

Mark Twain Award

Jerusalem Lodge

No. 506.

F. & A. M.



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Introduction

The community surrounding the Masonic Children's home in Elizabethtown, Pa., woke up on April 1st to a story in the local newspaper that couldn't help but touch their hearts. Author Jon Rutter wrote about the gifts Jerusalem Lodge No. 506, 4400 Magee St., Tacony, Philadelphia, Pa., delivered the day before - 39 Bikes for 39 Kids.

The article, both in print and online, helped foster a positive Masonic identity in the local community when it referred to the Brethren as Springtime Santa's after each child residing at the home received both a bike and a helmet customized to their individual sizes.

Planning

The relationship between Jerusalem Lodge No. 506 and the Masonic Children's home in Elizabethtown, Pa., began over 50 years ago when the lodge started making yearly monetary donations to the home.

In 2006, however, that relationship became more personal. Under the direction of then-sitting Worshipful Master Bro. David Tansey D.D.G.M., Jerusalem Lodge started giving a gift at Christmas time that included a \$50 gift card to either Wal-Mart or K-mart and necessity items such as combs, brushes, toothbrushes and tooth paste to each child residing at the home.

The children living at the home are placed there by the State of Pennsylvania after it is deemed that the parents can no longer care for their child due to drugs, alcohol or violence issues. There is space for up to 40 children at Elizabethtown, each of which comes from non-Masonic backgrounds. However, they are introduced to Freemasonry through the home.

While delivering the yearly presents to the children on December 17, 2011, then sitting Worshipful Master, Bro. Robert W. Stringer III, got into a conversation with Virginia Migrala, the Director of Children's Services at the Masonic Children's home, about what more the lodge could do for the kids.

He felt that the Children's home, which is celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2013, gets lost in the shuffle of the Masonic homes when it comes to charity from the lodges. She then told him about her 2012 Initiative: to get sponsors to raise enough money so that each child residing at the home could get a brand new bicycle.

The Initiative was essentially a wish-list; Migrala was hoping that by putting the Initiative in the Freemason Magazine, several lodges would help purchase a bike for a child.

After Migrala took Stringer to a garage that housed a few of their current assortment of bikes, most of which were hand-me-downs and in a state of utter disrepair, Stringer had an idea on a way to help.

As out-going Worshipful Master, Stringer knew there was some money still left in the charity fund at the end of the year and that's when his wheels began to spin, so to speak.

A few days later, Stringer called Migrala to get an idea on how much a bike for an individual resident was going to cost. She wanted to make sure they were quality bikes and that \$200 per bike was her ballpark.

Although Stringer's last stated meeting as Worshipful Master had passed, he reached out to the charity committee and was told there was, indeed, some money left over. However, there was only enough to cover approximately half of the necessary bikes.

Stringer then approached the incoming Worshipful Master, Bro. Gerald T. Lienert, who had the idea to present the project to the lodge. Jerusalem Lodge, which has a long history of supporting Masonic youth groups such as DeMolay and Job's Daughters, has a soft spot for children.

Lienert contacted Tansey and they presented the idea at the 2012 Past Master's meeting in January (see Appendix A). The Past Masters unanimously agreed that he move forward with it and Lienert, in his first stated meeting as Worshipful Master, began a discussion on the topic.

In the course of discussion in the lodge, Bro. David Ritchie, P.M., suggested that Jerusalem Lodge buy each child a bike. The membership stood behind him 100-percent. Bro. Gervase J. Purcell Jr., P.M., then pointed out that they'll all need helmets, too. The membership decided unanimously to include the helmets as well (see Appendix B, page 2).

Implementation

With that in place, the next step was to form a committee. It was chaired by Tansey and was comprised of Gerald Lienert, Stringer and Bro. Steven C. Lienert (see Appendix B, page 1).

Stringer contacted Migrala and she compiled a wish-list of each child and the type of bike they wanted, down to the color of the bike. The committee forwarded that information to different bicycle shops around the Philadelphia area, including

Doylestown Bike Works, Bikeline, Lancaster Bike Shop and Guy's Bikes.

This helped begin the journey of Masonic Awareness outside the lodge. Each bicycle shop did the best it could to keep the cost as low as possible in hopes of joining Jerusalem Lodge in helping the children, most of whom arrive at Elizabethtown with just the clothes on their backs.

Ultimately, the bid submitted by Lancaster Bike Shop, (which came from Tansey's co-worker Michelle Jones) with its combination of price, quality of bike, proximity to the home and the guarantee of help with the maintenance of the bikes, fit the parameters of the lodge, which ended up spending more than \$9,000 on the entire project (see Appendix B, pages 3, 4 and 5).

Lancaster Bike Shop did its best to match the children's aforementioned wish-list, purchased the bikes, assembled them, adjusted the bicycles for every child and stored them with the helmets and locks until Jerusalem Lodge was ready to present them (see Appendix C).

Each bike and helmet was set up custom to each child. Now the problem became how to get the bikes get to the Children's Home, which was 20 minutes away?

Jerusalem Lodge members were prepared to caravan from Philadelphia to the Lancaster Bike Shop and transport one or two bikes in each car to the home. But Tansey reached out to his Masonic motorcycle club, the Widow's Sons, and Bro. David Poli, Hackenburg-Mt. Moriah Lodge No. 19, offered a solution.

Poli runs a tractor-trailer driving school and he arranged to have a trailer transport the bikes to the home. Poli drove the truck himself.

Twenty Brethren from Jerusalem Lodge made the 96-mile drive from Philadelphia to Elizabethtown on Sat., March 31, 2012, to help unload the 39 bikes and deliver them to the 39 children living at the home (see Appendix D to E for the newspaper article and photographs).

Evaluation and Reflection

The looks on the kids' faces when they got their individual bike instantaneously made it worth all the time and effort.

For example, Cassie Telencio had recently arrived at the Children's Home and her bike was the first one off the truck. One problem: Telencio didn't know how to ride a bike. By the end of the day, though, thanks to the tutelage Tansey's daughter, Telencio was not in need of training wheels.

In fact, Jon Rutter, a writer for the *Intelligencer Journal/Lancaster New Era* newspaper, who was there covering the event, quoted Breanna Brown, a 13-year old child living at the home in the lead in his story the next day. There "she praised the Masons of Jerusalem Lodge 506 in Philadelphia for their generosity in providing the gift." (See Appendix D.)

Another child said that the bike was the first brand new thing he's ever received in his life.

That's when the public was made aware of the benevolence of Freemasonry through the actions of Jerusalem Lodge. Rutter referred to the Brethren as "Springtime Santa's."

Just over three months removed from Stringer's conversation with Migrala about her Initiative, Jerusalem Lodge delivered a bike to each child (see Appendix E to F). There was full participation from the lodge members, from the unanimous vote to helping hand-load and deliver the bikes to the kids, which helped foster feelings of fellowship and self-improvement between Brethren in the lodge. It became the proudest moment of the Brethren in 2012 (see Appendix G).

"Not only did everybody jump on board, this is where you say the Grand Architect of the Universe reached out because it couldn't have gone any smoother," Gerald Lienert, W.M., said. "I don't think there was a ripple in the pond. I think we had smiles as big as the kids had."

In the May edition of *The Pennsylvania Freemason*, the lodge was recognized for its work (see Appendix H) and Bro. Jay W. Smith, the Right Worshipful Grand Master of Pennsylvania, made an unscheduled visit to lodge's September stated meeting to

personally acknowledge the noble efforts of Jerusalem Lodge. The Children's Home is one of the Right Worshipful Grand Master's Initiatives in 2013.

In conclusion, the Brethren of Jerusalem Lodge No. 506 were already proud Freemasons. This experience only heightened the positive Masonic identity and feeling of fellowship within the lodge and, furthermore, helped improve Masonic Awareness in the local community. We hope you find us worthy of this prestigious award.