

Iota Phi Lambda Sorority, Inc.

Business and Professional Women Meeting The Challenge of Change Via AOIP's Community-Building Thrust

"Women united in common tasks for the welfare of others build a bridge over which all mankind can pass."

THESE words were uttered by Mary McLeod Bethune, an honorary member of Iota Phi Lambda Sorority, Inc. They vividly describe the valiant work that these strong Black women have been doing for soon-to-be 56 years.

With the addition of the national Assault On Illiteracy Program (AOIP) to their impressive list of affiliations, this national business and professional sorority has an unparalleled opportunity to realize its aim of making "worthwhile contributions to the changing socio-economic patterns of our time" and of projecting the philosophy of the pursuit of excellence in all worthy endeavors among youth and adults."

The Beginnings

LOLA MERCEDES PARKER, a highly successful Chicago businesswoman, believed that the best approach to the understanding and solution of social problems lay in social consideration and social action. The Great Depression, which affected the lives of all Americans, was particularly devastating to Black women who had just become participants in the world of business. These women were doubly penalized by both race and sex. Mrs. Parker saw the need to enhance the influence of Black businesswomen and to make it as effective as that wielded by Black women in the professions and the arts.

The revered founder of Iota Phi Lambda understood that the greatest group-forming factor in a community is the recognition by intelligent human beings that they are not alone—that there



Dr. Evelyn Sears Peevy, National President

are others like themselves in tradition, beliefs, aspirations and ideals. She further believed that an organization of businesswomen that would stimulate, inspire, foster and give mutual assistance could solve many of these problems.

On June 1, 1929, Mrs. Parker met in Chicago with six like-minded friends—five of whom, like herself, were graduates of the Chicago Business College. These seven women became pioneers in a movement which was destined to help raise the morale and

heighten the prestige of countless Black businessmen and women in America and beyond.

Seeking the wise counsel of Black community leaders like Dr. Lacey Kirk Williams, long-time president of the National Baptist Convention; Attorney Arthur W. Mitchell, who would become the first Black Democrat elected to the United States House of Representatives; and Irene McCoy Gaines, who later became an honorary member of Alpha Chapter—Lola Parker and her six well-

chosen friends formed the nucleus of Iota Phi Lambda Sorority. These charter members were Ethel T. Edwards, Mildred G. Hardin, Ophelia Harrison, Birdette Trigg and Marjorie Tyndall—all graduates of the Chicago Business College. The sixth member was Harriet M. Robinson of Kansas City, Missouri, a graduate of Kansas State College, who was employed in Chicago.

The Greek letters Iota Phi Lambda, which stand for "Ideals of Friendship and Love" were chosen because they symbolize the Christian social principles of friendship, love and loyalty upon which the sorority was founded.

At this initial meeting, the following officers were elected for Alpha Chapter: Lola M. Parker, president; Ethel T. Edwards, vice president; Mildred G. Hardin, recording secretary; Harriet M. Robinson, financial secretary; and Ophelia Harrison, treasurer.

On September 30, 1930, Iota Phi Lambda Sorority was chartered by the state of Illinois. The first Constitution and By-Laws were drafted with the invaluable legal advice and helpful suggestions of Attorney Mitchell. Soon chapters were formed in other cities and Iota became a national organization.

The First National Convention of Iota Phi Lambda Sorority convened in Chicago on August 18, 1933. Five chapters were represented: Alpha Chapter, Chicago, Illinois; Beta Chapter, Buffalo, New York; Gamma Chapter, Washington, D.C.; Delta Chapter, Atlanta, Georgia; and Epsilon Chapter, Cleveland Ohio.

The first roster of national officers was elected at this 1933 convention. They were Lola M. Parker (Alpha), president; Amelia Anderson (Beta), first vice president; Stella Pickens (Epsilon), second

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"Pulling Ourselves Up By Our Own Bootstraps"...A Series