

Terry Wooten, Bikes For Books Program

Old Town Lodge 751 in Winston-Salem is the proud sponsor of a project whose purpose is to encourage reading improvement in the public schools. OTL believes that the ability to read opens the door to most of what is important in life. As Will Rogers said "A man only learns in two ways, one by reading, and the other by association with smarter people." — *Will Rogers, American humorist and Freemason.*

The project began when, at the September stated meeting in 2008, then SW Terry Wooten (*now past master, deceased*), proposed that OTL institute a program to encourage reading proficiency in our local schools. He had been inspired by an article in the Scottish Rite Magazine.

The program, as he foresaw it, would involve awarding bicycles to students in the public schools for improvement in reading skills. Many details had to be worked out and the approval and cooperation of the school officials had to be obtained.

The lodge agreed, and the fact-finding phase of the project began. At the October meeting Brother Wooten was able to report significant progress and at the November meeting he reported that principals of four nearby schools were on board with the idea. The lodge passed a motion to move on with the project and several members immediately subscribed monies to get it started.

Since that beginning, Old Town Lodge has supplied bikes to be awarded each spring to the boy and girl of the 3rd through 5th grades who have made the most progress in reading skills at four neighborhood schools. The winners are determined by the teachers. Brother Wooten did not want to get into that side of the project.



In the beginning OLT purchased the bikes and the schools displayed them in each school's library near the time of the awards. Signage and other publicity were used early in the year to generate interest on the part of the students. From the outset the teachers reported an improvement in reading skills and interest. In 2014 we made a slight change in procedure at the suggestion of some of the teachers. The schools now put the actual bikes to be awarded on display in the school libraries near the beginning of the school year. The bikes have generated even more enthusiasm than mere signs alone did.

To date fifty-eight bikes supplied by OTL have been distributed. Fifty-eight because some years produced outright ties and "extra" bikes were awarded. And, at least one school has a similar program, inspired by that of OTL, to award additional bikes. This Year 2015-16, three more schools have been added and fourteen bikes have been put on display in the schools. That brings our total to seventy-two.

Other lodges in the district have shown a more general interest in the project. DDGM Gary Handy has been active in supporting the idea. He and Brother Wooten and others have visited lodges in the 26th district to explain the program and to offer their assistance in getting programs started. Brother Wooten, who just recently passed away, said that at least six district lodges are seriously evaluating the possibility of starting their own Bikes for Books projects.

The Bikes for Books committee, Chaired by brother Will Moody, JW, is more than willing to explain the program and to share what has been learned. Their knowledge could well help a lodge to sell a project to schools and to avoid the pitfalls and snares that might threaten its success. At this point we envision Bikes for Books to be a part of Old Town Lodge's program for the foreseeable future.