

THE VOICE OF KANSAS MASONRY

# THE KANSAS MASON

March 2026

A Publication for Kansas Masons in partnership with the Grand Lodge of Kansas



## Celebrating 60 Years

*Community Excellence Endowment*

*Cancer Research Endowment  
and Capital Funding*

*Pediatric Care Endowment*

*Masonic Heritage Preservation  
and Endowment*

COMMUNITY FOCUSED, COMMUNITY FUELED

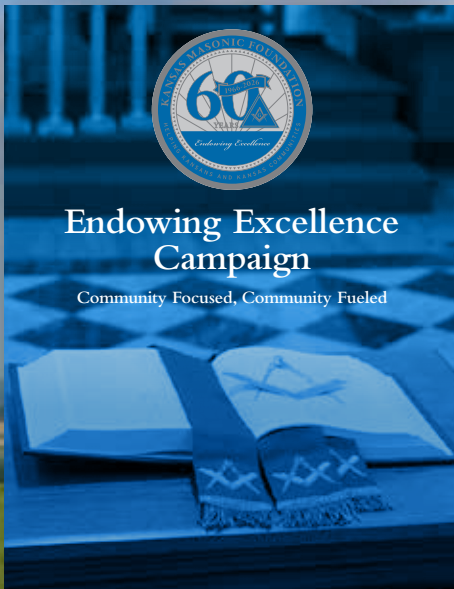
# ‘ENDOWING E

Means Continuing  
Kansas Mason’s Enduring  
Impact on Local Nonprofits



# XCELLENCE'

Community Excellence Endowment



In August 2025, the Kansas Masonic Foundation awarded \$100,000 to more than a dozen nonprofits around the state.

Selected from applications submitted by 54 local lodges, grantees ranged from the Black Entrepreneurs of the Flint Hills to the Osage County Historical Society and the Central Kansas Conservancy. Amounts ranged between \$5,000 and \$10,000.

The recipients represented the inaugural group funded through the Kansas Masonic Foundation's Local Community Grants Program

"Through this program, Kansas Masons are reinforcing our longstanding commitment to improving lives and strengthening our communities," Bob Shively, executive director of the Kansas Masonic Foundation, said in announcing the awards. "By investing in initiatives that directly support the wellbeing of Kansans, we hope to empower our lodges to create meaningful change where it matters most, right here at home."

Shively might as well have also been talking about the \$5 million Community Excellence Endowment envisioned as part of the Kansas Masonic Foundation's 60th anniversary "Endowing Excellence" campaign. The overall goal of the campaign is to raise \$10 million.

As described by the Kansas Masonic Foundation, the Community Excellence Endowment would help facilitate "meaningful alliances to address community needs, promote the value of Freemasonry, and help those in need."

The Community Excellence Endowment would generate long-term funding for the Local Community Grants program.

The endowment would also provide a steady source of revenue for the Kansas Masonic Foundation's longstanding (and popular) Charities Lodge Matching Funds program, through which the foundation partners with local lodges on charitable initiatives in their home communities. With a dollar-for-dollar match of up to \$2,500, the program donates approximately \$300,000 annually to philanthropic endeavors.

As the chair of the "Endowing Excellence" campaign, Jeff Sowder said donations to local causes help correct the misimpression among many outsiders that the Masons are a secret organization with strange rituals.

"Nothing could be further from the truth. There's never been any attempt to hide who we are, where we meet, when we meet, or anything else. We meet just like every other organization," he said. "But it's important for any organization, ours included, that people be able to point to something in that community and say, 'This is what they've helped us do.'"

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**'ENDOWING EXCELLENCE'** *continued from previous page*

With 170 lodges around the state, the charitable work of Kansas Masons benefits numerous communities and causes, including the Newton-based Heart to Heart Child Advocacy Center and The Museum of Art + Light (MoA+L) in Manhattan. The foundation's charitable dollars also assist statewide organizations like Kansas Concerns of Police Survivors (Kansas C.O.P.S.)

Working with McPherson Lodge No. 172, Heart to Heart received a \$5,000 grant through the new Local Community Grants program.

Heart to Heart is a child-abuse prevention and treatment organization serving Harvey, Marion and McPherson counties.

As one of 19 community action centers around the state, Heart to Heart serves approximately 200 children a year. Referrals come from law enforcement organizations and the Kansas Department for Children and Families.

Executive Director Veronica Mosqueda-Bargdill said the assistance from the Kansas Masonic Foundation was a welcome infusion of operating capital at a time when the organization was grappling with about \$30,000 in funding reductions from its usual sources, including federal dollars through the U.S. Department of Justice.

Operating funding is about more than just keeping the lights on. It allows Heart to Heart to retain its three full-time and three part-time employees.

"Without the staff, you'd have no programs," Mosqueda-Bargdill said, "and so this 5,000 just goes in making sure that we can continue to see the kiddos in our offices and not have to say, 'Oh, you need to wait until staff is present, or you have to wait until our hours are open.'"

"We've been able to meet every kid that walks in our doors, which some Child Advocacy Centers are not that lucky right now."

The McPherson Lodge was helpful even before the Local Community Grants award, and Mosqueda-Bargdill is grateful for the backing.

"It makes me know that we have the support of our community, and (the dollars) are coming from people that have maybe never been to our center, but because they see what we do, or hear what we do, and believe in our mission, we're able to keep going and doing what we do,"

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**MoA+L**  
THE MUSEUM OF ART + LIGHT

## 'ENDOWING EXCELLENCE'

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she said.

The affirmation "makes us want to do our job more," she said.

About 100 miles to the north and east of Newton, Kristy Peterson is utilizing a \$5,000 donation from Lafayette Lodge No. 16 to initiate a digital photography workshop with teens served through the Boys & Girls Club of Manhattan.

Peterson is vice president of learning engagement & visitor experiences at MoA+L, and she said funding from the lodge will help purchase small digital cameras and cover other costs of the workshop, including paying for professional teaching artists. One of the instructors is photographer Shreepad Joglekar, who is chair of the Kansas State University Art Department.

Ten teens, selected from a pool of applicants, are participating in the "See My World" workshop. The participants are telling a story about an aspect of their life through digital images, which organizers will curate into a book.

The museum is building the workshop around a travelling exhibit it is hosting entitled "Crafting Sanctuaries: Black Spaces of the Great Depression South," which features a number of black-and-white images shot by photographers from the Farm Security Administration in the 1930s and 1940s.

The images, many of which were never previously published, depict the lives of Black Southern agriculture workers.

The museum anticipates involving elementary school students in the project through visits and discussions.

Peterson viewed "See My World" as an initial step in a broader collaboration with the Boys & Girls Club, which serves a significant number of children from economically disadvantaged families.

MoA+L opened in November 2024, and Peterson said it would be wonderful to one day have a major underwriter

provide enough support for the museum to offer free admission.

Similarly, she said, the museum does not have the money to undertake an educational endeavor like "See My World" without the money donated by Lodge No. 16.

"I'm extremely grateful for this kind of community support as a brand new art museum in the middle of the country and in a community like Manhattan, Kansas," Peterson said.

"It takes a long time to garner support, launch programs, find partnerships, shape something, so in a year's time, we've been able to successfully connect with and collaborate with the Boys & Girls Club, and I'm excited to have the opportunity to work with them and their professional staff to really shape the future."

While MoA+L aims to bridge 21st century technology with the visual and performing arts, the mission of Kansas C.O.P.S. is to comfort the family, friends, and co-workers of law enforcement officers who lost their lives in the line of duty.

Quinter resident Connie Weber knows the benefit of organization firsthand.

A representative from Kansas C.O.P.S. provided support to Weber for a week after her husband, Gove County Sheriff Allan Weber, died in December 2020 after contracting COVID-19 while on duty at the Gove County Emergency Operations Center. He was 61.

"He refused to stay home," Weber said. "He said he wasn't elected to stay home in his basement."

She contracted COVID at the same time as her husband, leaving her unable to continue her work as a nurse. She works a little with the local ambulance service.

And now, as president of Kansas C.O.P.S., Weber helps assist other grieving survivors of fallen officers.

One of the most meaningful services is financing the travel of family members to see their loved one's name engraved on the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial in Washington, D.C. Kansas C.O.P.S. also sponsors trips to the state memorial in Topeka.

The next trip to D.C. is scheduled for May 2026. Five families are going.

Justice Lodge No. 457, an affinity lodge for the law enforcement and criminal justice communities, has donated more than \$14,000 to Kansas C.O.P.S. since 2017. It announced another gift in October 2025.

That support is critical to the success of the organization. Without contributions, Weber said, Kansas C.O.P.S. can't help family members rebuild their shattered lives.

Those trips to D.C. are a big part of the healing process.

"It's very humbling when you go there," Weber said. "And it's just a privilege to see your loved one's name on the wall — that they gave their life for something and they won't be forgotten." ■





Kansas Masonic Foundation  
to Build on Commitment to

Cancer Research Endowment  
and Capital Funding

# KU CANCER CENTER



through \$10 Million  
'Endowing Excellence'  
Campaign



Jeff Sowder gulped.

"What did you say?" he asked Dr. Barbara Atkinson, the executive vice chancellor of the University of Kansas Medical Center and executive dean of the KU School of Medicine.

"I'd like for you to go out and raise \$15 million for us," Atkinson repeated.

It was 2003, and Atkinson had requested a meeting with Sowder in his capacity as board president of the Kansas Masonic Foundation.

The foundation had been funding cancer research at KU since the 1970s.

But in seeking its assistance for the university's push to become one of the elite cancer centers in the nation, Atkinson was asking the foundation to *triple* the amount it had contributed over decades ... and to do it in just five years.

Sowder was one of the younger members of the board at the time, and Atkinson's request was a tough sell to some of his colleagues.

"But I eventually convinced them that this would put the Kansas Masons on the map and that this would be something that we could really hang our hat on," Sowder recalled in a 2025 interview.

"And so they finally said, 'Well, OK, if you think you can.' And I will tell you, there were a lot of people that said that we never should have started this campaign, that we would never finish it, and we would look like fools in the end."

Not so. The Kansas Masonic Foundation met the target six months ahead of schedule.

And in proving Sowder correct, the "Partnership for Life" campaign heightened the profile of the Masons and spotlighted its contributions to the KU Cancer Center, which now total more than \$40 million.

The Mason's longstanding impact is embedded in the Cancer Center through programs and professorships that bear the Mason's name — and through the Masonic Square and Compass symbol that adorns a prominent research building on KU's medical center campus in Kansas City, Kansas.

The Mason connection was also integral to the recruitment of Dr. Roy Jensen, who in 2004 took over as director of the nascent KU Cancer Center and spearheaded the drive to become a nationally designated center through the National Cancer Institute (first in 2012, and then again in 2022 when it received higher-level "comprehensive" status).

Dr. William Jewell, a surgical oncologist who spent nearly 40 years at KU Medical Center before retiring in 2010, was Jensen's predecessor as director of the Cancer Center. The Kansas Masonic Foundation's contribution to the Cancer Center's success cannot be overstated, Jewell said.

"They've been the one driving force that has kept this program going," he said.

"It was like starting a fire that almost goes out. And several times, they reignited it — 'Don't give up guys, keep going. We know what you're doing and keep trying.' I'm not sure it would have ever gone anywhere without them."

Jensen concurred.

"They believed in us before we even believed in ourselves," he said.

## 60th Anniversary Endowment Campaign

As one might expect from an organization that is part of a fraternity borne from stonemason guilds established in the Middle Ages, the Kansas Masons intend to build on their commitment to the KU Cancer Center.

The Kansas Masonic Foundation is looking to raise \$2.5 million for the KU Cancer Center as part of the \$10 million "Endowing Excellence" campaign it is undertaking to mark its 60th anniversary in 2026.

Of the money earmarked for the KU Cancer Center, \$500,000 would go toward the research building the center is building on the KU medical campus at 39th Street and Rainbow Boulevard in Kansas City, Kansas. The Cancer Center projects the initial \$450 million phase of the building will be completed in 2027.

The remaining \$2 million would establish a professorship

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## KANSAS MASONIC FOUNDATION HELPS KU CANCER CENTER PROVIDE 'HOPE ON WHEELS'

Kansas Masonic Foundation Helps KU Cancer Center provide 'HOPE on Wheels'

In the more than two decades that University of Kansas medical teams have conducted free cancer screenings around the state, the number of residents checked would all but fill Allen Fieldhouse, the famed Jayhawk basketball arena.

The actual figure is more than 15,000 screenings since 2003, with most of them coming at wellness events the KU Cancer Center has held in conjunction with local masonic lodges, including one several years ago in Garden City with a twist that led to the removal of a cancerous kidney that had grown to the size of a Nerf football.

In recognition of the Kansas Mason's support of its efforts, the KU Cancer Center now calls its statewide outreach network the Masonic Cancer Alliance (MCA). It was established in 2008 as the Midwest Cancer Alliance.

The MCA's 18 organizational partners include hospitals and medical centers in places like Coffeyville, Colby, and Hays. In addition to screenings, services provided by the MCA include access to clinical trials and continuing education for medical staff.

And in early 2026, the MCA expects to serve even more Kansans through a new mobile unit it has dubbed HOPE on Wheels — short for Health Outreach, Prevention, and Education. The 40-foot mobile unit will include a state-of-the-art mammogram machine, three exam rooms, screening/dressing area, medical refrigerator, bathroom, and phlebotomy station.

Two rooms will be used for dermatology screenings, with the other dedicated to prostate cancer exams. Individuals may also be screened for colon cancer, body mass index, and blood pressure.

The Kansas Masonic Foundation has designated the KU Cancer Center as a primary beneficiary of the foundation's 60th anniversary endowment campaign, but HOPE on Wheels illustrates the foundation's ongoing support outside of the campaign.

The MCA purchased the mobile unit with a nearly \$1 million donation from the Kansas Masonic Foundation, financed in large part by a special campaign that raised \$500,000 for the mammogram unit.

MCA physician leaders Gary C. Doolittle and Roy Jensen,

who is also director of the KU Cancer Center, said the mobile unit will be a gamechanger.

"It's going to be a great boon to our efforts to reach a whole host of underserved communities across the state," Jensen said.

Doolittle, the MCA's medical director, said the unit will add to the "really good medicine" local primary care physicians provide every day. "It's not an easy job," Doolittle said.

Providing cancer screenings is one way the MCA can help those local providers, he said.

"Hopefully, (people) wind up without a cancer diagnosis," Doolittle said. "But if the screening was accurate and they are diagnosed, the hope is to catch it early and provide the treatment required for that particular patient."

Jeff Sowder predicted the HOPE unit will log a lot of miles. Sowder, of Toronto, Kansas, was a longtime member of the Kansas Masonic Foundation board and is chairman of the 60th anniversary endowment campaign.

"I kind of pity the guy that's in charge of that because I think he's going to be on the road a lot," Sowder said. "Because when the lodges see this thing, they're going to want to have it in their communities. It will be a great thing for us."

Yet even before the mobile unit made it to the drawing board, the partnership between the Kansas Masons and the MCA was already making a big difference in the life of Gene Juno.

Juno, 55, is a sixth-grade reading teacher, and he's the guy with the massively enlarged right kidney that a Dr. Jeffrey Holzbeierlein removed after a 2018 screening hosted by Garden City's Tyrian Lodge No. 246.

The unusual aspect of the diagnosis is that it came not as a result of the screening itself, but rather from dinner afterwards that the lodge hosted for the KU Cancer Center visitors.

Juno mentioned to the urologist that he had seen blood in his urine, but that it had not happened for a couple weeks. At the urologist's urging, Juno pressed his local physicians to consider something other than the kidney stones they had rather nonchalantly diagnosed.



An ultrasound and CAT scan revealed kidney cancer that had fortunately not spread to any other organs. He had sent a group photo to the KU staff that had come to Garden City and contacted them after the diagnosis.

"I'm like, 'Guys, I need help,' and I laid out my story on the line, and they ended up responding back, 'Don't worry. We've got you. Someone will reach out to you in the morning,'" Juno recalled. "And sure enough, first thing in the morning, someone from KU called me, and I was up there with Dr. Holzbeierlein within a couple of weeks, and had just the best care through them."

Follow-up care through KU means a 6.5-hour drive to the medical center in Kansas City, Kansas, every six months. But that's not so bad; Kansas City is growing on him.

And, in 2024, a checkup revealed a spot on his left kidney. "It was about 1.4 centimeters," Juno said, "and again, KU just — I can't praise them enough. They went in there through a half-inch hole, did a biopsy, burned it off, and at this point (in late 2025), nothing has come back. We'll check up again in February, but knock on wood, so far, so good."

Also, four years after the kidney cancer diagnosis, Juno once again took part in an MCA visit, that time as part of a lodge in Scott City, where he went through the screening, and staff found a concerning spot on his left chest. The cells were abnormal but not melanoma.

Juno has assisted with several screenings and is well aware of the added benefit HOPE on Wheels will provide with its mammogram capability. "It's going to be a godsend," he said, "and it's going to reach more people that way and hopefully save more lives." ■



honoring Jensen, much like the William R. Jewell, M.D. Distinguished Masonic Professor position Jensen now holds. Jensen plans to retire in 2028.

Honoring Jensen is fitting, Sowder said, for an "amazing person" who was central to the center earning NCI designation. "Not only does he have vision, he has the ability to raise funds, and he also has the ability to put together programs and bring top notch doctors in," he said.

Jensen is also director of the Kansas Masonic Cancer Research Institute and chief executive officer of the Masonic Cancer Alliance (MCA), which KU renamed from the Midwest Cancer Alliance in 2019 after the Kansas Masonic Foundation endowed the operation with a \$5 million gift.

Meanwhile, oncologist Dr. Gary Doolittle is KU Med's Capitol Federal Masonic Professor of Medicine and medical director of the MCA. Established in 2008, the MCA's mission is to extend the reach and impact of the KU Cancer Center to residents throughout the state.

It has 18 member organizations working on prevention, early detection, treatment and survivorship through services such as access to clinical trials and professional education.

The MCA evolved from Jensen's vision that the KU Cancer Center should be a regional resource, Doolittle said.

"Even before some of the other key things were in place, he felt very strongly about setting up an outreach network," he said. The Kansas Masonic Foundation was "really pivotal" in the growth and development of the outreach program.

The Kansas Masonic Foundation's contributions to the MCA include supporting a nurse that helps patients navigate the complexities of going through treatment, such as managing medications and appointments, along with a worker who specializes in helping patients work through insurance and other aspects of paying for their care. Doolittle also noted the Kansas Masonic Foundation's financial support of KU physicians such as Dr. Carol Fabian, a renowned breast cancer prevention specialist, and Dr. Jeffrey Holzbeierlein, who specializes in urologic cancer surgery, especially bladder, kidney, penile and testicular cancer, and is the physician in chief of the KU Cancer Center.

On a personal note, Doolittle said the support from the Kansas Masonic Foundation has allowed him to take time out of his clinic duties to focus on rural cancer care. "So there's all kinds of layers to the involvement with the program they have had through the years," Doolittle said.

### **Key Players Drive Cancer Center Growth**

Jewell arrived at KU from the University of Kentucky in 1971, the same year President Richard Nixon signed the National Cancer Act as part of his "war on cancer." Like

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## KC CANCER CENTER

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many other universities around the country, KU was looking into becoming one of the 15 new cancer research centers established by the law.

Jewell watched the cancer program advance at a snail's pace because it lacked funding and support from within the medical school, though the Kansas Masonic Foundation had been assisting the program since 1972.

Leaders came and went before Jewell took over in 1995.

It was Atkinson who supercharged the effort to attain NCI designation, Jewell said, based upon her experience seeing cancer centers during her time in medical programs in Philadelphia.

Atkinson came to KU Med in 1999 as chair of pathology before assuming her dual leadership roles with the medical school and medical center.

The drive toward NCI designation started at a time when Jewell had tired of maintaining a busy surgical practice in addition to running the cancer center, so he was happy to turn over the reins to Jensen as the director.

**But in witnessing their good work, Jewell became a Mason. He and his wife have also provided strong financial support for the Kansas Masonic Foundation's work with the KU Cancer Center.**

Sowder is among the supporters who have watched the cancer center advance during the past two decades.

Sowder is an agribusinessman in his hometown of Toronto, Kansas, a small community off U.S. Highway 54 about 85 miles east of Wichita. He has held numerous local, state, national, and international positions with the Masons and the Shriners, including serving as chairman of the board for Shriners Hospitals for Children.

Sowder is the chairman of the 60th anniversary endowment campaign, and in the honorary chairman, Sowder is partnered with another distinguished Kansan with a family history with the Masons: Roy Jensen.

Jensen's masonic lineage stretches back to his great grandfather, who operated a dairy farm in what is now the Rosedale neighborhood in KCK, a stone's throw from the KU medical campus.

Sowder and Jensen are far from strangers, having first met in a KU medical school conference room as the university was wooing Jensen from Vanderbilt University. Not six months after issuing her \$15 million challenge to Sowder, Atkinson had called upon him again to emphasize the Mason connection with Jensen.

Having travelled the state as the Grand Master of Kansas, Sowder had gotten to know Jensen's father, uncle and brother on visits to the Gardner lodge. He had not met Jensen until his site visit to KU.

Jensen recalled Sowder leading an entourage from the Kansas Masonic foundation into the conference room.

As Sowder recalled, "We impressed upon Dr. Jensen that we were Masons, he was a Mason, that we were there to support him in his efforts, and that we were committed to raising \$15 million for his effort there, and that anything that he thought he might need going forward, we were committed to helping him."

Said Jensen: "They were putting the hard sell on me to come back to Kansas."

Several months later, Jensen called Sowder in his office in Toronto to tell him he was taking the job at the cancer center.

Yet even before his recruitment to KU, Jensen knew about the Mason's commitment to the KU Cancer Center. That's because an alphabetical seating arrangement placed

Jensen next to Jewell at an NCI meeting where both men were serving as grant reviewers.

As they got to talking, Jensen told Jewell he was from Kansas originally, and then Jewell started telling him about an organization that was playing a significant role in helping the KU Cancer Center earn NCI designation.

"What organization are you talking about?" Jensen asked.

When Jewell told him it was the Masons, Jensen told him that he was a Mason. "And I think Bill almost fell off his chair when I told him that," Jensen said.

Jewell followed up after the meeting and asked Jensen to be on the

### Cancer Research Endowment and Capital Funding



external advisory board for the KU Cancer Center.

The tenets of the Masons played a role in Jensen's decision to pursue a medical career.

"The idea that that service ought to be a primary motivator in your life ... was something that very much resonated with me," he said. "The whole idea of going into medicine, that's something that I think is critically important for somebody to have."

Jensen said there is symmetry in the fact that the Kansas Masonic Foundation's 60th anniversary campaign includes funding for a professorship in his name.

"I'm really proud to be the Bill Jewell professor," he said, "so it's almost kind of like a full-circle moment. That's a really neat aspect of all of this."

Endowed professorships are wonderful recruiting tools, he said, because it ensures the candidate will have dedicated funding for their work.

With construction of the new building, Jensen sees real promise for KU Cancer Center researchers to make strides in new treatments like Chimeric Antigen Receptor T-Cell therapy, which alters the genes in a person's T cells (a type of white blood cell) to help them attack cancer cells.

For its part, Sowder said the Kansas Masonic Foundation wants to establish the professorship to affirm to Jensen that it is "very appreciative of the role that he's played over all these years and that his legacy will live on long after he's gone."

And regarding the 60th anniversary campaign as a whole, Sowder said it is about more than raising money and heightening public awareness of the Masons.

The effort, too, he said, is a reminder to its own members that "let's not forget who we are, and let's make ourselves known as we move forward and make ourselves even bigger and better than we are today in our public service." ■





Shriners

Pediatric Care Endowment



60th Anniversary Endowment Campaign  
Would Cement Kansas  
Masonic Foundation  
Commitment to

# SHRINERS CHILDREN'S ST. LOUIS



## At Shriners Children's St. Louis, physicians use special equipment to facilitate implanting a piece of orthopedic hardware into a patient.

But this bone mill, a sophisticated version of a mortar and pestle grinding tool, does not come cheap, said hospital administrator Mark Venable.

It costs about \$30,000, and it's the latest example of how philanthropy from the Kansas Masonic Foundation enhances the quality of care at Shriners Children's St. Louis. Foundation-funded purchases have also included ultrasound equipment

and high-resolution monitors for the hospital's operating rooms.

The Kansas Masonic Foundation is nearing the end of a decade-long, \$500,000 commitment to Shriners Children's St. Louis, but that does not mean the foundation is walking away from the hospital.

On the contrary, the Kansas Masonic Foundation is looking to lock in its support of Shriners Children's St. Louis in perpetuity through its \$10 million Endowing Excellence campaign. The 60th anniversary campaign would establish the \$1 million Kansas Freemasons endowment for the hospital, which is projected to generate \$50,000 annually for equipment purchases.

The "tremendous commitment" from the foundation is a blessing when it comes to setting the hospital's annual budget, Venable said.

"As we're working with the providers and the care team here, we can go to them and say, 'What are your needs?' And from an equipment standpoint, 'What would help provide better outcomes to our patients?'" Venable said.

"And knowing that we have this source of revenue coming in that can help us keep up with the latest technology and make sure that we're providing the best care possible to the patients — it lifts some of that burden off of you in terms of decision-making," he added.

While the community might recognize Shriners International by its fez-wearing members riding go-karts in parades, the fraternity — founded in 1870 on Masonic principles and emphasizing fun and fellowship, family engagement and acts of service — supports and governs Shriners Children's, which has locations across North America as well as international clinics that create a global reach.

The healthcare system provides specialty medical care to children with orthopedic conditions, burn injuries and cleft lip and palate, changing

and improving lives regardless of the family's ability to pay or insurance status.

The range of conditions treated at Shriners Children's St. Louis includes scoliosis, cerebral palsy, club feet, limb deficiencies, sports medicine injuries, limb length discrepancy and spina bifida.

The border-state hospital makes Shriners Children's St. Louis the most accessible facility for Kansans, including a family from Seneca whose 9-year-old son Beckett had his first surgery there when he was a year old.

Kansas Masons have provided financial support to Shriners Children's St. Louis for decades, including donating some of the proceeds from the Kansas Shrine Bowl, a high school football all-star game that has been played since 1974.

The five Shriners temples in Kansas also use revenue from the Shrine Bowl to pay transportation costs for families receiving care from Shriners Children's, whether in St. Louis or another location, such as the highly regarded burn center in Galveston, Texas.

In addition to funding, Kansas Masons have contributed greatly to the healthcare system through men like Brad Koehn, of Topeka, and Jeff Sowder, of Toronto. Koehn is currently chairman of the board of directors of Shriners Children's, and Sowder has also served in that capacity. Both men have also held leadership positions with the Masons on local, state and national levels.

Sowder is the campaign chair of the Endowing Excellence campaign, and he knows from his experience on the healthcare system board that technology needs never stop.

"There's always a need for something in patient care," he said. "It's always the next big thing that comes down the pike — and Shriners Children's is committed to providing innovative treatments that change lives."

One multimillion-dollar purchase came several years ago when the

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## SHRINERS CHILDREN'S ST LOUIS

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board decided to purchase specialized EOS imaging machines.

The \$1.5 million EOS machines subject patients to much lower radiation levels, which Sowder said is better for Shriners Children's patients, many of whom have conditions that require multiple imaging studies.

The Shriners Children's has EOS machines in nearly every location now.

"So EOS machines have played a big part in what we do, and it's something that we're pretty proud of — that we subject our patients, our children, to far less radiation than a normal X-ray would," Sowder said.

"And not only that, it's much easier to get imaging done in an EOS machine," he added. "A lot of times, the patient doesn't have to lie down — they can sit, they can stand, and they're in there for far less time."

Koehn, meanwhile, is "very gratified" that the Kansas Masonic Foundation has been able to dedicate annual funding to Shriners Children's St. Louis for so long. The success stories of pediatric patients "bring tears to my eyes every time — it warms me up."

Beckett, the Seneca boy, came to Shriners Children's with a rare condition. But Shriners Children's is proud to say "yes" to families, when other healthcare providers might say no.

Beckett was

born with a deformed right leg, the result of two genetic conditions: fibular hemimelia and proximal femoral focal deficiency. His mother, Jenn, said that his hip joint did not form properly. At birth, his lower right leg was curled up under him with a tiny foot and ankle.

Neither of Beckett's parents have genetic components that would indicate their offspring could be at risk. Beckett has a younger sister with no limb issues.

"We were actually told by multiple geneticists that we could have six or seven or eight more kids, and we would have less than a 1% chance of this ever happening again," Jenn said. "So that kind of puts into perspective how rare this situation is."

At Shriners Children's, Beckett received three surgeries and was fitted for a custom prosthesis.

Beckett's right leg is about half the length of his left. He has his upper leg and his knee, so his prosthesis runs from about mid-shin down.

The prosthesis has a hard outside casing made at healthcare system's Pediatric Orthotic and Prosthetic Services (POPS) fabrication center in Tampa, Florida, Jenn said. Then they sent it to St. Louis, where workers inserted a bar that serves as the lower leg and attached the prosthetic foot.

In his first surgery, doctors removed the foot and ankle. The second, which was the biggest, came when Beckett was 6 years old. Doctors made repairs

to his hip joint and his knee. The third (and hopefully final) surgical procedure came in February 2025 to remove the pins, screws and plates that were inserted during the second surgery.

It was Jenn's mother, who at the time was a pediatric nurse, who pointed the family toward Shriners Children's St. Louis, based on the adamant recommendation from a provider in the practice.

The intake process was simple, she said, consisting mainly of a phone call where she gave her son's name and conditions. There was no paperwork, and she was given an appointment.

"My kid is a boy through and through," Jenn said. He loves sports, whether it's wrestling, baseball, or golf. "He just finds a different way to adapt sports to be successful with his abilities," his mother said.

Beckett has a lot of friends and lights up the room when he enters.

The family have given back to the Kansas Masons by telling their story to players, cheerleaders, and band members at the Kansas Shrine Bowl. In the hospital's welcoming, family-centered environment, they have made close friends among families who have also received care through Shriners Children's.

"We can never thank the Masons enough for what they do for our kids," Jenn said. "It's a really positive experience we have had just through and through." ■

## Pediatric Care Endowment



### Brother Makes \$1.0 Million Pledge to KMF 60th Anniversary Endowing Excellence Campaign

Imperial Sir and Past Grand Master Jeff Sowder, Shriners Children's St. Louis Board of Governors Treasurer, Jeff Breault, Kansas Masonic Foundation Executive Director, Bob Shively, and Shriners Children's Board of Trustees Member, Ron Capps, undertook a trip to Udall, Kansas to visit with and thank lifelong farmer and Brother Mason/Shriner Mike Thompson, whose family has been farming in the area since 1902, for his very generous gift.

Masonic Heritage Preservation  
and Endowment

# KANSAS MASONIC HISTORY EXHIBIT

WOULD PROVIDE  
WINDOW TO STATE'S PAST

If you think a psychology pioneer, automobile executive, and sports legend have nothing in common, you would be mistaken.

That's because Karl Menninger, Walter Chrysler, and James Naismith were all Kansas Masons, belonging respectively to lodges in Topeka, Ellis, and Lawrence.

Most Kansans would probably recognize the names of the co-founder of The Menninger Clinic, future head of the Chrysler Corporation, and the father of basketball.

Yet dozens of other lesser known Kansas Masons have also had profound impacts on the state — and the world beyond — since seven men established the initial lodge near the Wyandot Village in 1854.

It's not a stretch to say that the story of Kansas Masonry is also the story of Kansas itself. (By one count, more than 60% of the state's governors have been Masons.)

Thus, the Kansas Masonic Foundation is looking to establish a history exhibit as part of its \$10 million, 60th anniversary "Endowing Excellence" campaign.

The \$1.5 Masonic Heritage Preservation fund would generate funds to refresh the exhibit annually and pay the

*continued*



## KANSAS MASONIC HISTORY MUSEUM

*continued from previous page*

costs of building the display and compensating the yet-to-be-determined host facility. The Kansas Museum of History in Topeka is one potential venue.

The exhibit would demonstrate the Kansas Mason's institutional pride, said Jeff Sowder, of Toronto, Kansas, who is chairman of the endowment campaign.

Additionally, he said, "We want the general public to understand better who the Masons are, that we aren't some secret organization that doesn't do anything — the fact that we are very active in our communities and have made a true difference in the lives of a lot of people in those communities."

Few people know that history better than Herb Merrick, who in 2017 authored a 69-page compendium entitled "Masonry's Impact on Kansas." The paper profiles the accomplishments of members both famous and not-so-famous.

A retired U.S. Army lieutenant colonel, Merrick is past master of Fort Leavenworth's Hancock Lodge No. 311. He is also a past potentate of the Abdallah Shriners No. 30 in Overland Park and a member of the Kansas Masonic Foundation board of trustees from Lansing.

Merrick said books and Bibles now stored in local lodges or displayed in smaller, local museums would likely be part

of a state exhibit that could include some 300 or so pieces. Other noteworthy artifacts could include gavels, columns and other "ritualistic paraphernalia," Merrick said.

He also mentioned a set of large Eastern Star murals in the Emporia lodge. The Order of the Eastern Star is a Mason affiliate for women.

Perhaps one day as well the exhibit could even include the eight 10-foot-by-4-foot Tiffany stained glass windows from the old Atchison lodge.



"And if you want to have a really interesting read," Merrick said, "go read old lodge records because it gives you tremendous insight into the times and places and how people lived, and so some of that will be available to look at."

One set of minutes from the Hancock Lodge was signed by Omar Bradley, a Missourian who earned acclaim as a World War II general and the first chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Among Merrick's favorite Kansas Masons are U.S. Sen. Edmund Ross, a member of Topeka Lodge No. 17, and John Harrison Atwood, a member of King Solomon Lodge No. 10 in Leavenworth and a leader with the Shriners regionally and nationally.

A Republican, Ross served during the 1868 impeachment trial of President Andrew Johnson and stood his ground against his party by "not guilty" on the conviction.

Ross's abolitionist views were contrary to Johnson's policies, but Ross said the trial had not convinced him that the president had committed a high crime or that the statute in question was constitutional.

A native of Massachusetts, Atwood moved to Kansas shortly after graduating from Harvard in 1884, according to Merrick's masonic history.

A gifted orator and lawyer, Atwood argued before the U.S. Supreme Court. He was also a leading Democrat with a close friendship with William Jennings Bryan, who was a three-time unsuccessful nominee for the U.S. presidency.

Then, too, Merrick said, "There's a Medal of Honor winner buried up in Atchison who, when you read his citation, you go, 'What? Somebody go find the guy who wrote this. He must have been crazy,' because (the medal winner) is the chief bugler for the 11th Infantry Corps and gets the medal of honor for capturing the ensign of the (Confederate) gunboat *Namsemond*."

As it turned out, the bugler was a member of Washington Lodge No. 5 in Atchison late in life, many years after his gunboat heroics in April 1865.

Meanwhile, Merrick said, the burning question of

slavery provided an example of how the Freemason principles of integrity, fellowship and respect can transcend animosity borne of opposing views.

Abolitionists and slavery proponents co-existed in Kansas' early years as members of Leavenworth Lodge No. 2,





Merrick said, "but they were able to go find at least in some part of their life where they could sit down and talk about things other than what they disagreed about."

Their ability to find common ground provides a blueprint for civility during fraught times, and Merrick argued that example illustrates the benefit of a Kansas Mason exhibit.

"What a historical museum provides you is an opportunity to think and reflect," he said.

Sowder noted the declining participation in civic and public organizations like the Masons. He guaranteed that the Masons are nowhere near extinction, but said preserving the past is crucial.

"I run into people almost weekly in some of the things that I do for KMF or for the Shrine or whatever," Sowder said.

"And they go, 'You know, my dad was a Mason, my granddad was a Mason ... and I'm really glad to see that now I know what he was all about.' And I think that's important to all of us." ■



# Endowing Excellence: Community Focused, Community Fueled

To achieve our vision, the Kansas Masonic Foundation is launching a \$10 million endowment campaign in celebration of its 60th anniversary. This campaign is an investment in the future of Kansas and a testament to the enduring relevance of Masonic principles in today's society.

As the Foundation embarks on this ambitious campaign, leadership would like to invite all stakeholders to join them on this epic journey of renewal and growth. This unifying effort will call upon all capable individuals, supportive lodges, and community partners to reach its goal. Organized in 2025, the Endowing Excellence Campaign will launch at the 2026 March Annual Meeting and celebrate success the following year.

This comprehensive campaign will be conducted in phases to ensure all prospective donors are offered the opportunity to participate at the proper time at an appropriate level. A six-year pledge period will be offered to accommodate larger commitments. The campaign plan incorporates both donor recognition and ongoing communication strategies to inform and inspire other benefactors to participate. This campaign will be an anniversary celebration that is community focused, and community fueled!

*“I’m honored to lead the Kansas Masonic Foundation and their transformative work in our communities. This Campaign isn’t just about raising funds—it’s about empowering Masons to shape Kansas’s future. I urge you to join me and fellow Freemasons in seizing this opportunity to be agents of positive change throughout our state.”*

**Robert A. Shively, CAE, CFRE**  
Executive Director  
Kansas Masonic Foundation

