

Lodge celebrates 125

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Masonic Lodge No. 14 in Saratoga will celebrate the 125th anniversary of its founding, and 125 years in the Valley doing charity and other works to benefit residents.

The Masons will hold a cornerstone ceremony at the Masonic Temple at the corner of Second and Rochester Streets in Saratoga, and will then hold a social hour at Firewater Public House on East Main Street later that evening.

Teense Willford of the Masonic Temple, said a new cornerstone would be placed at the Masonic Temple on Rochester to commemorate the founding of the Saratoga temple 125 years ago in 1892.

Originally, the Freemasons met at the Chatterton, Burdick and Whittlesey building, the brick edifice that at 118 East Bridge that is currently home to North Fork Engineering. By 1893, the group purchased a brick building located at the corner of Second and Main Streets. In that location, the fraternal organization stayed until 1988.

By then, the building was in such poor condition it was no longer suitable for use as a Freemason's hall, or much else, Willford said. "There were so many cracks in the walls that at one point, you could look at the wall and see the post office," Willford said. "When the wind blew, the chandelier in the building swayed."

So in 1988, the Freemasons changed their locale to their present location on Rochester, in a building that used to house the LDS church, and the Nazarine Church prior. The building, built in 1947, was purchased by the Lodge No. 14 after a member, Henry G. Crane, left the

group enough money in his will to purchase the building.

They've been in that location ever since, and Saturday, the group will place a new cornerstone to commemorate the group's 125 years in Saratoga.

Their time in Saratoga has been very productive, Willford said, since the group has long been a contributor to charities around town, the state and globally. Locally, the Freemasons donate a lot to widows and orphans, Willford said. But the Masons perform other charitable works, and the Saratoga Lodge and others in the state support those causes.

The Freemasons altogether donate about \$2 million per day, Willford said. Several of the groups that perform charitable works have a presence in Wyoming.

Scottish Rite, one of several Rites of Freemasonry, operates child learning centers for disabled children. The Shriners, another organization of the Freemasons, operates 22 hospitals and burn centers in North America that provide free healthcare to children. Another Rite, the York Rite, operates the Knights Templar Eye Foundation, which provides eye care, including surgery to the needy. The Order of the Eastern Star provides scholarships to students.

The Freemasons are celebrating their 125th anniversary in Saratoga, but Willford said the organization has shrunk in membership like many fraternal and community organizations across the country.

He hopes the celebration, to which the public is invited, might help attract new members to the group in order to keep the charitable works going on.

"Right now, we have 34 members," Willford said. "When I went in 52 years ago, we had 142. The numbers in fraternal orders are dwindling. It's sad but it's true."

"We always look for Quality members, but we cannot solicit," he said. "People need to come to us." To become a member of the Freemasons, Willford said a person just needs to ask a member.

The Freemasons will hold their Cornerstone Ceremony at the Masonic Lodge located at the Corner of Second and Rochester Streets in Saratoga at 4 p.m. Saturday. The group will then host a dinner at Firewater Public House on East Main. The general public is invited to attend the celebration.