

The Pomerantz Administration

So ended that academic year and so began the 1977-1978 year. Newly elected HCC President Eric Pomerantz wrote this letter to the *Hinman Halitosis*, like his predecessors before him, to encourage student activity within Hinman.

Hi! My name is Eric Pomerantz and as President of Hinman College I would like to welcome both new and returning students to another year of Hinman life. Hinman is, I feel, quite unique throughout the University. This is due to the large number of activities that bring Hinman students together to form our community. The Hinman Student Government plays a large role in coordinating these activities and getting things started. This year we have many dedicated people working to keep Hinman tops as the place to be, but we can always use more help...¹

Pomerantz, like the previous Presidents of HCC appealed to the students in Hinman to step up and become future leaders. However, Pomerantz would have his work cut out for him in this and in other areas of Hinman life. There had certainly been many great HCC Presidents. The previous President, Sy Rolnick, was one example. Each and every one of them played a major role in trying to make Hinman a better place and worked harder than any other student to do so. However, while many of the previous Presidents would have to deal mostly with such internal problems as student apathy, Pomerantz would, to paraphrase Shakespeare, have greatness thrust upon him. In the coming months Pomerantz would deal with what amounted to a seemingly unending series of crises, and in the end he would take on the greatest, most feared enemy of all: the SUNY Binghamton administration.

Scandal quickly struck Pomerantz and HCC shortly after Hinman's annual Oktoberfest celebration. Besides the German cuisine and plentiful stores of beer, typically a traditional German Oomph-pah band would be hired to play music during the program. However, this year no band was hired, much to the dismay of many Hinmanites who had come to expect live music. Angry insults began to be hurled at certain student government individuals who were charged

with gross dereliction of duty by not hiring the band. To put the rumors to rest and to restore order, Pomerantz quickly explained the situation in an open letter to the members of the Hinman community. Pomerantz explained that no one person was responsible for the lack of a band. He went on to say that the issue was brought up before the Social Committee and the chairperson suggested a plan to finance the band. That plan would require each building in Hinman to donate some money from their own funds for the band and was brought back to each individual hall. Not a single hall reported back on whether they liked the plan or not. With no funding secured for the band, none was hired. Pomerantz ended his letter by stating, "Any false rumors implicating a person or single dorm for there not being a band are totally erroneous and I hope that they quickly cease. On behalf of Hinman College, I apologize for the inconvenience and pain suffered by anyone due to false rumors."² More controversy struck when HCC decided to not put up money for the two and a half kegs of beer which would be the grand prize for the Co-Rec Super Bowl.¹ In an effort to quell the anger brewing from the student body towards HCC, the *Hinman Halitosis* editorial staff wrote this article in defense of HCC.

It's about time. There is now 2 weeks until Thanksgiving and 5 ½ weeks until the end of the semester and finally there is no violently radical issues to be solved. Between the band (or lack of one) at Oktoberfest to the kegs of beer for Co-Rec, Hinman Council, and for that matter, the Hinman student body has seemed to be pre-occupied with the above matters.

The Oktoberfest incident was brought up at Hinman Council and nothing more was said. Rumors were started that it was an individual(s) fault or a dorm's fault. These rumors were started because of a misunderstanding between 2 people. The incident was explained in a letter by the president of Hinman, Eric Pomerantz.

The arguments for and against the kegs were fast and furious and many good points were brought out. For what ever reasons, there were no kegs as a prize, or during the game.

These issues seem to have changed Hinman from a group of people working and living together, to five separate dorms with hardly any co-operation between them. Without the

¹ See the chapter on Co-Rec Football for more information on this topic.

dorms co-operating, nothing will get accomplished. If there was more co-operation, there may have been a keg and a band at Oktoberfest.

Hinman Council also has spent much of its time arguing and has not been a very together unit. There has been much heated debate and fighting over these issues and many unkind things have been said.

These issues are now over. Everyone still has their opinions on the issues and that won't change. It is time, however, for the dorms and Hinman Council to join together and start working for the college and make Hinman College the leader in SUNY/B [sic] colleges that it has been in the past.³

HCC had had its share of issues that semester, just as it had in the previous years. HCC needed a successful program in order to revitalize its image. They lucked out that year with the highly successful Hinman Semi-Formal. The only complaint stemming from the Semi-Formal was the band, which only played "low quality disco music."⁴ Otherwise the program was highly successful, well attended and a boon for HCC and for Hinman.

HCC took a stand that year against some of the deplorable acts happening just before the start of winter break. In Hughes Hall, a Christmas Tree that had been on display on the first floor on the north side of the building. In addition, many residents of Hinman (and other communities) were going into the Nature Preserve to cut down trees in an effort to save money. HCC unanimously passed a resolution calling for this practice to cease partly because it was environmentally unsound, but also because it hurt the business of professional Christmas tree growers. In their resolution, HCC stated, "It is absolutely contrary to the holiday spirit, showing a total disregard for those who enjoy the unspoiled beauty of the Preserve. The Council finds equally reprehensible the theft of a tree from the floor lounge of one dorm over the past weekend. The stealing of Christmas trees, whether from fellow students, merchants, or public State property cannot and should not be excused."⁵ HCC had spoken for the residents of Hinman College. No amount of Scrooges would hurt the holiday spirit of Hinman. As problematic as

these challenges were in the early part of the Eric Pomerantz Administration, nothing would compare to what was about to come. What was to happen next would be, by far, the greatest challenge that HCC had ever faced up until that point.

In January of 1979, New York Governor Hugh Carey proposed legislation that would earmark \$71,000 for building new parking lots and expanding existing ones on the SUNY Binghamton campus.⁶ Parking spaces (or the lack thereof) had been a contentious issue at that time and in many ways still is today. The main source of contention came from students, staff and faculty who commuted to campus and had to fight tooth and nail for a parking space. Just about everyone agreed that there were inadequate areas for parking on campus. Many on campus students, especially those interested in environmental causes, saw this proposal as nothing short of the administration quite literally paving over paradise and putting up a parking lot. They also cited irreversible environmental damage, such as poor drainage and hazardous runoff, which would occur if these large parking lots proposed by the administration were constructed. What would raise the ire of those in Hinman and consequently those in HCC was that one of the largest parking lots was to be constructed on the land between Hinman and CIW. If Hinmanites were divided over issues such as a lack of kegs at Co-Rec Weekend and a poor music selection at the Semi-Formal, they now rallied behind one another and prepared for an all out war to save their land from the clutches of the university administration and their bulldozers.

In late January, Vice President for Facilities and Operations Walter R. May (who was also chairman of the Parking Advisory Committee) met with HCC to discuss the plans for construction of the 525 space parking lot adjacent to Hinman. He also stated the intentions of converting all but three current parking lots (CIW East, Bingham, and Smith lots) to commuter parking lots. This designation would essentially forbid on campus residents from parking their

cars overnight in these lots during the week. Members of HCC stated that no student, whether they lived on or off campus would be served by the new parking lot because university civil service workers and faculty would arrive on campus long before students and use up all the spaces. HCC Academic Vice President Laurie Cohen argued that on-campus students were entitled to parking spaces, since they were considered tenants of the university. May argued that residents of the university were not guaranteed parking spaces and that all parking on campus was on a first-come first-serve basis.⁷ The meeting ended with HCC unhappy about the projected outcome of the project. The members of Hinman College Council felt that instead of listening to their concerns the administration was simply relaying to them what they were already planning to do. The meeting concluded with HCCers feeling even more ill at ease and realizing that they had to do something in order to protect the valuable open space between Hinman and CIW. Knowing that it would be an uphill battle all the way, President Eric Pomerantz prepared for an all-out war against the administration.

Heated and contested debates surrounding the parking lot issue were huge all across campus that semester, and especially in Hinman, with Eric Pomerantz leading the charge to defeat the measures. Almost immediately after the issue of the expansion of parking on campus, Pomerantz set about to researching the issue. First off, he went to University Security to find out how many parking spaces were in each lot presently on campus. Next, he went to the Personnel Office where he acquired the number of full-time workers on campus. After evaluating this information, he found that in no way would students benefit from any additional commuter parking lots. He found that these lots would only benefit only faculty and staff who arrived early before regular students. Armed with this information, Pomerantz approached the Parking Advisory Committee and after sharing his newfound information with them, asked that they

consider some alternatives to the commuter lot proposal. The committee refused. Not to be deterred, Pomerantz then went to OCC, the SA and every residential college to drum up support for his cause. Every one of them agreed to stand behind him, with the exception of Newing College. When plans to construct new parking lots were being pushed through, Pomerantz again went to the Parking Advisory Committee with a new plan. This plan called for a parking lottery that would help alleviate the problem of parking on campus. The committee refused to accept his idea, stating that it would be unfeasible. Lesser men would give up, but Pomerantz continued his drive to halt the construction of new parking lots and the conversion of existing lots over to commuter lots. He brought the issue up at a SUNY Binghamton Council meeting, a meeting that was supposed to rule on the issue. He watched heartbroken as the council tabled the issue for a month. In a last-ditch effort, he stated a petition drive and an aggressive media campaign, with a storm of letters to the editor published in *Pipe Dream* against the construction of new parking lots.⁸

The number of letters to the editor concerning the parking lot issue was astounding. Perhaps no single issue in the history of SUNY Binghamton mobilized the student body as did the parking lot controversies of 1978. An editorial in *Pipe Dream* in support of the parking lots was featured in the February 7, 1978 issue of the newspaper. The editorial read in part:

...All things considered, mass transit has become a better investment than parking lots...however [that] is not what the Governor prescribed. Rejecting the money as a protest against the automobile would be a senseless gesture. The automobile is here to stay, and it needs a place to park.

So the question comes down to: do we want more parking lots, and if we do, who should be allowed to park in them? Given all the numbers we've heard about vehicle to available space ratios, it's safe to say that new parking lots certainly couldn't hurt the situation. And if Walter May...is to be believed, construction of the two new lots...would not hurt the campus environment...In any case, though, in times of retrenchment and steady state one takes what one gets. The University should, when granted legislative approval, proceed with the lots—somewhere...⁹

Not everyone was as accepting of the parking lot proposal as the editorial staff of *Pipe Dream*. Dozens upon dozens of letters were fired off to the newspaper condemning its stance and issue of constructing more parking lots. One letter in particular summed up the feelings of many on the parking lot issue.

...Spending a million dollars for the construction of 900 parking spaces will create more problems than answers. The location and impact on the environment are potential controversies, but even though even though this project does not appear to cost the University any money, it is going to cost this campus valuable resources down the line.

I hope you and everyone else are aware that unless the State increased the University's budget to maintain those parking lots, time, energy, and money will come out of the already meager maintenance and security budgets...

Where would you divert existing funds to pay for lighting, increased security patrols, plowing, repaving, etc? I'd hate to see maintenance services on this campus become watered down because they've had to increase their responsibilities and yet have received no increase in their budget...

...I've been a proponent of open parking on this campus since 1970...Open parking is the fairest, most equitable manner of parking. There were reserved parking lots for commuters, residents, and faculty/staff before 1971 and they caused much bitterness. If there is a cause to be fought for concerning parking on the campus, let it be over the plight of people with disabilities...¹⁰

Environmental issues were on the minds of many students at Binghamton as this one letter suggests:

...just glance around where the proposed lots will be built. You'll find empty space, dotted with trees and covered at the moment with snow. Nothing spectacular, just a nice place to walk through or throw a Frisbee. The sight becomes spectacular when we realize we might have in that same place in the future—377 cars. We must learn to appreciate these patches of nature *before* they are paved over. I'm not saying don't build new lots—I am saying that if we must have increased parking facilities, let's exercise caution before about where we put them.¹¹

These are just a few examples of dozens upon dozens of letters that were published in the *Pipe Dream*. The parking lot controversy galvanized students like nothing had before. Unlike the takeover of the Administration building, where proactive student action was taken, the

parking lot controversy was fought mostly with meetings with administrators and letters in what some would call a more civilized discourse. However one wants to describe it, the parking lot controversy brought forth a form of student action which was led by one of Hinman's own. Hinman had a huge stake in the parking lot issue. Not only would what was considered Hinman land be affected, many of the key players in the debate were Hinmanites, including the President of HCC, Eric Pomerantz.

In the end what would become the paid parking lot would be built between CIW and Hinman as would the additional lots proposed by the Parking Advisory Committee. It was also the beginning of the end for much of the open space on campus. The area behind Hinman unofficially known as Sinisi Park, which was a grassy area with trees that had become a popular recreational area for Hinmanites, was eventually paved over to make Lot M and M1, two more massive parking lots. There was a small victory in that not every lot was made into a commuter lot. Some of the parking areas were still designated for on-campus drivers. While to many this victory may have seemed hollow in the overall scheme of things and the entire battle may have felt like a defeat, the reality was rather different. While it is true that Eric Pomerantz and the rest of HCC were unable to attain all of their goals, they did something that no other community had the gusto to do: stand up to the administration demanding equal rights for on campus students. HCC was the driving force behind those fighting for the parking rights and open space on campus. While they may not have achieved all their goals, everyone involved in the fight, especially Eric Pomerantz, went well above and beyond the call of duty. That action in and of itself is a victory. They took HCC which for over a decade had been troubled by student apathy and had the reputation for not getting anything done, and came close to achieving the impossible. What the parking lot controversies of 1978 did for Hinman College was give HCC a reputation

for getting things done and fighting for the rights of not just residents of Hinman College, but for every student living on campus.

Though HCC left off on a positive note the previous year, the 1978-1979 academic year began with the same problems of student disinterest and. A rather tongue-in-cheek article appeared in one of that year's first issues of *Hinman Halitosis* making fun of the rather poorly attended HCC meetings.

It has recently been brought to this reporter's attention that Hinman College has a Council, a group of people who do government-like things, or, rather had a Council. No one has sighted any group resembling a college government since school started. Even more peculiarly, no one seems to care. It is rumored that there is a group of approximately thirty people who appear each Monday in various dorm lounges to mummer among themselves. However, informed opinion has it that the group is actually an Anti-Monday Night Football League which congregates to decry video violence.

Many Hinman veterans remember a government operating in years past. Some claim that it did actually perform a valuable function. On the strength of this testimony I tried to contact Derrick Pomerants [sic], said to have run the group in the past. Pomerants [sic], unfortunately, could not be reached for comment.

Dr. Allan Eller, College Coordinator, states that there is indeed supposed to be such an organization. He was unsure as to its current status, "but" he said, "I sure would like to have Monday night free for football!"¹²

As tongue-in-cheek as the article may have been, it did offer a sobering reminder to the residents of Hinman that HCC was important and that it played an important role in each and every one of their lives.

Residents of Hinman soon found out just how important HCC was to their lives. On Friday, October 20, 1978, fire broke out in Lehman Hall. The fire, which would consume most of the first floor on the A-side of the building, was the most devastating fire in Hinman history and in the history of the university. During this time, HCC continually acted as an advocate for the students of Hinman, and especially for the displaced residents of Lehman Hall. HCC and its

leadership would help traumatized Hinmanites through what was undoubtedly the most traumatic event in the History of Hinman College.²

During the course of the year, HCC managed the inner workings of Hinman College and provided much needed services to Hinmanites. Unfortunately, little is written about the events that transpired that year other than the organization of the I Love [heart symbol in place in the word love] Vito campaign. Faculty Master Vito Sinisi was up for reinstatement as Master and a successful campaign was run to keep him in the position. On a less flattering note, the Hinman Social Committee was harshly criticized for the poor showing at their end of the year party on the quad.

...Although last Saturday was a sunny, breezy, and warm spring day, an ideal day for outdoor activities, only a small group of Hinman residents participated in the afternoon's festivities. Why didn't the majority of Hinman residents come out and enjoy the weather? Was it because all Hinman residents, excluding those who did show up and exhibit their frisbee [sic] skills at the tune of "Down with the Jocks", [sic] were nerding out in the libraries? No. The main reason for the poor turnout of the event is simply that the members of Hinman Social Committee failed to perform tasks that they've been elected to perform—to organize and promote social events that are congenial to the taste of Hinman residents.

The HSC failed to do its job in two ways. First, it's [sic] public promotion of the party was utterly inadequate. The committee made no special effort beside writing in [sic] article in Halitosis, to inform Hinman residents of the party. Not a single sign was posted on the dining hall or any other buildings in the college. Consequently, a great number of Hinman residents didn't even know that there was "another day of Sun anFun" [sic] on Saturday, May 5. Secondly the Committee negelected [sic] its duty to serve the entire Hinman population by turning the afternoon's activity into a "Dead" music show rather than a musical event designed to appeal to the diverse musical taste of Hinman residents. Considering the fact that the purpose of the party was to provide entertainment for the entire Hinman population, the afternoons [sic] music should have varied from hard rock to disco to soft folk music. By playing only "Dead" music, the committee fulfilled its commitment to a small minority of Hinman residents who do not come for "Dead" music.

Last Saturday could have been a day of "Sun and Fun" for the entire Hinman population. However, Hinman Social Committee's inadequate promotion and irresponsible planning of the event have turned the afternoon of "Sun and Fun" into a semi-private party for a

² See the chapter on the Lehman Hall Fire for more information on this topic.

small number of Hinman residents. It is our sincere hope that inefficient and irresponsible manner in which Hinman Social Committee will not be repeated in any of the committee's future endeavors.¹³

With this, the 1978-1979 academic year ended on a relatively sour note for HCC. Though they had been highly successful in orchestrating the I Love Vito campaign and in being an advocate and source of information for the residents of Hinman after the Lehman Hall fire, the same problems that had affected them since the beginning were still plaguing them now. To the outside observer, HCC was an organization that was in desperate straits, while the reality may not have been that bad, and most certainly it was not all doom and gloom. However, the record (or lack thereof) tends to report only the defeats suffered by HCC and the problems facing them. It is important to recognize that HCC as an organization was still working tirelessly in the best interest of the student body of Hinman and regardless of the adversity it faced it was still positively affecting the lives of average Hinmanites.

¹ Eric Pomerantz, "And Now, From Our President..." *Hinman Halitosis* Vol. VIII, No. 1, August 25, 1977.

² Eric Pomerantz, "To The Members of Hinman College," *Hinman Halitosis* Vol. VIII, No. 7, October 20, 1977.

³ "From The Editorial Staff," *Hinman Halitosis* Vol. VIII, No. 10, November 10, 1977.

⁴ Carole Michaels, "Successful Semi-Formal," Vol. VIII, No. 12, December 8, 1977.

⁵ Hughes Hall First Floor North, "letter to the editor," and "HCC Resolution," Vol. VIII, No. 13, December 15, 1977.

⁶ Marilyn Angelo, "Parking lot construction awaits 1978-79 budget approval," *Pipe Dream* Vol. XVI, No. 5, January 27, 1978.

⁷ Richard Green, "May meets with Hinman on parking lots," *Pipe Dream* Vol. XVI, No. 6, January 31, 1978.

⁸ Al Breznick, "...Pomerantz: the driving force," *Pipe Dream* Vol. XVI, No. 24, April 1978.

⁹ Editorial, "Accept the Auto," *Pipe Dream* Vol. XVI, No. 8, February 7, 1978.

¹⁰ Sandy Voigt, letter to the editor, *Pipe Dream* Vol. XVI, No. 10 February 14, 1978.

¹¹ Gary H. Forman, letter to the editor, *Pipe Dream* Vol. XVI, No. 17 March 10, 1978.

¹² "Hinman Council Disappearance Goes Unnoticed," *Hinman Halitosis* Vol. X, No. 5, October 19, 1978.

¹³ "The Hinman Social Committee: What a Disappointment!" *Hinman Halitosis* Final Edition [no date given-approximately May 1979].