



Independent Order of Odd Fellows  
Dedicated Members for Change

April 28, 2012

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,  
Some Thoughts About the Davis Lodge  
By Dave Rosenberg, PG

I'd like to chat for a moment about my own Lodge, the Davis Odd Fellows #169. From time to time, I hear criticisms (sometimes directly, but generally indirectly) about my Lodge. The criticisms always intrigue me because they seem to be based on assumptions, and not on actual observations. I think of myself as part of the New Odd Fellows - based, frankly, on what Odd Fellowship was in the 1800's. We are, in Davis, a throwback to the past. In the late 18900's and early 1900's, Odd Fellows Lodges were the center of town, and membership in the Lodge was a highly desired quest for community leaders and community members. That's the way it was in the 1800's - and that's the way it is in Davis in 2012. So, perhaps to understand my Lodge better, we should examine the three biggest "criticisms" of the Davis Lodge:

1. The Davis Lodge has had all this great growth because they are in a "University town", not like the rest of us.

Yes, the Davis Lodge has experienced enormous growth in the past eight years, and yes, the Davis Lodge is located in a University town. But in this case, 2 plus 2 doesn't equal 4. To understand what I mean, we need to look at the history of the Davis Lodge. The Lodge was chartered in 1870 - so it's been around for 142 years as of 2012. The University of California at Davis has been around for over 100 years, having been founded in 1905. From 1872 to 2004 (a period of 134 years) the Davis Lodge initiated a total of 425 members - averaging around 3 per year. From 2005 to 2012 (a period of only 8 years), the Davis Lodge initiated 178 members, averaging about 22 per year.

From 1905 to 2004, the Davis Lodge was located in the same "University town" as it was from 2005 to 2012, yet membership crept along in the former years and exploded in the latter years. So, being a "university town" is the not the reason for the Davis Lodge's enormous growth in the last eight years. Why the huge difference? With all due humility, the difference is that I became the Noble Grand of the Davis Lodge in 2005 (and served for five years in that role) and changed everything about the way we do business. When I joined the Odd Fellows in 2004, my Lodge was just like most other Lodges in California (even though we were in a "University town") - we had about 40 members, and could barely get a dozen to attend meetings. We now have 185 members, 18 applicants for membership, and we get 100+ at meetings and events. In the last eight years, our Lodge has increased our membership by over 400% - at the same time that other Lodges were either static or losing members. We have



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brought in members in their 20's, 30's and 40's, and we have brought in community leaders. We have so many applicants that some have to wait close to a year before we can initiate them. Why the huge difference? We went back to the old days of Odd Fellowship and recaptured what made Lodges the center of town. Many Lodges today are one dimensional - but we focused on three dimensions: the historic ritual of our Order, active involvement in our community, and social activities within the Lodge to foster good fellowship. In other words, we made the Lodge desirable to folks in the 21st Century.

So, when I hear folks say that their Lodges can't do what Davis does because they aren't located in a "University town" I view it as an excuse. Every Lodge can do it - in their own way. The secret of success is increasing membership. The way to increase membership is to make the Lodge a place that people want to join. And people want to join a Lodge where they can do good works in their communities and also find a place where they can enjoy a full plate of social activities.

2. The Davis Lodge may be growing, but they aren't "true Odd Fellows".

I'm not sure, of course, what people mean when they say "true Odd Fellow", but it sure sounds like a criticism to me. I'm saddened to hear it, however, because it doesn't display the level of brotherly love and tolerance I would expect of an Odd Fellow.

What is a "true Odd Fellow"? I should think that one who follows the ancient admonitions of our Order would be considered such a person. The main tenet of Odd Fellowship is to "relieve the distressed, bury the dead, and educate the orphan." In the Davis Lodge, we don't just talk the talk, but we walk the walk.

"Relieve the distressed." The Davis Lodge has a Social Services Committee whose members volunteer to spend their time working with persons who have mental illness. The Davis Lodge has a Senior Project Committee which goes to the homes of frail seniors in town, at their request, to help them with household and yard chores. The Davis Lodge has a Bingo Committee which runs Bingo games every month, each of which provides the proceeds to charitable and community groups in town. The Davis Lodge has a Community Support Committee which has hosted and co-hosted events at the Lodge and in the community to benefit developmentally disabled persons, cancer survivors, persons with mental illness, and victims of sexual assault and spousal abuse. The Davis Lodge members have provided meals to men, women and children at the homeless shelter. The Davis Lodge hosted a huge musical event called "Hope for Haiti" and provided over \$22,000 to relief organizations which assisted the people of Haiti after their devastating earthquake.



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"Bury the dead." One of our newer members has just proposed the creation of a "Death and Dignity Committee" which will be working with the County Public Guardian/Public Administrator (who is also a member of our Lodge) to develop ways to provide dignified burial services for the poor in our community. A number of members of the Lodge have expressed interest in the work of this new committee.

"Educate the orphan." Members of the Davis Lodge have recently launched the "Triffle P. and Annie G. Ivancovich Scholarship" through the Davis Lodge Charities, Inc. (a Section 501 (c) (3) corporation) to provide scholarships to orphans and those who were in foster care. Large scholarships will be provided to qualified young men and women so that they can get a full education, and contribute back to society - just like Thomas Wildey did.

3. The Davis Lodge members don't follow "the code".

I wonder how many folks who talk about "the code" have actually read the document. I have. I'm Chairman of the Grand Lodge Judiciary Committee so I know something about the code. And I can say that the Davis Lodge follows the code, the ritual, and more importantly, the SPIRIT of Odd Fellowship. In fact, the Davis Odd Fellows go through the same initiation as every other Odd Fellow, we take the same oath as all other Odd Fellows, and we run formal meetings with the same ritual and wear the same regalia as every other member of the Order.

The members of the Davis Lodge are very interested in developing as Odd Fellows. At every one of our meetings, our Vice Grand is charged with talking about the history of Odd Fellowship. Members proudly wear sweatshirts, jackets, caps, and shirts with the Odd Fellows three-links logo on them. The other night, a number of members wanted a refresher on the passwords, grips, signs, etc., so we met in the conference room and confidentially reviewed them. The interest in our ritual is so great that we now have 31 of our Odd Fellow 3-degree members who have joined the Davis Encampment #21 - making it the largest Encampment in California - they joined because they wanted to obtain an additional three degrees and continue their education in our great Order.

Does our Lodge have social meetings, open to prospective applicants? Sure we do. We find that when prospective applicants meet our members and see what we do, they apply to join us. And as incoming Sovereign Grand Master Chuck Renninger has told us, social meetings are permitted and perfectly compatible with "the code".

So, in short, I'm proud to be a member of a Lodge - the Davis Lodge - which has shown a path



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for the growth and development of this Order. And make no mistake about it - we each have to take responsibility for the growth and development of our Order. We cannot continue to turn a blind eye to the dramatic drop in our membership. And growth requires that we change the way we have been doing businesses. For over 65 years we have been doing it the "old way" and for over 65 years we have lost members. Someone once said that the definition of "insanity" is doing something over and over again and expecting a different result. We must embark upon a "new way". That new way means we must reach out to our communities and engage in good works in those communities, and we must develop the social activities within our Lodges that foster good fellowship. We have to become attractive and relevant to the men and women of the 21st Century. Or else we become the dodo.