



Brother Spotlight: John J. Rooney "Photos", Phi Lambda '86 Hiking the Appalachian Trail

This month, the Alpha Chi Rho Educational Foundation is excited to highlight the adventurous and inspiring journey of Brother John J. Rooney, Phi Lambda '86. A Penn State graduate with a degree in Mechanical Engineering, Brother Rooney's remarkable career and dedication to Alpha Chi Rho showcases his commitment to excellence both personally and professionally.



Life as a Brother at Penn State

During his time at Penn State, Brother Rooney was an influential figure in the Fraternity and university community. He served as Vice President of the Phi Lambda Chapter and was elected President of the Interfraternity Council (IFC). Beyond these roles he was involved in the National Council serving as an Undergraduate National Councilor for one term, and Graduate Councilor for two, remaining actively engaged with the Fraternity after his graduation in 1986.

Some of his fondest memories from his undergraduate years include hosting the annual "Crow Bowl" at Penn State, organizing the "Haunted Crow House" as their largest philanthropy event each year, and supporting THON, Penn State's annual

dance marathon benefiting pediatric cancer research.

A Life of Leadership and Service

After completing his MBA in Finance at the University of Chicago, Brother Rooney embarked on a successful career with Deloitte Consulting, where he remained for nearly three decades before retiring in 2020. Even with his busy and successful career, he stayed committed to making a difference in his community, particularly through his involvement with the Boys and Girls Club of Philadelphia. He also became a founding board member of the Cristo Rey Philadelphia High School, a Catholic school for students of all faiths that nurtures and challenges young people to recognize and realize their full potential as they learn to love others, grow in their faiths, and serve the common good.

Hiking the Appalachian Trail

While retired, Brother Rooney set his sights on a new challenge: Hiking the entire Appalachian Trail. After dreaming about it since college and never finding the perfect time to start, he decided to take the plunge in 2023. He spent years testing gear and planning, using trails close to home and embarking on multi-day trips to prepare for the grueling trek across the east coast.

Brother Rooney hiked the trail in a “flip flop” approach beginning in the mid-Atlantic section (Harpers Ferry, VA to mid-NY state) in late 2023 before heading down to the Southern Terminus in Springer Mountain, GA in February 2024. From there, he proceeded north to Mount Katahdin in Maine, avoiding the summer heat in New England. He completed his trek on July 10, after a total of 143 days hiking; averaging 15.4 miles per day.

Lessons from the Trail

Throughout the journey, Brother Rooney learned valuable lessons about perseverance and self-reliance. He encountered challenges both physically and mentally but remained steadfast in his determination to finish the trail. Along the way he documented his entire journey on YouTube, showcasing his adventurous spirit to his family and followers and proving that even in retirement, he still has the drive and endurance to take on such a formidable challenge.

The sense of community on the trail, which he described as restoring his faith in humanity, made a lasting impression. From the camaraderie of fellow hikers to the kindness of “trail angels” offering unexpected help, the experience was not just a personal journey but a shared one. Thru Hikers are typically given Trail Names by fellow hikers during the hike. Brother Rooney earned the Trail Name “Photos” because of his hobby as a photographer capturing his son’s college sports teams and the way he documented his entire journey for his friends, family, and followers to see.

What’s Next for Brother Rooney

Brother Rooney’s passion for hiking hasn’t faded since completing the Appalachian Trail. Looking ahead, he plans to hike the Camino de Santiago in Spain, a famous pilgrimage trail, as part of his travel plans while he visits his son who is in graduate school in England. Beyond that, he has his eyes on the Pacific Crest Trail, a long-distance hike from the California-Mexico border to the Washington-Canada border. He is planning that expedition for 2026.

His advice to anyone considering hiking the Appalachian Trail? “Do It!” While acknowledging the difficulties, he emphasizes the unique, life-changing experience

and encourages others to take on the challenge – especially by tackling it in sections to savor every moment.

Brother Rooney’s story is a testament to the lifelong values of Alpha Chi Rho — leadership, perseverance, and a commitment to growth and community. His adventurous spirit serves as an inspiration to us all.

Make sure to check out Brother Rooney’s [YouTube channel](#) to get an in-depth understanding of his day-to-day experiences while on his journey!



P.S. Giving Tuesday will be on December 3, 2024! Make sure mark your calendars. It's not just about giving; it's about unlocking potential and providing the resources Brothers need to thrive and succeed!



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