

# Twenty Years and Counting: National CASA and Kappa Alpha Theta Celebrate and Look Ahead

When the Kappa Alpha Theta Fraternity chose National CASA as its official philanthropy in 1989, it planted a seed that quickly took root in the hearts and minds of its members. Today, Kappa Alpha Theta and its members are deeply involved in the work of National CASA and its network—making lasting contributions as leaders, financial supporters and passionate ambassadors for the CASA mission.

Founded in 1870 as the first Greek-letter fraternity for women, Kappa Alpha Theta has a clear social aim: *to exercise the widest influence for good.* “Every member promises to uphold this founding value,” says Fraternity President Katie Busby. “During the past 20 years, members of Kappa Alpha Theta have had a special opportunity to fulfill this promise through CASA.”



Since 1989, the Kappa Alpha Theta Foundation has contributed \$1 million to National CASA in support of expanding volunteer advocacy for children. But that’s only the tip of the iceberg. The fraternity’s 125 college-based chapters and 190 alumnae chapters are vital supporters of the CASA/GAL network; in 2008 alone, Kappa Alpha Theta chapters gave more than \$330,000 to CASA programs in their communities.

As the collaboration moves forward, National CASA and Kappa Alpha Theta envision the remarkable women of Theta increasing their involvement by donating their time, talent and experience to local CASA programs.



Left to right: University of Missouri Thetas Lacey McFadden, Rose Sammur and Valerie Craig sport their CASA polos.

## Weaving CASA and Theta: The Missouri Model

Megan Phillips and Allie Chang Ray were initiated into Kappa Alpha Theta at the University of Missouri (known as “Mizzou”) in 1989, the very year Theta adopted National CASA as its official philanthropy. Concocting campus fundraisers to support CASA programs gave Phillips, Ray and their Theta sisters the chance to practice *leadership in service*, an ideal upon which Theta culture was built. By the time they graduated and went their separate ways, loyalty to CASA programs was a thread connecting Theta members.

Fast-forward 20 years. Today, Phillips is president of the board of directors of the Missouri CASA Association, one of two Theta alumnae on the state board. Ray is executive director of CASA of St. Louis County. That CASA thread, says Ray, is now “woven into the culture” of Theta in Missouri.

Thetas serve as CASA volunteers and board members. Alumnae chapters throughout Missouri support local CASA programs in diverse and meaningful ways. And at the state’s two collegiate chapters—at Mizzou and Westminster College—Theta collegians incubate passion and learn leadership skills by helping CASA programs.



Allie Chang Ray

Theta support “is vital to our efforts to provide CASA volunteers” to the state’s abused and neglected children, says Missouri CASA Association Executive Director Beth Dessem.

“I know the alumnae here are genuinely interested in the child welfare system because they have reached out to me to learn more,” says Ray. “For them, CASA is more than a philanthropy Theta has adopted—it’s addressing a serious issue in our community.”



Megan Phillips

Phillips is proud of the Missouri model and sees vast potential for Theta alumnae to become leaders in the CASA movement nationwide. “The sort of talent and commitment and enthusiasm that exists within the Theta community here exists across the country,” she says. “It’s out there, ready to be harnessed.”

## “Show Me State” Thetas Show Creativity in Their Support

Thetas in Missouri support CASA programs in a number of imaginative ways.

University of Missouri Thetas organize an annual Fantasy Football competition on campus. Last year the event raised \$12,000 for CASA programs. The Mizzou Thetas also host an annual pancake breakfast benefit.

Theta collegians at Westminster College recently partnered with St. Louis–based Build-a-Bear Workshop to make teddy bears for CASA children, which they sent along with cash donations collected from alumnae.

St. Louis alumnae throw an annual outdoor movie event, *Movies in the Moonlight*, raising nearly \$10,000 a year for the three local CASA programs. They also staff information and fundraising tables at local malls.

Kansas City alumnae compiled and published *Dining in Kansas City*, a cookbook to benefit their local CASA program. The group also organized a private shopping event at Crate & Barrel, donating ticket sales and 10% of proceeds to the local program.

## On Campus: TCU Run is More than Fun

This year, more than 1,500 runners registered for the *Fall Breakaway* 5K run, a highlight of the Texas Christian University (TCU) *Family Weekend*. Now in its 13<sup>th</sup> year, the run is organized by TCU’s Kappa Alpha Theta chapter and raises funds for CASA of Tarrant County.

Stacey Mortenson, a TCU Theta alumna, is “floored” by the event’s size and overjoyed by its success. When Mortenson chaired the first *Fall Breakaway*, she and her Theta sisters could only hope that they were starting something big. “We wanted to establish a signature philanthropy event that would be a permanent fixture on our campus,” she says. The first run raised \$4,000—a resounding success.

In the years that followed, TCU Thetas tweaked and changed the run. As its popularity skyrocketed, so did the windfall for CASA of Tarrant County. Between 2005 and 2008, the run raised more than \$100,000 for the program.

“These young women have been steadfast in their commitment to the CASA mission over the years,” says Connie Brown, executive director of CASA of Tarrant County. “And they contribute so much more than dollars,” she adds. “They’ll show up to assist us in any way we need.”

Mortenson, who is now the executive director of the Arizona chapter of the American Lung Association, says planning the first *Fall Breakaway* provided a valuable introduction to the inner workings of a nonprofit organization. It also made her a lifelong CASA supporter, a feeling she says is shared by all the Thetas she knows. Although her 13-year-old CASA 5K T-shirt

has worn thin, Mortenson says, her enthusiasm for CASA has only grown.

## Atlanta Alumnae: “CASA Is Part of Who We Are”

The year Theta adopted National CASA as its official philanthropy was the same year Georgia launched two pilot CASA programs. The Atlanta Theta alumnae chapter was right there in 1989, supporting the fledgling state CASA organization. Today there are 48 CASA programs in Georgia; the women of Theta have been instrumental in supporting this tremendous growth and providing leadership at both the state and local levels.

According to Nancy Wood, an Atlanta Theta alumna who has served on the Georgia CASA board of directors and is now a life member, “Members of the Atlanta Theta alumnae chapter have sold wrapping paper; worked at golf tournaments; organized wine tastings; commissioned and raffled off elaborate playhouses; and organized fashion shows—all to raise money for Georgia CASA.”

Thetas have also put their considerable professional skills and experience to work for Georgia CASA, which frequently calls on the Theta brain trust to serve on committees and help with projects. A Theta alumna has been on the state board since 1993.

“One of the things you learn when you pledge Theta is that you are a Theta for a lifetime,” says Wood. “Being involved in CASA is very much a part of who we are.”

*The Theta alumnae are just wonderful, and they have been instrumental in our success.*

Duaine Hathaway  
Executive Director, Georgia CASA



These Theta alumnae attended the 2009 Georgia CASA luncheon and fashion show. Thetas help with every aspect of planning and staging the luncheon, which is the primary event held annually to raise funds for Georgia CASA. The first two young women from left in the back row were among the models. Nancy Wood is third from left in the back row.



Visit [CASAforchildren.org](http://CASAforchildren.org) and search for “Theta” for more information, including a story about alumnae supporting CASA of Santa Barbara County. 🖱️