FALL 2026

NORTH CAROLINA THE MASON

Official Publication of The Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons of North Carolina



Admit Him Properly Clothed

Rage, Rage Against the Dying of the Light



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FRONT AND BACK COVER:
Grand Master Steve Norris at the 2026 Annual Communication photo by Michael Harding, Genesis Photography

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Opinions expressed are not necessarily those of *The North Carolina Mason*, the Grand Lodge, or Board of Publications.

From the Grand Master:
ADMIT HIM PROPERLY CLOTHED.

By Steve Norris, Grand Master of Masons in North Carolina



On Tuesday, August 31, 1982 my Uncle Thelton pulled up in my driveway on time, as always. He was dressed in a coat and tie, just as he had instructed me to be. I had seen "Uncle T," as we called him, dressed like this for church, but never during the week. His usual attire as a grading and drainage contractor was khaki work shirts and pants every day, Monday through Saturday, and normally he was dirty from working on equipment.

After a 20-minute drive we arrived at our destination and went inside. I saw several people I knew well, a few acquaintances and many others I had never met. There was a carpenter, a mill worker, a mechanic at the local Ford dealership, a Soil Conservation Service employee and a farmer. There was also a jeweler, a retired Marine, an outboard motor mechanic, a businessman, a gas station owner, a bridge tender for NC DOT and many others of varying occupations and professions. Every single one wore a coat and tie.

I was there to be initiated as an entered apprentice, and this was my introduction to Freemasonry.

Later that evening I was presented with the lambskin apron and informed of its antiquity and its superiority over the badges of numerous other orders. I was admonished to wear it with pleasure to myself but always with honor to the fraternity. I was informed that I was a just and upright Mason and to always carry myself as such.

I progressed through the other two degrees and became active in our lodge. This was during the height of membership in our gentle craft, and my lodge was constantly conferring degrees. We were extremely proficient and our ritual was always performed in the most dignified manner.

Over the years, little by little, slowly and almost imperceptibly, our fraternity has slipped. I'm not sure if it was in response to social changes or if it was a change in the quality of the men we allowed through our west gate, but over the last 40-plus years the "good enough" mentality became the norm. As a result, our membership plummeted.

Masonry has always accepted "good men" and given them the tools and lessons to improve themselves, to reach higher levels than they may have imagined possible. By applying our Masonic principles and striving each day to be better, we not only become better Masons, but we also become better men who could build a better world.

As Masons we bind ourselves to obey certain laws, rules and regulations. Before initiation

we were asked a series of questions, the third of which was: "Do you seriously declare, upon your honor, that you will cheerfully conform to all the ancient established usages and customs of the fraternity?"

Rules provide a structure that guides behavior and sets clear expectations for individuals and institutions. By defining what is acceptable and what is prohibited, they prevent chaos and ensure predictability in our daily lives, allowing us to plan and act with confidence. Without such frameworks, societies risk descending into disorder as individuals act only on personal interests, leading to conflicts and instability.

The Code doesn't dictate our dress for Masonic meetings. It simply says, in Regulation 89-3: "The Masonic apron may be worn beneath the coat but never in such a way as not to be readily visible. The Master in his discretion may determine how it shall be worn." Our Masonic Ceremonies Book says the apron "shall be worn on the outside of the coat at funerals." Both sources imply that Masons wear coats! In other words, it is a time-honored tradition for how Masons dress.

At the 1843 National Masonic Convention in Baltimore, where John H. Wheeler of North Carolina was a delegate, the resulting Masonic Trestle-Board stated that "Black clothes, with white gloves and aprons, are most suitable."

More importantly, our own Masonic Code of North Carolina, published in 1875 by authority of the Grand Lodge, is very direct.

Article XVI, Section 18, p. 39, "Regalia and Dress on Public Occasions," provides for white aprons, white gloves, officers' collars and jewels, and "whenever practicable, black suits and hats."

Our 1902 Proceedings describes the customary dress of a Mason as "evening dress, with white gloves, apron, collar, and jewels" (evening dress is black tie). While this reference is not a regulation, it confirms that formal dress is an established Masonic custom.

Taken together, these sources establish a strong historical precedent. Clearly, the expectation today for black or dark suits, white shirts, appropriate ties and proper Masonic regalia is not setting a new standard. It is consistent with longstanding Masonic tradition and, in North Carolina, one that was specifically written into our Code by 1875.

Ties – neckties and bowties – have deep historical roots. They evolved from the 17th-century cravat and became a symbol of the professional class early in the 20th century. Wearing a tie with a coat reinforces your connection to Masonic formality and tradition. It signals your level of respect for your brethren and your lodge, pays tribute to the significance of the event and the people involved, and tells your brethren you approach your role with discipline, attention to detail and respect for the occasion. Walking into the lodge with this attitude also serves as a tremendous confidence booster.

We know that the internal qualifications, what is contained in our hearts, is what recommends us to be Masons. It is not worldly wealth or honor. But this fundamental tenet has been twisted to justify and excuse sloppy and inappropriate dress at lodge meetings. Masonry is about quality. It demands that we get up every day with a desire to be better than the day before. It expects us to conduct ourselves in order that the world sees the respect we have for our fraternity and for ourselves.

Give Freemasonry the respect it deserves.

My hope is that each of us will ever walk and act as just and upright Masons, properly clothed, proudly displaying our apron for the world to see. How else can we re-establish Freemasonry to its former greatness, and build great men to make a better world?

It's up to each of us to walk and act as such, so that one day, our children's children may knock on a door and hear in response, "Admit him properly clothed."

The Lodge and the Schoolhouse

By Jonathan A. Underwood, Grand Secretary



On October 12, 1793, a procession of Freemasons climbed a wooded hill in Orange County to lay the cornerstone of the first building of the University of North Carolina. At its head was William Richardson Davie: Revolutionary officer, champion of the University's charter, and Grand Master of Masons in North Carolina. With square, level, and plumb, he set that stone, and in doing so declared that in this state, education would be built by the same hands that built the Republic.

The men who won independence understood that a free people must be an educated people. A republic cannot govern itself if its citizens cannot read the laws they live under. Teaching the next generation was not charity. It was patriotism.

North Carolina Masons kept at the work. In 1838 the Grand Lodge first resolved to found a Masonic seminary of learning, and in the two decades that followed, Lodges across this state sponsored fourteen academies, institutes, and schools, among the most of any state in the South. Many met under the Lodge's own roof. In Holly Springs, the Brethren of Lodge 115 built a two-story hall, met upstairs, and in 1854 opened an academy downstairs with trustees drawn from the Lodge. In Oxford, Tuscarora Lodge gave land and money toward St. John's College, which opened in 1858. When war and hard times closed it, our Brethren reopened its doors in 1873 as a home and school for orphaned children.

The Brethren of Holly Springs and Oxford were not alone. In crossroads villages and county seats across North Carolina, in places whose names never made the history books, Masons saw a need and met it. They hired the teacher, raised the schoolhouse, and served on the boards and committees that built their towns. That is the whole design of our Craft. The Lodge exists to make Masons, to take good men and make them better. But a Mason is not made to stay in the Lodge room. He is made to go out, into his town, his church, his school, and his neighbors' lives, and to leave each a little better than he found it.

This one is close to my heart. I am the son of a teacher who gave thirty-three years to the classroom, helping young people see their own strengths and the good they could do in the world. I know how often a teacher's own pocket fills the gap. Yes, we support our schools through our taxes, but taxes do not cover everything. A classroom short of books, a student who cannot afford the field trip, a library that needs shelves: these are gaps a Lodge can fill. And schools are only the beginning. Ask your Lodge a simple question: what does our town have because we are here? Then go add to the list.

We call ourselves builders. We speak of cornerstones and of work that outlasts the workman. Davie and his Brethren laid theirs on a hill in Chapel Hill more than two centuries ago, and North Carolina has been building on it ever since.

It is our turn to take up the trowel.





MHCO

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A Gift That Keeps on Giving

By Charlie Roberson, MHCO

There are questions no child should have to ask themselves. Where will I sleep tonight? Will there be food on the table tomorrow? If today goes badly, will anyone notice?

At the Masonic Home for Children at Oxford, we watch children stop asking those questions every single day, but it doesn't happen all at once.

It happens in the small, ordinary moments that add up to something a child can finally trust: the same face at breakfast each morning, someone remembering that today was the big test, a birthday that doesn't go uncelebrated. Somewhere in the accumulation of those moments, a child starts to understand that the people around them aren't just doing a job. They're just there for them.

That is what makes the Home more than a place to live. It is a place to belong.

For more than 150 years, the Masonic Home for Children at Oxford has given children and young adults the safety, stability, and opportunity to discover what's possible for their lives. For generations, North Carolina Masons have been part of that promise.

Your support shows up in the big moments... a diploma, a graduation, a first day in a bed all to themselves. But it shows up just as often in the small ones. A new pair of shoes before the first day of school. A week at camp that becomes the memory a child holds onto all year. A guitar lesson. A shot at figuring out what they're good at.

Sometimes your generosity is felt in a moment you'll never see. You may never know that child's name. You may never see that moment. That doesn't make it any less real, or any less yours.

This is Masonry doing what it has always done best, not simply talking about brotherhood, but building it, brick by brick, child by child, for a century and a half. Long before it was called philanthropy, Masons called it obligation: to look after the widow, the orphan, the one who has no one else. Every Lodge that has given, every Brother who has shown up, has added their name to a lineage of men who understood that a fraternity is only as strong as what it protects. Few organizations in this state can claim a legacy like this one. Fewer still have sustained it for over 150 years.

As this year draws to a close, we hope you'll consider making the children of the Home part of your year-end giving. Your gift joins a legacy that has helped more than 11,000 North Carolina children find safety, opportunity, and hope over the last century and a half. That's a long history to be trusted with. It also means we get to help decide what comes next for the children who call the Home theirs today, and for the ones who haven't arrived yet.

We hope that years from now, when they look back, they remember one simple thing... *Someone was in my corner.*

That is the gift you give.
A gift that keeps on giving.

THE EAST GATE LEGACY LODGE GIVING PROGRAM:

Building Permanent Charitable Legacies Through Corpus Giving

by George Marut, President, North Carolina Masonic Foundation

For generations, North Carolina Masons have translated the principles of Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth into meaningful service. Our lodges support neighbors in need, strengthen their communities, and preserve a tradition of charitable leadership that reaches far beyond the walls of the lodge.

The East Gate Legacy Lodge Giving Program provides every lodge with an opportunity to make that tradition permanent.

The program was inspired by the extraordinary generosity of East Gate Lodge No. 692, whose transformational gift to the North Carolina Masonic Foundation corpus demonstrated what is possible when a lodge looks beyond the needs of today and invests in the future of Masonic charity. That gift will remain invested, grow over time, and provide charitable support for generations to come.

Through the East Gate Legacy Lodge Giving Program, lodges of every size can participate in building that same kind of lasting legacy. Gifts must be designated to the NCMF corpus, where they become part of the Foundation's permanent charitable resources. Each gift strengthens our ability to support the Masonic Home for Children at Oxford, WhiteStone, scholarships, the Fraternal Friendship Program, and other charitable priorities of North Carolina Masonry.

Corpus giving is powerful because a lodge's contribution does not serve a single moment—it continues working year after year. The Foundation's spending policy provides for an annual charitable distribution based on four percent of the corpus's seven-year rolling average. This disciplined approach allows us to provide meaningful support today while protecting and growing these resources for the future.

We have already seen what this long-term stewardship can accomplish. Over the past five years, the Foundation's corpus has grown from approximately $17 million to more than $31 million. That growth reflects responsible investment management, the confidence of our Masonic family, and a shared commitment to the future.

The East Gate Program recognizes both annual participation and cumulative giving over time. A lodge does not need to make a six-figure gift to have an impact. Consistent contributions—whether made annually, through a special campaign, or from existing charitable resources—can grow into a significant legacy. What matters most is beginning.

Imagine the collective impact if every lodge in North Carolina committed to strengthening the Foundation's corpus. Together, we could expand charitable support, respond more effectively when Masonic families face hardship, and ensure that the generosity of today's Masons continues serving others long after we are gone.

The East Gate Legacy Lodge Giving Program is more than a recognition initiative. It is an invitation to build something permanent.

I encourage every lodge to consider the legacy it wants to leave. By making a corpus-designated gift to the North Carolina Masonic Foundation, your lodge can help secure the future of Masonic charity in North Carolina—one gift, one lodge, and one generation at a time.

Build Your Lodge's Legacy

Scan the QR code to watch The Legacy of East Gate No. 692 and see how one lodge transformed its resources into permanent charitable impact.

To make a gift by check, make it payable to the North Carolina Masonic Foundation and mail it to:

North Carolina Masonic Foundation
PO Box 4365
Rocky Mount, NC 27803

NORTH CAROLINA MASONIC FOUNDATION



A LIFETIME OF SERVICE

Worshipful Brother Allen Hughes

By Alvin Billings and Charlie Roberson, MHCO

On June 13, 2026, Orphans Lodge No. 761 honored Worshipful Brother Allen Hughes with his 25-Year Service Award, recognizing not only his quarter-century of Masonic service, but a lifetime defined by service to others.

Worshipful Brother Hughes' connection to the Masonic Home for Children at Oxford began long before he ever donned a Masonic apron. He grew up at Oxford Orphanage and graduated from John Nichols School in 1962. From there, he continued his education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill before accepting a commission in the United States Army. During his military career, he attained the rank of Major and later continued his commitment to serving young people by teaching ROTC in Virginia.

In 2001, Major Hughes was called home to Oxford, returning to the place that had helped shape his life. He joined the Masonic Home for Children as Assistant Administrator and Business Manager. In April 2007, he was named Administrator of the Children's Home, a position he held until his retirement in June 2011.

His commitment to the Masonic family did not end with retirement. Worshipful Brother Hughes has been a dedicated and active Mason and served as Master of Orphans Lodge No. 761 in 2015. He has also been deeply involved with the Order of the Eastern Star. Through that association, he was appointed to the Board of Directors of WhiteStone, a Masonic and Eastern Star Home, where he served for several years.

Even today, Worshipful Brother Hughes continues to give his time and experience to the Masonic Home for Children, serving on the Home's search committee. He and his wife, Sandra, remain steadfast supporters of the Home and its mission to provide a safe, nurturing home and opportunities for children and young adults in need.

From a young boy who called Oxford home, to a United States Army Major, educator, Administrator of the Children's Home, Worshipful Master, board member and steadfast supporter, Worshipful Brother Hughes has spent a lifetime answering the call to serve.

He is, in every sense, the epitome of a servant leader.

Congratulations to Worshipful Brother Hughes on 25 years of Masonic service and a lifetime of service to the Home and the Craft. His dedication has touched countless lives along the way.



Combined Feast and Open House

By Alex H. Ellis

On June 27, Joseph Warren Lodge No. 92 and Mount Lebanon Lodge No. 117 co-hosted a combined Feast of Saint John the Baptist Day and Independence Day celebration, along with an open house. More than sixty attendees gathered to celebrate this special occasion and to commemorate a new chapter in the history of Joseph Warren Lodge.

After 115 years in its previous building and a Masonic tradition spanning more than two centuries in the Village of Stantonsburg, the members of Joseph Warren Lodge made the difficult decision at their November annual communication to sell the 1911 Masonic Hall located at 108 S. Main Street. Following that decision, the brethren of Mount Lebanon Lodge graciously offered the use of a second lodge room within the Masonic Temple in Wilson. Joseph Warren Lodge gratefully accepted the offer and immediately began the task of relocating to its new home.

Following the move, the brethren undertook an ambitious series of improvement projects. They carefully reviewed and organized the lodge archives, painting the new lodge room, reupholstering the antique station chairs, professionally restoring and digitizing the historic Past Masters' gallery, repairing many of the original picture frames, locating several missing Past Masters' photographs, commissioning new portraits of the living Past Masters, framing the new photographs, and thoughtfully organized the new space. During the same period, the brethren of Mount Lebanon Lodge completed a major HVAC renovation to the building. As these projects progressed, plans were made for a combined celebration and open house to showcase the improvements and celebrate the partnership between the two lodges. After all, why not add one more project to the list?

The driveway at 2501 Nash Street NW in Wilson certainly saw plenty of traffic over those six months.

The vision of the brethren of Joseph Warren Lodge came to fruition on a hot Saturday in June. After countless days and nights of hard work, sweat equity, and even the occasional "blood donation," the facilities were finally ready to be unveiled. To say the improvements were well received would be an understatement.

As one father-and-son pair entered the building, I noticed them immediately turn toward the Joseph Warren Lodge room. I gave them a moment before following. The father turned to me with a smile and said, "I feel like I'm at home!" Mission accomplished.

Members and visitors spent the next hour touring the facilities, renewing old friendships, and enjoying fellowship together. Lunch followed, featuring a traditional Eastern North Carolina-style pig pickin' and chopped barbecue with all the trimmings. Worshipful Brothers Allan Harper and Tyler Harper generously provided the hog and the expertise required to roast it to perfection. The meal was outstanding and thoroughly enjoyed by everyone in attendance.

The day marked not only a celebration of Saint John the Baptist Day and our nation's independence, but also the beginning of a new chapter for Joseph Warren Lodge. The fellowship shared, the warm reception from members and visitors alike, and the overwhelming sense of pride in the newly prepared lodge room made the event one that will be remembered for years to come.

Daughters of the Nile

Friendship, Fun and a Heart for Children

By Jennifer Coconato

What if the woman in your life could be part of an organization where friendship, fun and service come together to make a difference in the lives of children? She may find that opportunity with Daughters of the Nile.

Founded in Seattle in 1913, Daughters of the Nile is a fraternal organization for women age 18 and older. While membership has traditionally been connected to the Masonic and Shrine family, a new membership opportunity now allows women of good character to join when sponsored by two Daughters of the Nile members.

Our philanthropy is Shriners Children's, and our support goes far beyond financial contributions. Daughters of the Nile have given more than $80 million to Shriners Children's and continue to provide thousands of hours of hands-on service. Members sew quilts and other items for patients, donate needed supplies, volunteer and support the hospitals and their families in countless ways.

North Carolina is home to Latona Temple No. 154, the state's only Daughters of the Nile Temple. We meet at Westgate Lodge in Charlotte on the third Sunday of the month at 2 p.m. We meet nine times a year, taking July, August and December off.

And we have plenty of fun along the way! Members enjoy our Shag Dance Club, Book Club, Sewing Club, special events, fundraisers and opportunities to enjoy fellowship and friendship.

If you or someone you know would like to learn more, please contact: Jennifer Coconato Queen, Latona Temple No. 154 at (704) 230-9041.





Charles Ray Summerlin

25 Years of Service

Members of Crown Point Lodge No. 708 gathered at the home of Worshipful Brother Charles Ray Summerlin to present him with his 25-Year Service Pin and certificate, recognizing a quarter century of faithful Masonic service.

WB Summerlin was raised to the Sublime Degree of Master Mason on August 25, 2001. During his Masonic journey, he was a member of Crown Point Lodge No. 708, Washington Lodge No. 675, and an honorary member of Grimesland Lodge No. 475. He served as Worshipful Master of Crown Point in 2013 and Washington in 2019. A retired U.S. Air Force crew chief, he flew CH-3E and HH-3E helicopters during his military career.

With family and lodge brothers gathered around him, WB Dennis Campbell presided over the presentation. WB Justin Robinson presented the 25-year pin, WB Conrad Paysour presented the certificate, and WB John Hill offered prayer as chaplain.

Following a courageous battle with kidney failure, WB Summerlin laid down his working tools on June 29, 2026, and joined his beloved wife, Mary, and the GAOTU. He will be remembered for his attention to detail, his love of "apple picking," fishing, and, above all, his devotion to his family. Well done, good and faithful servant.

From the Quarry

Backpack Food Program

Knights of Solomon No. 774



On March 21, the Brethren of Knights of Solomon Lodge No. 774 donated over $600 of food to the Pisgah Elementary School Backpack Food program in Candler. About 20 Masons and five guests were on hand, along with WB Russell Bridges, Junior Grand Steward.

Oasis Shrine 250th

Cannon Memorial Lodge No. 626



On June 27, Brothers attended Oasis Shrine's 250th celebration of the United States at the Rowan County Shrine Club. About 50 Masons and 50 guests enjoyed plenty of food, fun, music, and fireworks over the water, with the DDGM of the 28th District among those present.

Helping a Brother

Atkinson Lodge No. 612



On March 5, 2026, WB Walter Phipps fell and was severely injured. He is paralyzed from the chest down. Before the doctors would allow him to return to his home in Atkinson, NC, he had to have a "wheelchair ramp."

WB Donald Hufham went to work with the goal of helping build a ramp or locating a nice aluminum ramp. He went to several lodges in the 12th District and even to other districts in a fantastic effort to acquire lumber or an aluminum ramp. He found an almost brand-new aluminum ramp in Castle Hayne, NC. Mrs. Gwen Miller, an OES member in Wilmington, donated it. Her husband David, a 22-year US Army veteran and a Prince Hall Mason, had recently passed away. Talk about Brotherly Love and Affection.

On Saturday, June 27, three Past Masters went to her home, disassembled the ramp, took it nearly 20 miles to WB Walter's home, and reassembled it. WB David Eakins and his son Dwayne, WB Tom Perkins, and WB Allan (Nick) Squires worked nearly all day on this project. We are praying for WB Walter to recover!

Service Awards

Mount Holly Lodge No. 544

On June 4, 2026, WM Dave Padgett had the distinct privilege of joining MW Mack Sigmon, MW Rick Moore, and WB Keith Lawson to honor Brother Tommy Everhart, Brother Harry Suddreth, and Brother Lynn Jetton for their remarkable dedication to our fraternity, presenting them with seventy-year, sixty-year, and fifty-year service awards, respectively. It was truly heartwarming to see the joy and appreciation on their faces as we visited them in their homes to present them their service awards.







Patriotic Night

Grantham Lodge No. 725



The July 7 stated communication of Grantham Lodge No. 725 was a special patriotic one to celebrate 250 years of our nation.

We started with a hamburger cookout. Dress code was short pants and a patriotic or red, white, and/or blue shirt. In lodge, after the Pledge of Allegiance, Brother Aquiles Faustino, a National Sojourner, provided a rendition of "A Toast to the Flag" that was enjoyed by all.

Then WB Aaron "Wailin' Wayne" Morris amazed us with his exciting performance of "The Star-Spangled Banner" on his electric guitar. It was an evening to remember!



Outdoor Degree

Western Star Lodge No. 91



On September 12, during a break in the rain, the lodge conferred the Master Mason degree outdoors. Dubbed the "Inaugural Rutherford County Gold Rush Degree," the event highlighted the heritage of Rutherford County and its role in the Carolina gold rush of the 1820s.

One of those who came in search of gold was a jeweler named Christopher Bechtler. At the time, the only mint in the United States was in Philadelphia, and it was difficult and dangerous to transport raw gold there, so gold miners urged him to open a private mint. In 1832, Bechtler minted the country's first $1 gold coin, 17 years before the U.S. mint, and during the mid-1800s the Bechtlers minted more than $2.24 million in gold coins.

The degree was planned with brothers from the county's four lodges and held on pasture land owned by a Hollis brother, bordered by Puzzle Creek, which was well known for panning gold. All the brothers dressed for the theme and enjoyed a great meal of beans. We also had some great smoked BBQ chicken and other fixin's.

To the great surprise of the candidate, now Brother Darron Honeycutt, he was met by his brother Michael, who only a week earlier was badly injured in a tractor accident. "He wasn't going to miss this, I made a commitment to my brother," Brother Mike said.

70-Year Service Award

Black Mountain Lodge No. 663



MW Bryant Webster, PGM 2016, and Junior Grand Deacon David Cashion presented Henry C. "Hank" Hilliard with his 70-Year Service Award in August. Brother Hilliard served as Grand Chaplain in 2016, and Webster presented him his 60-Year Award ten years ago.

80's Flashback Weekend

Junaluskee Lodge No. 145



Members of the lodge and their families ran the popcorn tent at Franklin's 80's Flashback Weekend, held July 31 and August 1. Started 12 years ago by Bro. Dave Linn and his wife Vanessa, the event gives all proceeds to Shriners Children's Hospital in Greenville. The lodge raised over $670 selling water and popcorn.

250-Year Celebration

Biscoe Lodge No. 437



What I've learned from the Lion & Pillar

By Bobby Meadows

Did you know that some lodges in our Grand Jurisdiction do not contribute to our charities? I believe the Lion and Pillar (L&P) has helped bring charitable giving to the forefront. It reminds us not only of our obligation as lodges to support our charities, but also of our individual responsibilities.

When PGM Cobb instituted the L&P in 2017, he instituted a program that helped us become more responsive to our obligations. Many of the lodges already did most of these things but the L&P gave us an incentive to look at ourselves both as a lodge and as individuals.

For me, it allowed me to look at myself in a new light. Was I doing all I could do to support our charities? The answer was No. There are a couple of specific areas I want to address.

1. Recurring giving. Probably the most painless way to give. You don't have to donate a lot. As little as $5 a month mounts up. Because of L&P, the lodges have a goal of 5% of its members donating via recurring giving.

2. Stuff the Bus. As I have gotten older, my kids and grandkids are through with school. However, this item reminds me that there are a lot of kids out there who don't have school supplies. Even though my kids are beyond this need, many kids need us to step up.

While the L&P is not just about giving to our charities and communities, it is a vital part of what we stand for. Let us all remember our widows and orphans. Let's get involved by using the L&P as a guide going forward.



Automatic External Defibrillator Presentation

By Andrew King

While rounding second base during a game in Charlotte on May 20, 2026, 13-year-old Bryson Blanton of Rockwell, NC, suddenly fell to the ground. Bryson was in cardiac arrest. An off-duty Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police officer quickly began CPR and asked for an AED, but there wasn't one at the field. Thankfully, nearby paramedics restored Bryson's heart rhythm.

Bryson's parents, Randy and Samantha Blanton, began raising awareness about the incident and the need for AEDs at athletic fields.

"Not just for the athletes. What if it's a grandparent sitting in the stands?" Samantha Blanton said. "What if it's a young sibling playing on the playground? What if it's the umpire?"

Rockwell, a close-knit community, saw several groups begin fundraising efforts. At the next regularly stated communication of Keller Memorial on May 25, making a donation was discussed, but the conversation quickly turned to, "Why don't we just buy them one?" The motion passed, and the AED was ordered on June 5.

In recent years, Keller has become something of an Emergency Services Lodge, with active and retired members from law enforcement, fire service, EMS, and 911 telecommunicators. Two of its members are even certified CPR instructors by the American Heart Association. They have offered to train coaches and parents should another sudden cardiac event occur.

On Monday, July 13, 2026, Jared Temple, Jason Smith, and (Brother) Nick Bost of East Rowan Diamond Sports visited the Lodge to receive the AED, pads, a weather-resistant tamper-resistant cabinet, and a Stop the Bleed kit, ready to be installed at the field.

North Carolina Rainbow Girls

By Vickie Shue

On a hot Saturday afternoon in August the NC Rainbow Girls enjoyed some cool drinks and treats at the first Official Visit for Caroline McMillian, Grand Worthy Advisor, Order of Rainbow for Girls. Raleigh Assembly #4, Wayne Assembly #46 and Albemarle Assembly #32 hosted over 80 people in attendance. The girls enjoyed a time of fellowship with a dirty soda bar. They created their own special drinks with flavored syrups, soda and cream. Next, they also enjoyed an ice cream bar served by some great Masons. Nothing like vanilla ice cream with all the toppings to cool off!

Then the girls participated in a service project for Caroline McMillian. She is a firefighter in Dunn, NC, and there are some calls she must go on that involve children. Stuffed animals help children calm down and give them something to hold in stressful situations. So NC Rainbow donated stuffed animals that she can take on those calls. Of course, we had to find a fun way to give Caroline the stuffed animals, so we dressed her in clown pants and the girls had an opportunity to throw the stuffed animals in those pants. Toward the end, there were so many that Caroline had a hard time holding on to the pants!

The day ended with plenty of hugs and the girls saying “until we meet again.” Thank you to the Zebulon Shrine Club and Past Potentate of Amran Shriners Kyle Carlson and Lady Kristen Carlson for allowing us to use the facility! Their hospitality is unmatched!











Rage, Rage Against the Dying of the Light

A Masonic Reading of Dylan Thomas' Signature Poem

By David Webb

When Dylan Thomas wrote his renowned poem Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night in 1947, he was witnessing the aftermath of World War II in England and Italy. Yet the poem's primary inspiration was much closer to home: his father's rapidly declining health, including throat cancer and failing eyesight. When the poem was published in 1951, it preceded his father's death by only a few months. Thomas himself would die just two years later, in 1953, from pneumonia and its complications.

Scholars regard the poem as a remarkable combination of rigid poetic structure and universal human emotion. Thomas uses the demanding form of the villanelle, built around recurring lines and refrains. Its central message is unmistakable: a valiant refusal to surrender quietly to the end.

That refusal is not necessarily a rejection of death itself. Death is inevitable. Rather, Thomas urges us to resist the premature surrender of the human spirit, to continue living, striving, and finding meaning for as long as we are given the opportunity.

The poem is organized around four kinds of men who resist the approaching darkness: wise men, good men, wild men, and grave men.

The wise men understand that death is inevitable, yet resist because their words and accomplishments have not had the effect they hoped.

The good men look back upon their lives and regret the deeds left undone.

The wild men have lived intensely, having "*caught and sang the sun in flight*," only to realize too late that the sun is setting.

And the grave men, though physically close to death, discover that even at the end they may still possess the capacity to see and act with clarity.

Running through all four is a common fear: the fear of wasted light.

Thomas was not a Freemason, yet his imagery offers a compelling Masonic interpretation.

From our earliest steps in Masonry, we are taught to seek Light. We seek it through knowledge, reason, truth, virtue, brotherly love, relief, and our obligations to one another. Thomas uses light primarily as a symbol of life; a Mason may see in that light something more: the moral and intellectual illumination that enables us to live according to our obligations.

If we understand "rage" not as uncontrolled anger, but as a refusal to surrender what is right, the poem becomes remarkably compatible with the work of a Mason.

The construction of our own moral and spiritual temple is a task we may never completely finish. Our stones remain imperfect. Our work remains unfinished.

But we continue the work.

Every Mason will eventually reach his own "good night." Every lodge will eventually bid farewell to its older brethren. Look around the walls of this lodge and consider the names of those who came before us. Generation after generation entered these doors, received the Light, took up the working tools, labored upon the rough ashlar, and eventually laid those tools aside.

Every generation passes. But the Light does not have to pass with us.

We received Light from those who came before us. We work by that Light while we are here. And our obligation is to leave enough of it burning so that those who follow us can continue the work.

We cannot stop the night from coming. But we can keep the Light burning.

Perhaps, then, this is what it means for a Mason to rage against the dying of the light.

Not to rage against death, for death comes to every man.

But to rage against ignorance when knowledge is within our reach.

To rage against indifference when suffering is before us.

To rage against injustice when we have the courage to speak.

To rage against complacency when there is still work to be done.

And, above all, to refuse to allow the Light entrusted to us to go dark before we have passed it to the next generation.

Thomas ended his poem with a plea to his dying father:

Do not go gentle into that good night
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

For a Mason, those words can become more than a son's plea to his father. They can become a reminder of our own obligations.

We will not work forever.

The lodge will continue after we are gone.

The Light must continue after we are gone.

So while we have the opportunity, let us take up the working tools, improve the rough ashlar, strengthen our brethren, serve those around us, and add our small measure of Light to the great work entrusted to us.

The night will come.

Until then, Brothers, let us keep the Light burning.

Steve Hagen, Certified Instructor

By Thomas Pope



Brother Steve Hagen has been an active Mason for 50 years … half a century of witnessing and participating in ritual work.

So in August, for the first time and at age 74, he decided to undergo the test of his knowledge and earn the rank of Certified Instructor. That's a Mason who can successfully complete 20 parts of a 22-piece oral exam and earn a B Certificate. The following year, he can be tested on the final two segments – the Entered Apprentice and Master Mason lectures – to upgrade to 'A' status, aka Certified Lecturer.

Less than 1% of the state's 25,600-plus Masons have achieved those two ranks. Hagen became part of the elite group, he said, out of a sense of duty and being "all in" with the fraternity and its teachings.

"When you're committed to something, you do everything you can to show that that commitment is strong," he said. "You sit and listen to [the ritual] year after year in the lodge; you know it. Make that commitment to memorize it and help the brothers gain a better understanding of its lessons."

The Hagen name is synonymous with Masonry in the small Robeson County town of Red Springs. Dennis Hagen, Steve's father, was a Mason for 40 years, Certified Lecturer and District Deputy Grand Master. Steve was Worshipful Master of the lodge in 1995 and '99 and DDGM from 2020-22, and Steve Hagen Jr. was Red Springs' Master in 2020 and '23.

Part of what inspired Steve Sr. to become a Certified Instructor was the positive effect performing the work had on his father after a cancer diagnosis and five-year battle that took his life in 1999.

"On the night he died, his doctor told us … 'Listen, your dad's remarkable. I've never had a patient live more than two years on that treatment,'" he said. "Daddy was DDGM during that period of time, and Masonry, I know, kept him alive and gave him purpose in life.

"He showed you by the way he lived that Masonry is not just a bunch of words, it's a way of life. It makes you a better person if you are fully committed to the principles of Masonry."

Hagen said he plans to upgrade to Certified Lecturer in August 2027, when he will be 75.

"*There's no such thing as being too old*," he said.



Grand Master Norris's Official Visit: District 34

By Joshua Bristol

The 34th District was honored to welcome the 173rd Grand Master, MW Brother Steve Norris, to Hibriten Lodge No. 262 for his official visit. The evening was filled with warmth, fellowship, and a genuine sense of unity that reminded everyone present of what makes our fraternity so enduring.

Before the lodge was opened, Grand Master Norris presented Brother William "Bill" Everhardt with his 60-Year Diamond Jubilee Award, an extraordinary milestone that reflects a lifetime of devotion to the Craft. Brother Everhardt's wife, Kaye, graced the evening with her presence and had the privilege of pinning his 60-year pin, a moment that touched every heart in the room.

A total of 51 brothers gathered, representing lodges across the district. As we shared a meal and fellowship, it became clear that the strength of Masonry is found not in buildings or titles, but in good men coming together in brotherhood.

Our 34th District spans five counties, supports fourteen lodges, and stands as the largest district in the state. Yet what truly makes it strong is the Light carried by its members. And as MW Norris has reminded us time and again, Masonry is not broken. The Craft does not need to be reinvented or repaired. It simply needs to be lived, with sincerity, with purpose, and with the quiet, steady dignity that has carried it through the ages.

We are grateful to Grand Master Norris for traveling to the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains to be with us. His presence, his words, and his example reaffirm what we already know: that the heart of Masonry beats strongest when brothers gather in unity, honor their obligations, and carry the Light beyond the lodge room.

Widows Appreciation & Awards Night

The brethren of Hibriten Lodge No. 262 gathered on September 5th, for our annual Widows Appreciation and Awards Night, an evening filled with warmth, gratitude, and fellowship. We were deeply honored to welcome five of our beloved widows, whose presence reminded us of the enduring bonds that connect our Masonic family.

It was a privilege to present Bro. Max White with his 50-year service award, a milestone that reflects decades of dedication, integrity, and quiet leadership. WB Russell Bridges, Junior Grand Steward, joined us to offer congratulations on behalf of the Grand Master.

The night was truly blessed, filled with laughter, remembrance, and heartfelt moments shared among our widows and brethren. It was an evening that reminded us of the strength of our traditions and the love that continues to carry our lodge forward.







FOR THE GOOD OF MASONRY

By J. D. Paschal

December 20, 2025, was a significant day in my Masonic journey. It was the day my officers and I were installed as the leadership of Jefferson Penn Lodge No. 384. As sometimes happens, fate got in the way.

The week prior to our installation, the lodge HVAC system failed. The response from our repairman was, "The parts are on order."

My incoming Secretary, R.K. "Rocky" Turner, made a valiant effort to have the system repaired, but time ran out. The forecasted outside temperature for the day of our installation was 31 degrees. After discussing the situation with our DDGM, Clifford Shrewsbury, it was decided that we would bundle up, perform the installation ceremony, install our officers, and open our Lodge of Sorrows.

To provide a little background on the condition of our lodge, on the day of our installation the lodge was debt-free. The HVAC repair cost us $3,300. This left us with sufficient funds for the coming year, provided the 40-year-old HVAC system continued to operate. If it failed again, replacement costs would be in the neighborhood of $40,000.

After the installation, the DDGM and I had a difficult conversation - one that I initially felt was rather harsh. Clifford told me that we needed to consider consolidating our lodge with Leaksville Lodge No. 136, a brother lodge located 17 miles away.

His reasoning for consolidation was threefold.

First, our ability to fill our officer chairs. We had brothers serving multiple years in the same chairs, and we had little to no incoming membership.

Second, the condition of our building. Our lodge building, constructed in 1953, is a two-story structure with a 40-year-old HVAC system and numerous building systems that are now more than 70 years old.

Third, our ability to finance future repairs and unexpected expenses.

After a few days to think everything through, I called WB Shrewsbury and told him I believed we should proceed with the process of consolidation. I contacted our Trustees and arranged a meeting at my home. We held that meeting on January 3, 2026.

That day, we had a sincere and serious discussion. The DDGM laid out the issues previously mentioned, and we carefully discussed each one. One thing to remember in conversations like these is that your membership represents many different ages and generations of Masons. Brothers with 50 years of membership often view these matters differently than newly raised Master Masons.

I attended all of the Trustee meetings, but I remained neutral throughout the discussions. I believe it is extremely important for the Worshipful Master to remain outside of those deliberations because, regardless of the outcome, he must continue to lead his lodge.

Ultimately, the Trustees unanimously agreed that consolidation was the right decision.

In the meantime, DDGM Shrewsbury approached Leaksville Lodge No. 136, whose members proved to be receptive to the idea.

On February 17, Secretary Turner read the Resolution of Consolidation before our lodge. It was met with thoughtful questions and discussion, but overall, our brothers began to understand the realities of our situation. As required, the resolution remained on the Secretary's desk for 28 days.

During that same period, Leaksville Lodge No. 136 followed the same procedure approximately one month behind our lodge.

On March 3, WB Shrewsbury attended our Stated Communication and conducted an open discussion with our members. By the conclusion of that meeting, the lodge was generally in agreement that consolidation was the proper course of action.

On March 17, we held the official vote to consolidate. The resolution passed by a vote of 24-5.

The vote at Leaksville Lodge No. 136, held on April 27, was unanimous.

Having gone through the consolidation process, I learned several lessons that I believe are worth remembering should your lodge ever face a similar decision.

First, always remember that your decision must ultimately be made for the good of Masonry.

Second, remember the diverse ages and experiences represented within your lodge.

Third, establish and maintain a strong relationship with the lodge with which you are consolidating.

Finally, as Worshipful Master, lean on your DDGM. WB Clifford Shrewsbury was there to guide our lodge through this difficult process.

I can never thank my brothers of Jefferson Penn Lodge No. 384 enough. They stood together throughout this consolidation because they understood that it truly was for the good of Masonry. *"I love Masonry."*



Miracle

In the middle of the spotlight, dressed in a blue sequined gown and standing confidently on stage, 7-year-old Miracle catches people's attention. But for her mom, Michele, what shines brightest has little to do with the dress, the crown or even the pageant stage.

It's the determination that has carried Miracle through 18 casts, two surgeries and now her fifth brace to help her walk with ease.

"She's my hero," Michele said. "People tell me I'm supposed to be hers, but she's mine."

Miracle was born with clubfoot affecting her left foot; a condition in which the foot appears twisted inward at the ankle. If left untreated, clubfoot can cause severe mobility limitations, chronic pain and lasting physical complications.

Shortly after birth, Miracle was referred to Shriners Children's Greenville, home to the largest team of pediatric orthopedic surgeons in the Carolinas, treating over 125 pediatric orthopedic conditions, including clubfoot.

Her treatment began early, starting with a series of casts stretching from her tiny toes to her thighs.

Even then, Michele remembers a little girl who refused to let treatment slow her down.

"Even fully casted, she always found a way to jump," said Michele.

That determination followed Miracle through each stage of her care. Through every cast, brace and surgery, Michele said, "she never once complained."

As Miracle grew, so did the list of things she wanted to try. She began gymnastics at age 4 and basketball at age 5. Then, an unexpected opportunity introduced her to something new: pageants.

"I tried to get her to participate in pageants when she was younger, but she wasn't interested," said Michele. That changed when she learned that the fifth graders at her school needed help raising money for a class trip before they made the transition to middle school.

Miracle wanted to help.

She entered her first pageant with proceeds supporting the school trip and discovered that stepping onto a stage could be about more than winning. For Miracle, it became another way to give back.

Today, Miracle has participated in four pageants, each supporting the community in some way. She has earned the People's Choice Award and placed third overall, achievements that now sit alongside the reminders of just how far she has come: her casts and braces from over the years. Together, showing that with world-class care and a young girl's determination, anything is possible.

Your gifts help kids like Miracle live their best possible lives.

Shriners Children's™ Greenville

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The Final and First Chapter

By A. Gene Cobb, SGIG - Scottish Rite Orient of North Carolina



On August 29, 2026, the Scottish Rite in North Carolina made history in our beloved state. Prince Hall Scottish Rite and AF&AM Scottish Rite held their first-ever joint unity reunion. The 2026 Joint Scottish Reunion conferred degrees 4, 14, 18, and 30. Prince Hall conferred degrees 4 and 18, and AF&AM conferred degrees 14 and 30. Damien Jack from Prince Hall communicated degrees 15–17 and 19–27. From AF&AM, I introduced the degrees and communicated degrees 5–13 and 28–29. Thirty-four Prince Hall Knights, alongside thirteen AF&AM members, made a total of forty-seven new Knights of Kadosh. Each will pursue degrees 31 and 32 in his respective Consistory as directed by Orient leadership.

This event had several beginnings. In January 2021, Grand Master Wicker and I met with Grand Master D. T. Thompson and Deputy James Upchurch in Fayetteville to begin discussing efforts to bring our two groups together in more visible and significant ways.

On September 7, 2022, all four Supreme Councils in the United States signed an agreement expressing solidarity and unity going forward. This event paved the way for all other Orients to begin moving forward in visible and significant ways of their own. The signers of the document were James D. Cole 33°, Sovereign Grand Commander Supreme Council 33° Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite SJ, USA; Corey D. Hawkins, Sr., 33°, Sovereign Grand Commander USC 33° A & ASR of Freemasonry PHA SJ, USA; Peter J. Samiec, 33°, Sovereign Grand Commander Supreme Council 33° Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite NMJ; and Dr. Melvin J. Bazemore, 33°, Sovereign Grand Commander USC 33° A & ASR of Freemasonry PHA NJ, USA.

Before the ink was dry, Deputy Upchurch and I continued conversations that would express and shape a more perfect harmony and brotherhood among the Scottish Rite members of North Carolina. Those conversations continued over three and a half years, working through challenges that were not fully anticipated that cold January day in 2021.

Finally, the breakthrough came. It was officially announced by me, now Sovereign Grand Inspector General, at the April 16, 2026, Council of Deliberation for the Prince Hall Affiliate (PHA) Scottish Rite. The next day, word had spread through the AF&AM world as well that the long-anticipated first-ever Joint Reunion of PHA and AF&AM Scottish Rite in North Carolina would take place.

It started over 28 years ago. It happened because Past Grand Masters and Masonic leaders from both organizations worked for recognition. A steady progression of Grand Masters, beginning with MW Gary Smith and Tom Gregory and continuing to the present day, has supported the recognition of our brothers that was sealed through the "Mutual Compact," signed in a ceremony in the Old State Capitol Building on November 21, 2008, on the very table where North Carolina voted to exit the Union and join the Confederacy in 1861.

The Joint Scottish Rite reunion in 2026 was a significant and visible action that we can think of as the final and first chapter of a past behind us and a future before us. We went to work with the Right/Rite heart!

Grand Special Assistant to the Grand Master

Presented by M.I. William Dill, Grand Master of the Grand Council of Royal and Select Masters in North Carolina



Enoch Council No. 5, Royal and Select Masters, welcomed a distinguished visitor on Wednesday, August 5, 2026, when Most Illustrious William L. Dill, Grand Master of the Grand Council of Royal and Select Masters in North Carolina, made a special visit to the Council in Raleigh.

The evening was made especially memorable by the recognition of a dedicated supporter of Cryptic Masonry. Prior to the meeting, Grand Master Dill presented Curtis Olen Chriscoe with an award recognizing his appointment as a Grand Special Assistant to the Grand Master.

In presenting the honor, Grand Master Dill recognized Curtis's consistent attendance, service, and support of Masonic activities throughout North Carolina. He specifically noted Curtis's participation in important events such as the Summer Assembly in Maggie Valley and the Annual Communication of the Grand Council, along with his presence and support at numerous other Masonic gatherings.

The appointment reflects more than attendance alone. It recognizes a demonstrated willingness to support the work of the Grand Council and the fellowship that strengthens Royal and Select Masonry across the state. Through his continued participation, Curtis has demonstrated the commitment and dependability that Grand Master Dill cited as evidence of his deserving both the honor and the additional responsibilities associated with his new position.

The presentation highlighted an important principle within Freemasonry: faithful service does not go unnoticed. The strength of our Masonic organizations rests not only with elected and appointed leaders, but also with those who regularly attend meetings, support programs, travel to statewide events, encourage Masons, and make themselves available when assistance is needed.

Grand Master Dill's special visit to Enoch Council No. 5 provided an opportunity to celebrate that spirit of service while strengthening the bonds between the local Council and the Grand Council of Royal and Select Masters in North Carolina.

For the Companions gathered in Raleigh, the evening served as both a special occasion and a reminder of the importance of participation, fellowship, and service within Cryptic Masonry. Recognition such as that bestowed upon Curtis demonstrates how dedication contributes to the continued strength and vitality of Royal and Select Masonry throughout North Carolina.

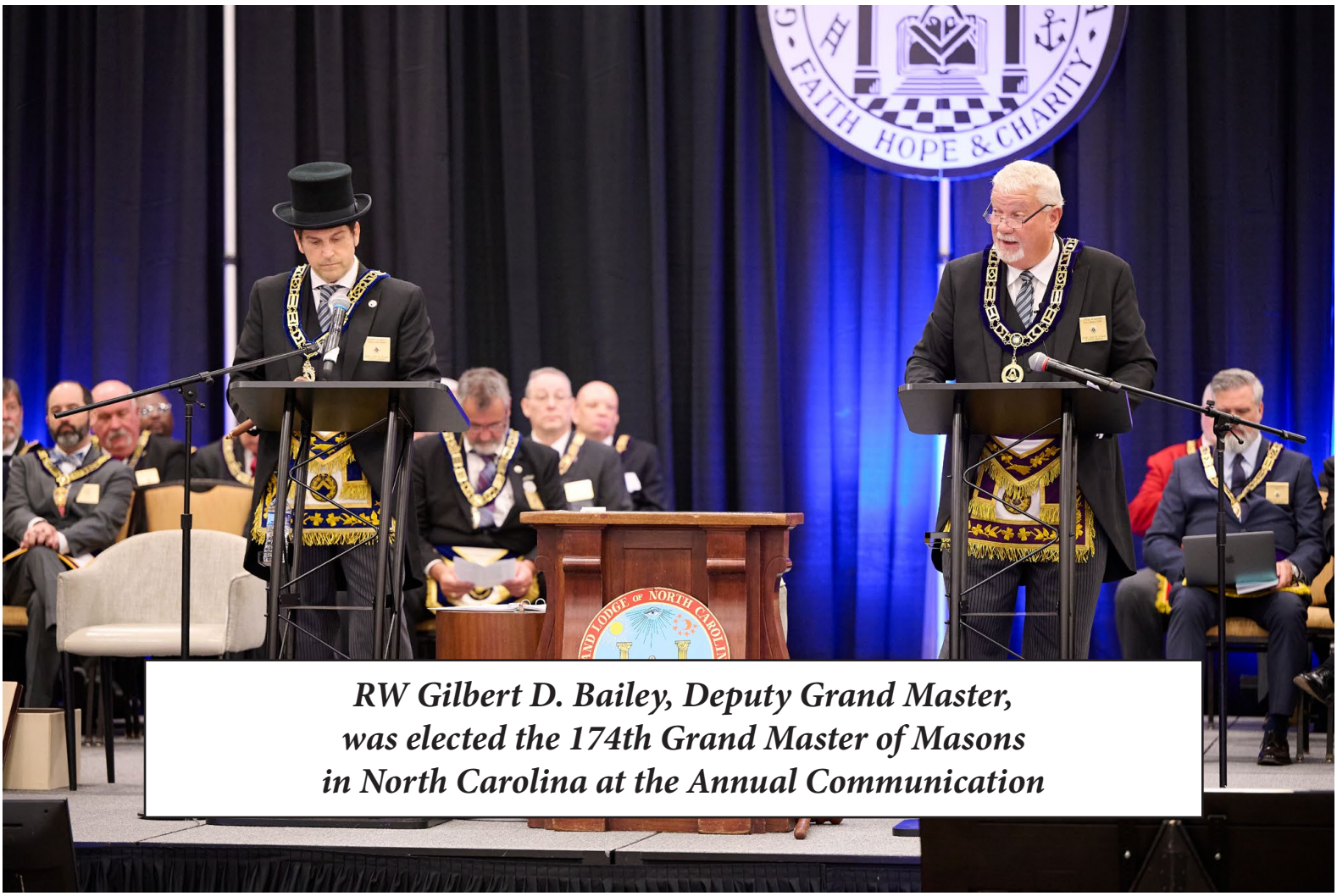
The Companions of Enoch Council No. 5 extend their sincere appreciation to Most Illustrious Grand Master William L. Dill for his visit and for recognizing Curtis Olen Chriscoe's faithful support and service to Cryptic Masonry.

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RW Gilbert D. Bailey, Deputy Grand Master, was elected the 174th Grand Master of Masons in North Carolina at the Annual Communication