

## North Carolina

Would you be surprised to know that one out of every four American's volunteer? I was incredibly surprised. With so many people volunteering how could I make a difference? Then I decided to give it a go. Here is what I found. No matter the service being provided, as a volunteer I found it to be a double rewarding adventure. Especially at the Charles George Veteran's Medical Center here in Asheville, N.C. The first reward is for the Veteran(s) being served. The second reward is for the self-satisfaction of knowing I can once again be of service to my country and community.

The adventure of volunteering starts when you first greet or meet the veteran. It does not matter at which facility the adventure starts, or who the veteran is. But make no mistake, it is an adventure. Until you get to know the individual(s) you are assisting, you have no idea what they have been involved in, what they have seen, or what they have experienced. Their stories are always different. They could be joyous and pleasant, or a series of purgatorial catastrophes from hell.

One of the important things to remember as a volunteer is the veteran may or may not want to tell you anything about what they have experienced. I found this out firsthand when I was talking with a retired Colonel friend and lodge brother of mine. He freely answered my questions about his service in Vietnam, however, it was not until later he explained to me, although he enjoyed our conversations, it seemed his reminiscing about the events of his past, really took its toll on him as he tried to sleep. I finally figured out although he was being nice, his stories really brought up many horrible memories he would just as rather not have to think about or remember.

Working as a hospital volunteer with the MSA it is a positive advantage to be a veteran. It is just like being a brother Mason. Just understanding you are talking with someone who has been through something similar is a common frame of reference. This can lead to a more productive relationship and establishing a bond. Whether for an extended period or just for a short time.

Why do I volunteer? It is quite simple. I must be able to give something back. My father taught me to, "always give them a little something extra." As a result, I volunteer. Now, as many are aware, it is one thing to work and do a job which is expected for a wage. It is something quite different to freely give of your time and volunteer while expecting nothing in return.

Volunteering is the most rewarding service I have ever done.

As a Christian, I am guided by John 8:7 and Acts 20:24. Those two passages of scripture define how I try to live my life. The key word of course, is "try." Finally, as a recipient of an honor bestowed upon me some time back, an amazingly simple phrase provides a clear explanation. "It's not about me. It is about volunteering!"

John M. Burchfield – Asheville – North Carolina

## Nebraska

To describe why I volunteer at the VA hospitals or attempt to encourage others to volunteer has to deal with a couple of things. First, I spent 27 years in the United States Air Force and had the privilege and honor to serve with some of the finest men and women from all Services. Spending that much time, especially the time I spent deployed to the Middle East and basically spending the last ten years of my career working with Joint Forces I have a soft -spot in my heart and always will for those who have sacrificed so much for their country and sometimes are forgot about. BY doing what I can in either volunteering myself or encouraging others to volunteer I try to make sure that those Veterans do not feel forgotten.

Second as a Mason we are instructed that relieve the distressed is the duty incumbent upon all men, but particularly upon Masons. I again was asked and had the privilege of being asked by Past Grand Master John Parsons to become involved in a Grand Lodge project called Change for Troops. This was originally designed to provide phone cards for those troops deploying out of Nebraska so that they could stay in touch with their loved ones. This program started in 2010 when cell phones were not as prevalent as they are today and are capable of working globally. Shortly after volunteering my help for this, I was made the Chairman of the project and when the deployments dwindled, I recommended that we give the cards to Veterans and their families to help them while they were staying at the VA hospital in hope to relieve some of the expense of being at the VA hospital or while staying with their loved ones. This is where I first became acquainted with the personnel at the hospital and asked where else they could use help. Also, about this time, now 2012, because I knew people at the hospital, I was asked by then Grand Master Rex Moates to be one of the Masonic Serve Association (MSA) Representatives for Nebraska. It was about a year out from this time that we changed the focus and name of Change for Troops to the Masonic Veteran's Partnership (MVP) and started working towards helping the Disabled American Veterans Association with the purchase of vehicles to get our Veterans to and from the hospital as a lot of their vehicles were getting old. Also, during this time, I started visiting Lodges to encourage them (especially their Veterans) to help and volunteer where they could or our terrific VA hospital. Though I myself because of work and last year COVID are not as able to volunteer at the VA hospital in Omaha I encourage and work to fill other MSA representative vacancies throughout the state in Lincoln and Grand Island. As for the MVP mentioned above, since 2013 we have purchased three vehicles as a Grand Lodge for them to transport Veterans, two Ford Flexes and most recently this year a Ford Explorer. We have also given in excess of \$3000 during the Holiday Seasons so that the homeless shelters the Hospitals run in Omaha and Lincoln could provide some holiday cheer. I spend the majority of my time as a representative supporting these projects and encouraging other volunteers. Why? Because it is a great way to show those who have given so much that someone truly cares and I promise you it will leave you with a warm spot in your heart knowing you have helped someone who is in need or just needs some re-assurance that they are appreciated!

Anthony T Johnson – Omaha – Nebraska

## **Missouri**

Good day fellow and future Masonic Volunteers,

For a little over eight years, I have been the Masonic Rep. for a Veterans hospital in St. Louis, Mo.

I started simply doing visits at the hospital and tried to brighten a few lives. Hospitals, can indeed, be very lonely places, especially, for the patients with no family. It can also be a busy place, at times, due to therapy treatments, tests, and other things that can be disruptive.

So, after a few months, the hospital asked if I would be interested in doing home visits.

I decided to try it and have learned a lot from the experiences.

Basically, it helped me develop a talent for seriously listening to people. They have mountains of information to share. Some, but not all, want to share their experiences in the military. They describe why they in hospital care. Some speak of their families. Some want to know why I volunteer. After a short time, we become friends. That is one of the best parts.

Another point is that I have learned to appreciate my own life. Some of these folks have very serious health problems. A few have a family that has abandoned them. Some have no friends anymore, because the friends are too busy, ill, or even died off. It can be depressing.

Having someone call or visit is a great thing for them and rewarding to me.

All of the folks are similar to a library of knowledge about life and survival.

I would highly recommend being a volunteer. It is definitely a positive two-way benefit!

Joe Puff - Scarborough--Jefferson Barracks MO Veterans Home - Missouri

## **South Carolina**

Being a volunteer is a rewarding experience. You never know the people that you encounter and the lifelong friends that you will make. As an MSA Field Agent for Richard Campbell's Nursing Home, I receive a blessing each time I visit. I have been fortunate to help get supplies for our veterans, t-shirt for all veterans with MSA logo, and helped raise money to buy each veteran a tv. I could not have done any of this without the support of the masons in the state of South Carolina.

I consider it an honor to say the pledge and have prayer with the veterans to start their day. I have become close friends with these veterans, and I cherish their smiles and joy whenever they tell me how much that they appreciate a visit. I am reminded of a quote from William Penn "I expect to pass through life but once. If, therefore, there be any kindness I can show, or

any good thing I can do to any fellow-being, let me do it now, and not defer or neglect it, as I shall not pass this way again." I am just thankful that this opportunity came my way and that I can make a difference in these veteran's lives.

Sam Atkins – South Carolina- Campbell Veterans Nursing Home

### **Georgia**

Since I had some problems getting info from our VA a few years ago, I volunteered at our Augusta V. Giving directions to clinic, assisting the patients repost to the proper clinic for their help and claims. It was very satisfying that I was able on most cases to provide assistance to them. The after action reports the patients wrote about their visit was very favorable and I felt maybe I was able to get them to the right place and taking care of them concerns or problems in a timely manner. Since the Parkinson's hit me, I haven't been able to do much, that is from Agent Orange in Vietnam and stayed dormant in my body until this past year.

Chuck Riggins- Augusta- Georgia

### **Georgia**

People ask why do you volunteer? I ask why not. Starting as a small child, there were so many people that gave their time and effort to mold me into who I am today. From my parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts, teachers, coaches, and many close friends shaped my morals and ambitions to be the best at everything that I do.

I enlisted into the U. S. Air Force to serve the country that I truly love. As a young airman, I was led by great men and women in teaching me the proper way to perform my duties. I felt it was my duty to airmen that came after me the same opportunity to learn that I was given.

The Masonic Order was part of my Father and Grandfather's life. I have seen as a child what the order did for widows and orphans. Both were heavily involved with the Crippled Children's Hospital and the Shriner's Charities. That is why I do what I do.

To see today's veterans that have suffered injuries and are being treated makes kamind off what they a going through and take the time to just talk and show some respect. One example is the seven lodges in the Georgia 12th Masonic District conduct a fish fry to feed all veterans at the VA Hospital in Dublin Ga. This year's fish fry will be held August 21st. Last year was canceled due to Covid but the year before, we feed 250 veterans. They all loved it and the smiles and thank you's were worth all of the hard work put in to pull this off.

I don't ever want these veterans to ever be forgotten!

Richard A Kiser - Dublin--Carl Vinson - Georgia

## **New Jersey**

Myself and two of my MSA deputies have return to Sunday Chapel escorts starting Sunday morning June 6,2021.

We enjoy chatting with the residents at the NJMH-Vineland and provide doughnuts before and after Sunday worship service.

The new Pastor starts the Sunday worship service 1/2 hour earlier than the other Pastors 10AM rather than 10:30AM and before we are allowed to enter the home a nurse tests us for Covid.

Forrest A. Andrews – Vineland – New Jersey

## **New Jersey**

I volunteer at the VA in East Orange, NJ. I too am a veteran and feel the need to give back to the community. Me and my fellow Brothers visit and bring coffee and doughnuts to the veterans to show appreciation to them for serving our country. I get great joy on seeing how happy they are to get visitors and that within itself gives us joy.

Jose Rivera - East Orange - New Jersey

## **New Jersey**

First, I must apologize to those who requested some information regarding my personal experience with the MSA Hospital Visitation Program. If I could simply say something like “Oh, it’s great, and makes me feel good” I would have sent such a sentence immediately, but it is much more complex than that. I think it is a story worth telling, but that brought me to the next problem – I really don’t like writing about myself, and so had a few false-starts and then found myself sidetracked with other projects. Tonight I will explain a bit of how the world works for those of us with faith in God and a sense of duty towards mankind. I have to start at the beginning, so bear with me and watch as things came together in unexpected ways.

I have always given-back as best I could to this world of ours as best I could. Skipping that resume, in 2008 I found myself looking for a new challenge of charity and service. I had become very active in my church and was considering upgrading my First Aid certifications and rejoining the local squad. I also realized that I was getting older, did not want to bite off more than I could chew, and hoped to find a service that I could perform into my older years.

At this time I had no knowledge of an incredible family history in Freemasonry, but a work associate many years ago had sparked my interest in the Institution and for roughly 25 years I had made an independent study of it. Here were to be found men, who like me, seemed to work for a better world which holding each other, and especially themselves, to a higher

standard, morally, intellectually, and socially. I made the decision to join the Fraternity with the specific hope of finding charitable works to be done. The feasts and banquets held no appeal for me. My mission was different.

So in the summer of 2008 I began my search for a Masonic Lodge to join, with very limited specific knowledge of the structure of the Craft in New Jersey. For several months I routinely stopped by the Temple only two miles from my home on their posted meeting nights hoping to meet some Masons. My phone calls went unanswered. Eventually I would learn that the building had been condemned and the Lodge was in disarray with a very uncertain future. When I finally made contact, I was advised to look elsewhere. My Masonic journey could very well have ended there, but I looked at a map and located the next-nearest Temple.

This Lodge had a website and even had a link for "Are you Ready to Ask?" And yes, I was, but I thought it was strange that the links were not for that location but a more distant Temple in Rutherford, NJ. It took some time but I then realized that the link I had used did not work, but the phone number did. I ended up having a nice conversation with the wife of the secretary of Lodge #67, and later that day, my call returned, I was made to feel welcome and invited to become a Mason, even if it was at a Lodge that was not even on my short list. Of course there were the usual formalities of application and investigation, and the committee that visited me in late 2008 informed me that it would be some time in 2009 that I could receive my first degree. A couple of snow days slowed things further but finally in February of 2009, I was officially a Mason.

That happened on a Tuesday evening and just by chance that very Sunday was Lessing Passaic Lodge's scheduled visitation day to the Veterans Home at Paramus. This was the very first time I ever heard of the MSA and the program and I enthusiastically volunteered to go along. Perhaps this would be the community service I was seeking. Remember that it was a comedy of errors that brought me to this Lodge on this day.

Sunday arrived and let's just say from that very first day I felt a calling and felt absolutely at home with the veterans, Masons, and volunteers. I still had no idea where all this would lead and how I would come to look back at these simple events as a Divine intervention to get a man to where he needed to be, but for now I just wanted to serve as a volunteer to help those disabled worship God. I was of course introduced to the MSA Representative and he seemed a bit shocked when I asked if I could come every Sunday, even if my Lodge was not scheduled. His answer was enthusiast to say the least. For many Sundays it would only be me and the one Rep and possibly his wife showing up to assist with Worship transports. I would be good to my word and I believe it was around seven years before I would miss a Sunday at the Veterans Home. I was made a Deputy Rep somewhere between my first and second year of service.

In 2012 I would step up my service to the Veterans in an unexpected manner. The staff chaplain was retiring early in the year and it would take at least until very late in the year to cut through the red-tape at the state level and eventually hire a replacement. The Worship

Services were going to be suspended but a conversation with the CEO of the Home gave them my assurance that I (with other volunteers) could continue Sunday Worship without interruption. And so we did! When the search for a new Chaplain was approved I was honored to be invited to apply for the full time position. I could not do so at that time, but my recommendations all came from residents and staff who genuinely wanted me to continue as their religious leader. As you might imagine there were many consultations and such, many difficult, throughout all the years.

An unexpected surprise came in September of 2012 when I was awarded Legion of Honor status with the Chapel of Four Chaplains, located in the Philadelphia Naval Yard, and dedicated by Brother Harry S. Truman in 1951. In 2013 I would be granted the title of NJ Representative Chaplain for the Chapel of Four Chaplains. Reverend Norman Beale was eventually hired and I am certain that I handed to him a well-run worship structure supported by a stronger Masonic support than had been known for many years. I have since continued as the interim chaplain for special events and providing an average of six Sunday services per year.

Early on I had also become a certified volunteer at the home. Through all of this I tried to use a light-touch approach to improving Masonic support of the MSA Visitation Program. This led to what I call the "A Team" which consists of Masons who can be counted on to show up on a regular basis. In short, the old way of Lodge scheduling simply does not work and all too often leaves us short-handed. My ways may not be perfect, and I am certain could be improved, BUT I can only recall one or two Sundays over the years where we did not get the job done.

Over the years I can say with absolute honesty that there was NEVER, not even one Sunday, where I did not look forward to getting to the Paramus Home after a morning of worship and choir at my home church. Some Sundays I felt rushed but never was there a feeling of forced obligation or wishing to be somewhere else. Maybe others notice this, maybe not, but I think our present success is leading by example. Throughout my professional career, I led from the front. I think that is Masonic.

I would never force anyone to this sort of service. Either you want to do it in your heart or you are probably better off staying away and concentrating on the Table Lodges. I have full respect for a few brothers who over the years told me in private they could not look at the age and illness found in the Home. Simply put, it was not for them and a man must know himself; and we must know that we all have different gifts to offer.

And then came COVID. Since the second week of March 2020 even certified volunteers have been excluded. There are no worship services. The cafeterias are closed. There are no activities. Even as I type this on 7/1/21 families are not allowed into the Home for visitations. Instead, residents must be brought outside for short visits. Better days are coming but things are not going to be the same as they were for a long time to come. No one knows at this point what the future of the MSA program holds, but sooner or later the call will come. Just as Masonic volunteers assisted during the brutal cholera epidemics of the 1850's and older

Masons lent their service to the veteran's hospitals during World War One (eventually leading to the creating of the MSA) so we in the future will find our place, accept new challenges, and continue to demonstrate genuine humanity. We can barely imagine how the residents of Veterans Homes and Hospitals have suffered through this time of pandemic, not only with illness and age, but now with isolation and boredom. Perhaps we can make our emergence grander than ever before and show a rising sun once again to those on whom it is setting.

As a PS of sorts to my ramblings, my Masonic journey would take an incredible turn around 2014 when I would, learn that I actually had not only an amazing family history regarding patriots of the Revolution but that these ancestors were also early Pennsylvania Masons! For that matter, a cousin quite literally wrote the extensive history of Freemasonry in Pennsylvania in the 1800's and another cousin wrote the amazing history of my blood ancestors. Had I known that Ben Franklin and George Washington (and others) dined with those who gave me the blood in my veins, I undoubtedly would have sought Masonic membership decades earlier. Had I known that Sunbury Lodge #22 was chartered by and met in my Great-Uncle's house for the first 9 years of their existence in the late-1700's and that his brother, my Great-Great-Great-Great Grandfather, Lt. Colonel John Henry Antes, was Sunbury's first Sr. Warden, I would have certainly been drawn to Masonry at an earlier age. That considered, consider my story, and the undeniable fact that much in life is about timing, but not only being in the right place at the right time, but having a frame of mind open to opportunities. Anyone who knows me is aware of the fact that I never pray for opportunity or intervention, but only that my eyes are open to what is put in my path that I might do the work of the Father. MSA was put in my path. I will end on that thought, and I hope this story was worth the time!

R.W. Richard C. Powell, PJGS - Paramus--NJ Veterans Home -NJ

## **Wisconsin**

I began my volunteering at the Tomah VA going one Sunday morning a month to push veterans to chapel services. They were so appreciative that I felt that I could do more. A brother Mason who was the MSA Rep asked me if I wanted to become a volunteer. At first, I was hesitant and told him I would think about it. Being retired I had plenty of time so why not. It would give me something to do to fill my time. So inquired as to what I would have to do to become a volunteer. To make a long story short I went through the process and became a volunteer. I was helping the veterans check in for appointments and directing them to the right place. I also volunteered in the Hospice Unit. The Tomah VA has a program called No Veteran Dies Alone. A volunteer sits with the veteran who is actively dying when family members can't be there for various reasons. The families were so relieved to know that their loved one was not alone. The

point I am trying to make is that it is a very rewarding experience. You do not have to commit to a certain amount of days or hours. I planned my time around my wife's work schedule, so I was able to volunteer four days a week four hours a day. No matter how much time you are willing or able to volunteer it would be beneficial to you and to the veteran.

Jesse J Long – Tomah – WI

## **Wisconsin**

My volunteering with MSA at the Wisconsin Veteran's Home at King, began around the summer of 2005. The path that led to that volunteering was not direct or sudden. It started when I was a first Master of my home Lodge in the late 1980s. There were two Lodges in Oshkosh at the time, my Lodge, Centennial Lodge #205, and our older sister Lodge, Oshkosh Lodge #27. WB Tom Dowman was Master of Oshkosh Lodge during the time I was Master of Centennial. We shared installations, picnics and social activities, Brothers from one Lodge would help with ritual in the other. Besides our fraternal ties Brother Tom and I were both involved with Boy Scouting and we knew each other through appendant bodies including Eastern Star and White Shrine. After my year as Master my professional career started taking me around the country, but I always maintained and returned to my home in Oshkosh and when home, worked with the Lodges. The two Lodges eventually merged and Brother Tom served as my Treasurer, when I served as Master of the combined Lodges. So far this sounds more like how Tom came to be a volunteer as much as how I arrived there, but for good reason. Brother Tom was a Korean War era Veteran and a joiner. Tom was Emcee for almost every non-profit's annual dinner in the city, he worked with the Boy Scouts, the Rotary, the Salvation Army and United Way. When he needed help he called on his Masonic Family. One of Tom's favorite involvements was through the MSA with the Wisconsin Department of Veteran's Affairs at the Veteran's at King. Tom developed a program of events MSA sponsored at King which carries on today, we will be starting up later this year as pandemic restrictions are eased. Tom arranged Grand Lodge support of the programs and recruited help from the Brothers in a six county area. One of the recruits was my wife Bernice. While I was out of town on one of my construction projects, my wife started volunteering at King. She would get members of her OES Chapter join her and soon my grandchildren were volunteering. When I finally stopped traveling for my work I was recruited. For several years I helped Tom and pitched in where needed. The main events we sponsored were Ice Cream Socials with Swing Era music performed by local community bands. We had door prizes, personal hygiene products for the residents to choose from, cookies which a state-wide convenient store provided at reduced cost, and ice cream and beverages purchased through the WDVA. We would have residents from the entire campus attend and when, in the summer, we would fill the park in the center of the campus with guest we needed the grandkids to run the door prizes out the winning residents. As Tom grew older and his health began to betray him he asked four of us, members of local Lodges, to start taking over the programs. It took four of us to cover the work the work Tom did for a couple decades. He asked me to take over the staffing, coordination with the home, booking the bands,

arrangements for the food and personal items and prizes for the residents. Tom always said to have more help than you need so that you could send Brothers out in the crowd to talk to the Vets. The prizes and gifts were nice but the conversations with another person the human connection was what is really important to these Veterans. Tom has passed on to that country from whose bourne no man returns,, but charity extends beyond the grave. His gift for sharing has influenced me and given me the gift of volunteering.

Steve Labus - Veteran's Home at King – Wisconsin

## **Michigan**

### **Why Am I a MSANA State Coordinator?**

The Grand Lodge of Michigan has a committee called the 'Michigan Masonic Veterans Hospital Volunteers' Committee, which, a few years ago, being a Korea War era Vet myself, I was asked to chair by the Grand Master. The following year I was asked by the newly installed Grand Master if I would accept the appointment of State of Michigan Coordinator for the MSANA.

After accepting the appointment and being certified by the MSANA to represent Our Masonic Fraternity and the Grand Lodge of Michigan at our VA Medical Centers and our State VA Homes in Michigan, I became aware of one of the best kept secrets of Freemasonry.

The MSANA has one of, if not the best, hospital visitation programs in existence. It is very satisfying to be able to assist our Masonic Vets, as well as all veterans, who are unable to provide some of their own basic needs.

In the State of Michigan, as of July 1, we have 5 VA Medical Centers and 3 State VA Homes. The 3<sup>rd</sup> just opening this Spring. We have Representatives and Deputy's at all of our facilities with the exception of the newest one.

It is truly satisfying to be able to volunteer and to be able to help these men and women who gave so much for us.

Since the rise of the Covid 19 Pandemic, our program has been on hold for the last year and a half, as has pretty much I suspect, the whole MSANA program.

We have dedicated volunteers here in Michigan, as I know there are thru-out the whole MSANA hospital visitation program. They support our VA facilities and events and we are always looking for available volunteers to improve our program here in Michigan.

For anyone interested, there is a website at, [www.MSANA.com](http://www.MSANA.com), That has an interesting video that explains 'Who We Are'. It was put together at the Augusta, Georgia VA Medical Center and gives a very good idea of what we do and why. I get a proud feeling of just being a part of the program.

Lyle Cate, MSANA State Coordinator, Grand Lodge of Michigan

## **Arizona**

I was a Mason for many years before I heard of the MSA and Hospital Visitation Program from my Lodge Mentor. He was the MSA Representative for the Veteran's Hospital in Tucson, AZ. He recruited me for help in the chapel service on Sunday mornings. One of the many Volunteer needs of our Military Hospitals in most states.

I was welcomed by our Masonic brothers (including a past Grandmaster) and their wives and jumped in where I was needed. There were other Masons and other Lodges doing many other jobs during the week.

The Chapel Escort Service was my main effort, and most rewarding. Bringing our Vets to Chapel from Rehab and the Blind Center was so much appreciated by the Vets and the Nursing staff, who report our work made an impact on morale and look forward to Sunday mornings.

Some hospitalized vets we helped would return months or years later and look us up to renew our fellowship. That applies to our Masonic Brother vets as well. It is a blessing to see their eyes brighten up with the comradery and joy of voices and contact with non-hospital volunteers.

Hospital visitation is the MSA mainstay goal. After a year and a half of lock down, some of our Brothers are looking for a rewarding way to pay-it-forward. Could you be one of them?

Tom Fowler – Tucson – Arizona

## **Arizona**

Our York rite bodies started volunteering at the Veterans Home in Phoenix several years ago. The residents liked the fact like the fact that we would come to the it the hospital and bring magazines games board games sodas and organizing and running bingo games for the inmates Afterword we would often go to the hospital rooms and visit with the residents. Often there weren't very many visitors at all for some of the residents.

All of them were veterans and we would take the van and take them to the park and let them interact with the town people and each other. All of the veterans in the home were not allowed to have personal transportation and often we would bring things to them that they could not get in the VA itself. It was very gratifying to help these vets by talking to them hanging out with them and listening to their war stories. Sometimes it was hard on us because we would get there and several of the residents in the hospital were no longer there, they had passed away and we did not know it. We were we were able to utilize the hospital staff to help us run bingo wow we were able to pass out the soda pops and bingo cards. Another way we volunteered what's the take a list of items that the VA hospitals could not provide for the residence, and we would obtain I'm playing those items and bring them back to them.

It was important to maintain a schedule with the VA hospital so that the residents there could look forward to the Mason's and playing the game on a regular basis many of the residents of the home did not have regular vet visitors and they look forward to visitors that would interact with them as a group and in their rooms on a regular basis.

Because of IRS regulations concerning volunteering at the VA home we could only provide items of nominal value to the veterans but they enjoyed our conversations and interactions far more than they did the small gifts that they would win playing bingo. During the COVID-19 pandemic this practice all but stopped because of regulations and hospital protocol concerning the virus. Veterans in the home were all senior citizens and it was felt that we had to be very cautious interacting with them, and finally ending our visitation efforts because of social distancing, hospital and state regulations.

As the government is loosening regulations and health restrictions, it will be enjoyable and satisfying to resume our Masonic volunteering efforts.

Douglas S. Robertson – Phoenix – Arizona

### **Louisiana**

As the MSANA Representative to Overton-Brooks VA Medical Center for the last 10+ years, it is my honor to serve those who served the country. As a USAF Retired veteran of 27 years and a Master Mason I am doubly honored and humbled to serve Masonry and my fellow Veterans and their families. Representing the Grand Lodge of Louisiana in this capacity has been very rewarding and I can think of no better way to continue my service by helping those who sacrificed so much for the Freedoms we enjoy as a Nation.

Johnny Byrd - Shreveport (Overton-Brooks VA Hospital) – Louisiana

### **Tennessee**

I currently serve as a MSANA rep for the Tennessee Valley Healthcare System, with two VA hospitals located in Murfreesboro and Nashville TN and a major clinic in Clarksville, TN, near Ft Campbell.

During the pandemic, visitation and organizations which served VA hospitals were shut down. Donations of much-needed healthcare items dropped dramatically. Even though Masonic bodies were not meeting, I contacted leadership of our local lodges and the two Masonic veteran affiliated organizations; National Sojourners and the Shrine Legion of Honor. Both the lodges and these two groups stepped up with major donations of money, toiletries, underwear and socks. Despite very restrictive access to the VA facilities, the administration granted us entry and gladly accepted our much-needed supplies. The Legion of Honor even provided color guards for deceased veteran's funerals due to the active duty personnel not being allowed. The pandemic did NOT keep the masonic fraternity to keep from serving.

Locally, I work as a volunteer at one of our largest state VA clinics in Clarksville, TN. Volunteer services were shut down for about a year, but in March reopened to start inoculation of state veterans. After we received our Covid vaccinations, our area volunteers assisted with four Saturday day-long vaccination events, providing vaccinations to approximately 2000 veterans. This greatly assisted in getting lives “back to normal” after being in isolation for so long.

Why do I do it (why do WE do it- my wife is a veteran as well)? Both of us have been blessed after years of serving our country. Through our life-experiences, we are able to give back with both time and knowledge to those who have either physical or emotional needs-either through personal experiences or references to resources. The satisfaction of being able to help a fellow veteran is something that can't be measured and allows me to be able to continue to serve my country as well as my fraternity.

Our veteran hospitals and clinics are always in need of assistance. Considering the number of veterans, and specifically disabled veterans, as a result of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts, our systems are overwhelmed. Anything we as Masons can do to ease that burden fulfils our obligation to serve not only our fellow man, but our country as well, whether a veteran or not.

Steve Singleton – Clarksville – Middle Tennessee

## **Maine**

It can be hard to find time to volunteer especially when one is working and family oriented. However the benefits can be enormous. Volunteering offers vital help to people in need, worthwhile causes, and the community, but the benefits can be even greater for the volunteer. You can find friends, learn new skills, connect with the community, and even advance your career. Being a volunteer will get you extra credits as a student and is highly regarded on any application or resume.

Personally, I have been involved in some kind of volunteer work as far back as I can remember. My parents were great volunteers and involved the family in much of it, especially their Masonic Affiliations. I learned young in life that I was blessed simply by being made aware of my surroundings through volunteering time for those less fortunate.

I believe there is a natural compassionate instinct in all of us to be good to each other. If that isn't true why would we ever feel guilt. With all the time I give to volunteer programs, as I have been retired for several years now, I will still feel guilt for various reasons but the satisfaction I feel when I am part of something, large or small, that lifts someone over a concern or sadness in their life can be overwhelmingly satisfying to me.

At some point in your life, you will ask yourself “How can I give something back for the life I have lived”. Life, good or bad, we all have a need to satisfy that sense of goodness within us. Volunteering is a great way to do that and bring honor to yourself and inspiration to others.

If at some point you should feel the need to give yourself to something meaningful make it a point to investigate the Fraternal Order of Free Masonry, one of, if not the greatest philanthropies in the world today. Masonry has made me an instrument of its goodness and other than family there is nothing in my life more fulfilling and significant.

W. Daniel Hill – Augusta – Maine

## **New York**

I joined the Freemasons 25 years ago. Took a while for me to ask one evening “*What good do we, as a lodge and fraternity, DO to help in the neighborhood?*” And an old timer Brother told me how they go to the local Veterans Home over in St. Albans, Queens every month. He said I’m welcome to come one day and see firsthand. He said I could bring my wife and son too if I wanted to. So that next week we all joined them to see just what Masonry does near us. We got there and were asked to hand out Bingo cards to residents as they arrived, many in wheelchairs. One veteran asked my 8-year-old son if he could play his card for him - as he was blind. Bobby asked me if he could sit with the man & I told him he could help if he wanted to. He was excited that he could be playing. He thought we were going to be working all afternoon, but it sounded fun now! After a few rounds of Bingo we started to serve everyone coffee and cake. The cake excited most of the people in the room, including the volunteers, especially little Bobby. Winners of games each got a fresh pair of socks & coupons they could use as cash in the Canteen. Even those who hadn’t won a game got a Canteen Coupon just for joining us. Everyone had a great time! The residents and the volunteers alike.

**I was hooked.** My whole family was!

That one day, with traveling, took us about three hours of our time. The faces and stories I heard; I will never forget. Twenty-four years later and I haven’t missed a monthly gathering at St. Albans, until Covid19 struck, calling off the visits due to health concerns. My wife always comes too. She now helps me run the events.

Now winners get to choose prizes ranging from knickknacks to shirts & blouses to MP3 players to clock radios. The residents love what we have made it in to. The stories we have heard over the years while talking to the residents over coffee and cake would fill a book. One man we met there and became friends with, in a wheelchair, told us his daughter was going to get married. He wanted to work extra hard at his re-hab, so he could dance with her at the wedding. Over a year went by and he walked into Bingo one afternoon! A few weeks later he said the wedding was wonderful and he showed us pictures of him dancing with the young bride.

Once an old timer in a wheelchair and who couldn’t talk, one day motioned for my wife to wheel him down the hall where he pointed to a photo on the wall. It was him as a young, handsome man, in uniform, next to his fighter plane on a landing strip. My wife was very impressed, and he was so proud to “SHOW us his story.”

Listening to their stories for a while once a month is SO rewarding for them and for us. It takes such little effort on our part. Just a few hours. Isn't stuff like this why YOU joined Masonry?

Bob Getschel - St. Albans--N.Y. Vets Home – New York

## **Idaho**

Being able to reach out to the veterans who reside in the three Idaho State Veterans Homes is easy for me as I am the Administrator of the Boise home. There are two other state veterans homes in Idaho, one of which is in Pocatello and the other in Lewiston. As the Administrator, I am involved in all admissions and have been able to verify Lodge membership for any of our admissions through our Grand Lodge office. However, this is not a perfect method of identifying Masonic brethren in our facilities, as a resident could be a member of a lodge outside of Idaho. Additionally, we have had (and currently have) members of a Prince Hall Lodge, and there is no consistent method of identifying those members. Therefore, I make it a point to visit every new resident, wearing my Past Master's ring, and talking with him about where he came from and if he ever joined a Lodge.

Volunteering to provide support for our Masonic veterans gives me a chance to reach out to those Brethren who are living in a place they would rather not be, but the comfort, care, and support we give to our Brothers and all residents gives them and their families peace of mind, knowing they are living in a caring and homelike environment. No Brother receiving care in a skilled nursing or assisted living facility should be alone, and the connection I can give them to the Blue Lodge and Grand Lodge is very much appreciated. Last year's Grand Master of Masons in Idaho Steven Hall wanted to set up a lodge meeting in a secure location in the veterans homes, but COVID stopped any ability to make that happen.

I also volunteer my time and airplane as a Command Pilot with Angel Flight West, flying patients and their family members to and from much needed medical appointments all over the Pacific Northwest. Especially pleasing has been the ability to fly children to the Shriner's Hospitals for Children in Salt Lake City or Portland. Being able to help those who did not ask for or deserve the conditions they are in brings Masonic brotherly love and relief to those outside our beloved Fraternity.

Rick L. Holloway – Boise, Lewiston, Pocatello, and Boise Veterans Home – Idaho

## **Kansas**

Raised to the Sublime Degree as a Master Mason in 1977 by Andrew Jackson Lodge AF&AM in the Masonic Temple located in Alexandria, Virginia, there have only been few-true accomplishments worthy of asking others to embark.

Years ago, I became a volunteer at the Robert J. Dole Veteran's Medical Center (Hospital) in Wichita, Kansas. My volunteering is very fulfilling in many ways that some would ask "why do I do this?" A quick example would be that we sometimes receive donations to pass along. In the last year the Masonic Service Association received two shipments of "BOMBA SOCKS" which I handed to the Volunteer Director at the Wichita Robert J. Dole Medical Center/Hospital. The Homeless Veterans receive much needed help not only medically, Mental Health but personal needs.

As most veterans have found in the past applying for and receiving assistance for which each VET deserved was difficult. I could go on and on what didn't work, but today the VA has changed and now easier to get help, especially with the different organizations such as the Disabled Americans, American Veterans and several others,

A few years ago, I learned that we have a Masonic Service Association of North America that exists in reaching out to our Veterans to help these men find a true sense of brotherhood and peace that coincide with the medical and spiritual assistance for the Vet and family.

I am the Kansas Masonic Service Representative responsible for reaching out personally and officially to all personnel to assist in the information and availability to each.

This may sound like a job for Superman but it is far from it. If you know and have visited with me, I can see you smiling.

The Masonic Service Association of North America stands strong behind me and each other Regional Representative, by making and giving us name badges, personal business cards, and helping reimbursement of travel expenses. Each Representative keeps in contact with the main MSAOA office. Not only does all this come together to help the Veterans but also show the VA Employees and Patients of our dedication and ability to help without asking anything in return.

Going back to why I do the Volunteering? I feel the comradery and acceptance by my Brothers and Sisters that sometimes just need a break a smile and helping hand.

Think about giving just a few hours a week or even a moth, it is well worth the return.

Gregory E. Burge – Wichita - Kansas

## Pennsylvania

As a young person we were always taught that you should always help others less fortunate than yourself when possible. My father used to clown (RUFFLES) with the Jaffa Shrine, and as a masonic family it was just what you did for others in your own small way for a greater cause. Anyway I regress- I had been volunteering for the Salvation Army Disaster Services with my buddy Smokin Joe also a Master mason for about 3-4 years when there was a shake-up in management and style of the mission. So you know what they say –when one door closes another one opens. I had been using the VA for medical benefits after a life-threatening illness and on one of my visits I thought it could be a new venue to help in. I found out that there was a Masonic organization that volunteered. I spoke with Brother Bill Vaupel, MSA and was handing out coffee and donuts with a few great guys' that were all veterans also. I became very close to and am grateful for the time with my brothers and the lessons they taught me and the fun we had together. I am now the MSANA Rep at the Pittsburgh, Pa VA Healthcare system with 10 years and 4500 hours of volunteering under my belt so far. I also do MSA/VA awareness programs for anyone or any organization that desires me to do so along with serving on a few boards at the VA Pittsburgh. I am always looking how to better serve our National Treasures- our VETERANS. Please if you want a truly rewarding experience volunteer at your local VA hospital or CBOC. And as always thank a Veteran when possible, the freedom WE enjoy is because of them and many others, some of whom gave the ultimate sacrifice.

Spes Mea in Deo Est,

Robert B. Ruff - Pittsburgh--H.J. Heinz III Aspinwall- PA

