



Starting a new lodge of the Benevolent Order of the Guardians Of Corvidae

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Background

Between 1890 and 1930, roughly one third of American men were members of a “fraternal order”. These organizations, often secretive with their rites and rituals, offered camaraderie and, more importantly, a social safety net for men and their families before Roosevelt’s New Deal became a reality. Since then, membership in these organizations has waned, shedding an average of 60% of their members since 1970. As families accumulated wealth and the internet provided a convenient method to connect with family and friends, the thought of in-person mutual benefit networks seemed all but obsolete.

Modern American life offers new challenges, some of which resemble issues our country has grappled with in the past. Our government continues to pick apart the programs that originated in the FDR years. Meanwhile, threats to net neutrality and social media fatigue leave us yearning for better ways to connect with our “tribe”.

2016 was the year that we realized we’d had enough, but it took us 2 more years to figure out what to do about it. We knew we needed to strengthen our communal network, and we knew we were all one medical or financial emergency away from personal disaster. We knew we cared about the city we live in, and we realize one of the biggest disasters on the horizon is the health of our environment. We looked at other organizations with roots in the past, and we realized our

values didn't completely match with theirs. So, in November of 2018 a group of us met and put pen to paper, and in doing so updated the concept of the "fraternal order" for the 21st century.

What we've created is a panhellenic organization for and based on Secular Humanist principles. You will not be asked to affirm your belief in a god. You will, however, be required to affirm your faith in your community. There will be no "ladies' auxiliary" association; we believe our lodge belongs to everyone, regardless of gender. There will be no test of skin color to join, nor of sexual identity. We exist not only for the mutual benefit of our members, but for the health of the urban areas that we operate. As other similar organizations have largely moved to the suburbs, we affirm our commitment to our community by locating our lodges in urban areas, and pledging our efforts to improve the communities where we operate.

Our name

Every year as the seasons change and the weather grows colder crows and other corvids flock to the heart of downtown and inhabit the trees overlooking the masses of cars and people traveling beneath. Despite their extremely high intelligence and resourcefulness in urban areas every November the city targets this family of creatures with sonic weapons, bent on removing them from their roost. Every year these creatures defy the powers that be and return to their urban roots. In solidarity with these mysterious and misunderstood avian friends, we symbolically identify as the Guardians of Corvidae.

Purpose

As stated in Article II, Section 2 of our Constitution: The purposes of the fraternal and charitable lodges are as follows: (a) to offer a fraternal gathering place for the local Humanist and secular community; (b) to facilitate frequent and meaningful benevolent actions, particularly within the areas of environmental causes and ensuring healthy urban neighborhoods; (c) to assist members and their families in times of need or poor health; (d) to aid in the pooling of member resources for the purpose of obtaining insurance and other benefits as we age.

Legal

Benevolent Guardians of Corvidae is a "fraternal" organization. This is a legal term referring to "a social club or membership organization formed around a common bond, ideology, or personal background." We are recognized as tax-exempt under IRS 501(c)(8) rules and because of this we enjoy certain benefits, yet are also bound by a set of laws. This means:

- We are organized under the Lodge system. BGOCC is the "parent" lodge, while all other chapters are regarded as "subordinate" lodges.

- Each subordinate lodge should, at a minimum, adopt and uphold the BGOC Constitution and Covenant of Relations.
- We have certain activities which are mandated by law, such as obtaining group life insurance or similar benefits for members* and performing charitable work together.
- Each Lodge must serve as a members-only gathering spot. Regular meetings should be held.
- Our common bond, ideology, or personal background is Humanism. Each lodge must consist solely of members who demonstrate Humanist values in their everyday lives.

*Group life insurance, or similar group coverage, cannot be purchased until we have been operating for 3 years and have a minimum of 300 eligible members.

ARTICLE IX (“Lodges”) of the BGOC Constitution says the following:

Section 1: Creation. New subordinate lodges shall be created at the discretion of Council and after securing support from at least five (5) sponsor members in good standing.

Section 2: Location. Each new lodge may not be located within 25 miles of an existing Lodge.

Section 3: Governance. Each subordinate Lodge may, at the discretion of its members in good standing, adopt its own unique bylaws. However, in the absence of a bylaws document, this Constitution shall serve instead. Additionally, no bylaws of any subordinate Lodge may supersede or negate the rules contained in this document.

Membership

Any person may become a member based on the following criteria: (a) They must be sponsored by a current member; (b) They must pledge to uphold our purpose; (c) They must pledge to uphold our Covenant of Relations and Conflict of Interest policy; (d) They make a dues payment upon membership approval.

Financial

- Each lodge may establish their own dues rates.
- Each lodge must remit 2% of annual revenue to the parent lodge no later than December 31st of each year.
- Each lodge treasurer must transmit end-of-year financial reports to the BGOC treasurer by January 1st.

A Step-By-Step Guide to Creating A New BGOc Lodge

1. Become a member, and plan on attending national meetings (via Zoom). Your initial dues payment will be saved for your new lodge account.
2. Familiarize yourself with important organizational documents and traditions. You will likely be the primary teacher of BGOc values in your geographic area.
3. Petition the BGOc Council for new lodge status. This can be done as a motion introduced in writing at a Council meeting. If all the qualifications are met, Council will approve the motion and the following steps can be taken.
4. Recruit a Lodge Council, consisting of President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, and Sergeant-At-Arms. Traditionally 13 members have been the minimum for starting a new lodge, however the absolute minimum is 5 to fill all Council seats.
5. Name your lodge. Preferred structure is [City] [Corvid bird] Lodge [Lodge number], i.e. Rochester Ravens Lodge 001, or Baltimore Blue Jay's Lodge 002. The bird you choose, while not critical, should reflect the qualities of your lodge. Magpies are intelligent, crows are resourceful, etc.
6. File paperwork for nonprofit incorporation. (This will likely be the most complicated step in the process. No worries, Council will be here to help guide you.) In New York the fee is \$125. A template for Certificate of Incorporation and Constitution (Bylaws) will be provided by BGOc, but each state has its own requirements. Consult a lawyer if possible, though be aware that could drive up the cost significantly.
7. Register for an EIN (via the IRS) and report this to the parent lodge.
8. Open a lodge account at a local credit union.
9. Have monthly lodge meetings, and start searching for a permanent lodge space.
10. We are a community service organization as much as a social club, so start planning group activities and make a difference in your community.
11. Remember to report a roster of all members to the parent lodge. Also keep in mind annual fees and reporting requirements. The parent lodge handles annual IRS filing for all subordinate lodges.
12. The parent lodge will provide you with additional resources along the way, such as a website and lodge email address. When in doubt, ask.