



THE ASHLAR

A PUBLICATION FOR MINNESOTA MASONS, STARS AND FRIENDS



173RD ANNUAL COMMUNICATION

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A MESSAGE FROM THE GRAND MASTER

ROBERT S. DAVIS

LEADERSHIP IS THE WORK

WHY LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT MATTERS NOW FOR EVERY MINNESOTA LODGE



Freemasonry has always depended on leadership—not as a concept, but as daily work carried out in lodges and communities

across Minnesota. Our fraternity has never lacked commitment, tradition, or good intentions. What it has always required, however, is a steady practice of preparing leaders, supporting those who serve, and passing that responsibility forward. As Minnesota Freemasonry has declined from its peak in 1961 of over 70,000 Brothers to today's 7,577 Brothers meeting in 108 lodges, it has become clear that sustaining our lodges—especially amid changing communities and increasing consolidation pressures—will depend less on doing more and more on leading well. Lodge engagement remains essential, but engagement follows leadership, and leadership does not develop by accident.

“Engagement follows leadership, and leadership does not develop by accident.”

We often speak about the importance of lodge engagement as the key to attracting and retaining members, and rightly so. Engaged lodges create meaningful experiences, strengthen fellowship, and provide reasons for Brothers to remain active and invested. Yet engagement is not something that can be mandated or sustained through activity alone. It is shaped—day by day—by the quality of leadership within a lodge: how meetings are conducted, how officers are prepared, how Brothers are welcomed and mentored, and how the lodge understands its purpose in the community it serves.

Leadership development is not a new idea in Minnesota Freemasonry. For more than two decades, Brothers have recognized its importance and have, at various times, launched thoughtful and well-intentioned efforts to address it. Too often, however, those efforts have depended on individual enthusiasm rather than sustained support. When leadership development is episodic, its impact is limited, and the lessons learned are easily lost.



THE ASHLAR



The result is not a lack of willingness to lead, but an absence of continuity in how leaders are prepared and supported from one year to the next.

Lodges across Minnesota operate in very different environments. Some meet in growing communities with access to a wide range of civic institutions; others serve towns where the lodge remains one of the few enduring organizations connecting neighbors across generations. These differences matter. They require flexibility, local judgment, and respect for how each lodge understands its role. At the same time, they reveal a shared challenge: regardless of size or location, every lodge depends on capable leadership to remain healthy, welcoming, and relevant.

If leadership development is to be more than an occasional effort, it must be approached with intention. Leadership is learned over time, strengthened through experience, and sustained when lodges and leaders are supported consistently. This means ensuring that those who serve—Worshipful Masters, officers, and mentors alike—are not left to navigate their responsibilities alone, but are equipped with guidance, shared practices, and encouragement appropriate to their lodge and community.

A lodge-based approach to leadership development respects the reality that leadership is most effectively formed where it is practiced. Such an approach does not replace ritual, traditions, or local autonomy. Instead, it offers adaptable resources that lodges may draw upon as appropriate—helping to prepare officers, strengthen continuity from year to year, and build confidence in those asked to lead. When leadership is approached this way, engagement is not a separate objective, but a natural outcome of a well-led lodge.

“Leadership is not a separate initiative—it is the work.”

If leadership development is to be consistent and enduring, it must also be stewarded with care. One idea now being explored is the establishment of a Grand Leadership Director—not as an authority over lodges, but as a volunteer Brother focused on helping leadership efforts remain coordinated, supported, and sustained over time. Such a role would exist to preserve institutional learning, assist Regional Directors, and help ensure that leadership development does not depend solely on momentum from one year to the next.

Leadership development also offers an opportunity to reconnect Freemasonry more visibly to the communities we serve. A lodge-based model makes it possible to explore partnerships with organizations whose work aligns with Masonic values, such as the University of Minnesota's Center for Integrative Leadership and the University of Minnesota's Extension Agency. These partnerships would be optional and locally adaptable, providing lodges with additional tools and shared language for ethical, civic-minded leadership. By combining Masonic principles with proven leadership practices, lodges can once again be recognized as places where leaders are formed—for the lodge room and for the broader community.

Minnesota Freemasonry has reached a moment that invites reflection and discernment. The question before us is not whether leadership matters—we already know it does—but whether we are willing to approach its development with intention, continuity, and shared responsibility. How we choose to prepare and support leaders will shape the vitality of our lodges and the relevance of our fraternity in communities across Minnesota. Leadership built Freemasonry. The manner in which we develop it will determine what comes next.

Every Thing You Do Matters!

A MESSAGE FROM
THE WORTHY
GRAND MATRON

KATHLEEN TAYLOR

Is it spring yet? I often think of our winter Texans, Floridians, and Arizonans when we're eyeball-deep in snow and slush. We Minnesotans are a hearty bunch, eh? Last time, I shared about Helping Paws, one of the charities we proudly support through our collective generosity. This month, our focus turns to the Masonic Institute for the Developing Brain (MIDB), a partnership between Masonic Charities, OES, and the University of Minnesota, dedicated to advancing brain health from the earliest stages of life across the entire lifespan.

If you have never toured MIDB, housed in the former Shriners Children's Hospital in St. Paul, or visited their website, I strongly encourage you to do so. The progress being made there is remarkable. Research conducted at the Institute has led to important discoveries regarding iron deficiencies in young women and how those deficiencies



can affect future pregnancies, including the possibility that they may contribute to autism. Who knew?

This year, Worthy Grand Patron Kurt Johnson and I have selected MIDB as one of our signature projects. We have introduced a "Be the Change" challenge, are raffling a beautifully handcrafted quilt at Grand Chapter, and are directing specific donations to support the Institute's work. At Grand Chapter last year, we were honored to display a stunning camp-scene backdrop created by Les Fordahl, a world-renowned artist and Vietnam veteran. Following our Grand Session in May, this backdrop, along with child-sized outdoor furnishings, will be donated to MIDB to create a peaceful outdoor space where young patients can read, relax, and simply breathe.

In addition to MIDB, we continue to support the Masonic Home, MACV, Helping Paws, and cancer research. Our sewing clubs also create quilts, afghans, and tie blankets for veterans' hospitals and medical facilities across the state, gifts that are always warmly received.

If you'd like to learn more about becoming a Star member, please reach out. We would love to welcome you into our family and continue working together for the greater good.

Kathleen Taylor
Worthy Grand Matron, Minnesota OES

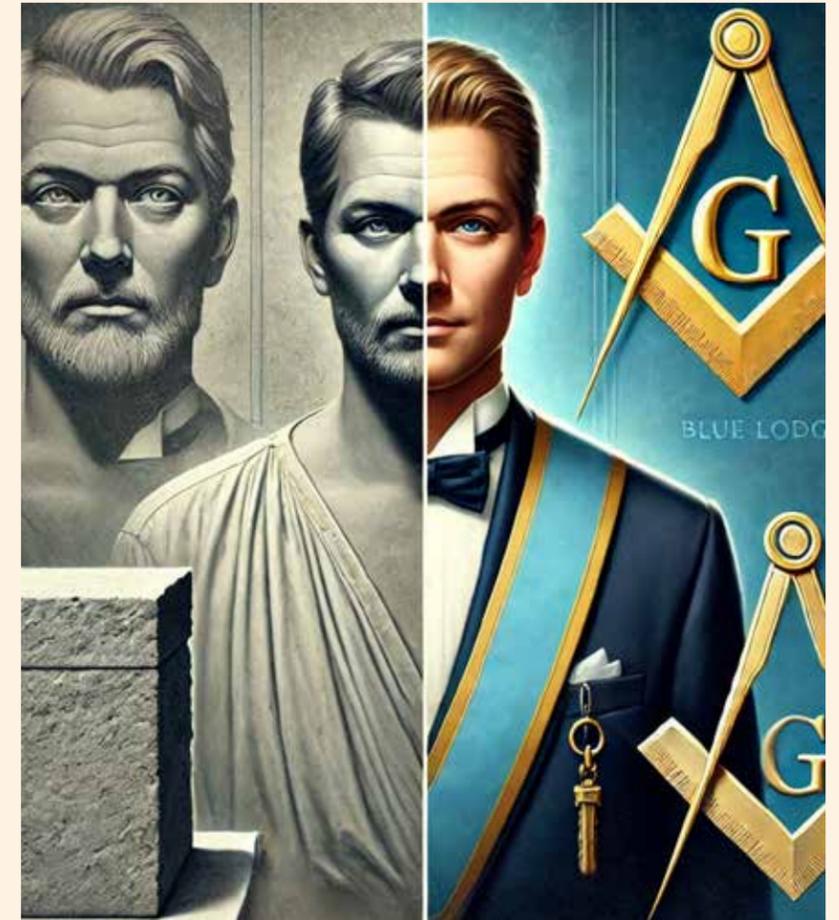
IF YOU COULD SEE WHAT I SEE

BRADLEY PHELPS,
GRAND LODGE EDUCATION OFFICER

As Grand LEO, I often get the privilege of addressing members of the craft and attempting to inspire thought and reflection. It is a labor of love. It is also true that I do not often get the opportunity to simply enjoy the sidelines, and take in and observe our work. Recently, I was given the honor of sitting next to the presiding master in one of our apprentice degrees, and I was inspired to address new audiences – our candidates, those who are thinking about joining our craft, and curious family members. That said, maybe this will also spark some memories and reflection for those of us who have already taken these steps that echo throughout time.

A friend and mentor of mine once said something along the lines of: *Masonry feels unique because, when the doors close, the outside world fades away, and members experience a tradition that is both ancient and consistent.* Although I love this message, at face value this viewpoint might be a bit idealistic and romantic. While we know that there are differences from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, and our degrees have seen changes over time, the basic building blocks remain consistent. The way we conduct ourselves today and the lessons we are taught through our symbols and allegories are the same as what was experienced and learned by General Washington, Benjamin Franklin, and Lafayette ... even if the delivery has mutated a bit with time.

By the time I petitioned a lodge, my closest male relatives with ties to Freemasonry had already passed away. Regrettably, I did not learn of their affiliation until it was too late—perhaps a byproduct of an earlier era marked not so much by secrecy as by selectiveness and perhaps built-in testing of a man's resolve. While adapting our approach may be a necessary evolution to remain relevant in today's more connected world, I remain uncertain as to whether these changes will ultimately yield the outcomes we hope and anticipate. There is something to be said about tenacity and a longer investment – but the path of proficiency, trials, and excellence is still available to those who truly seek it, so I digress...



When my experience started, I remember thinking, "I do not know these men personally, but I know the type of men that they are." I was nervous, but I did not fear danger. I knew that there would be work that I would need to do, and I would likely need to prove my understanding as I progressed through the degrees. I did not want to disappoint or let these men down. For our candidates, or those thinking about joining us in our work, I'll stop here to avoid ruining your experience.

The point that I wish to make is that what I knew about Freemasonry was based on memories of good men, popular culture, and interactions with Masons that I had met as a non-initiated person. I guess what they say is true: be mindful of our actions because we never know who we might inspire with them, and we never know who might be watching. If you are just starting to take your first steps, I hope you reflect on and understand the weight of the steps you are about to take.

As I sat and watched the apprentice degree unfold, I remember having another thought, "In the same way I can, I wish you could see the caliber of men that you are surrounded with. Many of my favorite..."

Read the full
article here:



HONORING A LEGACY OF SERVICE

This spring, Minnesota Freemasonry will recognize Jeff Wiser as a recipient of the Hiram Award, one of the Craft's highest honors, at the 2026 Grand Lodge Annual Communication. Reserved for those whose service extends far beyond expectation, the Hiram Award reflects quiet leadership, dedication, and lasting impact.



In our May issue of The Ashlar, we will share a fuller reflection on Jeff's leadership and service to Minnesota Freemasonry, including his work alongside Grand Master Robert Davis.



M
SERIES EVENTS

Not everything needs a spotlight; some things are meant to be discovered.

The M Series is a new limited event series launching in Minneapolis and Mankato in 2026.

This year's gatherings will support the Masonic Cancer Center.

More soon.

173rd Annual Communication of the Grand Lodge of Minnesota

The 173rd Annual Communication of the Grand Lodge of Minnesota will take place **April 17–18** at The Park Event Center in Waite Park.

Grand Master Robert S. Davis encourages all Minnesota Lodges to send not only their voting delegates (Masters and Wardens), but also Master Masons in good standing. We look forward to welcoming you and your spouse/partner for a weekend of fellowship and fun.

Registration and meal tickets will be available in mid-February. The room blocks at the Hilton Garden Inn and Residence Inn Hotels are still open, but the booking deadline for our group rate is March 16th. Full details, hotel links, and registration information can be found at <https://mnfreemasons.org/ancom>.

Hilton Garden Inn St. Cloud

Booking Link: bit.ly/3NwJskl

Guests can also call the hotel directly at 320-640-7990 and use **GROUP CODE: 91B** to get the same discounted rooms.



Residence Inn

Booking Link: bit.ly/4kdgRNL

Book your group rate for Grand Lodge. Guests can also call the hotel directly at 320-640-0200 and ask for **GRAND LODGE GLM** to get the same discounted rooms.



This year's session will feature Wor. Brother Dan Hrinko of Ohio, a prominent Masonic author and educator. Dan will be receiving the Duane E. Anderson Excellence in Masonic Education National Award. Also, Harvard professor and author Theda Skocpol will be speaking on her book *Diminished Democracy*, addressing the challenges of membership and management in civic life.

We hope to have you with us in April and look forward to seeing you in Waite Park!



MINNESOTA MASONIC CHARITIES UPDATES ITS SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM



Minnesota Masonic Charities has updated its scholarship program to better reflect today's students, educational pathways, and community needs, while continuing our long-standing commitment to helping individuals pursue their education.

The refreshed program simplifies eligibility, expands access, and strengthens our investment in Minnesota students, while introducing a brand-new opportunity for Minnesota Masonic Home employees.

A More Accessible, Minnesota-Focused Approach

The new program reduces academic barriers by establishing a standard of a consistent 3.0 minimum GPA and removing ACT requirements. It places stronger emphasis on students attending Minnesota colleges, universities, and trade schools.

We are also encouraging students pursuing careers that strengthen communities, including education, healthcare, agriculture, and public safety/first responder fields, to apply!

What's New

The updated scholarship program now includes four clearly defined scholarship paths:

Signature Scholarships - For high school seniors beginning college in Minnesota
\$5,000 per year, renewable for up to four years

Legacy Scholarships - For current college students continuing their education in Minnesota
\$3,500 per year, renewable for up to three years

Heritage Scholarships - For students pursuing trade, technical, or two-year college programs in Minnesota
\$1,500 per year, renewable for up to two years

Selfless Scholar Awards - One-time \$5,000 awards recognizing students who demonstrate exceptional service and character, and the people who inspired them

Open to Students Attending Any Accredited U.S. School

Launching this year, Minnesota Masonic Charities is proud to introduce an **Employee Scholarship** for team members of Minnesota Masonic Home. This new opportunity reflects our belief in investing not only in future generations but also in the dedicated people who care for our residents every day.

Learn More

Students, families, counselors, and Minnesota Masonic Home employees are encouraged to review updated scholarship information at: mnmasoniccharities.org/masonic-student-scholarships

APPLICATIONS ACCEPTED THROUGH FEBRUARY 28

CONUNDRUM 105

MWB JOHN L. COOK JR.

The answer to Conundrum 105 is Most Worshipful Brother John L. Cook Jr. Those who answered correctly are WB Todd Mayer (Anoka No. 30), and WB Jerry Johnson (Accacia No. 51).

In Episode #70 of our *Minnesota Histories and Mysteries* podcast, I learned that MWB Cook enjoys fishing, tennis, and coins. I also learned about his service, family, and what brought him to Freemasonry. I have met MWB Cook on several occasions, but it was a treat to get to know him and his history a bit more through our own *Minnesota Histories and Mysteries*.

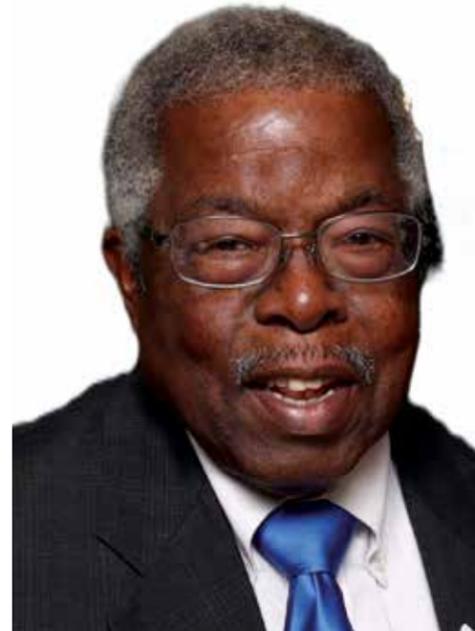
It is my belief that the *Minnesota Masonic Histories and Mysteries* Podcast is one of our greatest treasures. It is such a great opportunity to tune in and listen to the stories of many of our Brothers, and to hear the great works they are involved with. It has been invaluable for getting to know Brothers across the state. Speaking personally, the podcast has led me to new friendships and has increased my admiration of the Brothers that make up our membership. If you ever questioned the diverse backgrounds and stories of our members, this is a great resource to hear about them first-hand.

The podcast also offers excellent opportunities for learning – from the relatively new segment called “18:53 Working Tools” to guest speakers from the likes of the University of Minnesota and Face-It Foundation — there is always something new to learn with each podcast drop on Fridays. If you have tuned in, I hope you continue to do so. For those who have not yet checked it out, you are in for a treat. If you find yourself a road-warrior, there is no better virtual companion or way to make the miles melt away.

— Brad Phelps

Check out *Minnesota Histories and Mysteries* at:

<https://mnmasoniccharities.org/minnesota-masonic-histories-mysteries-podcast>



UPCOMING EVENTS



- **February 28**, MMC Student Scholarship Deadline
- **February 28**, Arizona Reunion (for more information, contact jennifer.harrison@mnmasonic.org)
- **March 1**, Community Scholarship applications accepted
- **March 4**, Lodge Hall Rededication at Excelsior Lodge No. 113, 3 PM
- **April 17-18**, 173rd Annual Communication, Waite Park Event Center
- **April 25**, Annual Masonic Cancer Center Dinner, Masonic Heritage Center, Bloomington, 5:30 PM
- **May 1-3**, OES Grand Chapter, St. Cloud, MN
- **August 20**, MMCCCD Annual Dinner, 5:30 PM, Greysolon Ballroom, Duluth
- **September 26**, MMC Annual Gala, 5:30 PM, Masonic Heritage Center, Bloomington

HEALTH + WELLNESS

Can't be there? Participate virtually!

And walking is just fine!

The Minnesota Freemasons are lacing up again for the 16th Annual Goldy's Run in support of the University of Minnesota Masonic Children's Hospital!

Last year, nearly 50 Masons and friends joined the team to walk, jog, or run for this incredible cause. This year, we're aiming higher; let's double that number in 2026!

NEW this year: Your registration fee is on us! Minnesota Masons will cover the cost for you AND a guest to participate.

Whether you run, walk, or cheer from the sidelines, your presence makes a difference for kids and families who need it most—even if you participate virtually!

RSVP now, invite your lodge brothers, family, and friends, and let's show up strong in our Masonic blue!

Visit mnmasoniccharities.org/goldys-run for more information

GOLDY'S RUN

Step up, lace up, and make a difference.

University of Minnesota Campus

Distances for every level: 5K, 10 Mile, and Kids Run

Your registration fee is on us! Minnesota Masons will cover the cost for you AND a guest to participate.

Whether you run, walk, or cheer from the sidelines, your presence makes a difference.

RSVP now, invite your lodge brothers, family, and friends!

Visit mnmasoniccharities.org/goldys-run to REGISTER

WITH CODE MASONSACTION

April 12, 2026

Start: 7:30 am - Finish

420 SE 23rd Ave, Minneapolis MN 55455

MNFREEMASONS.ORG

... and now for Conundrum Question #106:

Short and sweet, and please don't cheat (by looking it up):

I walked with a limp and a bag full of cheer,
Narrated a snowman we still hold dear.

A folk singer, an actor, a voice you all know,
Especially when winter begins with a glow.

Which famous Freemason am I?

Send responses to masonicconundrum@gmail.com.
Please include your preferred title, e.g. Bro, WB, etc.
and your home lodge.



VIEW OUR LATEST PHOTOS





Christmas in June

For the fourth year in a row, Red Wing Lodge is presenting "Christmas in June" to bring joy to children receiving treatment at M Health Fairview Masonic Children's Hospital.

Our goal is to raise **\$6,000** for art supplies that help lift spirits and spark imagination during the summer months, when donations typically dwindle.

How You Can Help

Your donation — no matter the amount — will directly fund art projects for these children.

By Check

Make payable to:
Red Wing Lodge 8
P.O. Box 174
Red Wing, MN 55066

Online Donation

Scan the QR code or visit:
<https://square.link/u/YzQ9YzO1>
for more information.



Questions? Contact Shawn Carrick at srsmasonic@gmail.com

GRAND GUARDIAN COUNCIL OF MINNESOTA

TOP GOLF FUNDRAISER

Tee up for a terrific time at our Top Golf Fundraiser benefiting the GGC of MN.

Sunday, April 12th, 2–5 PM
Brooklyn Center Top Golf



\$100 per ticket
Appetizers Included

Register Online:



Proceeds of the event support
the Job's Daughters of Minnesota



*"The District Deputy Grand Master, here to seize your charter
for answering the door after only two knocks."*

THE ASHLAR



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WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

To contribute news articles and photos about your Lodge activities or upcoming events, please email them to theashlar@mfreemasons.org.



If you would like to receive the digital version of the Ashlar in lieu of the paper issue, please sign up on Grand View.



MINNESOTA FREEMASON APPAREL SHOP

Click or scan the QR code or visit:
mfreemasons.org/shop

THE ASHLAR

The perfect ashlar shows what can be done with a rough, unpolished and unsightly piece of stone as a result of skill, industry and perseverance, so man, with all his rudeness, roughness and imperfection, may, under the operation of the Divine workman be polished and prepared until he becomes a noble character fit to be included as a part of the great spiritual temple which will abide forever.