

Maine Sea Coast Mission celebrates 100-year partnership with Sigma Kappa Sorority

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BAR HARBOR — The Maine Sea Coast Mission celebrated its 100 years partnership with Sigma Kappa Sorority on Saturday, Nov. 5 when sorority representatives enjoyed a luncheon on the Mission's boat *Sunbeam V*. The sorority representatives also volunteered at the Mission's Christmas Program, listened to the history of Sigma Kappa's partnership with the Maine Sea Coast Mission, and were presented with a book that contained a copy of the Mission's historical material related to Sigma Kappa.

Twenty one representatives from Sigma Kappa attended the celebration, including Becky Vinzant, foundation president; Laura Owsley, national sorority president; Susan Polizzotto, foundation secretary; Nancy Nelson, foundation treasurer; Mary Belding, foundation trustee; Ann O'Connell, foundation trustee; Judy Rostad, foundation trustee; Jordan Bentlage, national sorority executive director; and Lisa Swjontek, foundation executive director.

Also in attendance were representatives from five undergraduate and five alumnae chapters that won Sigma Kappa's nationwide "gift card competition," held earlier this year in celebration of the 100-year partnership.

Sigma Kappa became aware that the Maine Sea Coast Mission Christmas Program was having a difficult time purchasing gifts for teenagers due to diverse preferences in clothing, music and books. As a result, Sigma Kappa chapters were challenged to collect gift cards for teenagers and the sorority chapters collected more than \$7,800 in gift cards for the mission's program.

According to mission officials in a press release, Sigma Kappa was instrumental in the creation of the Maine Sea Coast Mission Christmas and Scholarship programs. In addition, Sigma Kappa sisters were the Mission's first paid staff and volunteers.

The partnership began in 1910 when Myrtice D. Cheney, Sigma Kappa Alpha Chapter alumnae, heard Maine Sea Coast Mission founder, the Rev. Alexander MacDonald, speak at the Woodfords Congregational Church in Portland. She was reportedly touched by the stories of women and children living on Maine's less fortunate islands. Cheney was the Maine Sea Coast Mission's first volunteer and supported the Mission for more than 30 years. She also served as the first chairwoman of the Sigma Kappa Philanthropy Committee, as a member of the Maine Sea Coast Mission's Board of Directors and as the Mission's first secretary of Higher Education for Islands and Coastal Maine.

In 1911 the Portland Sigma Kappa Alumnae Chapter dressed eight dolls as Christmas gifts and sent them to the Maine Sea Coast Mission to give to little ones on the coast. These eight dolls were the beginning of the Maine Sea Coast Mission's Christmas Program, or as it was called in the 1930s, the Department of Christmas Cheer.

Today, 100 years after those first eight dolls were donated, Sigma Kappa chapters across the country hold fundraisers and send boxes filled with clothing, toys, books, and many other gifts for the children and elderly living Down East and in Maine's island communities. The Mission's Christmas Program will provide more than 16,000 gifts to almost 3,000 children and elderly this year, thanks in a large part to Sigma Kappa donations.

In 1918, the Sigma Kappa Grand Council voted to give a scholarship of \$100 for a girl living on the coast. This was the first scholarship given by the Maine Sea Coast Mission and was the beginning of the Mission's Scholarship Program. This tradition continues and in 2011, 113 college scholarships were awarded to Maine students Down East and on the islands.

In 1920, Sigma Kappa voted to pay \$1,200 for the salary of a Maine Sea Coast Mission island worker. The sorority's donations continued each year and in 1924, Sigma Kappa voted to give \$2,300 to Maine Sea Coast Mission for two workers. The workers taught cooking, sewing, directed social activities for young people, taught day school, cared for the Sunday school, conducted the church services when necessary, and taught music. In 1931, Sigma Kappa wrote, "The most important part of our National Philanthropy, of course, is our annual pledge to the Mission, which underwrites the salaries of our representatives." This support continued until the 1960s, when there were no more active Sigma Kappa chapters in Maine.

Sigma Kappa voted in 1920 to adopt the Maine Sea Coast Mission as its national philanthropy to honor the five Maine girls from Colby College who founded Sigma Kappa Sorority. Sigma Kappa is linked with the Mission in so many ways that this choice was inevitable and the bond has strengthened year to year.

The Maine Sea Coast Mission continues to receive strong support from Sigma Kappa through financial donations and Christmas gifts and Mission officials said the organization is deeply grateful for Sigma Kappa's hundred years of support.