

The Graduate

Dan Weatherington 33°

I am often asked what is so special about a Wilkerson College graduate. This is an unfair question. Mainly, because there are so many things special about a Wilkerson College graduate, but one is very special. Special for everyone in the graduate's lodge, district, and fraternity. Achieving this special quality is simple. Any Mason can do it, it's fairly inexpensive, yet probably less than 2% to 3% of the Masons in North Carolina have it. That quality is seeing what you have right now.

The Wilkerson College graduate has visited three places that North Carolina Masons own, guide, and should be very proud of. . . The Masonic Children's Home at Oxford, the Grand Lodge building in Raleigh, and the star in the crown that few, especially down east, ever see; the Masonic & Eastern Star Home in Greensboro.

Many will say they've visited the Children's Home at Oxford many times. They go every Saint John's Day. Well, gentlemen, it is getting there, but watching a parade, listening to a couple of singers, eating a free chicken leg with 10,000 other people and then going home is far from a visit to Oxford Orphanage.

A visit to Oxford Orphanage is going on a quiet Saturday, with no hurry, no rush, and taking one of the children by the hand, and I mean that quite literally, and allowing him or her to show you "HIS" campus. People, this is a whole different direction. A guided tour is nice, but it pales beside having a child show you where he sits in the cafeteria or "his" cottage and where he sleeps and where he does his homework. Having someone tell you about the number of children who have gone through the home means little when a child is showing you where he prays. That, my brother, is a visit to Oxford Orphanage, ask any Wilkerson graduate.

I know the term "Grand Lodge" throws some into a tizzy, but the Grand Lodge building is really something to behold. And, in spite of what you may think, flying past a big granite building at 60 miles per hour on the way to Raleigh-Durham International Airport is not a visit to the Grand Lodge building. A visit to the Grand Lodge is conducted by Walt or by Ric or by Cornelia or Frankie or Paula or by Jim and includes seeing the history of your grand lodge. It includes the stories of the massive murals and the countless memorabilia. It includes seeing the board room where YOUR committees meet and the Grand Master's office which he seldom has time to use. Haven't seen it that way? It's a shame, as a Wilkerson graduate.

Then, the one I referred to as a jewel in the crown. According to a survey, almost half the Masons in N.C. don't even know it exists And that is a shame! The first reaction of almost every graduate when they see the home is "unbelievable" and "did you see all the smiles?" Like me, most people expect to see, and smell, an "old folk's home". Let me assure you, it's far from an old folk's home! It's neat. It's clean. The people are happy.

The smells of soiled linen are replaced by the smells of dinners prepared under the direction

of a chef. Instead of white-clad orderlies with banging trays, there are people gathering around the salad bar and talking about tonight's activities. Instead of "Nurse Cratchets" crabbily passing out milk of magnesia there are smiling nurses helping the people with their meds while they talk about the things they have planned for tomorrow.

A brochure about the home doesn't do justice to a church filled on Sunday with people who are so very glad to see you and meet you. A presentation at a Grand Master's visitation isn't the same as seeing senior citizens who can hardly wait to show the Deacons their home. And there is absolutely nothing to equal seeing the 80 and 90 year old ladies with their little bigger than usual smiles eyeing some the Wilkerson students.

The faculty of Wilkerson College looks forward to the graduation weekend because it opens a whole new world of Masonry to the Deacons. They can't conceive that something like the Masonic & Eastern Star Home even exists, and absolutely can't conceive that they are a part of it. John Rose puts the Deacons, the residents, and the staff, all together into a weekend that no student will soon forget. If you have a Wilkerson graduate in your lodge ask him about it. If you don't ask a graduate from another lodge to come speak. They'll tell you!