

Shriners of North America is, at its most basic level, a fraternity.

It all started in Manhattan back in 1870, when some gents - members of what's widely considered the world's oldest fraternity, Masonry - were hanging out at their favorite tavern. The guys felt like their band of brothers needed a little spicing up. They thought Masonry, which traces its roots to stonemasons and craftsmen of the Middle Ages, was a tad too focused on ritual. These guys wanted a fraternity that stressed fun and fellowship. Leave it up to an analytical mind- Walter M. Fleming, M.D. - and an artistic type - Billy Florence, an actor - to take that idea and run with it. Florence conceptualized the idea for a Near East-themed organization after attending a party thrown by an Arabian diplomat. Fleming added the structure to Florence's proposed pomp-and-circumstance, drafting the fraternity's name, initiation rites, rituals and rules.

Together, the guys designed the new fraternity's emblem, devised a salutation and determined the red fez with a black tassel would be the group's official headgear. And local Shriners chapters, it was decided, would be called Temples. The first such chapter, Mecca Shriners, met in New York City in 1872. Thanks to a pretty good public relations campaign on behalf of the new fraternity's governing body- known tongue-twistingly as The Imperial Council of the Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine - word about the group spread fairly quickly, even without the Internet, PDAs and cellphones. Membership grew rapidly across the United States in the early 1900s and even spread to Canada, Mexico and Panama. Today, there are approximately 400,000 Shriners, belonging to 191 chapters in the U.S., Mexico, Canada and the Republic of Panama.

Becoming a Shriner isn't as simple as walking into a Temple, paying dues and donning a fez. To become a Shriner, a man first must be a Master Mason. Why? Let's back up.

The fraternity of Freemasonry is the oldest, largest and most widely known fraternity in the world. It's impossible to Google the exact date Freemasonry began, but we do know it dates back hundreds of years to when stonemasons and other craftsmen gathered after work in shelter houses, or lodges. Over time, the men organized into Masonic guilds, and the tools of their trade - the square and compass - became the symbol of their brotherhood. Time passed, and the need for Masons declined. So, Masonry evolved into an organization that began to accept members who weren't craftsmen. Today, Masonry is built upon a foundation of improving character and strengthening communities, though the square and compass are still the symbols of the fraternal brotherhood.

Just as Shriners have Temples, Masonry has a basic organizational unit called the Blue Lodge or Craft Lodge. (Groups of Lodges are organized under governing bodies known as Grand Lodges.) Members of the Lodges are required to read up on their fraternity and earn a series of Masonic degrees. Once they've

completed the third and final degree, members are titled Master Masons. Of course, for those men wishing to delve deeper into Freemasonry- in essence, continuing their Masonic education - there are additional courses of study, known as the Scottish Rite and York Rite. Once a Mason earns the Master Mason title, he can join the Shriners fraternity. In short, all Shriners are Masons... but not all Masons are Shriners. Non-Shriners often have a hard time wrapping their heads around some of the rituals, symbols and terminology used in the Shriners fraternity. What's an Imperial Potentate? How about a Divan? And what's up with the fezzes?

Fez-iquette

Let's start with the fez - the rhombusshaped, tasseled, red hat most commonly associated with Shriners. The fez was adopted as the official headgear of Shriners in 1872. Named after the town of Fez, Morocco, where it originated, the hat seemed to portray the Near East theme the original founders of the fraternity were looking for. Today, the fez is worn at Shriners functions and in parades and outings as an effective way of gaining exposure for the fraternity. It's not unlike wearing a baseball cap to support your favorite team. Only, in this case, the fez draws attention to the fraternity, helps recruit new members and spreads the word about the Shriners' philanthropy, Shriners Hospitals for Children. There are strict rules when it comes to the fez, though. Only certain ranking Shriners may have their titles on their fez, and the tassel can only be secured with two pins or clasps on the left side of the fez. Additional pins or adornments are off-limits!

The Emblem

Just like Mercedes-Benz is known for its three-pointed-star symbol, the Shriners fraternity is known for its Crescent, or "Jewel of the Order." Carrying on the Near East theme, the emblem is composed of the claws of a tiger, united in the middle with the head of a sphinx. On the back of the emblem are a pyramid, urn and star. Additionally, the emblem bears the motto "Robur et Furor," which means "Strength and Fury." The Crescent hangs from a scimitar, while a five-pointed star dangles from the sphinx. Just as Mercedes' star represents something- domination of land, sea and air - so does the Shriners' emblem. The scimitar stands for the backbone of the fraternity, its members. The two claws are for the Shriners fraternity and its philanthropy, Shriners Hospitals for Children. The sphinx is representative of the governing body of the Shriners, while the star hanging beneath it represents the thousands of children helped by the philanthropy every year.

Greetings and Salutations

Since 1872, Shriners have used the salutation "Es Selamu Aleikum," Arabic for "Peace be with you!" The response: "Aleikium Es Selamu," or "With you be peace."

The Chain of Command

Now on to the Shriner hierarchy. To better understand it all, it helps to begin at the local chapter level. The group of elected officers who run the chapter is called the

Divan. Granted, the number-one definition of divan is a long, backless sofa, but a Divan also refers to a government bureau. The top dog in the Divan is known as the Potentate, defined as “one who has the power and position to rule over others.” The second in command is called the Chief Rabban. Within each chapter there can be any number of “clubs” or “units” formed for a certain purpose. The best-known examples are the units of clowns and motor patrols (the “little-car” guys), often the most visible in the community. There are also clubs and units for people with various other interests as well. From golfing and boating, to classic cars and motorcycles—there truly is something for everyone! Just like the countries of North America are governed by representative bodies, so are the 191 chapters. The group of representatives, called the Imperial Council, convenes once a year to make policy decisions and legislation regarding the fraternity and philanthropy. Representatives strive to become one of the 13 members of the Imperial Divan, Shriners’ international governing body. The chief executive officer of Shriners of North America is the Imperial Potentate, who serves a one-year term.

Women and Shriners

Alongside most Shriners is a strong woman. While it’s true that women aren’t eligible to join the Shriners fraternity, there are several organizations for women that support the fraternity and the philanthropy, Shriners Hospitals for Children. In most cases, these organizations are open to the wives, widows, daughters, granddaughters, sisters and nieces of Shriners. They include Daughters of the Nile, Ladies Oriental Shrine of North America, Shrine Guilds of America, and Order of the Eastern Star.

- **Daughters of the Nile** contributes to Shriners Hospitals in a number of ways, including the donation of prostheses, quilts, toys and volunteer hours. Since the group was founded in 1913, Daughters of the Nile has contributed millions of dollars to the philanthropy.
- **Ladies Oriental Shrine of North America** was founded in 1903 for the purpose of extending good fellowship among families of Shriners. The ladies extend financial support and assistance to Shriners Hospitals with an emphasis on the hospital fund, hospital sewing and special projects.
- **Shrine Guilds of America**, established in 1947, provides independent support and aid to Shriners Hospitals and concentrates on the education of children during their hospitalization.
- **Order of the Eastern Star**, started in the mid-1800s, is the largest fraternal organization for men and women in the world. The organization strives to strengthen the moral and social character of its members, and it contributes to numerous charities.

SHRINERS HOSPITALS

As membership in the Shriners fraternity grew in the early 1900s, so did the call for establishing an official charity. In 1919, the Imperial Potentate-elect pitched the idea of establishing a hospital to provide free care for children with orthopaedic problems. The idea was mulled over and, in 1920, a committee was established to explore the idea. This committee concluded that there shouldn't just be one hospital; there should be a network of hospitals throughout North America that provide medical care at no charge. It was an idea that appealed to Shriners, who, as we know, like to do things in a big way. The first hospital opened in Shreveport, La., in 1922.

Orthopaedic, Burn, Spinal Cord Injury, and Cleft Lip and Palate Treatment

Today, there are 22 Shriners Hospitals for Children, 18 of which specialize in orthopaedic care, treating injuries and problems of the bones, joints and muscles, as well as complicated conditions, such as brittle bone disease, spina bifida and cerebral palsy. Additionally, four hospitals specialize in providing medical care to kids with burn injuries. Shriners entered the field of burn care in the 1960s after recognizing a lack of medical expertise in the field. Shriners Hospitals treats children with acute, fresh burns; conducts reconstructive and restorative surgeries on kids with healed burns; treats children with severe scarring that limits mobility; and also helps kids with scarring or facial deformities caused by burns. Spinal cord rehabilitation units are located within three Shriners Hospitals. These units provide long-term rehabilitation and intensive physical, occupational and recreational therapies for children with spinal cord injuries. One of the hospitals, located in Sacramento, Calif., provides care for children with orthopaedic conditions, burns and spinal cord injuries. Moreover, Shriners Hospitals for Children established a cleft lip and palate program in 2005. This program provides lip and palate repair, nasal reconstruction, facial work and dental procedures, as well as audiological, speech and psychological services.

Outstanding Research

"Today's research is tomorrow's patient care" is a well-known saying at Shriners Hospitals. In 2007, \$37 million was budgeted for research projects. Since Shriners Hospitals began a formal research program more than 40 years ago, more than \$515 million has been invested in research projects. While eight Shriners Hospitals are specifically designated as research centers of excellence, all 22 Shriners Hospitals for Children are involved in some form of research. Shriners Hospitals have research affiliations with major universities. Generally, these investigations focus on improving and expanding treatments for severe burns, understanding complex musculoskeletal disorders, and improving techniques used to treat both mobility problems and spinal cord injuries.

Teaching Opportunities

Shriners Hospitals take an active role in medical education. Over the past 20 years, more than 8,000 physicians have received residency education or postgraduate fellowship education at Shriners Hospitals. Most of our hospitals have residency or teaching affiliations with other hospitals or universities. Shriners Hospitals also provide training in other medical areas, including nursing, physical and occupational therapy, and orthotics and prosthetics. While there are many elements to Shriners Hospitals for Children, there is only one purpose: to improve the lives of children.

No Barriers to Care

The total budget for the 22 Shriners Hospitals is \$721 million in 2007, but that money doesn't come from the pockets of patients or their families. Thanks to the generosity of the Shriners and the general public, ability to pay or insurance coverage is never an issue. All care at Shriners Hospitals is provided at absolutely no charge to the patient, family or legal guardian. The hospitals are substantially funded through the Shriners Hospitals for Children endowment fund, maintained through gifts, bequests and contributions. Additional income is provided by an annual hospital assessment paid by every Shriner, as well as fundraising events.

Admission

Admission to a Shriners Hospital is based on medical need. All children, up to the age of 18, are eligible for admission if they can benefit from the specialized services available at Shriners Hospitals. Application forms are available from your local Shriners, online at www.shrinershospitals.org or by calling toll-free (800) 237-5055 in the U.S. or (800) 361-7256 in Canada.

How You Can Help

Shriners Hospitals for Children needs your help! Learn more about making a one-time gift, recurring gift, or a planned gift by visiting www.shrinershospitals.org or by calling (800) 241-GIFT.