

'HOUSEMOTHER'



Remember when fraternities used to have charming ladies who were escorted in and out of the dining room at dinner, taken to church on Sundays, and called "mom" by their boys? Well, times are changing within the Greek system. It is not that housemothers are no longer revered. But at six fraternities at Mizzou, there is no "mom" to lend her gracious presence. In her place? Housefathers. All in their twenties, most of the young men are also full-time graduate students. They conscientiously perform duties formerly delegated to "mom," such as planning menus and ordering foods. In addition to these necessary tasks, they also act as official hosts at house functions and offer guidance to their charges. Maintaining at least a semblance of comfortable living can be quite a task indeed, especially when 60 or more college-age men are involved. More than one parent, expecting to find a silver-haired matron presiding at his son's dinner table, has been initially aghast upon meeting a bearded housefather. "I disapprove entirely of housemothers in male houses," said Scott Strohl, 22-year-old housefather at Kappa Sigma. "Parents don't seem to have negative reactions to me," he added. "After all, a 22-year-old guy can handle their sons a lot better than a 60-year-old woman." Sam Harden, 27, who is in charge of the 40-man Pi Kappa Alpha house agrees. "Housefathers have a more positive influence than housemothers." As a former member of the fraternity, Harnden says that he can understand the house officer's duties better than a woman who is unable to attend chapter meetings. Dan McGowan, also 27, who is Sigma Alpha Epsilon's housefather, said he favors housemothers. "A good housemother is irreplaceable. Most housefathers are so young they tend to become another brother and then lose potential authority." "One of the calling cards of a fraternity man over the years has been social grace, but without a housemother, especially at the dinner table, social graces seem to have disappeared," McGowan said. The main duty of a housemother in the past has been planning menus. At the PiKA house, Harnden, formerly a mess officer in the army, plans the menus himself. "It's not all that hard to plan a balanced meal," he said. The Kappa Sigs and SAEs, however, have food committees of house members who plan the menus once a week. "At least we have a wild variety of food now," one SAE said. The committees have introduced tasty concoctions never before served in fraternities. For instance, the SAEs now feast on such delicacies as Chinese pepper steaks, pizza burgers, and spiced-up tacos, all of which might cause a conventional housemother to swallow her partial plate. Housefathers' apartment quarters still retain tasteful furnishings and rich carpeting from bygone days. But instead of pictures of grandchildren, there are likely to be blown-up posters of Racquel Welch in a revealing bikini, stereo speakers, and even Confederate flags perched upon the walls. And in the place of a lounge chair left by a former housemother, one housefather has a gigantic beanbag chair occupying a favorite corner of his abode. "It's more relaxing," he explained, flicking a cigarette ash into a purple hanging ashtray suspended from the ceiling. All three housefathers say they receive cooperation from house members. "There was only one time last semester I had to say anything," Harnden said. Don Waters, Interfraternity Council advisor who screens all housefather applicants, said that his office has no reservations about hiring young men. "We're more interested in the qualities of the individual than in age or sex," he said. "However, a housemother does add a certain *esprit de corps* that a housefather cannot," he added, almost wistfully. So, it seems that the concept of housefather is becoming as firmly established at University fraternities as weekend keg parties and sorority sweethearts.—TOM DRYDEN.