideas to Karla in our office at 319/335-3000 or karla-thordsen-hanrahan@uiowa.edu

David Coleman Is Bidding Us Adieu!

On page #1 of this newsletter, David Coleman told us he made a “life-changing trip” in 1967 when he ventured to the UI campus. Now, after 36+ years, he’s decided to make another “life-changing trip” and start a new career called: “RETIREMENT”!

David has been a critical component in Residence Services, for the most part serving as Assistant Director, Residence Life, and in the past few years assisting our new director in special projects. One of those projects—in fact—is this newsletter, and David painstakingly went through hundreds of old files in

order to collect all of your names and addresses. We think this is especially valuable to us, since we can now share news of his retirement with all of you!

We are holding a reception in Dave’s honor on Tuesday, May 24, 2005, from 3:00 to 5:00 in the Van Oel Multipurpose Room in Currier (old dining area). Please feel free to stop in and wish

Dave well as he begins his new “career”. If you are unable to make it and would like to wish him well via email or letter, please send your correspondence to karla-thordsen-hanrahan@uiowa.edu or Karla Thordsen-Hanrahan, Residence Services, 8 Burge Hall, Iowa City, IA 52242-1214. We look forward to hearing from you, and especially reading any little tidbits you’d like to share with us about Dave!

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Do You Know Who This Person Is?

In June of 2004, during ceiling renovations in Stanley Hall, the below letter was found in a pile of ceiling tiles that had been removed from 10th floor Stanley. Unfortunately, we don't know which room number, but we do know that the room faced the Iowa river (her reference to beautiful sunsets—thus facing West). And, she only signed it with the initials "A.E." If you were an RA in Stanley in 1977, maybe you can remember who this might be—we think it would be fun to contact this former resident and let her know that we did, indeed, find her letter after over 25 years! If you have any thoughts, please call Karla at 319/335-3000 or email her at karla-thordsen-hanrahan@uiowa.edu.

To Whom It May Concern,

Friday, May 13, 1977

It was a very pleasant year for the occupants of this room. One was a political science major, the other had a double major of art history and journalism. 10th floor Stanley was restricted - no men were allowed. While most people thought this strange, it was actually much quieter. The academic year had its ups and downs. We were both supporters of President Ford. Although I thought he was very average, he was a better choice than Jimmy Carter. At least at the time we thought so. Campaign buttons and posters decorated the room along with prints by Van Gogh, Andrew Wyeth, and some Oriental paintings. The room was bright yellow. The room carried the nickname "Nirvana" because it was tranquil and sunny in the daytime. We would drink tea and discuss art or music or the decline of American society in general. One girl who used to come up and visit said she had dreams that came true. She was kind of a mystic. I am a pragmatist and never really believed her. It is the human subconscious and great power of the brain that causes us to make grand observations about the world. Some more common complaints: Currier was remodeled this year. The passageway (hallway) leading to the dining room used to have big archways as you walked through the hall. Now it is a mass of rectangles with dreadful orange stripes running along the walls. Girls on this floor talked about "neat guys" practically all the time. It made very dull conversation. It seems to me that women want to get married more than ever before. The women of the 1970's wish to be comfortable and avoid the harsh challenges of the world. Oh well, I must end. I hope you enjoy this room as much as I did - with its beautiful sunsets and carefree life. Perhaps you are laughing at my dated language or rambling sentences. At any rate have an enjoyable life. —A.E.