

Substitute mom makes DU house a home

By LAURA MCDANIEL

Not many people could get away with pulling the hair of a college man for passing the potatoes to the left, but Ceil Uhas isn't just anyone at the Delta Upsilon Fraternity.

Ceil's been house mother at DU for almost 24 years. She's the only person who can call the 50-some men of the house, "boys," and she is probably the only enforcer of strict table manners and rules of etiquette on campus.

men who don't learn all the rules.

At dinner, the men don't eat until Ceil does, and they're always conscious she's watching their manners. "They tell me I have more than two eyes," she said.

Ceil enforces the rules in a way that's usually remembered—she pulls their hair. "It used to be fun to pull their hair when they had long hair. I could really get a hold." Swearing is also kept to a minimum with that method.

"The boys have given me wrinkles and gray hair, and I'm proud of it."

—Ceil Uhas, Delta Upsilon Fraternity house mother

The men more than tolerate her rules. During the school year, she is their mom.

"She makes this house a home," DU Matt McGauley said. "We always get her something for her birthday and Christmas. We treat her like a real mom."

On Mother's Day, Ceil is often remembered by past members, too. The cards and gifts make her so happy that, "I sit and cry," Ceil said.

Working as a house mother is "the last thing" she thought she would be doing, but now she loves it she says.

And the 74-year-old is well established in the house. "I think I'm their good luck charm. If they let me go, they're going to go downhill," Ceil joked.

Ceil supervises the dining room Monday through Wednesday at evening meals, teaches the men etiquette and helps with decorating decisions when the house gets new furniture. She also keeps the living room looking lively with a collection of plants and flower bouquets. "I try to make it look homey," Ceil said.

Teaching table manners and etiquette to a bunch of men isn't easy. "I do a good job with some," she said, but she doesn't comment about the

"There are some words I absolutely despise," Ceil said.

The men turn to "mom" for help and advice on a wide range of topics—everything from matching a shirt and tie or sewing on a button to dealing with family problems. "Sometimes I come in a little bit handy," Ceil said.

Ceil wasn't always privileged to call the men "boys." When she was instructed to refer to them as men, it lasted for about four days. They wanted her to call them boys again, because "it sounded like the army," she said.

She's learned over the years not to be too sensitive if a member dislikes her judgment. "I just tell them 'that's tough.'" But Ceil said she always tries "to be a good mother to all these boys."

Life was quite different when Ceil began her career 24 years ago. Any parties held at the house had to be registered with the dean of women and the dean of men. Two chaperones were required at each party, which ended promptly at 1 a.m.

Ceil, however, was often the only chaperone. "I was counted as two. That made me cross. I didn't think I was quite that size," Ceil said.

Ceil chaperoned all the parties until the requirement for



Photo/bill alkofer

Delta Upsilon house mother Ceil Uhas surrounded by her boys from the fraternity.

chaperones was dropped 15 years ago. The job didn't bother Ceil, but she said "when rock music started, that's when I got the earplugs."

Refreshments at the parties have also changed over the years. No liquor was allowed—popcorn, hot

chocolate and "cute little ice cream cones" were the popular snacks, she said.

Ceil has two children, neither living in Grand Forks, but two of her grandchildren attend the University of North Dakota.

Ceil says that God knew what he was doing when he

gave her the job. And she's been happy all 24 years of it. "The boys have given me wrinkles and gray hair, and I'm proud of it," she said.

Next year, after her 25th anniversary of house mothering, Ceil said she will consider retiring.



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