



'Hunter's Fund' Provides Phi Psi Chapters Turnkey Philanthropic Program to Save Lives

By HQ Communications Staff

Jerry Watson *Alabama '64* and wife Judy are working to keep their son Hunter Watson's legacy alive and growing in Phi Kappa Psi.

In 2016, 21-year-old Hunter Brooks Watson *Syracuse '15* lost his life when a distracted driver struck the car he was riding in. In the months that followed, Hunter's parents, his Syracuse brothers and other friends, established a Memorial Fund in his honor.

Hunter's chapter brothers suggested that part of the mission of "Hunter's Fund" be to spread awareness of the dangers of distracted driving. They held a "Safe Driving Week Campaign," setting up tables around campus and inviting their campus community to sign a pledge to drive distraction-free. They and their families also used social media to raise over \$20,000 to help replicate the campaign at other Phi Psi chapters.



Brother Jerry Watson spearheads that expansion phase. In 2019-20, more than 800 Phi Psi brothers at 25 chapters hosted safe driving campaigns, resulting in nearly 20,000 students signing "Hunter's Pledge" just this school year.

Jerry is convinced of its need. "Distracted driving claims over 3,000 lives a year and causes hundreds of thousands of injuries. We felt we could make a difference. Using tabling events and social media, our guys are doing an amazing job. And studies show that more than any other incentive, signing a pledge is the likeliest way to get someone to change their behavior."

In late 2019, Jerry's Alabama Alpha chapter hosted their second annual Hunter's Pledge campaign. A week later, the school lost one of its own in a tragic wreck. Twenty-year-old Claire Largin died when her vehicle collided with a truck along a state highway on a weekday afternoon. Zach Valdez, who coordinated the campaign, said his brothers planned to invite Claire's Alpha Chi Omega sisters to assist them in future campaigns.

While it highlights a gravely serious topic, Phi Psi brothers find the Hunter's Pledge campaign is easy to run and fun to hold. "They made it super simple," one philanthropy coordinator shared. "All startup costs are covered. We got step-by-step instructions, materials, and anytime I had a question I just emailed Jerry or called a member of Hunter's Fund staff. People loved the wristbands that were in our school colors. And it's really flexible; we could modify the written program to



make it our own, based on our small chapter size."

As the COVID-19 pandemic swept across the globe, college campuses were forced to close and introduce social distancing measures. Meanwhile, Hunter's Fund had to reimagine what on-campus campaigns would look like during the pandemic.

Through scannable QR codes, digital pledge forms, and innovative social media campaigns, Hunter's Fund created a new, COVID-safe philanthropy model on campuses around the country.

In addition to its safe-driving emphasis, another goal of Hunter's Fund is to provide meaningful grants supporting the passionate pursuits of teens and young adults around the world. Together, the two prongs of Hunter's Fund are now making a positive difference for thousands each year.

For Jerry Watson, it's all about carrying on his son's indomitable spirit. "Wherever he went, whatever he did, Hunter brought a spark and a smile and a contagious energy that inspired those around him. We want to keep that alive and growing."

Working with the Phi Kappa Psi Foundation, the Watsons also have established the Hunter Brooks Watson Memorial Scholarship, an annual award conferred upon one Syracuse brother whose own spirit and dreams are reminiscent of Hunter's. To start a campaign on your campus, go to hunterwatson.org/campus-campaign.