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Masons aid dead brother's family

BY HOWARD MCEWEN | ENQUIRER CONTRIBUTOR

FORT THOMAS - When Harold Tharp, 39, learned that Medicare wasn't going to cover a pulmonary device his mother needed, he turned to his deceased father's "brothers."

His father, Estill Tharp, who died in 1978, was a member of Cincinnati's Carson Masonic Lodge. Harold Tharp, who lives with his mother in Alexandria, sent out letters to various lodges asking for help.

"Sure enough, they came through for us," Tharp said of the Masons' purchasing a pulse oximeter for his mother. "I'm borrowing it as long as we have a need, then hopefully someone else can use it."

ADVERTISEMENT Ed Harber, of the Fort Thomas Masonic Lodge, responded to Tharp's letter. That lodge then asked another in Newport and Henry Barnes in Dayton to help out.

"The tenets of Freemasonry are brotherly love, relief and truth," said Ryan Engle, 33, the current Master, or presiding officer, of Fort Thomas Lodge. "We are taught to live out these principles in our daily lives - not only to talk the talk but walk the walk. We obligated ourselves to help a widow or orphan of a Mason in any way that we can."

Ed Harber, 58, a lodge member and paramedic, took the lead for the lodges in helping the family. He joined the fraternity a year ago.

"I've always been taught to do good Christian things for my fellow man; and I felt that, besides the church, being a Mason was another way of doing this," Harber said.

The device the Masons purchased for Oma Tharp measures the amount of oxygen in the blood. She suffers from chronic obstruction pulmonary disease and has emphysema.

The gift already has paid off for the family.

"There's been at least two times we've avoided going to the ER by knowing what her oxygen is and calling her respiratory therapist," Tharp said. "He tells us how to adjust her oxygen to make sure her level is OK."

Although his father was a Mason, Tharp didn't know much about the organization. Freemasons are not allowed to actively recruit members. To become a Mason in Kentucky, a man must ask another Mason how to join. He must also be 21 years old, believe in a God and be unanimously elected into the lodge.

"I don't know much about them," said Tharp, "other than they are a great organization."

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