

Volunteerism and the Order of the Eastern Star

By Barbara Ramsey | Photos by Keith Borgmeyer

As Associate Grand Conductress this past year, Debi Olson chose to show her support of the Masonic Home of Missouri and her passion for helping her sisters and brothers in need. She wanted to remind her fellow Eastern Star members that they are not forgotten when age or physical limitations prevent them from attending Chapter. Rather than receive personal gifts at her reception, she asked for gifts of fabric to be used to make gifts for Masonic Home Outreach Clients. She then turned those pieces of fabric into beautiful lap quilts.

Outreach staff has been presenting the lap quilts to our clients all over the state. It is difficult to put into words the reaction that we receive when giving these beautiful gifts. One specific client is currently struggling with a life threatening illness. She lives alone with no family support. This beautiful act of kindness by the Order of the Eastern Star wraps her in warmth and reminds her that she is not alone and forgotten during this most difficult time in her life.

The relationship between the Order of the Eastern Star and the Masonic Home of Missouri spans over 100 years, beginning when the

Masonic Home was just an idea.

The year 1875 was an important year for two organizations that would become linked together to make a difference in the lives of men, women, and children for over a century.

On October 12, 1875 Past Grand Master John C. Ralls introduced a resolution at Grand Lodge Annual Communication recommending a committee be appointed to look into the creation “of a ‘Home’ for the indigent widows and minors (orphans) of worthy (deceased) Master Masons.” This was the first call to create what would become the Masonic Home of Missouri.



The very next day, October 13th, would begin the creation of the Grand Chapter of Missouri, Order of the Eastern Star.

The Missouri Order of the Eastern Star was still finding its way in 1877, when Worthy Grand Matron Mattie A. Yost spoke to the possibilities of the organization as it grows. She stated “One of the possibilities I see outlined in the future would be a Masonic Widows’ and Orphans’ Home, labored for, and maintained by, the joint efforts of the two Orders.” Only two years after its inception, the Grand Chapter of Missouri, Order of the Eastern Star joined in the call for a Masonic Home.

The initial support for the Home by the Order of the Eastern Star chapters and members was financial, helping to raise the funds to open the Masonic Home’s doors in 1889. In 1904 the Grand Chapter formalized their support with the approval of 25 cent annual per capita dues for each member. They would build the Order of the Eastern Star Chapel on the St. Louis campus in 1897 and a replacement Chapel in 1928. They would build a playground for the children, provide furnishings for the Home, volunteer hours at the Home,



Debi and Jack Olson

THANK YOU!

and provide necessities for the residents. The Order of the Eastern Star spent over a century helping to not only fund the Masonic Home's operations, but provide the extras that helped make the Masonic Home truly feel like a home to the many men, women, and children who lived there.

As the Masonic Home shifted away from facilities to helping people remain in their own homes and communities, a new phase in this century-old relationship would take place. In 2009 the Eastern Star's Masonic Home Advisory Board began providing a \$20 monthly gift for each Outreach client receiving monthly financial assistance through the Long-Term and Short-Term Financial Assistance Programs. In 2012, the Grand Chapter of Missouri voted to forward the monies accumulated by the Eastern Star's Masonic Home Advisory Board directly to the Masonic Home. The Masonic Home set these funds aside to continue providing the \$20 monthly gift to Outreach clients in the name of the Order of the Eastern Star. There have been countless stories from clients of gratitude and appreciation for this extra kindness.

Two years ago, MWB Richard Smith was the Masonic Home Board President. The topic of Penny-A-Day was being discussed during a Board Meeting. In attendance at the Board Meeting was then-Associate Grand Matron Nancy K. Lane and Grand Conductress Karlene Baylous. Brother Smith turned and issued a challenge to Sister Lane – would the Order of the Eastern Star consider

adopting a Penny-A-Day program?

Sister Lane accepted Brother Smith's challenge, and introduced Penny-A-Day to the Chapters this past year as Worthy Grand Matron, beginning the year with her own personal Penny-A-Day donation. The Masonic Home is so very grateful for the support shown by WGM Lane and continued by now WGM Baylous. Their support extends well beyond the renewed financial support. They have taken time out of their schedules to attend meetings and learn more about the Outreach Programs. They have become tremendous advocates for the Masonic Home helping to share what the Outreach Programs are doing while also strengthening the bond between the two organizations.

Volunteerism has always been a very special part of the relationship between the Masonic Home and the Order of the Eastern Star. As the Masonic Home transitioned to Outreach, it seemed like this part

of the relationship might be lost. However, the Order of the Eastern Star has always known that it was never about the buildings – it was always about the people within the buildings. We just needed to get a bit more creative in how we fit the desire for service with the confidentiality of the Outreach Programs.

Creative thinking by The Missouri Show-Me State Grand Representatives Club would be the beginning of the modern era of volunteerism to benefit clients through the Outreach Programs. The group had visited the Masonic Home's facilities in St. Louis and Kansas City in the past, bringing gifts to the residents to brighten their holiday season, and wanted to do something similar for the Outreach clients. In 2014 Club President Bev Steelman led the charge on the new project – creating gift boxes, filled with items for the clients, to be mailed out to each client in time for Christmas.

Another Order of the Eastern Star project was done in honor of Brother Jack Olson's year as Worthy Grand Patron of the Grand Chapter of Missouri, Order of the Eastern Star. Instead of a reception, they held a service day. They created bags that could be attached to walkers for Outreach clients to hold items such as their phones and keys as they move around their home or assisted care facility. They also made beautiful greeting cards that the clients could then use to send to loved ones.

The Order of the Eastern Star's support of the Masonic Home helps make it possible to truly make a difference in the lives of those in need.

