

James Newman and Les Hutchinson
Northants & Hunts Festival Launch – 2 March

James

RW Provincial Grand Master, Ladies, Gentlemen and Brethren.

It doesn't seem almost five years ago that I was in this room as President of the RMBI thanking you all for the tremendous success of your last Festival, which, if you needed reminding, raised over £2.2m. It was one of a number of celebration dinners I attended that year, which was personally very memorable, not just as the new President but as WM of OW Lodge. It made me very proud to be a member of the Province and as we launch this new Festival on behalf of MCF, I am sure the Province will make me proud to belong yet again.

I am delighted to be able to join you this evening together with my wife Lesley and Les Hutchinson, Chief Operating Officer of the Masonic Foundation, or MCF as it has become known, as you launch your 2024 Festival.

This time I am representing our new Masonic charity, which was formed almost two years ago as we consolidated the four central charities into a single unit. This I am glad to report has so far been a huge success.

I am also delighted to report that we have continued our 230 years tradition of Masonic charity, which has been helping to meet the needs of those less fortunate than ourselves.

Our support to the Masonic community has increased with almost double the number of applications in the last year and additional services, such as the Visiting Volunteer programme and support to Charity Stewards and Almoners.

We have also increased our support for non-Masonic organisations and last year's Community Awards, with a public vote added to the mix, raised the profile of Freemasonry and the charity throughout the UK, with a lot of positive press for a change and signalled the beginning of our strategy to increase the awareness and profile of Freemasonry in the charity world at large.

To put this into perspective, two members of the MCF staff team recently attended a charity sector conference, and when they looked around the room they realised that Freemasonry through the MCF had supported over 60% of the charities in attendance. It is moments like these that highlight the significance of Freemasonry within wider society and the tremendous impact of our work.

In Northants and Hunts, six local charities benefitted from a £67,000 share of this fund. These charities were:

- Carers Sitter Service, Northampton Mencap Society and Peterborough and District Riding for the Disabled, who were all awarded £4,000.

- Daventry Area Community Transport and The Acorn Cancer Support Group who each received £15,000.
- And Crazy Hats Breast Cancer Appeal who were given the top £25,000 grant, and if you turn to page six of your Festival Appeal Booklet, you will see three members of Risdene Lodge, donning the charity's infamous crazy hat!

Everything we do and achieve is made possible by the generous support of Freemasons and their families. Despite funding thousands of worthy local and national charities, we have never had to ask for financial help from the wider public or other organisations, something of which the Masonic community should be incredibly proud.

We are very fortunate to benefit from an established system of Festivals, which provides an opportunity for Provinces to focus their fundraising efforts on the support and services provided by the MCF.

Les will tell you more in a minute about what we are doing nationally and locally in your Province with the money that you have raised in the past and what we hope you will raise in this new Festival.

Festival Appeals don't just happen. To get to this point takes a lot of hard work and dedication. So I would like to place on record our thanks to your Provincial Grand Master and the Festival Committee who have already shown

imagination, followed best practice in Fundraising, committed their time and maintained professionalism at all twists and turns along the way. Your Festival Appeal could not be in safer hands.

I would now like to introduce to you Les Hutchinson our COO, who has the responsibility within MCF for the key operations we run to support our charitable activities.

Les

Ladies, Gentlemen and Brethren, since your last Festival, the whole structure of Masonic charity has changed significantly. The MCF brought together four long established and well respected charities, and has allowed us to offer needs-led cradle to grave support, in a more effective and efficient manner.

The consolidation has meant removal of duplicate processes or services, simplified applications and access to support, and enabled us to improve efficiency meaning every £1 given to the MCF is used to maximum benefit.

We're now better placed than ever to serve the needs of the entire Masonic family, and others further afield. Our single enquiries line is now receiving an unprecedented number of calls – currently nearly 1,000 calls every month. We have also seen a 400% increase in the number of applications from charities seeking MCF support.

Ladies, Gentlemen and Brethren, I want to take this opportunity to assure you that we are very active in your Province, and what you raise over the next five years will enable us to continue supporting members of the Masonic community. In your Province, currently we assist:

- 52 Freemasons and their families, at a cost of over £215,000 every year.

You may also be interested to know that 44 visits to support Masonic families have been commissioned since mid-July of last year, which could ultimately mean an additional 44 beneficiaries in your Province. Across the whole country we are currently helping over 1500 beneficiaries at a cost of over £15m. Each person that we reach has their own unique story, each of them immensely grateful for all that we do.

Your support will also enable us to help local charities operating within your communities. Last year we supported several local charities in your area at a cost of over £42,000, including to the Carers' Trust who received a £30,000 grant to provide services and support to young carers in the Province.

Your Provincial Grand Master and Festival Committee have been incredibly accommodating and have allowed us to be a 'fly-on-the-wall' during their final planning meetings and launch events – your Province will be among six to feature in a short video series that aims to illustrate what a Festival is and to help future Festival Provinces as they tackle the challenges and milestones of

their own Appeals. If you want to see what happened behind the scenes to prepare for the next five years, make sure you watch the video series when it's released! From our perspective the professionalism and drive of the team selected to run the Appeal will stand you in extremely good stead!

I hope your members appreciate the Festival brochure that was created with the MCF and, most significantly, will feel compelled to commit a regular donation using the form tucked into the back of your brochure. The most important action is, of course, to sign up to Gift Aid, which will allow us to reclaim 25p for every pound, donated.

We are also incredibly proud of our communications successes – you may have seen our three-part mini-documentary series, “Making Memories”, which featured Jason Liversidge and his family. The series has been viewed over 70,000 times by members of the Masonic community and many more from the wider public.

Jason Liversidge was diagnosed with life-limiting motor neurone disease when his daughter, Poppy, was only one and his wife Liz, was five months pregnant with their second daughter, Lilly.

Jason's condition deteriorated quickly after diagnosis and soon he had to give up work. Since then, Jason has become completely immobile, his power of

speech is slowly deteriorating and unfortunately, he is likely to die before Poppy and Lilly's tenth birthdays.

As Jason's condition has progressed, Liz has had to give up work and become his full time carer, meaning the family rely on benefits to get by from day to day. Before they got in touch with us, they were struggling to even afford the basics.

Practically speaking, we have given the family daily living grants and extra-curricular activity support, but in reality we have given them much more.

Firstly, we have provided them with both the peace of mind that their bills will be paid at the end of the month.

Secondly, our grants mean Jason and Liz can enjoy watching Poppy and Lilly experience the normal childhood activities such as horse riding and swimming – an important break from their highly medicalised lives.

The final gift we have given them is something we can all agree is invaluable; memories. Camping trips and fun days out are now affordable and give the girls enjoyable, lasting memories of their time as a family of four.

In November, we sent the whole family to the Bendrigg Trust – an outdoors activity centre for people with disabilities that we have also supported with a £40,000 grant through our Charity Grants Programme.

The Trust recently opened a new 24-bed accessible accommodation facility, however lacked the funds to install the necessary equipment that would allow visitors to enjoy a safe stay. We funded a new hoist for the accommodation, meaning visitors with severe disabilities could get in and out of beds, baths and chairs in a safe and dignified way.

The new accommodation was officially opened to the public in November of last year, and the Liversidge family were among the first to stay.

If you haven't yet seen this documentary, please do visit our website where you can watch all three episodes plus a video diary from the family.

The fact that we can now deliver this kind of impact to both the Masonic community and wider society proves that the consolidation of the four legacy charities was the right decision. There is no doubt in my mind about the need that is out there within the Masonic community and one of my jobs is to ensure that our support and services are relevant and accessible, and that we maintain the fundraising streams that are essential to our survival as a charity

James

Provincial Grand Master, thank you for accepting this challenge. As the eighth Province to launch an Appeal in support of the MCF, you have already shown your enthusiasm and strong desire to raise as much money as possible.

Don't forget that we are all here to help you in this challenge. David Innes, our CEO, and Les, the Relief Chest, Communications and Fundraising teams plus David Watson, one of our hardworking Trustees, are all here to provide you with the tools and information to keep your Festival on track and I encourage you to use them if the need arises.

Ladies, Gentlemen, Brethren – thank you for supporting the MCF. Before we finish, I would like to emphasise that although this evening is all about starting a fundraising process, if you think you might require support for a financial, health, family or care-related need, or know of someone that may need our help, please don't hesitate pick up the phone to your lodge or Provincial Almoner or us direct – we are here to help.

Please also enjoy the Festival. I know many of the events last time had physical exercise attached to them, with your PGM literally leading the way. What I would say is that in many Festivals, PGMs are usually volunteered to do all sorts of dangerous or difficult tasks to raise money. Please treat him carefully as like us all we are at least 10 years older than when the last Festival was launched!!

Provincial Grand Master, Ladies, Brethren, please enjoy the rest of your evening, thank you for listening and Les and I hope to see many of you on a regular basis during the next five years. Thank you.