Talent Hunt History

The Talent Hunt program of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. is one of several National programs designed to identify and support the youth of our nation and the world.

The original idea was created by Brother J. Austin Atkins of Winston Salem, North Carolina, and Brother Dewey Duckett of Rock Hill, South Carolina. While the idea was conceived in 1945, the first District Talent Hunt program was held in the Sixth District in Charlotte, North Carolina, on April 19, 1946. The need for such a program was born out of the unequal opportunity afforded to some American youth to develop and give full expression to their talents.

The original statement of the Talent Hunt idea included this expression: “Creative and outstanding capacities in any honorable activity should be eligible for consideration.” During public presentations, all original displays were limited to the field of music. Since that time, the Talent Hunt program has been expanded to include other forms of the expressive arts.

In 1953, Brother J. Austin Atkins, assisted by Brother Dewey Duckett, chaired the first National Talent Hunt Committee and presented the first National Talent Hunt program as an integral part of the Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Grand Conclave held in Cincinnati, Ohio. The next chairman of the Talent Hunt Committee was Brother George Meares of Brooklyn, New York, Second District. The consultant during his tenure was Brother J. Austin Atkins. Bro. Meares period of service began in 1958; he directed the activities for the 1961 Grand Conclave. The next chairman to be appointed was Brother Zoel Hargrave of Charlotte, North Carolina located in the Sixth District. His appointment was in 1968, and he chaired the committee that presented the Talent Hunt at the Grand Conclave in Charlotte, North Carolina.

It is significant to note that prior to 1969, all participants in the Talent Hunt program were required to be high school seniors. The year 1969 appears on documents indicating a revision in the guidelines for the operation of Talent Hunt programs on every level. The revision expanded the level of participation to grades 9 through 12.

Brother Alphonso Patterson of Hartsdale, New York, Second District was next in the service of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity as national chairman. His tenure lasted until 1973 when Brother Charles Johnson of Detroit, Michigan, Tenth District, was appointed as national chairman. Brother Willis H. Pettis of Richmond, Virginia, Third District, assisted him. Brother Johnson was leader when the Grand Conclave of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity was held in Atlanta, Georgia in 1976.

Brother Willis H. Pettis of Richmond, Virginia, Third District succeeded Brother
Johnson in 1977 and served through 1979 as national chairman of the Talent Hunt Committee. It is significant to note that prior to 1979, the Talent Hunt program had been a demonstration. It was in Denver, Colorado that the National Talent Hunt became a competitive event with money being awarded to the first, second, and third-place winners. The first winner in national competition was Adrain Walker, a violinist from Jackson, Mississippi representing the Seventh District.

The era of the eighties starts with Grand Basileus Burnel E. Coulon appointing Brother Edgar Burnett of Saint Louis, Missouri, Eighth District, as Chairman of the National Talent Hunt Committee. He was succeeded by the appointment of Grand Basileus, Benjamin Livingston, who appointed the former Seventh District Chairman Brother Jimmie James of Jackson, Mississippi.

In 1985, Grand Basileus Moses C. Norman, Sr. appointed Brother Alfred D. Wyatt, Sr. of Atlanta, Georgia, Seventh District, to serve as National Chairman of the Talent Hunt Committee. It was during this time that the need to revise the existing guidelines was examined. To meet the needs of the growing numbers of talented youth that we were discovering as a result of this revision, Brother Wyatt was given permission to write a proposal that would address and bring into focus the future goals of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity.

The following committee was appointed to address those needs: Brother Emerson E. Brown, Savannah, Georgia, 7th District; Brother Berryman Foster, Lexington, Kentucky, 5th District; Brother Johnny Walker, Spartanburg, South Carolina, 6th District; Brother James M. Williams, Boston, Massachusetts, 1st District; Brother Jimmie James, Jr., Jackson, Mississippi, 7th District (Special Consultant); Brother Alfred D. Wyatt, Sr., Atlanta, Georgia, 7th District (Chairman); Brother John Epps, NES, and Brother C. Tyrone Gilmore, First Vice Grand Basileus Advisors. This committee addressed the validity of present operational procedures in light of the fact that much of the existing talent was outstanding and the awards that were being given on a national level were being equaled in local chapters and districts around the country. The discovery was made that many chapters and districts were operating on guidelines that in some cases were not compatible with existing guidelines of the fraternity. Permission was given to the committee to proceed with the writing and compilation of a handbook that would provide guidelines that all chapters and districts would be mandated to follow. The first proposal and draft was presented to the Supreme Council in February of 1987, in Detroit, Michigan. The proposed handbook was presented during the Leadership Development Seminar held in New Orleans, Louisiana, in July of 1987.

Brother Johnny Walker of Spartanburg, South Carolina, Sixth District was appointed as Chairman of the National Talent Hunt Committee in 1988 and Brother Alfred D. Wyatt, Sr., Atlanta, Georgia, Seventh District, was appointed as consultant. Brother Walker served as the leader of the first non-competitive Omega Talent Hunt
since 1979. While the guidelines were revised in 1987, the process of distribution took place in 1990 when the Grand Conclave once again presented the participants to the public as a demonstration.

In January of 2005, Brother Larry C. Pough of Rochester, NY, Second District, was appointed as chairman of the International Talent Hunt Committee (ITHC). Bro. Ernest R. Goode, Sr. of Mesquite, TX, Ninth District was appointed as the co-chairman.

The first task addressed by the ITHC was the revision of the 1987 Guidelines. This was accomplished with input from each District Talent Hunt Chairman via monthly conference calls. Following the review and compilation of all districts guidelines, the revised guidelines were completed in January of 2006.

In March of 2006, the first ITHC Retreat was held at the International Headquarters. Thirteen of the fourteen committee members were in attendance. The committee, in addition to reviewing the proposed guidelines in detail, had an opportunity to discuss best practices being utilized throughout the fraternity. In preparation for the 2006 Talent Hunt Demonstration, two members of the ITHC conducted an on-site visit to Little Rock, AR, the location of the 2006 Conclave.

In 2006, during the 74th Grand Conclave in Little Rock, AR the Talent Hunt Demonstration was held on July 24, at the Robinson Center Music Hall. All twelve districts were represented at the Talent Hunt Demonstration. Following the Talent Hunt Demonstration, which was videotaped for the first time, the participants were invited to a reception held at the President William Jefferson Clinton Library.

Leading up to the 75th Grand Conclave the Talent Hunt Guidelines were made available on the fraternity’s website. This allowed each chapter access to the most current guidelines. The availability of the guidelines via the fraternity’s website moved us closer to utilizing the same guidelines throughout the fraternity.

The 2008 Talent Hunt Demonstration was held in Birmingham, AL at the Birmingham Jefferson Convention Center Concert Hall on July 13th. Each of the 12 districts was represented. Prior to the performance, the International Chairman was interviewed on the local news. Following the performances, Bro. Jimmie James from Jackson State University offered a musical scholarship to each of the participants. The international headquarters arranged for the professionally taping of the Talent Hunt Demonstration. Copies of the DVD were made available on the international website.

In 2009, working with the International Informational Technology Committee, the ITHC established an OPPF email account for each of the District Talent Hunt Chairmen. This not only improved the communication process within the committee but it also provided an archive for the storage of talent hunt information within each district.
During the transfer of Talent Hunt leadership roles, information from prior years is now available to the new committee leaders and members.

The Talent Hunt Program of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity has touched thousands of students, many of whom have gone on to make outstanding contributions to their communities and our world. Many have earned scholarships, awards, and recognition through exposure from this program. It is our quest as Omega men of substance to continue to grow in our unyielding commitment to support our youth.