

# A TRIP TO THE PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE

## S.W. HACKETT LODGE GOES INSIDE SAN DIEGO SCHOOLS

by *Laura Normand*

As 2010 rolled to a close, Brother Jim Achenbach found himself back in the principal's office. It was a familiar scene – and it would stay that way, thanks to his lodge.

That day Achenbach and Principal Ryan Kissel were reviewing the annual partnership agreement between Sequoia Elementary School and S.W. Hackett Lodge No. 574, both located in San Diego. For the fifth year in a row, the lodge signed on to help.

### ***Precedent for partnerships***

San Diego Unified School District strives for meetings like the one in Principal Kissel's office. The district's Partnerships in Education Program, established in 1982, arranges partnerships between the district's 225 schools and local organizations.

As public schools suffer increasing resource cuts from the public sector, such private partnerships are becoming more and more important. In San Diego, about 1,500 businesses and community organizations are established as school partners. The partnerships focus on service, not funds (although sometimes, those come in handy, too). Organizations work directly with their partner schools to determine how they can help – hence Achenbach's frequent trips to the principal's office.

S.W. Hackett Lodge got involved in 1997, shortly after Achenbach joined the lodge. At the time, Achenbach was employed as a speech and language pathologist for San Diego Unified School District. He recognized a need at the elementary school where he worked, and learned about the Partnerships in

Education Program from a fellow educator. He pitched the idea to his lodge.

His suggestion was largely motivated by a desire to be more involved in Masonry. At the time, as a new Master Mason – and expecting his first child – Achenbach was hesitant to commit to the officer line.



(Today, he's the current lodge treasurer and a past master.) Public schools liaison was a role he could embrace. "It was my way of being active and useful," he says. He's still the liaison today.

"I'm in a unique position, having a foot in both camps," says Achenbach. "I can walk into the principal's office that day, and that evening, walk into lodge."

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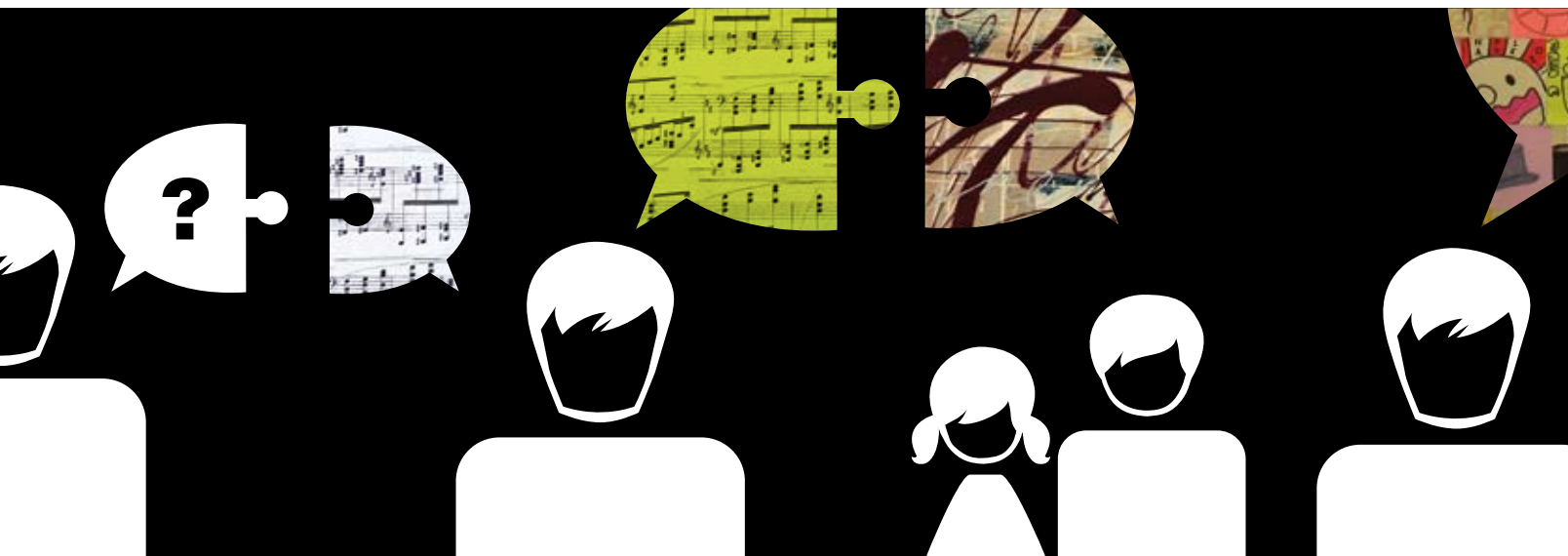
## LODGE SPOTLIGHT

### ***On the wish list: flutes to flagpoles***

It was the start of a lodge program that's helped hundreds of students. In fact, in 2006 the San Diego Unified School District Board formally recognized S.W. Hackett

and parts, and coordinated community drives for musical instruments.

When that school outgrew the partnership, the door was opened for Sequoia Elementary, a struggling school with a personal tie: the lodge secretary's granddaughter was a student there.



Lodge for outstanding service to the schools and community.

In 13 years the lodge has been a partner to three district schools. The first was an elementary school, the second a charter school for the arts.

"The art school couldn't afford reeds for the flutes or rosin for the bows. The music teacher would give me a wish list and I'd take that to the lodge musician," Achenbach recalls. The lodge donated instruments

S.W. Hackett Lodge has established some meaningful traditions with Sequoia Elementary. During the holidays, the school identifies six needy families in the community; the lodge buys gifts and holiday meal supplies, then delivers presents and meal fixings right to the families' homes. Every June, the lodge hosts a Teacher of the Year dinner. And members and families show up en force to the school's annual spelling bee, where the lodge presents checks to the winners.

That's just the beginning. Achenbach says that members' favorite activities are often hands-on, like renovating classrooms, or the time they erected a flagpole in the school yard for the

morning assembly. “We literally had to put our backs into that one,” he laughs.

One thing’s certain: The lodge helps in the ways Sequoia Elementary needs most. Achenbach’s visits to the principal are a direct conduit between the school and the lodge.



### **Living Masonry**

S.W. Hackett Lodge members have gravitated to the school activities: At least 50 of the lodge’s 134 members have participated in some way, plus ladies and kids.

The partnership has another notable side effect: membership applications. Achenbach explains that friends and prospects often lend a hand at school projects. “They’ve told me that the thing that really impressed them about our lodge and made them want to become a Mason was going out and painting that classroom,” he says.

That sense of identity is part of the partnership’s bigger picture.

## *San Diego’s Many Masonic Partners*

S.W. Hackett Lodge isn’t the only lodge teaming up with San Diego Unified School District. In fact, a number of San Diego lodges are involved in the Partnerships in Education program, including Point Loma Lodge No. 620, John D. Spreckles Lodge No. 657 and Silver Gate-Three Stars Lodge No. 296

At Point Loma Lodge, for example, members head to the local high school every spring to help with an important rite of passage for graduating seniors. They spend a full day hearing students present their high school portfolios – a summary of their achievements over the past four years.

“Being part of a local high school benefits the students, and it gets our name out to a younger group,” says Michael Paine.

“[The partnership] has really served as a rallying point for lodge members, wives, and even children. It gives brethren a way to say to other people, this is one of the things that we do,” Achenbach says.

“It’s all well and good to say George Washington was a Mason and tell the history,” he adds, “but this provides a real tangible way for us to demonstrate to friends and neighbors that we’re an active, vibrant lodge.” ❖