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CENTERPIECE

## Local sorority alumnae groups shares reasons to wear a mask to encourage others

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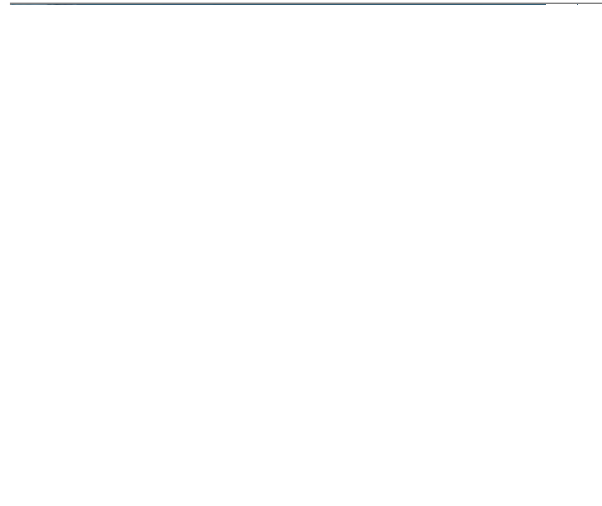
The Eastern Panhandle Alumnae Chapter of the Delta Sigma Theta sorority recently shared a video of reasons why the sisters wear masks and continue fighting the spread of COVID-19. Pictured above, DST sister Angela Brown shares a photo of her family, the reason why she continues to work to mitigate the spread.

Journal screenshot by Jessica Wilt

MARTINSBURG - To protect others, to have a chance to see her grandchildren and to be in the classroom with students once again, those are some of the reasons members of the Eastern Panhandle Alumnae Chapter of the Delta Sigma Theta sorority recently shared for wearing a mask and continuing to follow COVID-19 guidelines in a video message that showcased the virus' effects on a truly human level.

The video has been shared with leaders and the public around the state via social media as a way to encourage others to keep going, with hope for the end of the pandemic nearing.

"There is light at the end of the tunnel with the vaccine out now," said Michele Barnes-Russell, the mental and physical health chair for EPAC Delta Sigma Theta. "But we still need to be very diligent in what we were doing as far as making sure we wear that mask. Until we get the vaccine, that is your No. 1 defense."



Featuring women from all walks of life, spanning different ages and occupations, the reasons were meaningful and many, covering various topics but all with the same thought in mind: fighting the continued spread of COVID-19.

"The only defense you have right now – and what we've always had – is wearing your mask, social distancing, washing your hands," Barnes-Russell said. "That's how you control the spread of COVID-19. We've gone through the whole thing where the mask turned into a political thing, but it's a medical thing. When I'm wearing my mask, I may not know what I have going on. I'm trying to protect you. It's an act of being kind to your community. It's an act of wanting my kids in school. I want to work. I don't want our businesses closed. This is the way we have to do it. It's tough, but we're starting to see real light at the end of the tunnel with the vaccines. But until we get vaccinated, we need to ensure we're wearing that mask."

"We all shared those (reasons). One misses her grandkids. She has underlying health issues, so she hasn't been able to engage other than Zoom with her grandkids. It's really hard for her. She misses them. We want to work. This economic thing affects all of us. You think about our children and being in school, not being in school and the effects it might have for years to come. That's a big one. We have no idea what this has done at this point for the children."

With the effects of COVID-19 ongoing and reaching far beyond just physical health, the sorority sisters shared their message as a way to shine a light on the toll the virus has taken on everyone.

"One of my sorority sisters brought up her 5-year-old grandson," Barnes-Russell said. "He hasn't had the opportunity to go to day care. She's like, 'His socialization skills, what is that going to look like for him when he's ready to go to school?' Your social skills are just as important. But the only way we fight this is we've got to wear our mask. We've got to understand the importance behind it. I can't stress it enough.

"You think about how many people have passed away because of COVID-19. We all want our lives back, but until then, I want to make sure I'm protecting my family and myself. I want to be here. The holidays were rough, not having those family holidays, but I want to have some more. I'll get past 2020. I want an opportunity to see 2021 Christmas. That is a huge light at the end of the tunnel. But until you get that opportunity, you've still got to hanker down. We've still got to do what we've got to do."

The full video can be found on the local chapter's Facebook page at Eastern Panhandle Alumnae Chapter.

