

CHARITABLE DONATION CHANGES PERCEPTION

In 2004 at the Freemasonry in the Community presentation event, Dundas Lodge No 7970 donated the sum of £200 to the Soldiers Sailors Airmen and Families Association (SSAFA). This is an organisation which helps Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen who have fallen on hard times, either due to, or after service in Her Majesty's Services .

SSAFA were astounded at receiving this donation without solicitation, especially from Freemasons, as they had the preconceived idea that Freemasons generally only looked after their own.

In September 2006, an invitation was received from the local branch of SSAFA for someone to attend a luncheon they were holding on the 5th October at the TA Centre in Norton, Stockton -on-Tees.

Bro Ez Watson who had suggested the donation, went along to represent Freemasons in general. He was welcomed by a Major General (retired) who has recently become a volunteer with the organisation. Also present were people from Social Services, some members of Rotary, and also shop owners who give discounted goods like televisions, furniture etc.

After thanks had been given to those present, Bro Ez was asked to give a brief talk on the merits of the Craft. He said that it wasn't only about wearing aprons and giving funny hand shakes, and explained that money was raised at our meetings to enable all kinds of charitable organisations to receive help, both locally and nationally, often in excess of £2,000,000 per annum in total. It appeared to Ez, the only Mason present, that the attitude towards Freemasonry of the others attending the luncheon was somewhat changed.

The reason Ez had suggested that SSAFA should receive a donation was due to some personal experience of the organisation. In 1962, Ez joined the Army and became a squaddie in the Royal Signals. He was stationed in Aden in 1964 and then sent to Borneo to join the Marines and SAS on patrol in the jungle, in order to keep communications open with their base. On one occasion his patrol was being pursued by the enemy and they had to get out quick. Whilst Ez managed to get onto a helicopter, it was unfortunately shot down and upon crashing, his head was seriously injured resulting in prolonged hospitalisation and the need to have a metal plate fitted near to his brain. Needless to say his Army life was finished, but SSAFA were there to help him re-adjust to civilian life. Something he has done very successfully indeed.

The Army's loss was Freemasonry's gain, as Ez is a popular and active member of Dundas Lodge.