



THE MASONS OF CALIFORNIA

ANNUAL REPORT 2020



EXECUTIVE MESSAGE

What a Year!

MOST OF OUR original ideas and plans for 2020 went out the window in March, when the COVID-19 pandemic upended daily life around the world. And while traditional Masonry has faced seemingly insurmountable obstacles this past year, our members, lodges, and Grand Lodge all made incredible progress in 2020 that will continue to shape our jurisdiction for decades to come.

This Annual Report summarizes our tremendous achievements over the past year, especially around the four strategic pillars represented in the 2020 Fraternity Plan, the five-year roadmap we drew up in 2015 to guide us to this point. The first, “rewarding member experiences,” has seen us develop improved candidate-prospecting processes, elevated our leadership training, and cultivated 29 new lodges. “Meaningful and memorable degrees” saw improved ritual and candidate-training programs and dramatically increased opportunities for Masonic education, especially through

the new Online Masonic Speaker Series. “Strong lodges and halls” involved expanding the financial, tax, and real-estate services provided through Grand Lodge. “Positive impact on society” resulted in two of the most successful charitable campaigns in our Foundation’s history: Let’s Write the Future, which provided increased access to literacy for underserved students and improved senior care for our most vulnerable; and the Distressed Worthy Brother Relief Fund, our record-smashing drive to provide financial relief, counseling, and mental-health services to our brethren and their families affected by the pandemic, wildfire, and other disasters. This second effort was so successful, it will continue into the future.

Even while we were unable to gather in person, our members’ creativity allowed us to not only maintain, but expand our brotherhood. The best of what we learned will be incorporated into our fraternity’s operations as we re-open our doors and again meet on the level.

As California Masons, we should be proud of the progress we have made in the face of enormous adversity this year. We look forward to a brighter future as our fraternity continues to evolve to meet our 2050 vision—The World in Harmony.

Arthur H. Weiss

GRAND MASTER
GRAND LODGE OF CALIFORNIA



A Year that Mattered

EVEN WHILE APART, THE MASONS OF CALIFORNIA JOINED TOGETHER IN ALL-NEW WAYS.

IF NECESSITY, as they say, is the mother of invention, then 2020 was a fertile year for the Masons of California.

On March 19, when Governor Gavin Newsom issued the statewide stay-at-home order, lodges across the state began to realize they were going to need to

**BY ANTONE
PIERUCCI**

adapt to life online, at the very least to offer some measure of fellowship and connection. By the year's end, they'd done far more than that—and shown that in adversity lies ample opportunity.

As ever, Masons and lodges led the way for the fraternity, hosting countless Zoom meetups, check-ins, and happy hours—both with lodge brothers and with

prospects and Masons from other lodges. “Everything started organically,” says Mike Ramos, lodge development manager for Grand Lodge. “But we knew we needed to do something to keep Masonry integral to our members’ lives.”

With that in mind, Ramos and others at Grand Lodge—all of whom were working remotely—pieced together a slate of their own digital programming. In early April, then-Grand Master John Trauner hosted the first of what would become a weekly gathering on Facebook Live to toast medical professionals and frontline workers. The event was a nod to the Masonic tradition of the 9 p.m. toast to absent brethren—a pandemic-induced spin on a

centuries-old custom. Past grand masters and other Grand Lodge officers hosted subsequent gatherings, 20 in all, viewed by a total of nearly 300,000 people around the world.

Even more impressive was the rollout of the free Online Masonic Speaker Series, which launched in late April with a livestreamed lecture from Patrick Craddock—founder of the Craftsman’s Apron shop, a member of Prometheus No. 851, and a well-known expert on Masonic garments—about the history of the Masonic apron. More than 1,000 Masons from California and beyond tuned in. Craddock’s talk was the first of 20 lectures in 2020 that attracted a total of more than 10,000 viewers. Other speakers included Dr. Oscar Alleyne, an infectious-disease expert and a New York Mason, and Teresita Aréchiga, grand master of the Women’s Grand Lodge of California.

In May, the series welcomed Dr. Andreas Önnarfors, an authority on Scandinavian Freemasonry and master of Quator Coronati, the leading international Masonic research lodge.

Önnarfors’s presentation began a six-lecture sequence, presented in partnership with QC, in which that lodge’s expert speakers addressed topics related to Masonry in the American West.

All told, the 20-lecture Online Masonic Speaker Series was the most widely attended Masonic educational programming ever offered by the Grand Lodge of California—and there’s more to come in 2021. “It was an absolute success,” Ramos says. “We had people from South Africa, India, and Switzerland tuning in to hear these speakers. It was beyond what we could have hoped for.”

While the Speaker Series was undoubtedly the splashiest online offering, it was far from the only one developed by Grand Lodge—nor was it the trickiest to pull off. In April and May, meetings for Hall and Secretary Association members were adapted into streaming webinars (676 people registered); in July, what’s typically the

More Masonry reaching more people: Masons spent 875,000+ minutes in the Online Speaker Series alone.

A FRATERNITY GETS WIRED

Attendance at Grand Lodge online programming soared.

Virtual Saturday Night Toasts:

291,799 VIEWS FOR 20 EVENTS

Annual Communication:

4,462 REGISTRANTS

Online Speaker Series and California Masonic Symposium:

11,632 REGISTRANTS FOR 20 LECTURES

Leadership Courses and Association Webinars:

1,750 REGISTRANTS FROM 316 LODGES

THE DIGITAL UPGRADE

A new membership platform, iMember 2.0, is introduced.

IN 2020, at least one new online offering from Grand Lodge had actually been planned well in advance. The iMember 2.0 platform rolled out July 1, offering Masons a single place to search and update membership records, pay lodge dues, chat with fellow members, and access important resources.

Further, the system provides lodge leaders with custom dashboards that give an unprecedented view of membership engagement, finances, and communications.

Adoption has been strong. Approximately 10 percent of California Masons logged on to the new system in the first three months—a higher rate than in other Masonic jurisdictions using the platform; in 89 percent of lodges, at least one officer per month makes use of the dashboard.

Master and Wardens Retreat was reimaged as the Online Masonic Leadership Course, with more than 1,000 individuals representing 316 lodges. Another retreat, for district inspectors, was held virtually in September. More than mere PowerPoint slideshows, the digital retreats were interactive development sessions that attracted not only California Masonic leaders, but also Masons in 53 countries. “We made it clear that despite the pandemic, we would continue to provide services to the extent we could,” says Jordan Yelinek, director of member services and assistant grand secretary.

But by far the most complex event to move online in 2020 was the Annual Communication. “It serves as a fraternal homecoming of sorts,” Yelinek says. “It’s an opportunity for brothers throughout the state to come together—and we wanted to have that this year, even if only virtually.” Using a combination of live feeds shot in the auditorium of the California Masonic Memorial Temple in San Francisco, pre-recorded speeches, and prepared video, the Grand Lodge was able to meet, conduct a truncated slate of business, and elect a new grand master in Arthur Weiss. Some 1,500 people attended the business sessions, and more than 1,200 viewed the installation of new officers.

Though it turned out to be a success, don’t expect another virtual Annual Communication anytime soon, Yelinek says. Do, however, expect to see some enhancements to the live event in years to come. Elements of online training might stick around, too, though you can bet that in-person gatherings won’t disappear. After all, at its heart Freemasonry is about bringing men together. And as this year proved, that can happen in lots of different ways. ■

IN GOOD COMPANY

Membership is poised to grow, thanks to initiatives in the 2020 Fraternity Plan.

% of Members
Remain Active

62%

**MASONS
INITIATED
BETWEEN
2010–2015.**

92%

**MASONS
INITIATED
BETWEEN
2016–2020.**

1,134

**MASONS RESTORED TO GOOD STANDING DUE
TO THE RESTORATION CAMPAIGN.**



The World in Harmony

BUILDING PEACE AND UNDERSTANDING THROUGH FRIENDSHIP, SERVICE, AND SELF-IMPROVEMENT.

IF YOU WANT TO SEE the future of Freemasonry in California, start by looking to the past. The distant past.

In 2020, the fraternity embarked on an ambitious project: to collectively imagine—and then formalize—vision and mission

BY IAN A. STEWART statements to help plan the next several years and guide Masonry into the year 2050, the bicentennial of its arrival in California. The exercise involved asking hundreds of current and former members, as well as people outside the fraternity, for feedback both positive and negative and to imagine a path forward. As soon became clear, inspiration for many came directly from the earliest California Masons.

In the 1800s, Masons from every corner of the country and abroad were lured west by California's gold rush, and they soon formed a patchwork of lodges—men of disparate backgrounds, all of whom were eager to provide mutual aid to one another and build a new life far from home. Today, California Masons are driven by the same basic desires: to make lasting friendships, provide aid, and work toward a deeper understanding of themselves—with some subtle updates. From the many hours of conversation with lodge leaders, and numerous brainstorming sessions with a newly formed strategic planning committee, came a 2050 vision statement: *The World in Harmony*. A mission statement

was formulated for how the fraternity proposes to bring that vision to life: *By building peace and understanding through friendship, service, and self-improvement.*

Says Brandon Lippincott, of Conejo Valley Lodge No. 807 and a member of the strategic planning committee, “The goal is very large—it’s super ambitious. But the more I think about it, the more I feel that it’s something we can all participate in. This is something that everybody can use to make a difference.”

For the first time, the Masons of California have a target for all future plans, campaigns, and initiatives. Its influence is already being felt.

A NEW PLAN

Over the past year, the fraternity formally closed out the 2020 Fraternity Plan, its five-year guide, and began building a framework for the 2025 Fraternity Plan. Whereas the 2020 Fraternity Plan was mostly focused on strengthening infrastructure, the goal now is to help lodges

flourish by improving the member experience at all levels.

The plan rests on three pillars: lifelong friendship, diversity and harmony, and positive awareness.

To longtime Masons, these themes should sound familiar. However, the idea isn’t simply to maintain the status quo. Rather, the pillars address three areas in which feedback from members and the wider public suggested an opportunity to address a weakness (such as improving the public’s understanding of Freemasonry) or reemphasize a historic strength. Lifelong friendship, for instance, is already a calling card for Freemasonry. The 2025 Plan calls for lodges to capitalize on that by developing initiatives that maximize opportunities for fellowship.

Lodge harmony emerged in member surveys as one of the most important indicators of people’s overall perception of the fraternity. Fittingly, maintaining harmony will be a point of emphasis moving forward. Whether it’s addressing schisms between younger and older members or reducing



AMERICAN CANYON LODGE No. 875

PHOTO BY WINNI WINTERMEYER

the prevalence of cliques, finding ways to ensure that all members feel comfortable and valued is of utmost importance. Included under that rubric is embracing diversity. That means helping lodges to seek out and make themselves welcoming to people of all races and backgrounds, ensuring leadership is diverse at every level of the fraternity, and collaborating with other Masonic organizations.

The third pillar is about improving awareness of the fraternity among the larger public. Masons have much to be proud of, but too often lack the tools or encouragement to share their stories with the world. Over the next five years, the Grand Lodge will empower members to more comfortably discuss Masonry with friends and family and to help publicize the good work lodges do in their communities and around the state.

THE FUTURE IS NOW

When Masons resume meeting in person post-pandemic, they'll be doing so in a very different world than the one that existed a year ago. The future we've been planning for is already upon us. How lodges respond will determine the health and success of the fraternity for years to come. The goal of the strategic plan—and the vision and mission statements that birthed it—is to position California lodges to thrive in that new world.

"We're going to evolve," Grand Master Art Weiss says. "We have an opportunity to build a whole new level to the fraternity that we've never had before. I think that's exciting."

Yet the values that will guide us there are timeless. No matter what the year 2050 looks like, Masons will continue to come together in search of friendship, community, and self-improvement. ■

LOOKING FORWARD

Key metrics from the 2020 membership survey were used to design the 2025 Fraternity Plan.

The vast majority of members cherish their membership:



Friendship and purpose drives engagement:



And yet, Masons are staying silent:





Strength in Numbers

IN A YEAR WITHOUT LODGE, CALIFORNIA FREEMASONS MADE THEIR PRESENCE FELT LIKE NEVER BEFORE.

LAST SPRING, AS COVID-19 wreaked havoc across the country, Darin Sanden resolved to do whatever he could for his lodge brothers, many of whom found themselves out of work and struggling financially. Sanden, master of

**BY IAN A.
STEWART**

Yucca Valley No. 802, near Joshua Tree, started looking for things he needed done around the house: moving furniture, clearing out the garage, that sort of thing. “It was \$50, \$100,” he says. “Some of these young guys, they’re gig workers. I was just trying to help out.”

Sanden was doing what generations of Masons before him have done in times of crisis: offering relief. As an obligation that Master Masons take on, that part came naturally. What didn’t was asking for help when he himself needed it.

In late summer, Sanden lost his job as a hearing-aid technician. His wife, a home health professional, was out of work, too. The couple scrambled for whatever work they could find. They applied for unemployment and CalFresh benefits. “We made it stretch as far as we could,” Sandin says, but money was still tight. His lodge brothers suggested he turn to Masonic Outreach Services for help. “I never imagined I’d be the guy on that side of the table,” Sandin says. Reluctantly, he agreed. What he saw there, he says, forever changed his view of Freemasonry.

A BROTHERHOOD TRANSFORMED

The pandemic has affected just about every aspect of the fraternity over the past year. In March, lodges suspended in-person meetings and activities, instead relying on Zoom meetings to stay in touch and conduct essential business. Members around the state organized food drives, arranged grocery and medication delivery for the elderly, and reached out to members’ widows and other vulnerable folks.

At the Masonic Homes in Union City and Covina, campuses were closed to visitors and public spaces made unavailable; practically overnight, management rushed to develop protocols to keep residents and staff safe.

Every branch of the organization adapted: At the Masonic Center for Youth and Families, counselors shifted to tele- and videoconferencing, and began offering emotional-wellness “virtual visit” calls free of charge to residents and staff at the Masonic Homes. The Acacia Creek Retirement Community joined with the Union City campus of the Masonic Homes in expanding the programming available to residents, who were otherwise cooped up in their apartments. Perhaps no example of this was more dramatic than, in April, opera soprano Tracy Cox singing “America the Beautiful” as flag-waving residents watched from their balconies. On social media, a video of the performance was viewed nearly 50,000 times.

Life on these campuses was indeed transformed by COVID-19—but rather than wall residents off entirely, staff at both Acacia Creek and the Masonic Homes doubled down on opportunities for safe socialization and companionship. These included activities like hallway happy hours, grocery and goodie delivery, balcony workouts, car parades, grab-and-go cocktail hours, and library pickup service. At Acacia Creek, leaders developed a myriad of virtual programming for residents and staff, including online exercise programs; video-conferenced Great Courses, discussion groups, and TED Talks; online film nights; Zoom and other web-tools tutorials; even a dinner-theater reading.

Ensuring the health and safety of everyone was paramount. Campus managers rapidly developed new safety standards, including administering more than 11,000 coronavirus tests to staff and residents through



mid-December. The Masonic Homes also recruited heavily, hiring 78 additional employees to help manage the load.

DISTRESSED WORTHY BROTHERS

During those hectic first weeks of sheltering in place, fraternity leaders began working behind the scenes on an organization-wide response to what was clearly a burgeoning crisis. The result was the formation of the Distressed Worthy Brother Relief Fund, an emergency charity drive. Administered by Masonic Outreach Services (a division of the Masonic Homes of California), organized by the California Masonic Foundation and the Grand Lodge, and powered by donations from individual members and lodges, the fund brought every part of the organization together to provide services and financial support to Masons affected by COVID-19. Charity from the new fund would be expanded to help all members, regardless of age, degree, or lodge affiliation.

The response was overwhelming. The first \$5,000 was raised in 20 minutes. Within

a week, the fund had reached more than \$30,000. One month in, Masons had donated \$221,000 to the effort. By the end of the fall, fundraising records had been smashed, with more than \$650,000 for COVID relief and overall Annual Fund giving above \$2 million for the year, a new high-water mark.

Beyond the dollar amounts, the Distressed Worthy Brother fund clearly resonated with California Masons—even those who'd never given to the Foundation before. Twice as many members made their first charitable gift in 2020 as in 2019, the most first-time donors in nearly 20 years. "This is Masonry in action," says Sabrina Montes, executive director of Masonic Outreach Services. "It's activating a safety net that Masons have created over hundreds of years. It shows how powerful the tenets of Masonry are."

For members like Jack Wolf, a member of Hollywood No. 355, the call for relief served as an opportunity to put his Masonic values into practice. Wolf, 88, understood the value of Masonic support firsthand: The previous fall, his wife had passed away. A month later, his dog died. "A lonely period for me," he says. It left a

RAPID RESPONSE

The Masonic Homes of California and Acacia Creek Retirement Community responded quickly to the pandemic. A look at a massive organizational response, by the numbers.

64,000+

PAIRS OF PROTECTIVE GLOVES ORDERED.

12,534

TOTAL CORONAVIRUS TESTS CONDUCTED.

1,450

FACE SHIELDS PROVIDED TO STAFF AND RESIDENTS.

19,600+

SURGICAL, N95, AND KN95 MASKS DISTRIBUTED TO RESIDENTS AND STAFF.

4,663

RESIDENT TELE-VISITS AND TELE-THERAPY VISITS WITH FRIENDS, FAMILY AND MCYAF COUNSELORS.

114

VIRTUAL COUNSELING SESSIONS BETWEEN STAFF AND MCYAF COUNSELORS.

THROUGH DECEMBER 31, 2020

powerful impression weeks later when a lodge brother called to check in and make sure he was doing OK. “I felt a warm, secure feeling in my heart that I had help if I needed it.” When the opportunity to pay it forward presented itself,

The Distressed Worthy Brother Relief Fund “shows how powerful the tenets of Masonry are.”

—SABRINA MONTES

Wolf did just that, signing over his \$400 government-issued stimulus check to the fund. “It puts another warm feeling in my heart that I was able to help a brother in need,” he says. Clearly, the need was great: Right away, MOS began receiving calls from Masons who’d found themselves out of work. Care managers compiled information about local, state, and federal services available to those in need. They also consulted with members about their finances and advised them regarding bill forgiveness and payment options offered by many companies. “The MOS team is made up of social workers,” Montes says. “We know how to provide care-management support, which often is what people really need. We wanted to serve as a sounding board to members in crisis, to help them find a path out of this.”

Crucially, MOS was also equipped with the infrastructure to quickly wire funds to those in need, often within a week. The team developed an abbreviated application that reduced the burden of paperwork and sped the process along. In many cases, the quick injection of aid helped members bridge the gap until unemployment benefits or other financial help arrived. Assistance ranged widely depending on need, averaging \$4,302 per member or family. Not a life-changing amount of money, “but it is lifesaving at a time when there’s no other support out there,” Montes says. With the state unemployment system inundated by requests, “what we

Wolf did just that, signing over his \$400 government-issued stimulus check to the fund. “It puts another warm feeling in my heart that I was able to help a brother in need,” he says.

Clearly, the need was great: Right



PHOTO BY JAMES MACRAE

NURSES IN PPE CARING FOR RESIDENTS IN THE LORBER SKILLED NURSING ENVIRONMENT AT THE MASONIC HOMES OF CALIFORNIA IN UNION CITY.

helped ensure was that every person was able to keep a roof over their heads and food on their plates until other benefits became available,” she says.

HELP ON THE WAY

For Sanden, turning to MOS was a humbling experience, but also a rewarding one. For years he and others had stressed to new members the importance of providing aid to those in need, little expecting he’d be on the receiving end. (In fact, in the spring, he made a modest donation to the fund himself.)

Sanden was quickly connected to a care manager who reviewed his finances and pointed out programs and services in his area

UNPRECEDENTED

Distressed Worthy Brother Relief Fund

\$665,965

TOTAL FUNDS RAISED.

3,514

PEOPLE DONATED TO THE FUND.

172

CALLS MADE TO MASONIC OUTREACH
SERVICES FOR COVID-RELATED SUPPORT.

64

MEMBERS AND THEIR FAMILIES WHO
RECEIVED DIRECT FINANCIAL AID.

\$4,302

AVERAGE ONE-TIME
FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE.

\$275,359

PROVIDED TO MEMBERS AND FAMILIES
IN NEED.

THROUGH DECEMBER 15, 2020

such as hiring lists, food banks, assistance filing for unemployment, and working with lenders to defer payment.

In the end, Sanden determined that what he needed most was help paying for a hearing-aid certification exam he would need to pass in order to be hired by another company in his field. The test was given in person, in Sacramento, which meant he needed funds for the exam fee, air travel, and lodging. The money was in his account within days. “It was a huge help,” Sanden says. “It showed that we’re not giving handouts—we’re giving a hand up.”

In the following weeks, Sanden’s care manager continued to check in to make sure he was OK and to keep him apprised of other services. Sanden’s unemployment benefits were eventually approved, providing a measure of stability. But knowing that someone from MOS was there to help was an enormous emotional relief, he says. “I can’t even tell you how much faith I have in our organization because of this,” he says. “All the messages I get, the personal phone calls—these folks are the best there are.”

Unfortunately, the need for help—for Sanden and so many others—didn’t end there. By winter, as case counts mounted again across California, MOS was bracing for another round of calls for aid. And though the Masonic Homes and Acacia Creek were on track to have all residents and staff vaccinated by January 2021, for many, the fallout is ongoing. Lost jobs, missed wages, deferred bills—the impact of the crisis is far from over. For Sanden, that reality is clear: In December, his unemployment benefits were set to expire, and despite passing his exam, he’d yet to land a job. “We’ve been hanging on by the skin of our teeth,” he says. “Obviously, we’ll try

whatever we can. But in our area, in rural San Bernardino County, there aren't a lot of options. We'll do our best to survive."

A LASTING LEGACY

Recognizing that the need for help remains, the California Masonic Foundation has announced that the Distressed Worthy Brother program will continue into the new year as part of the 2021 Annual Fund. Rather than solely provide COVID relief, it will serve as an emergency fund for Masons going through all manner of crises. In a state continually dealing with the specter of natural disaster and faced with the uncertain prospect of a post-pandemic economic recovery, it's likely that Masons will again feel the need to tap into the reserve. "This program will live on beyond the pandemic," Montes says.

For Masons like Sanden, that's a reminder—of the obligation to help and, as he experienced, of the importance of asking for it.

Sanden says that when prospects approach his lodge, coaches talk to them about the importance of contributing to charity—and also about being big enough to ask for help when it's needed. "It's humbling, but that's what balances you out as a person," he says. "It's OK to turn to another brother and say I need your help. What good would we be as a fraternity if we let you fall?"

The experience, he says, has offered him an entirely new perspective on Masonry.

"How do we continue to go forward—to get up every day and work toward the bright future ahead?" he says. "We keep reinventing ourselves, carving the stone. I can't tell you, I'm so thankful. They've got a Freemason for life—and one who will one day be in a position to be charitable to someone else." ■

FINDING BALANCE

The Masonic Center for Youth and Families got creative in bringing emotional-wellness support to all in 2020.

STATEWIDE STAY-AT-HOME ORDERS came down on a Friday last March, Kimberly Rich remembers. By Monday, counselors at the Masonic Center for Youth and Families (MCYAF) were seeing clients again, entirely by videoconference.

It was a massive organizational pivot, says Rich, executive director of MCYAF, but one the team embraced. Before the pandemic began, only 1 or 2 percent of client interactions were virtual; since March, nearly every single one of its more than 3,000 appointments were remote—and that allowed MCYAF to expand services at a time when they're needed more than ever.

The Center has seen an increase in calls for educational therapy services, mostly for middle and high school students struggling to adapt to remote learning, as well as marriage and family counseling services. But the biggest change has been its expansion into the Masonic Homes of California (MHC), where MCYAF counselors offered residents and staff "virtual visit" calls free of charge. "It's not therapy, it's a friendly visit," Rich says.

MCYAF also launched a staff wellness program for MHC to help prevent burnout and alleviate stress for frontline workers. "The pandemic has taken its toll on folks," Rich says. "People are fatigued. At the same time, I'm seeing a shift around the stigma associated with mental health services. It's normalized the idea that everybody needs emotional support when they're going through a difficult time."

Another silver lining for MYCAF has been growth in outreach to the Masonic youth orders, where Rich says they've seen a quadruple increase in referrals, helped immensely by the sudden ubiquity of videoconferencing. "During the pandemic, nobody judges you for needing to talk to someone," Rich says. "Because who the heck doesn't need someone to talk to right now?"

"Everybody needs emotional support when they're going through a difficult time."



Homage to Service

IT WASN'T THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS MONTH CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION ANYONE ENVISIONED, BUT MASONS' SUPPORT OF EDUCATION WAS AS IMPACTFUL AS EVER IN 2020.

FOR 100 YEARS, the Masons of California have supported public education initiatives throughout the state. It's safe to say they'd never done it like this before.

In an unmitigated annus horribilis, public school students were hit especially hard. As students adapted to a new learning environment, Masons stepped up to support schools in new ways, helping to address widening educational gaps brought on by remote instruction. What was planned as a year of centennial celebrations of Masonic

**BY IAN A.
STEWART**

Public Schools Month instead turned into a very different, yet still deeply meaningful, homage to that proud legacy.

California Masons contributed more than \$630,000 to educational initiatives in 2020, part of a record year that saw more than \$2 million in overall giving to California Masonic Foundation programs. "We were astounded," says Doug Ismail, president of the Foundation. In all, more than 13 percent of members gave to the Foundation, the highest level of participation since 2004.

That support was needed more than ever. Over the summer, as students faced a return to entirely digital instruction, Foundation staff and members teamed with their partners at the childhood literacy nonprofit Raising A Reader and with four Major League Baseball team foundations to pack and deliver thousands of Super

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Summer Book Bags filled with age-appropriate books, art supplies, and other educational materials to the families of underserved students across the state. The bags, cobranded with the Masons of California, Raising A Reader, and the teams' logos, were conceived

as an attempt to address the COVID slide—knowledge loss among students that education experts worry is worsened by remote learning.

The Foundation's other major educational initiative continued apace: Rather than hit pause, the Investment in Success scholarship program awarded a record 225 grants totaling \$550,000 to graduating high school seniors, Masonic youth order members, and other deserving students. And in September, following an April postponement, Masons saluted 100 years of Public Schools Month in four virtual celebrations with local schools. Each included Masons, students, families, and addresses from then-Grand Master John Trauner and district superintendents, as well as a check

presentation for \$5,000 to each district.

While not quite the blowout Masons had in mind, the events were a reminder of the real-world impact the fraternity can have on young students. "It meant a lot for our membership to hear how much their support means," Ismail says. "It just goes to show that when pressed to express their ethos of relief, Masons can rise to the demand." ■

THE GIVING SPIRIT

Inside a record-breaking year for the California Masonic Foundation.

\$2,054,480

GIVEN TO ANNUAL FUND PROGRAMS IN 2020, INCLUDING DISTRESSED WORTHY BROTHER RELIEF.

\$7,274,000

RAISED OVER THE THREE-YEAR TERM OF THE LET'S WRITE THE FUTURE CAMPAIGN, WHICH FINISHED IN 2020, FOR SENIOR MEMORY CARE AND YOUTH EDUCATION INITIATIVES.

1,646

ANNIVERSARY-LEVEL DONORS TO LET'S WRITE THE FUTURE, A FOUNDATION RECORD.

324

GRAND MASTER CIRCLE-LEVEL DONORS TO LET'S WRITE THE FUTURE, ALSO A RECORD.

1,031

FIRST-TIME DONORS IN 2020, THE MOST SINCE 2005 AND TWICE AS MANY AS IN 2019.

JOE JACKSON
AWARD WINNERS

Twice as Nice for 2020

HALF THE EFFORT, double the impact: When it comes to giving back, the members of Anacapa Lodge No. 710 and Oxnard No. 341 have discovered that collaboration is the key.

This year, that approach was rewarded as the two Southern California lodges were honored with the Joe Jackson Award, given each year since 2014 by the Masonic Homes to a lodge or member who embodies the late Jackson's dedication to service. The lodges have both taken that pledge to heart, but what's made them stand out is an openness to creativity and partnership that's helped their shared ventures stretch even further. Says Sabrina Montes, the executive director of Masonic Outreach Services at the Masonic Homes, "It isn't the quantity of referrals a lodge makes that matters, but the quality of their outreach efforts. The leadership, involvement with Masonic Outreach Services, and partnering with each other to better serve their communities is what made Anacapa and Oxnard lodges stand out," she says.

Many of the two lodges' charity initiatives are simple but effective. Because both lodges are located in Oxnard and share a number of members, leaders have formed a single, joint widows committee. Says Oxnard No. 341 then-master Derek Duke,

"By coming together, we were able to pool our resources and make our communication with our widows more effective." Between invitations to Valentine's Day dinners, regular check-ins, and lending the occasional helping hand with bills or other concerns, the men of Oxnard and Anacapa have found that in terms of keeping in touch with fraternal family, two sets of hands are better than one. Their collaborative work has continued during the pandemic as well: The lodges teamed up to distribute more than 500 meals to local first responders

"It isn't hard, you just have to make service central to what you do as a lodge."

—RONALDO SOTOMANGO, MASTER, ANACAPA No. 710

in their community, including to paramedics at five different hospitals in their area.

Building a robust relief program has meant a commitment to consistency, from hosting meetings for the Lodge Outreach

Services team each year to making sure to send representatives to Masonic Outreach Services divisional meetings. "The regional meetings are really beneficial to us as a lodge," says Ronaldo Sotomango, master of Anacapa No. 710. "We get a chance to brainstorm with other lodges about creative ways to serve our members."

But it's also meant building smaller efforts into their lodges' DNA: activities like arranging rides to meetings for elderly members and bringing widows to lodge dinners. Taken all together, the lodges have been able to build a strong regional network of members, widows, and Masonic service providers. "It isn't hard," Sotomango says. "You just have to make service central to what you do as a lodge." ■

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The Hiram Award reflects the esteem, respect and admiration of a Mason's peers. It is given to recognize their extraordinary devotion to the community. Congratulations to each and every recipient this year!

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The Calling



KEVIN HERRICK

TEXAS No. 46, RIM OF THE WORLD No. 711

GRAND MASTER CIRCLE DONOR

WE CAUGHT UP with Kevin Herrick to ask him about why he feels it's important to donate to Masonic charities.

You're a medical professional, so you're acutely aware of the effects of COVID-19 on vulnerable populations. Was that part of your decision to give back this year?

As a family doctor, I feel like my profession is a calling. For nearly my entire life, I've believed in the concept of tithing, or giving back to the Great Architect, which means benefitting my fellow brothers and sisters and their children. So when COVID hit, I thought about it for a couple of weeks, and it was clear this was going to impact our nursing homes and senior centers and hospitals. My mother and many of my lodge brothers live at the Masonic Homes, so I really wanted to do what I could to help.

Can you tell me about your own work on COVID-19?

I work in San Jose at the Bay Area Community Health Center, which mostly caters to underserved people—those without insurance, or who are undocumented. I'm a family doctor and also the director of education. Since the spring, I've been running our COVID task force and am now, as of mid-December, in charge of developing how to vaccinate everybody we serve as the different phases are rolled out.

You made a particularly generous financial contribution. What do you hope can be accomplished with that?

I contacted the Masonic Homes when this first hit in March and talked to the clinical team there about some ideas to batten down the hatches. To keep control of the situation required almost daily testing of every employee showing up to work and of the seniors confined to their rooms until they could get multiple tests. At least in my clinic, each test costs \$50. That's a lot of extra expense. So whether it's helping a widow who needs emotional support at home or somebody who's not at the Homes but has lost their job, whatever resources we can muster to survive this until the vaccine is widely available is needed. It's all hands on deck. ■

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