



A Makeover Story



Community Of
★ The Year:

Villa Alvarado
Apartments

San Diego State University



No Frills 2004
at UC Berkeley



Life in VA Last Year – The Old Look

Our makeover story starts in San Diego, California on the San Diego State University campus. Here resides an apartment complex called Villa Alvarado, tucked away on the north-east side of campus. The apartments are separated into six “houses” lettered A through F, and each house contains fifteen four-resident apartments and one resident advisor.



Challenges:

Although it is part of our Residential Education department, Villa Alvarado has long had its own challenges to functioning in the same way as a traditional residence hall. First off, it is set up as apartments with outdoor common hallways, with four residents per apartment, and a common front desk and community center. This limits interaction and community building; many find it easiest to socialize only with their apartment-mates. It has also been the housing choice of many students who wish to live on campus for their second year, third year, or even longer. Many of these returnees had been there so long they were burnt out on hall programs, so motivation for hall involvement was hard to inspire.

Resident Testimony:

“Villa Alvarado traditionally lacked energy and programs lacked attendance due to the expectations many residents had for re-run programming topics put on by returning staff members,” said Alicia Moseby, a Resident Advisor in 2002. “Hall council consisted mostly of RA’s as house reps. People who had filled positions in previous years had lost interest in involvement. I was both the President and the Secretary,” said Matt Diener, Hall Council President 2002-2003.

Effects of New Housing Policy – The Makeover Begins

All great makeovers start with the same concept: “Out with the old, in with the new.” In order to make room for more first-time residents, the new housing policy stated that students could only live in SDSU’s halls for four semesters. This meant that V.A. would be losing a lot of its old residents. For some halls, it was detrimental to lose older returning students. For V.A., this was the opportunity it needed to build its community from the ground up, giving their complex what we like to call a “makeover.”

The new staff members came in with a very clear vision about what they wanted to accomplish in this new community. The Hall Coordinator for Villa Alvarado was new to the complex, as were most of the Resident Advisors. Together, they offered new energy and ideas, and helped the Villa Alvarado community exude energy with a welcoming leadership personalities, encourage active participation by residents, and create a fun environment to live in and benefit from.

Villa Alvarado’s makeup woes were toe-up. With some incredible “stylists” on staff, an extensive collection of hall council “makeup”, some creative new programs to add to their “wardrobe”, and unique accessories not found anywhere else: the International House.

The Stylists Get to Work

The Villa Alvarado staff wanted to start the year off strong. They decided on a theme, *Villa Las Vegas*, and decorated accordingly. Each apartment house was part of the Las Vegas theme. For example, “F” House was Treasure Island, complete with treasure map door name-tags and a pirate flag hanging from the RA’s balcony. “B” House was decorated to represent the Vegas club scene. There were handmade disco ball door name-tags with names of popular clubs on them. Even the RA was dressed the part. Elvis greeted new residents at the front desk “Wedding Chapel” as they began the check in process. The stylish staff of Villa Alvarado had created an inviting and energetic home for their new residents, starting the year off with a bang.

Hall Council

The stylish staff of Villa Alvarado was energized and creative, but they knew the makeover would not be complete without an extensive collection of makeup artists: the Villa Alvarado Hall Council. The staff publicized the benefits of involvement and recruited during move-in. Last year’s president even sat at a table in the check-in line to talk about the opportunities Villa Alvarado Hall Council could offer, such as programming in the halls, meeting new people and developing better leadership skills. This technique worked because the energy created during move-in inspired residents to join the makeover fun.

By election time, the stylish staff knew that the Villa Alvarado Hall Council would be bigger than it had ever been. Every hall council position was filled including House Representatives, which, due to a lack of interest, hadn’t been previously filled. In fact, there was so much interest in hall council that new positions were created to accommodate everyone. Meetings were energetic and exciting; the 23 hall council members had big plans to make this community an amazing one.

Hall Council Works Their Makeup Magic:

Each council member brought their own unique bag of makeup to share with the group. These beauticians had no shortage of programming ideas.

To celebrate Thanksgiving, Hall Council put on Turkey Fest. They provided the turkeys and each of the apartment houses were assigned an item to bring, making the event a huge potluck. This not only provided residents with a delicious way to begin the Thanksgiving season, it also provided the international students with an opportunity to experience a holiday not celebrated in their countries. The event was a huge success, with lots of food and over 75 hungry residents in attendance.



But Hall Council didn’t stop their makeup magic with only in-hall activities. They also participated in the campus-wide Homecoming celebration competition. Villa Alvarado was the only Hall Council to participate. At this competition, they cheered in the pep

rally, attended all of the activities and speeches from guest speakers, and encouraged and recruited Villa Alvarado residents to do the same.

Not only has the Villa Alvarado Hall Council been involved in the University community, they have gotten involved in the San Diego Community as well. For Halloween, they invited children from the local children's center to come to the complex and Trick-or-Treat. This provided a fun and safe atmosphere for the participating families and their young trick-or-treaters. Residents were encouraged to decorate their doors and dress, especially the international students, many who had never experience Halloween before, who were ecstatic to greet the trick-or-treaters. More than 30 families showed up for the event, and everyone had a great time.



The New Wardrobe: Programming

With a stylish new staff and talented hall council, Villa Alvarado was ready to try some new programs on for size. Programs are one of the most important ways to get residents out of their apartments and involved in the community. These creative activities have included the *Villagio* Brunch, Sex Week, Iron Chef: VA Healthy Battle, V-A Safety, Chicken and Waffles, and many more. Each program highlighted a different need and all had incredible attendance.

Villagio Brunch:

The “Villagio Brunch” took place the day before the semester classes started. It was a welcoming event for residents to come together to “meet and greet.” Breakfast-type foods were provided and over two hundred people attended, an amazing turnout for a Villa Alvarado program. Residents were told about the program while checking in and also at their first house meeting. The residents who came socialized with both their new neighbors and roommates. This would be the first of many programs that would have such a large attendance that they ran out of food before they ran out of takers.

Sex Week:

The next big Villa Alvarado program was “Sex Week.” This was a five day period consisting of a program with topics from to safe sexual practices to how others viewed intimate relationships. The schedule for the week was as follows:

- ★ **Monday** - “*Get Leid with Hall Council*” Residents were given Hawaiian leis with a condom and informational pamphlet attached. Then participants entered the “Condom Olympics,” competing to make the best animal out of a non-lubricated condom.
- ★ **Tuesday** - “*Dating and Mating*” International-House residents shared dating and relationship practices from their cultures.
- ★ **Wednesday** - “*Sexual Fishbowl*” This program was an opportunity for men and women to ask each other questions they might have about for the opposite sex. To do so, a group of either men or women would sit in an inner ring of a circle, facing

inward, and the other group sat in an outer circle, facing outward, then those on the outer circle would then ask the inner circle members any questions they might have. Questions asked ranged from “How important is going down?” to “The Wide World of the Clitoris.” Resident didn’t have to be afraid to ask a question because neither could see who asked/answered the question or gave their input. Then the two groups switched and the new outer group got a change to ask questions.

- ★ **Thursday** - “*Masturbate with your Friends*” This program occurred on at the same time as the television show, Friends. This program was centered on the idea of safe sex by yourself. There were facts, quizzes, and a vibrating prize at the end.
- ★ **Friday** – “*Porn and Corn*” Lastly, there was a showing of the movie “Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Sex * But Were Afraid to Ask,” accompanied by popcorn. Afterwards there was an educational discussion on some of the more taboo sexual practices.

There was an average attendance of twenty-five to thirty residents for each of the five programs. This innovative set of programs was awarded Program Of The Month from the San Diego State University chapter of NRHH.

V-A Saf-tay:

With an outdoor complex and being so close to a university setting, safety is very important. Resident Advisor Jamie-Lynn Paranal posted facts about safety throughout the hall. Many residents were interested in more information about how to stay safe and attendance was over 35 residents. A University Police officer came as a guest speaker and gave residents tips on how to stay safe when both on and off of the campus.



Iron Chef VA: The Healthy Battle

Iron Chef: VA Healthy Battle very successful educational programs. First, the Iron Chef was a spin off of the television show. To generate enthusiasm for the program, two Resident Advisors dressed in culinary attire and knocked on apartment doors with pots and pans. The program was started dramatically when the Resident Advisor took a hearty bite into a bell pepper, much like the beginning of the television show. “Contestants” were asked to bring a dish they had made at home, tell what was in it, and explain why they thought it was the healthiest. Dishes were judged on taste and content of healthy ingredients and the program finished with an “on hand cooking contest,” the winner creating a marshmallow



International House: An Incredible Accessory

Perhaps one of the most unique accessories of the Villa Alvarado community is the International House, more commonly known as the I-House. This part of the Villa Alvarado community offers both international students studying at San Diego State University and residents from the United States, the

opportunity for a community where they can live and socialize together while learning about different cultures. Each I-House apartment is home to two native students and two international students in each apartment.

Qualifications:

All I-House residents have applied to be placed in this community and have agreed to get involved to further enhance the benefits of living and learning together. They do this by educating their fellow residents on their various cultures and sharing different cultural practices with them. They have aided in programming, publicity, and ideas for the best way to do this. This encourages involvement on a general level but many residents have gone above and beyond this expectation. The international students come from countries all over the world including Iceland, Argentina, Brazil, Japan, and Australia.

Culture Night:

In order for the residents of the I-House community to become educated about their differing cultures, the Culture Night was developed. Once every month, a group of international students from a certain country get together and give a presentation about their culture. They cook food from their country, explain cultural practices, while also showing the differences and similarities between their own culture and the culture that they have



discovered in the United States. In doing this, the residents from the United States learn about their community members and their culture but also about countries they may wish to travel or study at in the future. Culture nights presented this year have been by students from Brazil, Japan, and Spain and the attendance has been phenomenal. The first one brought in over 60 people, and as the academic year has progressed, the excitement to attend these “culture nights” has only grown. Initially, many residents are drawn to these culture nights because they have heard about or smelled the incredible food that comes along with attendance. However, although these residents may come for the food, they are convinced to stay for the entire experience. They end up not just staying for the rest of that particular culture night, but attending future ones as well.



While the I-House Community has grown stringer over the course of the year, due to the hard work and dedication of its members, the strength of the entire Villa Alvarado community has grown to be even stronger than it has been in past years as well. This community has extended its branches beyond the walls of this residence hall and helped the residents make connections with members of other communities all over the world. Many residents keep in touch with the international students that they live with during the academic year.

Letter of Support

January 27, 2004

To Whom It May Concern:

It is my great pleasure to recommend San Diego State's Villa Alvarado Apartments for the National Residence Hall Honorary Community of the Year. Villa Alvarado (V.A) is a fantastic place to live and work! The students are conscientious, mature, motivated, and friendly. Student staff and leaders have worked diligently all year to make V.A. a fun, close-knit, and educational environment.

The sense of cohesiveness within this apartment complex is surprising given that apartment style living can present challenges in terms of fostering a sense of community. I have only been in my current position as Residence Hall Coordinator at V.A. since this past July. My predecessor and other staff members had indicated that V.A. was not a very active or involved community. In recent years Hall Council did not have very much participation and residents did not attend programs often or in high-numbers. This is not the V.A. that I currently live-in or manage. V.A.'s residents are not only friendly but they participate in activities and help to organize them! The Hall Council has been very active and has helped to plan some very popular events that have helped residents to get involved and help them meet others. The staff has consistently organized educational programs that have been entertaining, informative, and popular with the residents. The International House, located in the Villa Alvarado Complex, has also brought an enriching global educational experience for all V.A. residents. Finally, V.A.'s students, staff, and educational programs have already been recognized with six OTM awards in the fall semester!

I cannot offer a decisive explanation for why V.A. has shined this year in particular. The positive energy that is felt the minute you step through the gates must be attributed to all the involved players: residents, staff, and student leaders. Our desire is to continue to harness this positive energy and help students feel excited and proud of their community.

I would be happy to discuss V.A. in more detail if further questions should arise. My office number is 619) 594-2749.

Sincerely,

Vivian Garay
Villa Alvarado Residence Hall Coordinator