



# beta button

Beta Chapter of Theta Chi Fraternity at MIT • Fall 2024

## Productive Work Week Prepares the House for a Successful Semester and Rush

### Ali Backour '26 – House Manager

After an amazing summer, the brothers returned to the house two weeks before rush. Alex, our work week chair, took the lead in organizing plans and setting clear goals. About six brothers spent three days working on the roof. We successfully completed the roof deck renovation which officially wrapped up that project. Meanwhile, others dedicated their time to cleaning the house, organizing the closets, and installing a new audio system in the library. Some brothers were busy during work week serving as orientation leaders and FPOP mentors, which ultimately contributed to a smooth and successful rush week. Overall, work week was highly productive, making it easier to welcome 14 pledges and kick off the semester with a clean, organized house.

Once the semester started, the brothers continued their efforts to keep the house in great shape. The house remains mostly clean, and we're preparing for a fire inspection in the next few weeks. There was a minor issue with the fridge, but it's been fixed. Recently, a member of Theta Tau accidentally broke one of our windows. We're arranging to have it repaired, and hopefully, TT will cover the costs. Other than that, the house is in good condition.



## ALUMNI TRIUMPH ONCE AGAIN: A PLAYFUL SHOWDOWN AT THE ANNUAL ALUMNI WEEKEND SOFTBALL GAME



Alumni Weekend Softball - 2024

Front row (L to R): Ali Backour '26, Jose Martinez '25, Ryan Andrews '10, David Baumgartner '08, Juan Reyes '25, and Alex Edwards '25. Back row (L to R): Jaden Thomas-Markarian '25, Brian Robinson '25, Conrad Oakes '23, Raj Mehta '24, Andrew Komo '22, Axel Martinez '15, Andre Hamelberg '24, Aidan Vaughan '25, and Dankwa Buckle '24.

On the morning of Saturday, April 27, a brave group of undergraduate members foolishly agreed to play against the alumni in the traditional Alumni Weekend Softball Game. It started with the alumni graciously giving the undergraduates a firm advantage in terms of manpower: five alumni versus 10 undergraduates. Per agreement, each team provided their own catcher, and for some innings, a pitcher as well, to free up men to fill crucial fielding positions. Even with the two-to-one man advantage the undergraduates had, the alumni team managed to awaken their latent athleticism and ran up a commanding lead going into the third inning. It was at this point that self-appointed alumni team manager Ryan Andrews '10 offered the undergraduate team a trade: the alumni would send over future Beta Chapter softball team hall of fame member David Baumgartner '08 in exchange for undergraduate Juan Reyes '25 plus a six-pack of beer. The undergraduate team readily agreed (author's note: we are still waiting on that six-pack). In the fifth inning, David and senior sluggers Raj Mehta '24 and Andre Hamelberg '24 orchestrated a scoring rally that put a

dent in the alumni team lead. However, in the end, the alumni team carried the day with a final score of 30-12, thereby winning their fifth-straight Alumni Weekend trophy.

After the game, everyone regrouped at Sunset Cantina and Grill for lunch and a good time was had by all. The next softball game is yet to be scheduled, but if tradition holds, it will be on April 26, 2025. We welcome any and all alumni to join us as we seek an unprecedented sixth consecutive win.



L to R: Jackson Zhang, Derrick Liang, Jose Martinez, Lucas Marden, Nick Schultz, Leon Fan, Spencer Yandrofski, Andre Hamelberg, Raj Mehta, Ahmed Diongue, and Dankwa Buckle.

# Meet the New GRA: Joseph Bonavia Joins the Theta Chi Community

Hello everyone! My name is Joseph Bonavia and I am the new GRA in the house. I am a third-year graduate student in Course 2, studying theoretical solid mechanics. I work on problems involving the microstructures and growth of soft and biological materials. I grew up in Millbrae, California, on the San Francisco Peninsula, and have been living in Boston since 2018. I graduated from MIT undergrad in 2022 and am planning to graduate with a PhD in 2027.

In my free time, I enjoy going bug hunting and watching movies at the AMC in the Commons. I have been living in the house for about two months now, and it's been great meeting the brothers. I look forward to being part of the community and getting to know the brothers better.



## The “Summery” ΘX Summer Housing Rundown

### Aidan Bousquet '25 – Summer “Superman”

In another Boston summer when the temperatures rose to the 90s, Theta Chi kept it relatively cool. The house hosted the alumni, recent graduates, and their families after commencement. It was encouraging and promising to see how far all of the alumni have come, and how strong their bonds have remained over the years. During the summer, there were 26 boarders, including six brothers and one alumnus. These brothers were engaged in a wide range of activities, from aeronautics, biology, and computer science research to quantitative analyst internships to nuclear power plant maintenance.

Several tasks and scenarios were handled during the summer. Our fire escapes were recertified for the next five years and we started the process of recertifying our roof for the next half decade. One boarder chose not to move in, and a few boarders moved out too slowly.

We rightfully had to tow the car of one summer boarder who is a member of another fraternity, as he was in one of our parking spots prior to the get-together with the alumni, graduands, and their families. No expense on our end was spared on the towing or the boarder getting his car back. Finally, there were general issues with cleanliness in the house, but boarders and brothers were responsive when reminded to do their summer waits.

Whilst there were not many parties thrown, some of the brothers went out, partied, and hung out together. July Fourth celebrations were vibrant, with alumni returning to the house and brothers inviting their friends over to enjoy the camaraderie and the fireworks. All in all, the graduands became graduates, the brothers had some fun, and the house survived another summer at Theta Chi.

## Brotherhood in Full Swing: Theta Chi’s Action-Packed Semester of Events and Traditions

### Ashwin Prabhakar '27 - Social Chair

No matter the week, the Theta Chi calendar is filled with things to do. Whether it's a mixer, party, kickback, retreat, or just a friendly brotherhood outing, we never fall short with our events. On the schedule for this semester are seven mixers, four parties, a brotherhood retreat, our winter formal, and likely some other shenanigans that will pop up as time progresses. This past week saw the commencement of ΘXlympics, a series of several events that push brothers to their physical (and sometimes mental) edge. Multiple floors were run up and down, numerous brothers were challenged, zero brothers were injured, and a great time was shared by all.

Later this fall, our calendar features the signature brotherhood event: “Around the World.” We are excited to see the countries that will be represented this year and know it will be a wonderful celebration of all the world has to offer. We like to end the semester with our winter formal. It provides the brothers with a different type of atmosphere to

spend time with one another and their dates. It is always a great event to close out the semester.

Looking ahead to the spring, not many events are finalized yet, but we look forward to many mainstays. Alumni Weekend is always a favorite among the brothers as it allows the fraternity to connect across all ranges, further contributing to our deeply intertwined brotherhood. The transition and development of the house and the culture through the years can be seen and appreciated that weekend. Another big spring event is Marathon Monday, as we, along with the rest of the city, gather to support all who are running in the Boston Marathon while those who aren't as athletically gifted typically spend that day completing a different type of marathon. All this to say, regardless of where we are in the semester, the brothers of Theta Chi are always bustling in events and constantly looking forward to the next one.



# John Hsia '53 of Theta Chi

## First in the 1950s and Again in the 2020s!

Last January, brother John Hsia '53 (yes, 1953!) sent us a short email after receiving his winter Beta Button. He said how impressed and moved he was by the wonderful diversity of the Theta Chi undergrad brothers. Then he went on to say, "Many (or most) of you are not aware of the DEI history of Theta Chi, and I see from your past presidents and pledge class how far Theta Chi has progressed since my day."

His personal story began with: "I was a transfer student to MIT, and pledged Theta Chi in 1950. It was not until years later that I was told the story of my acceptance into the brotherhood, which is as follows: Beta Chapter was told by Theta Chi Headquarters that two other pledges and I could not be accepted as members. This was presumably because I was of Chinese extraction, another was Indian, and the third was from Yugoslavia but named Perrera. Beta Chapter insisted, threatening to resign from the National Fraternity. The matter was finally settled by making us honorary members. We were not told of this at the time. (Did you know that the chapter was named the "Beta Bastards" even prior to this event? Probably because they refused to accept the status quo if they thought it not right!) Almost 50 years later, I was invited to a reunion at the house of Bill Freeman '52 to celebrate my being made a "full member" of the fraternity. I'm not sure how it happened; possibly at Bill's instigation..."

This situation seems unimaginable today, and Theta Chi's National would never be a party to such exclusion now. But it was not uncommon in the

1940s and 1950s when discrimination was rampant and so many national fraternities were dominated by a large number of chapters in the South. There are other instances that older brothers can note in the early 1960s when Beta Chapter, sometimes without knowledge of the National Fraternity, went ahead and inducted brothers who would otherwise have been barred by restrictive codes.

Several of us felt John's very special email really required a personal response, so a local dinner was arranged with John, his wife Lily, Jim '63 and Pat Poitras, and Bob '67 and Deena Ferrara. It was an absolute treat hearing from John firsthand. He has certainly had a remarkable life, not the typical one for a fellow who grew up in Shanghai, China, in the chaotic times of World War II.

With the Communist threat looming in 1946, his father decided to send John to the U.S. John finished high school and two years of college at Hamline University before transferring to MIT in 1950. The best part of his story is that he really enjoyed his years at Theta Chi and all of this background never intruded on his undergraduate years. His experiences were much the same as his contemporaries at 528 Beacon: everyone sleeping in the ward, "Hell Week," the course "Bibles" in the library, and coat and tie dinners every evening. Intramurals were huge then as now and he recalls that SAE was a big rival in football. Old timers will be thrilled to know that Frank Ford was the house butler back then and Angie was the cook. Both of these people are

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## 50th Reunion Reflections: Alumni Return to Theta Chi for Memories and Milestones

### David Campanella '76

Donning their cardinal jackets and class hats, they came from Texas, North Carolina, and just a few miles down the road to celebrate their 50th Reunion. In addition to class-planned activities like MIT at the Pops, there was time for a casual dinner with a couple of local brothers from their era and a quick drink at The Muddy Charles. On Friday, Wayne Stargardt '74, Jim Kirksey '74, Frank Sauk '74, and George "Buzz" Kenney '74 stopped by to check out the house and meet the graduates. There were a few noise complaints from the neighbors but "not from 528." Back in the '70s, Frank's Cavern would have been blasting J. Geils.

If you are coming back for Reunion, whether it's your 10th, 50th, or you are near Boston, we hope you will drop by the Open House on May 30, 2025. Bob Sherrill '75 is planning to see the sites of our great country by taking his time driving in from California.



Theta Chi Open House (L to R): Bob Lonadier '84, Ken Schumacher '12, and Jim Kirksey '74.



Theta Chi Reunion Dinner (L to R): Mark Keough '76, Dr. George "Buzz" Kenney '74, Robert Holzwasser '76, Jim Kirksey '74, Frank Sauk '74, Beth Sauk, and Wayne Stargardt '74.



Chilling at The Muddy Charles (L to R): Jim Kirksey '74, Wayne Stargardt '74, Dr. George "Buzz" Kenney '74, and Frank Sauk '74.



# MEET OUR 2024 BETA CHAPTER PLEDGES

## Spring 2024 Rush



**Joel Manu '27**

Accra, Ghana

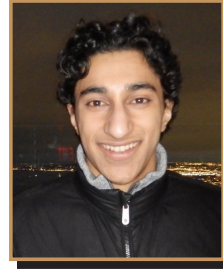
Joel grew up in Ghana. His tall frame can be seen all over campus, usually doing some form of math, playing Tetris, or just terrorizing the unfortunate students who ended up around him. Major: computer science, mathematics. Interests: music! and cubing.



**Calvin Baker '26**

Coral Springs, Florida

Calvin might say he's just taking it easy when he plays table tennis, but anyone who's faced him knows he hits with serious power. His laid-back humor hides a relentless drive, whether he's smashing a serve or bringing that intensity to everything else he does. Major: artificial intelligence and decision making. Interests: Tennis and photography.



**Kartik Pingle '26**

Cambridge, Massachusetts

From just a short walk down Memorial Drive, Kartik has lived in Cambridge for almost his entire life. Now living in New Vassar, if he hasn't yet gotten hit by a car while biking to recitation (that intersection is scary!), you can probably find him yapping during lecture, buying overpriced lattes between classes (Blue Bottle > Vester), or giving his dog a long walk on the weekends. Major: physics, computer science. Interests: Boston Celtics and Star Wars.



**Makar Kuznietsov '25**

Lviv, Ukraine

All the way from Lviv, Ukraine, Makar might be an MIT student, but we all know he'd be happier living on the BU campus. He resides on the fourth floor of our house, so he's basically there as it is! Major: electrical engineering. Interests: Brazilian jiu-jitsu and soccer.

## Theta Chi Shines in Fall Recruitment

### Welcoming 14 New Pledges After a Successful Rush Season

#### Ashwin Prabhakar '27 – Recruitment Chair

Recruitment at Theta Chi has been on the upswing again, with our fall rush numbers being one of the highest in recent times. Our spring recruitment saw us add four new members into the brotherhood, all of whom have blended perfectly within the fraternity. Although the spring is not nearly as intense as fall rush, it still plays a critical role in the growth and development of the fraternity. Laidback events such as “Shah’s and Shakes” coupled with high-energy competitions like our signature “Iron Chef” made for a memorable and successful spring rush.

With the fall comes the influx of freshmen who are just starting to feel out the MIT campus, and this is where Theta Chi truly shined at standing out among the other fraternities. Our stellar Recruitment Chairmen Ashwin Prabhakar '27, Garrett Heller '26, and Darius Ngueni '25 put together a packed schedule featuring 13 thrilling events including paintball,

a beach day, slip 'n slide kickball, and a North End bid dinner. Long days turned into even longer nights as daily meetings consistently ran well into the early hours of the next day. Not to throw anyone under



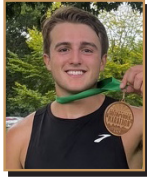
**Hampton Beach, New Hampshire**

L to R: Bilal Asmatullah '27, Alex Edwards '25, Makar Kuznietsov '25, Sam Blackburn '28, Kaden Silva '25, Brian Robinson '25, Matthew Alderson '28, Garrett Heller '26, Juan Reyes '25, and Calvin Baker '26.

the bus, but Brothers Ali Backour '26 and Kartik Pingle '26 definitely made sure to share ALL of their thoughts during these deliberation sessions. Throughout all of the ups and downs, the brothers continued to put their best foot forward, displaying our best qualities to our potential new members. At the end of the week, all of our efforts led to 14 new pledges (and somehow a new club and internal council), highlighting a very successful and thorough fall recruitment.

As the pledging process has started and they have become more acclimated to the fraternity, we maintain a good outlook on these new additions. They will turn into great members of the brotherhood, forever becoming resolute men of Theta Chi.

# Fall 2024 Rush



**Noah Roberts '27**

Hanson, Massachusetts

From Hanson, Massachusetts, just five commuter rail stops away, Noah is a big fan of getting outside and away from schoolwork. With a passion for public transportation, you will probably find him spending all of his free time waiting for a redline train that probably broke down two stops away. Major: urban planning. Interests: running and drinking coffee.



**Dat Tran '27**

Dallas, Texas

Hailing from Dallas, Texas, Dat never backs down from a challenge. Right now, he's prepping for a marathon to make his \$100 purchase worth it and may or may not be regretting it ... He also loves to binge shows, explore new food, and is lowk (lowkey) a Roblox addict. Major: computer science and Management. Interests: running and Roblox.



**Muhammad Bilal Asmatullah '27**

Islamabad, Pakistan

Coming to us from Islamabad, Pakistan, Bilal set aside his passion for physics to study AI instead but insists he would be a Course 8 given another life. Major: artificial intelligence and decision making. Interests: Soccer and meeting amazing people.



**Eric Nguyen '28**

Burien, Washington

From the mythical city of Burien, Washington, Eric is working hard to become Togi (working hard to become jacked). You can always find him at the gym or at a party! Major: electrical engineering with computing. Interests: gym and Instagram Reels.



**Samuel Blackburn '28**

Higginsville, Missouri

From Higginsville, Missouri, Sam spends his summers working on the family farm. Major: aerospace engineering. Interests: Soccer and more soccer.



**Elwin Au '28**

Brooklyn, New York

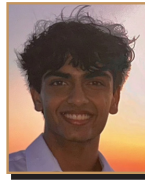
Straight outta Brooklyn, New York, Elwin definitely has not shot anyone with his many passion projects made in his basement room. But maybe, just in case, you shouldn't ask too many questions and instead invite him to play video games or something. Major: electrical engineering with computing. Interests: shooting and tinkering.



**Josue Castillo '28**

Miami, Florida

Flying in from Miami, Florida, Josue tries to stay focused but always seems to be doing something else. Staying now at Burton Conner, he's very disappointed with Cambridge's food, so he tries to emulate his mom's recipes rather than study for exams. Major: artificial intelligence and decision making and physics. Interests: video games and rap.



**Videet Mehta '28**

Houston, Texas

Hailing from Houston, Texas, Videet loves lassoing his cattle, playing basketball, and eating Mexican food. If you want to see how "everything is bigger in Texas," just ask, and he will deliver. Major: artificial intelligence and decision making and Neuroscience. Interests: sleeping and sneaker collecting.



**Akshar Cowlagi '28**

Ann Arbor, Michigan

Coming from Ann Arbor, Michigan (Go Blue), Akshar loves exploring new places, biking to food spots, and, of course, using ChatGPT for everything. He also has a knack for dropping the most out-of-pocket comments at any moment, so be prepared. Major: electrical engineering with computing and general mathematics. Interests: doomscrolling on TikTok or Insta Reels and playing random sports (Basketball, Volleyball, Cricket, etc.).



**Om Patel '28**

Irvington, Kentucky

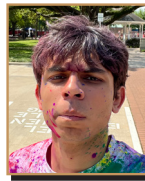
Straight outta the projects of ATL (he's from Kentucky), Om's nonchalance is nationally known and studied. When he's not benching 350, Om can be found flirting with baddies, especially on Omegle. As a Gates Scholar, Om was accepted to MIT exclusively for his style and "tuff thrifts," as his maker portfolio reads. When he's not locked in for his 6-3 lectures (he has never attended a lecture), Om can be found on Instagram (@ompatel\_oth). Major: computer science and finance. Interests: hanging out with friends and shopping.



**Arjun Melwani '28**

Dallas, Texas

Pampered in the cozy suburbs of Dallas, Arjun is well known across campus for his adept ability to yap. When he is not acing physics exams (he is on track to NR), Melwani can be found negatively progressing in the gym and with women. Major: electrical engineering with computing and physics. Interests: medical devices and aviation.



**Arnav Adhikari '28**

Houston, Texas

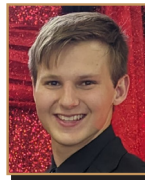
Arnav says a lot of silly things. The biggest baller straight outta the HTX hood, he loves that heat. He's currently scheming up a master plan to become an academic nuke and stop wasting time (he took three hours to write this). Major: electrical engineering with computing and finance. Interests: Basketball, Tennis, Football, Table Tennis, Pickleball, Billiards, Frisbee and exploring places and nature, particularly on a vehicle.



**Richard Lian '28**

Louisville, Kentucky

Coming from Louisville, Kentucky, Richard builds rockets by day as a part of MIT's Rocket Team and DJs frat parties at night. Outside of the fraternity, he does undergraduate research at MIT Media Lab and is a part of the Sloan Business Club and MIT Capital Partners. Major: electrical engineering with computing and physics. Interests: backpacking/camping and watching college football.



**Matthew Alderson '28**

Omaha, Nebraska

He grew up raising cattle on a ranch in Nebraska. Now at MIT, he intends on studying nuclear science and engineering. Even he doesn't know why, but hey, he will play you in a game of chess.



## Computer Titan Chester Gordon Bell '56 Passes at Age 89



Gordon Bell '56 and John Hsia '53. Soon after his graduation from MIT, Gordon Bell plunged directly into the wild ride of the nascent computer industry. He passed last May after 89 very full years. His obituary seems almost larger than life, describing him as a technology visionary whose computer designs for Digital Equipment Corporation (DEC) fueled the emergence of the minicomputer industry in the 1960s. He was called the "Frank Lloyd Wright of computers" by Datamation magazine. As vice president of research and development at DEC, he was the master architect in the effort to create smaller, affordable, interactive computers that could be

clustered into a network.

A virtuoso at computer architecture, Gordon built the first time-sharing computer and championed efforts to build the Ethernet. He was among a handful of influential engineers whose designs formed the vital bridge between the room-size models of the mainframe era and the advent of the personal computer. After stints at several other startup ventures, he became the head of the National Science Foundation's computers and information science and engineering group, where he directed the effort to link the world's supercomputers into a high-speed network that led directly to the development of the modern internet. Other notable achievements include the award of the National Medal of Technology and Innovation in 1991, and roles as a founder of The Computer Museum Boston and founding trustee of the Computer History Museum in Mountain View, California. Pretty good career for this one-time resident of 528 Beacon!

JOHN HSIA '53 OF THETA CHI - CONTINUED

revered among Theta Chis of the '50s and '60s.

John had a lifelong interest in music. He wrote the music, arranged it for orchestra, and directed the major Tech Show which was the very first production to be staged in Kresge Auditorium. The record of that production was formerly listed in the MIT Museum as one of 40 outstanding contributions by MIT to Cambridge. The very early 1950s were the time when "hi-fi" was first available to the cognoscenti; John's brothers did not seem to mind his bringing an eight-inch folded horn speaker and 10W amplifier to the small room he shared with two other brothers. At that time, there were only two music Courses given, Music 101 and Music 102, taught by professors Klaus Liepmann and Gregory Tucker. They changed John's life by introducing him to "serious" music (it was from them that he learned "Classical" was a period between the Baroque and Romantic). He continued this interest playing the piano and harpsichord, serving on the board at the New England Conservatory, and being a major contributor to Longy School of Music in Cambridge. John noted that Sid Hess '53, his Theta Chi classmate, still plays a good trumpet to this day. Sid has visited 528 in relatively recent times.

After transferring from Hamline, John tried Course 2 first, then switched his major to Course 3 (Metallurgy, as it was then called). He blames bridge games at 528 for him skipping

classes and having a mediocre academic record. He did his undergraduate thesis in the Metal Cutting Lab in Building 35, which still stands at the corner Mass and Vassar, and worked there for two years after graduating. Most of his career was spent at GE Aircraft Engines where he made effective use of his metallurgical and metal cutting knowledge in leadership positions in manufacturing technology. His love for travel resulted in a short stint at the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory where he ran their worldwide satellite tracking network. After retiring, John served for a few years as Sr. Lecturer in Course 16 at MIT.

John has never moved from the Boston/Cambridge area, living for over 50 years in a lovely house not far from Harvard Square that was renovated by his late first wife, who was a Harvard architectural graduate. Later in life, he met and married Lily, a lovely woman whom we met at the dinner. Now in his 90s, John is not as mobile as he would like, but Lily takes good care of him and helps him get around.

Thanks to John, and Lily, for spending time and sharing his thoughts and exceptional Theta Chi history with us. Speaking of memorable Theta Chi people, John was also the godfather of the son of his famous MIT fraternity brother Gordon Bell '56. Gordon was an absolute giant in the computer industry, as you can glean from another article in this *Beta Button*.



## Chapter Eternal

We regret to inform you of the deaths of the following brothers:

**William G. Franklin '43**   **Richard T. O'Brien Sr. '60**

October 19, 2021

December 17, 2003

**Henry J. Rack '64**

September 11, 2024



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