

St. John's Lodge No. 9, F. & A. M.

Trestleboard

April 2024

Jim Russell, editor



Serving Seattle since 1860

meets: 7910 Greenwood Ave. N.
Lodge phone: (206) 623-0261
jimrussell58@frontier.com
[web: www.seattleMasons.org](http://www.seattleMasons.org)

FROM THE EAST

[Eric Koteles](#), *Master*



**Eric Koteles Worshipful
Master**

Brothers,

As we step into the rejuvenating season of spring, a time marked by rebirth and renewal, I find it pertinent to reflect on the very essence of our Masonic Lodge—a sanctuary of friendship and virtue. In the hustle of the external world, where discord and disharmony often prevail, our Lodge stands as a bastion of peace, brotherly love, and moral excellence. It is a retreat where the weary soul finds solace and the seeking spirit gains wisdom.

The foundation of our Lodge is built upon the collective contributions of each one of us. It thrives on our shared commitment to foster an environment of support, understanding, and mutual respect. Every brother, regardless of rank or tenure, plays an indispensable role in nurturing this sacred space. By embracing our core values and principles, we not only uplift ourselves but also fortify the bonds that unite us as brethren.

In our gatherings, let us remember to extend a hand of fellowship to all, encouraging one another in our personal and collective quests for light and truth. Our conversations should be seeds from which the fruits of knowledge and wisdom can grow, creating an elevated atmosphere where every brother feels valued and inspired.

Looking ahead, I am filled with optimism for the future of our Lodge. As nature awakens from its slumber, bringing life and color back into the world, let us too embrace this season of new beginnings. Let the freshness of spring invigorate our spirits and renew our dedication to our noble cause. Together, we are on a journey of continuous growth and improvement, not just as Masons, but as men of honor and integrity.

Let us seize this moment to reaffirm our commitment to creating a Lodge that is a true refuge of friendship and virtue. May our actions and interactions be guided by the highest ideals of brotherhood and may our collective efforts lead us toward a brighter, more harmonious future.

With fraternal affection and unwavering optimism for what lies ahead, let us move forward, hand in hand, into the promising horizon that awaits us. Here's to new beginnings, to the enduring strength of our brotherhood, and to the boundless opportunities that spring heralds.

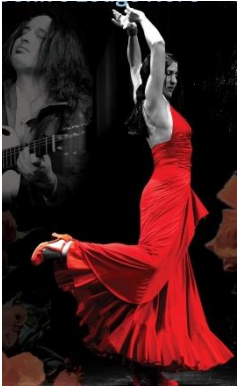
Fraternally,
Worshipful Master Eric Koteles.

CALENDAR



- April 3 (7pm): Education & Fellowship Night Zoom
- April 11 (6pm): Officers meeting
- April 17 (6:15pm) 7:30pm: **St. John's 9 (dinner) Stated**
- April 21 (11am): Celebration of Spring Brunch Scottish Rite Center Shoreline – Buffet & Flamenco Dancing **RSVP required**
- April 27 (10am): Quarterly meeting Masonic Service Bureau
- May 1 (7pm): Fellowship Zoom teleconference
- May 8 (6pm): Board of Trustees teleconference
- May 9 (6pm): Officers meeting
- May 12 – Mother's Day
- May 15 (6:15pm) 7:30pm: **St. John's 9 (dinner) Stated** Official visit of District 5 Deputy of Grand Master
- May 18 (1:30pm): Open Air FC degree Roche Harbor (BBQ 11am)
- May 24-25: Grand Masonic Day Vancouver, BC
- May 27: Memorial Day
- June 5 (7pm): Fellowship Zoom teleconference
- June 13 (6pm): Officers meeting teleconference
- June 13 – 16: 167th Annual Communication Grand Lodge (regional meetings)
- June 16 (6pm): King Solomon Lodge No. 60 Annual Strawberry Feed
- June 19 (6:15pm): St. John's 9 Stated **Table Lodge** Herb's Night
- July 3 (7pm): Fellowship Zoom
- July 4: Independence Day
- July 11 (6pm): Officers meeting
- July 17 (6:15pm): **St. John's 9 (dinner) Stated**—
- July 21 (1pm): Mariners Baseball family outing vs Houston
- August 3 (10am): Open Air Degree, Masonic Park
- August 3 (6pm): family night Everett AquaSox baseball

ST. JOHN'S HOSTS "CELEBRATION OF SPRING" FAMILY BUFFET



St. John's will be hosting a brunch for its members and families on Sunday, April 21 at the Seattle Scottish Rite Center. Food, featuring Spanish Paella, will be catered by "The Unlikely Spaniard," followed by flamenco dancing. Following the dance entertainment, those ready to try their hand (or feet) at flamenco will be instructed. **RSVP please.**



Inspired by a true love of Spain – its food, its people, and its lifestyle – one man and his wife share their passion for Spain. The Unlikely Spaniard believes that Paella is an event, not just a particular dish. It's what you do on a sunny Saturday afternoon in your backyard, or how you celebrate a special occasion with friends, family, and co-workers gathered around an enormous Paella pan set on fire. There are limits to what a paella must have (normally that would be rice, a nice, flavorful

broth, some meat and/or seafood, and/or some greens). It should be made in a large flat pan called paella or paellera following the adequate order of ingredients and, if possible, over a flame.

People can be very protective of their traditions whenever they're not properly represented or the proper respect towards them is not provided. The paella justice warriors might be a little loud, but this can be understood once you learn what tortures paella and other traditional well known dishes of different cuisines around the world have had to suffer.

Menu to be served: 11:30am Appetizers served buffet style, Tortilla de Patatas – traditional Spanish omelet made with fresh eggs, diced potatoes, and sweet onions. **Bruschettas** – Fresh tomato, garlic, and basil on baguette bread, **Shrimp Ceviche Spoons** – Peruvian ceviche served in spoons made of shrimp, sweet potato, red onions, corn kernels, rocoto, and lime.

12:15pm Main Course - served buffet style Mixed Salads– local fresh salad mix dressed with an olive oil and vinegar dressing. **Paella de Mariscos** – This paella includes prawns, shrimp, clams, mussels, calamari, garlic, tomatoes, rice, saffron, salt, artichokes, and green beans.

Desserts, Spanish Flan – Mami Nancy's Historic Sweet Custard recipe made with caramelized sugar. **Chocolate Cake** – A delicious chocolate flat cake served with vanilla ice cream. A family recipe from The Unlikely Spaniard.

The ingredients matter! The Unlikely Spaniard uses fresh, local, and organic ingredients whenever possible. The exceptions are the rice, the pasta, and the saffron, which are brought in from Spain.

Flamenco Dancers : One 30 minute performance by Eric & Encarnacion. E&E will be introduced before show and announced as a performance. Artists will give 10-15 minute Palmas/dance workshop at end of performance.

Will you be coming to our stated communication? **Please make your dinner reservations for our stated communication with the secretary at 206 623-0261 by Friday, April 12**, prior to our April 17 meeting. If you need a ride, the secretary will be happy to find one for you. Do you know of a brother who has not attended Lodge in a while? Call him and ask if you can pick him up and bring him to Lodge.



Seattle Mariners vs Everett AquaSox?

Tickets (\$15) for St. John's annual family outing to the Everett AquaSox are still available through WBro. Terry Grove. Entry to the game food court, included in the price, will be at 6pm, August 3. Fireworks will follow the game. Free parking.

Worshipful Master Eric Koteles will purchase a block of tickets to the Seattle Mariners for Saturday afternoon, July 21, at 1pm. Contact him if you are interested. Parking, food, and beverages will not be included.

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FROM THE WEST

[WBro. John Murray Louderback](#)



The very existence of Freemasonry is being threatened. As you are aware Masonry is open to all good honorable men regardless of religion. The requirement being a belief in God or a Creator.

During 17th century Europe, there was much religious persecution. When the King was of a particular religion, those that worshipped differently were often persecuted tortured or murdered.

This religious persecution would change quickly when a new ruler would come to power. Those that were persecuting were now the persecuted. This civil unrest was a major reason why the Pilgrims immigrated to America and the major inspiration for the First Amendment to the United States Constitution.

America was formed in the 17th century by men and women who in the face of European religious persecution, refused to compromise passionately held religious belief. They fled Europe for America.

The Constitution of the United States says that people have the right to practice his or her religion or - no religion at all if they choose. The First Amendment guarantees the separation of church and state. This fundamental principle is one of the major reasons why our country has been able to avoid many religious conflicts that have plagued so many other countries.

The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment prohibits government from encouraging or promoting religion in any way – including the President.

As I mentioned before - we need to continue to focus on our Constitution and any efforts that would change principles that we so deeply and so passionately cherish. To do otherwise, to regress hundreds of years, would be very short-sighted and very harmful to America.

Freemasonry is available for all men despite religious beliefs, not just men of one particular religion.

America and Freemasonry's very principles are based on the separation of church and state.

MASTER MASONS RAISED IN APRIL

Date Raised:

4/4/1966 Alvin W. Jorgensen
4/28/1973 Thomas R. McClain
4/28/1973 Mark A. Lentz
4/24/1976 Craig R. Messett
4/20/1978 Neil P. Quinn
4/19/1983 George O. "Bob" Smith, Jr.
4/18/1984 S. Ashley Brinkley
4/19/1984 Albert K Gustafson
4/23/1996 Mark A. Campbell
4/22/1998 Thomas Ray Everts
4/15/2015 Kemalcan Jimmerson



FROM THE SOUTH

[WBro. David Flood](#)



HOW FIRM A FOUNDATION?

The Entered Apprentice degree is the foundation of Freemasonry. It explains the nature and principles of our institution. The twenty-four inch gauge is the foundation for our Masonic journey. It is no coincidence that the first working tool you receive is a twenty-four inch gauge. It clarifies that for progress in our lives we have to take measured steps for growth as a man and as a responsible member of society.

How can we put the ancient tools and symbols of the fraternity to use in our lives today? Last month we took a brief look at ways to enhance our work life or as the degree calls them "hours for our usual vocations."

Likewise we can apply contemporary ideas and skills to our hours for refreshment and sleep. Modern medicine has intensively studied the effects of sleep on our health and daily effectiveness. There is a wealth of valid information available on how to maximize the many benefits of a good night's sleep. For example, neuroscientist Matthew Walker provides many strategies for enhancing your sleep. There are numerous interviews with him available on YouTube. You might want to begin by joining the 12 million viewers of his TEDtalk, Sleep is your Superpower, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5MuIMqhT8DM>

You can dive deeper into the realms of sleep and dreams by reading his bestseller, Why We Sleep. Amusingly Bill Gates wrote "This book put me to sleep."

The Twenty-Four Inch Gauge

The twenty-four inch gauge--one of the working tools of Masonry--teaches us to make the best use of our time.

Early Masons, who determined how to best use their time, may not have known all of the ramifications of the twenty-four hour cycle. A study conducted by the National Institute of Mental Health reveals some remarkable facts about the twenty-four hour internal clock or *circadian rhythm* as it is known scientifically.

Even plants in the dark open and close their leaves at regular intervals. Newborn babies acquire the circadian rhythm within sixteen weeks or less. Birds and lizards that were raised in soundproof rooms with temperature and light control came by the circadian rhythm without ever seeing daylight or any other living creature.

Jet lag is related to circadian rhythm and results when the normal rhythm is upset. The symptoms, familiar to most travelers, include fatigue, tendency to error and general malaise.

Although there is still much to be learned, the presence of rhythmic cycles in humans and animals is well established. Our Masonic forefathers, who used the twenty-four inch gauge as a measure to divide wisely our time, may not have known about circadian rhythm, but they certainly recognized the importance of adhering to a schedule for personal well-being.

Annual Communication Registration

Resolution booklets and registration information for our Grand Lodge Annual Communication are now available. This year's Annual Communication will again be in Wenatchee, June 13-16, 2024.

You can register by going to the Grand Lodge website and click on News/Events at the top of the page: <https://freemason-wa.org/annual-communication/>

Brethren Available for Junior Grand Warden Election 2024

There are four brethren who have made themselves available to be elected Junior Grand Warden this year. All four brethren were interviewed, and their responses posted on YouTube. Here are the questions posed and their responses at the links below:

JGW Question #1

What experiences have you had that you think prepared you to be Grand Master someday?

<https://youtu.be/Rq4N0S1MOKg?feature=shared>

JGW Question #2

What are areas that you feel that you need to work on to be prepared to be Grand Master someday?

https://youtu.be/Fn_hLzglRvY?feature=shared

JGW Question #3

How would you handle a conflict between Brethren, Lodges, and Districts?

https://youtu.be/5Xb_XSKGbzY?feature=shared

JGW Question #4

What do you believe the role is for an elected Grand Lodge officer in Freemasonry in Washington?

<https://youtu.be/NrPGYvDsCrU?feature=shared>

JGW Question #5

How would you measure success for Freemasonry in Washington?

<https://youtu.be/PYLCxP9PcHM?feature=shared>

JGW Question #6

What do you think Freemasonry in Washington will look like in 5 years? In 10 years?

<https://youtu.be/j8tBe9wN97o?feature=shared>

JGW Question #7

Any Closing Thoughts?

<https://youtu.be/DVuDGONpQo0?feature=shared>

See and hear these brethren address very important questions to help gain insights of someone who will most likely be our Grand Master in four years.

ST. JOHN'S EXAMINES CODE ON PETITIONS

Last month the brethren of St. John's participated in a discussion on how we should best know a prospect who considers petitioning our Lodge. It was agreed that we all have a responsibility to get to know a man who seeks to be a brother among us.

Part of this responsibility is to ask the prospect or candidate to answer several questions which may be in one's mind and to also answer those which may be in his. As a step in that process, we held our first "Meet and Greet" session at Razzis Pizza over pizza and beer. Three prospects and sixteen Brothers were present.

Previously in Lodge, our District Deputy of the Grand Master reminded us of our obligation regarding petitions for membership by reading excerpts from the Washington Masonic Code:

Sec.. 19.01 B.L.

Action Upon a Petition. Action upon a petition for the Degrees or for affiliation shall be in the following manner:

A. A petition shall be presented and accepted only at a Stated Communication. No vote of acceptance shall be taken,

B. Upon acceptance, the petition shall be referred to an Investigating Committee of *three* Lodge members,

C. The Investigating Committee shall deposit its report with the Lodge Secretary at a subsequent Stated Communication after referral of the petition. The Lodge Secretary will present the investigating committee's report. In case of a vacancy in the committee, the Master may fill the vacancy and receive the report at that Communication,

D. The investigation report shall be signed by at least two members of the committee; and

E. Regardless of whether the committee report is favorable or unfavorable, a ballot is still necessary. The rejection of a petition can be effected only by a ballot.

Sec. 19.08 B.L.

No Discussion on Petition. No discussion upon the merits of a petition shall be allowed in Lodge.

Brothers and Prospects meet at Razzis



Honor Flight Volunteers Sought

WBro. John Louderback, a member of the Grand Lodge Military & Veteran Services Committee, encourages brothers to volunteer as reception hosts to those veterans returning to SeaTac April 15. Local veterans will be hosted in Washington D.C., the weekend of April 13-15. This program is supported by Honor Flight Network, a national nonprofit comprised of independent hubs working together to achieve the Honor Flight mission. In furtherance of this common goal, they show our nation's veterans the appreciation and honor they deserve. Participation in an Honor Flight trip gives veterans the opportunity to share this momentous occasion with other comrades, remember the fallen, and share their stories and experiences with other veterans. Honored veterans always travel free of charge, thanks to generous donations to this organization.

While initially focused on America's World War II veterans, Honor Flight Network has expanded its mission to include those who served during the Korean War and the Vietnam War. The Honor Flight TLC program also honors veterans of any service era who are critically ill.

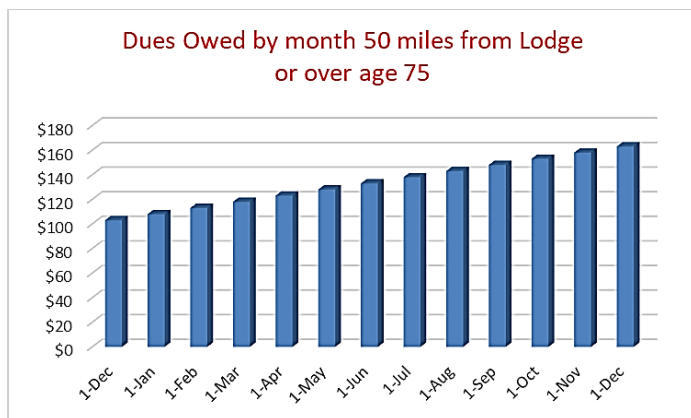
Both greeting hosts and returning veterans are deeply moved by this shared experience.

APRIL BIRTHDAY CELEBRANTS

- Day
- 6 Louis L. Turner
 - 9 David J. Holdsworth
 - 10 S. Webster Kavanaugh
 - 10 K. Eric Koteles
 - 16 Gale H. Kenney
 - 17 Carl L. Alexander
 - 19 Louis A. Van Der Wel
 - 19 Frederick A. Eastman
 - 22 Paul K. Doak
 - 23 Martin L. Burgess
 - 25 Howard C. Harris, Sr.
 - 26 Kenneth W. MacArthur
 - 27 Craig L. Catli
 - 30 Thomas R. McClain



Lodge Dues Climb as Months Pass



Visit Our District 5 Brethren

District 5 Lodges	Next Meeting	Time
St. John's 9	Wednesday, April 17, 2024	7:30pm
Eureka 20	Monday, May 6, 2024	7 pm
University 141	Monday, May 6, 2024	7:30pm
Daylight 232	Saturday, April 20, 2024	10am
Queen Anne 242	Thursday, May 9, 2024	6:30pm
Esoterika 316	Tuesday, April 23 2024	7:30pm

WASHINGTON MASONIC SERVICES SCHOLARSHIPS

Masonic Legacy Scholarship

(4 awarded at \$3,750 each)

Scottish Rite Masonic Legacy Scholarship

(8 awarded at \$3,250 each)

Masonic Youth Group Scholarship

(One per Youth Group at \$3,000 each)

Henry and Jenifer Herrmann Scholarship

(5 awarded at \$3,000 each)

To Apply: <https://www.masonscare.org> and click Youth Investment

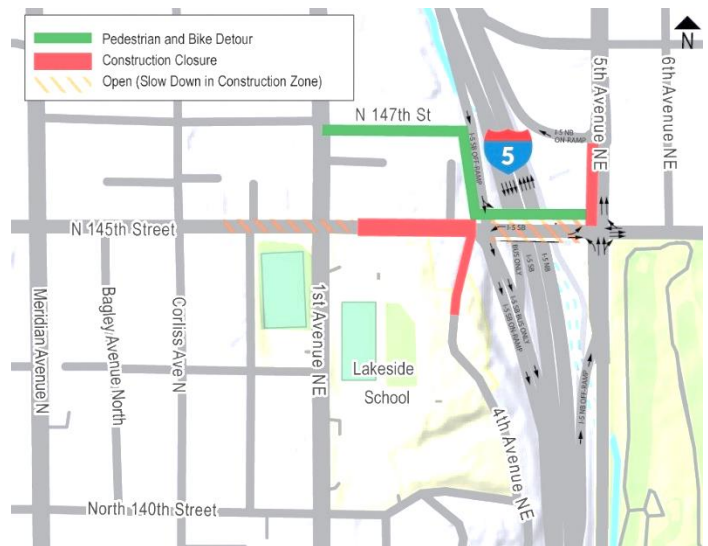
Timelines: Opens November 1, 2023. Closes March 31, 2024

Students can apply to all scholarships they are eligible for.

Travel Alert for those attending Spring Brunch

For those attending the Celebration of Spring Brunch at the Scottish Rite, be aware that the 145th exits north and southbound I-5 may well be unavailable. The overpass is under construction to remove traffic signals and add roundabouts. A **seven-month obstruction of N 145th Street is anticipated.**

If you are a frequent user of the 145th corridor, we advise you to plan for additional travel time and use alternate routes during this period. We anticipate the closure will last until the fall of 2024..



LET'S LOOK AT THAT A LITTLE CLOSER

In discussion with someone, or in reading a book/article, have you ever had a “Whoa – I never thought of it from that perspective” moment? This month Worshipful Master Eric Koteles invites VWBro. Bill Werner of Myrtle Lodge 108 to lead our Masonic Education portion of the April stated communication. Fellowcraft Masons (that’s nearly all of us) should review the lessons taught in that degree and come prepared for an evening of thoughtful dialogue!



A FUNDAMENTAL RE-EXAMINATION OF GRAMMAR: WHY MASONS SHOULD LEARN/RE-LEARN IT ON A DAILY BASIS

By VWBro. Bill Werner
Past Master Myrtle Lodge 108 (Issaquah)
President Puget Sound Masonic Service Bureau

Thanks for the invite to speak at St. Johns Lodge #9 on April 17th. I have always enjoyed my visits to St. Johns over the years – wonderful fellowship and discussion.

I have been working on a topic that I believe would be of interest to all Masons – especially the “EA” in all of us.

Many years ago I started researching Ancient “Colleges.” Perhaps think of them as early institutes of higher learning. Whether in Alexandria, Cordova, Nalanda, Oxford, or Beirut—these colleges drew students and scholars from around the known world, and all without exception had libraries attached to them. In the case of Nalanda (NE India) they drew students from Europe, Asia, and Africa.

So I delved into how they were able to instruct students from such diverse backgrounds, cultures, and languages.

The basic “Bachelor’s Degree” (for lack of a better term) consisted of Mastering: Grammar, Logic, and Rhetoric.

Only after Mastering those, were students then directed into “Post Grad” classes and instruction of Astronomy, Math, Geometry and Music.

What does this have to do with Masonry, and how is it applicable to our daily lives?

The EA Preparatory Lecture states: Freemasonry consists of a course in Moral and Philosophical Instruction. I would ask: “How is that going for you?”

Learning the Masonic Languages is a nearly identical process to the ancient universities. We must start with Grammar—learning the words associated with the culture and society we live in.

Thru the Initiation process, the Degrees, the proving up, taking on chairs; as time goes on and we grow a better working vocabulary – and the difference between a JS, JD, and JW!! – we move on to Logic – Organizing Grammar into a cohesive format of thinking – Learning Syllogisms, Mastering Figures of Speech. – In Lodge – We ask questions “Why this and Why that” till it starts to make some sense, and then – YEARS LATER in college!! – Rhetoric – the Art of Presenting Ideas

(From Wiki) Rhetoric is the [art](#) of [persuasion](#). It is one of the three ancient arts of discourse ([trivium](#)) along with [grammar](#) and [logic/dialectic](#). As an [academic discipline](#) within the [humanities](#), rhetoric aims to study the techniques that speakers or writers use to inform, persuade, and motivate their [audiences](#).

Consider the sheer joy and awe in observing WB Al Mungen deliver the MCL

In discussion with someone, or in reading a book/article, have you ever had a “Whoa – I never thought of it from that perspective” moment? (That statement is the criteria I utilize to determine if a Lodge Meeting, especially with St. John's involved, was successful).

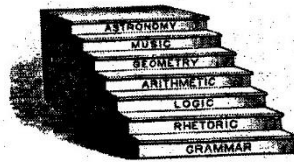
We need to be open to the world around us, BUT we must also have the tools readily available to us to consider the validity of the information and determine its truth or accuracy. We need the tools of Logic and Rhetoric in order to make better decisions!

How do we discern validity in a world that is awash with Facts, Statements, Allegations, Hyperbole?

The Masonic Application is to slow down, establish stronger foundations in Critical Thinking Skills. It is Not going to magically happen.

Given that we all have time, work, family issues – how do we go about learning Grammar? Learn to love Reading enough to create that quiet time daily. Pick up a book about some Masonic Topic. Read it slowly. Perhaps look at The Standard Work and review the Installation Obligations. Consider how many times the Worshipful Master is instructed to Educate, Educate, Educate. Re-visit the EA Degree from the beginning – especially the Preparatory Lecture – and then talk to a Brother or two or three and ask if they would like to meet for coffee or a brew and chat about it. Perhaps the reading/discovery can be mutually agreed upon beforehand

But most of all, we all need to recognize that regardless of our age, or our time in Masonry, we must not lose sight of the responsibility we have to Grow Our Self, remaining humble to learning is the foundation for continued growth. Twenty years of Masonic Dues experience – is it 20 years of growth or six months of growth repeated 39 times? We cannot be honest to others without first being honest with ourselves.



The North Star Program

A Solution to the Masonic Membership Problem

Posted: 17 Dec 2018

by Midnight Freemason Contributor

Bro. Michael Arce

“There is a great hunger in the souls of men today — a lack and want that neither food, clothes, nor shelter can fill. If Masonry is to save itself, it must be trying to satisfy this want. In my own town, with my own eyes I have seen it. (I) Have seen a Masonic college professor lecture night after night to an audience of three hundred brethren --- men from all walks of life — they were all there, and they simply ate up that “high-brow” stuff and called for more. They sat over an hour, hearing him talk about such a thing as the ‘Psychology of Architecture.’” And the discussion and live debate that followed, the interest and enthusiasm that were shown — and the new friends that were made -- — and out of it all there has grown a great revival of Masonry throughout the community” --- The American-Tyler Keystone, February 1922

It’s almost refreshing to read the desire for education in Lodge meetings. Our declining membership numbers, and challenges in engaging Brothers within the Craft are as old as Freemasonry itself. While it seems that in recent years with more voices rising to spotlight speaking to these problems, we would have an idea or solution. Grand Lodges in two jurisdictions, Michigan and New York, have worked together to present the North Star program to address the issue of membership retention. RW Daniel DiNatale, a member of the Grand Lodge of New York’s North Star project, simplified their findings, *“Men are less likely to leave a Lodge when they are more invested.”*

Brother DiNatale describes himself as one of the first wave of millennials to petition a Masonic Lodge. *“I was raised in March of my 21st birthday,”* he shared. Four years later, he served as Master of his Lodge. *“I was in a class of one, in a Lodge where the next person was 30 years older than me. The only reason I joined was because someone saw something in me and wanted me to be better than myself.”* One of the first Masons Bro. DiNatale met in Western New York was Grand Master of New York Masons, Jeffrey M. Williamson, who had been following a trend in the Erie Masonic District. *“Members were forming Traditional observance Lodges out of Lodges that were slowly fading.”* The evidence was clear, today’s Masons seek meetings that focus on esoteric and learning, rather than business and finances.

Instead of reinventing Lodges, an idea was proposed on how to improve them.

“That’s when we heard about the ‘7 Steps of Masonry’ program that the Grand Lodge of Michigan had started. We took their ideas and brought them back to Buffalo,” noted Bro. DiNatale. The Grand Lodge of Michigan had to address membership retention to survive. Flint, Michigan was their case study. The city of Flint had a population of just over 400,000 people in 2010 and was a very active community. When their economic downturn started in the mid 2000’s, the city became known for high-crime rates, a bad water supply, and was under a state of emergency. These factors created a domino effect and led to several Lodge closures due to a decline of membership. *“They dropped to like three Lodges and needed to produce a quick solution.”* Their solution was to provide a structured coaching model along with a very active digital marketing component, creating an online awareness advertising campaign that addressed their sagging membership development. *“They showed how to connect online interest with local Lodges,”* said Bro. DiNatale. The lessons learned in Michigan helped the New York Brothers find additional areas in improving the Masonic experience; Masonry needed to become “a way of life,” not just for prospects but for current members as well.

Creating Value in Membership

The original New York North Star committee met for five days to write the project. They proposed that instead of giving an interested man a petition on his first visit to a Lodge, the Lodge would voluntarily follow a series of steps to slow down the steps leading to initiation. They used a Success Coaching system, where Petitioners would be paired with a seasoned Brother of the Lodge, who would meet with them before his petition is completed. The process would allow both the perspective candidate and mentor time to address the basics of Freemasonry, addressing and setting the expectation level from both the Lodge and the candidate. When followed, the steps could be completed in a month or less, creating value in becoming a Mason.

It should be noted that the Success Coach remains partnered with his Petitioner through each degree, following his Master Mason’s degree, meeting with him on the first anniversary of his membership as a Master Mason.

“Before they were allowed to ask for a petition we wanted a proactive step to analyze a gentleman on a self-written narrative without violating the Constitution of the Lodge,” added Bro. DiNatale. The Letter of Introspection was an addition the New York project proposed. It allows for more constitutionally submitted information from the applicant to the Lodge. The candidate answers questions like, *“What did you learn from your family that makes you the man you are today?”* *“What are some of your*



strengths and what would you like to improve about yourself?” “Every person has a personal code or philosophy they live by. What is yours?” And my favorite, “What do you expect from Freemasonry?”

As a Master Mason, how many gentlemen have you balloted on where you can say you were 100% certain of the Petitioner’s name, vocation, or interest in joining a Lodge? This voluntary letter serves as the candidate’s narrative to all members of the Lodge.

Two years ago, I became North Star program certified for my jurisdiction. During the one-day training, it was instantly clear to me that creating value in membership is missed when we rush to hand a petition to the first man who asks for one. Outside of being able to find a Lodge, what do we really know about this man? I recalled my application process: starting with a search online to contact my mother Lodge, I attended a “prospect” meeting where we watched a video on Masonry (a CBS news story), were allowed to ask questions, and had a group discussion over pizza and beer. By the end of the evening, I was offered a petition. Only after I filled out my application did I begin researching Freemasonry with a deeper, more intent interest.

Guarding the West Gate

In the first meeting under the North Star program, the mentor discussed the required background check known as the Guarding the West Gate report. The Grand Lodge of New York now requires that a Petitioner provide a copy of a recent background review report attached to their petition when seeking membership to a Lodge. As RW Pat Imbimbo, Guarding the West Gate (GTWG) Advisory Committee Chairman, puts it, *“Our purpose is to assist the Investigation Committee with their duties.”* There are two items that immediately disqualify Petitioners from Masonry: registered on the sex offender database or lying on a petition.

This is where the GTWG program is helpful. The background check is paid for by the Petitioner, the report is sent to them, not the Lodge. Red Flag (felony convictions, violent offenders, sexual related offenses) items trigger emails to the Grand Secretary who communicates the warning to the Master and Secretary of the Lodge. Out of the 1860 reports conducted since 2016, only 60 were red flagged. It then becomes the Petitioner’s decision, not the Lodge’s, to pursue his application. If he chooses to continue, the Secretary of the Lodge will record that the review was completed, hand the paperwork back to the gentleman, and the Investigation Committee can discuss the particulars of the incident with the Petitioner.

Personally, I have had one of these rare conversations with Petitioners. One gentleman chose to withdraw his petition after he revealed that he was less than forthcoming with the details of an arrest and conviction of a violent crime left off his petition. In the end, we discussed that he hold his petition until his legal matters were cleared but continue to come to Lodge dinners and

events as a guest. The goal of the GTWG process is to maintain the sanctity of Freemasonry in a digital age where information and records are accessible. Most Petitioners receive a report that is only a page or two, present it to the Secretary of the Lodge in a sealed envelope, and continue advancing through the North Star program steps to their first degree.

Improving the Masonic Experience

One stat that floored me during my North Star training is that the average Mason demits or disengages from a Lodge within three to five years after being raised. I didn’t believe it at first but then I thought of Brothers from my class who were raised, came to meetings that first year, started attending less frequently over time, and haven’t been back in over a year. Sadly, these are the names that are read by the Secretary for “NPD.” These men simply lost interest.

We promise men the opportunity to make themselves better, they spend months learning our ritual, only to attend meetings that are absent of education and enlightenment.

The numbers speak for themselves, since 1924 the Masonic Service Association has compiled the totals of Master Masons in the United States Grand Lodges. According to M.S.A. records, 1959 was the “high point” of members with 4.1 million Masons in America. Last year was the “lowest point” with 1,076,626 Masons. Over 59 years we have lost 3,026,535 members. In my state (New York) alone, we have lost 1,799 members in 2016 reporting just 33,595 members last year (2017). There are many factors in declining membership: the baby boomer generation, changes in the modern American lifestyle, additional community/service organizations — but perhaps we must face the reality that the title of “Freemason” has lost its value over time with less engaged, less motivated members.

You can improve the Masonic Experience at your Lodge by creating meetings that matter. Work with your Master to engage Brothers with compelling discussions and programs on his Trestleboard. It is possible to create those moments of “live debate, interest and enthusiasm, and new friendship” that we all seek. Recognize and acknowledge your newly raised Brothers along with your seasoned members with special anniversary ceremonies during stated communications. And most importantly, help Petitioners find the Lodge that is the right fit for their expectations and interests.

“Our heritage is inexhaustible in interest, life-long in its appeal, with a power to enrich your life.” Lodge System of Masonic Education

Brother Michael Arce is (now) a Past Master of St. George’s #6, Schenectady and a member of Mt. Zion #311, Troy New York. When not in Lodge, Bro. Arce is the Marketing Manager for Capital Cardiology Associates in Albany, New York. He enjoys meeting new Brothers and hearing how the Craft has enriched their lives. He can be reached at: michael.arce@me.com

St. John's Lodge No. 9



April 21st, Celebration of Spring. SR Center
Shoreline