

Affinity lodges provide brotherhood for common interests

BROTHERS

TWICE OVER

by Richard Berman

The requirements to become a Mason are fairly straightforward: Only men of at least 18 years of age who believe in a Supreme Being are eligible. A number of specialized lodges around the world, however, also require that their members be dedicated to a specific cause or belong to an affiliated organization.

These so-called “affinity lodges” were formed to provide brotherhood for men with common interests and help them develop deeper connections with each other and with the craft. For these members, having a space to share their distinct set of interests is a vital expectation of the Masonic experience.

As is the case with all lodges, affinity lodges must receive a charter from a grand lodge. The United Grand Lodge of England has recognized several of these organizations, including Pioneer Lodge No. 9065 (affiliated with the scouting movement), Kindred Lodges Association (for Masons involved with youth work), Isthmian Lodge No. 4566 (for Masons who are passionate about sports), Old Cliftonian Lodge No. 3340 (for former pupils and teachers at Clifton College), and the Lodge of Brothers In Arms (for military veterans only). There's even Internet Lodge, which is open to Freemasons who have Internet access: The lodge boasts members in more than two dozen countries, including Andorra, Lebanon, Turkey, and Slovenia.

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Here in the United States, affinity lodges are far less common. However, two prime examples are based in Washington, D.C.: Magnolia Lodge No. 53 and Fraternity Lodge No. 54.

Magnolia Lodge was founded in 1996, and reserves membership to brothers of the Kappa Alpha Order, a college fraternity that promotes the virtues of courtly Southern culture. Confederate General Robert E. Lee, known for his gentlemanly behavior, is viewed by the Order as its spiritual founder. Fraternity Lodge was chartered in 2001, and is comprised of Masons who share membership in any Greek letter society.

"We consider ourselves 'brothers twice over,'" says Jordan Yelinek, master of Magnolia Lodge. "We have Masons who share the common bond not only of Masonry, but also of Kappa Alpha Order." Yelinek, 28, moved to San Francisco earlier this year after completing his doctorate in cell biology at Yale, but says that the geographical distance is not a problem. "Magnolia Lodge has more than 60 members, who live all over the country, and our officers live in places such as Florida, Mississippi, and Washington. We all fly to D.C. four times a year for our meetings."

Yelinek says that his involvement with Masonry actually goes back to his days as an undergraduate at Yale. "I was part of the Council of Honor

of Kappa Alpha Order, which is focused on learning about our laws and customs, and in the course of my research I found out that many of our founders were Masons," he recalls. "After attending some Kappa Alpha Order meetings in D.C., I met several men who were brothers in Magnolia Lodge, and I petitioned to join."

Although the Grand Lodge of the District of Columbia allows its lodges to use a number of rituals, Magnolia Lodge opts for the standard ritual. Nevertheless, the central role that Kappa Alpha Order plays in the lodge is evident at every turn, from the portrait of Robert E. Lee to the Confederate battle flags to the

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Magnolia Lodge flag, which is based on the Order's colors. In addition, members wear Kappa Alpha Order pins and ties as part of their standard attire. "Masonry and Kappa Alpha Order are equally important to all of us, and we are lifelong brothers in both," Yelinek says.

Because of the added eligibility requirement of the lodge, the brothers found that they couldn't share their experiences with friends,

even if they were already Masons. As a result, Magnolia Lodge petitioned the formation of Fraternity Lodge, for Masons who are members of any Greek letter society. A number of Magnolia Lodge brothers now have membership in both lodges. "We have members of many Greek organizations as brothers, and we find that they are very involved," says Walter Hoenes, assistant to the grand secretary of the Grand Lodge of the District of Columbia, who currently serves as secretary of Fraternity Lodge. "All of us had great experiences in fraternities when we were in school, and this is allowing us to carry that love forward within the structure of Freemasonry."

Like its parent lodge, Fraternity meets four times a year to dispense business and celebrate Festive Board (a traditional feast), which allows it to draw members from all over the country. "This is a great

way for Masons to connect with each other and have a common experience," says Hoenes. "Our brothers already had a strong commitment to fraternal organizations even before they became Masons, and our lodge gives them a way to maintain that involvement throughout their lives." ♦