

Why Do We Ask You To Show Your Membership Card?

Because doing so maintains our rights as a private organization - and can, quite literally, save your Lodge (and you) from financial ruin.

I have walked into several hundred Moose Lodges during my years as a member - and every time, I have been proud to reach into my wallet as I entered, to fulfill the requirement of displaying my Moose membership card. I have always thought of this small-plasticized card as saying several things about me - and about any other man or woman who carries one:

- It says that the holder is a *fraternalist*, a friendly person who enjoys the company of others - and who stands ready to help a fellow human being in need whenever he or she can.
- It says that the holder is someone who holds a special place in his or her heart for children. Through his or her Moose membership, he is doing something real and tangible to provide hope and a better life for youngsters in need, at Mooseheart Child City and School in Illinois.
- And, it says that the holder is ensuring - even if he or she (and his or her spouse) reaches retirement age without adequate savings - that together they will enjoy *a secure, dignified retirement without being a burden to either family or society*, through the availability of Moosehaven in Florida.

But, even though showing a Moose membership cards says all those positive things about a person, I know very well that the fraternity's requirement that a membership card be shown every time a member enters a Lodge, or makes a purchase, has for years been a big point of irritation among thousands of Moose men and women across North America. *"Fifteen years I've been a member here; why in the world should I have to show my card every time I walk in the door?"*

Let me pose three questions in return:

- For those of you who play golf, say you've received a very nice present - three years' membership at the exclusive golf club where your doctor plays every Wednesday. When you walk into the clubhouse with a guest and are asked to show your card, do you roll your eyes and groan? - or do you relish the chance to pull *that* card from your wallet?
- Many of our members who travel are also members of the American Automobile Association (AAA) or the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) - both of which have programs enabling their members to enjoy reduced rates in roadside hotels nationwide. But when you check in, to receive that lower rate, you have to show your AAA or AARP card. Does *this* irate you?
- Finally, consider this one carefully: You're the Jr. Past Governor walking into your Lodge's Social Quarters on a busy Friday afternoon, the door opened for you by a polite smiling thirtyish man you don't quite recognize but who's arrived at the same time. Must be a fairly new member, you think. Inside, the server, recognizing you - *and* knowing how much it irritates you - decides against asking for your card. You place a dollar-fifty on the bar, request and receive a beer. Then, not wanting to offend the young man now standing next to you, the server also draws a beer for *him* without asking for a card.

Then, at the next month's Lodge meeting, this nightmare: your Administrator's trembling hand holds an invoice for more than \$90,000 in back federal income taxes, interest, penalties and fees. The invoice has been presented to him that day by that same pleasant young man you stood next to at the bar that Friday afternoon! *He was the regional IRS agent - and you had been right there when he witnessed the Lodge operating as a public accommodation!*

If your Lodge's situation is like many, it can get even worse: Let's say the Lodge simply can't scrape together \$90,000 cash to pay that IRS demand, nor does the Lodge have that much equity in its building; it's heavily mortgaged. Regrettably, as a Lodge officer, the IRS could legitimately look for some or all of that \$90,000 from you - *personally*.

This scenario is not an unrealistic exaggeration. It has actually happened to more than one Moose Lodge in recent years. Their officers and longtime members didn't want to be "bothered" with having to show their membership cards. Well, they paid a substantial price to be freed of that "bother."

Let's put the IRS and the income tax issue aside for a moment. * Under the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution ("the right of the people peaceably to assemble"), fraternal Lodges such as ours enjoy special rights as a private organization. We are exempt from laws requiring royalties to be paid to music publishers such as BMI, ASCAP, and SESAC for "public performances" of musical selections from bands and jukeboxes. We get to run our operations under our own rules and by-laws, instead of being bound by civil court litigation. Perhaps most importantly, we have the right to choose who will associate with us. We can choose whom we wish to have with us as fellow members - instead of having to take anyone who walks in the door, as is required of "places of public accommodation" under the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

(And lest anyone jump to conclusions, *that last sentence does NOT mean we in the Moose afford ourselves the right to discriminate on the basis of race in choosing our members*. That would be stupid, even if it weren't dangerous. Fine men and women, come in every race and ethnicity - and we need them. What it *does* mean is that we maintain the right to say, to an applicant who is known to be a chronic abuser of women, or a bully, a liar or cheat: "No we don't choose to have you with us.").

BUT - we lose all of those rights that a private organization enjoys, if we don't *conduct* ourselves as a private organization! We cannot have it both ways. When a Lodge chooses not to check membership cards, and essentially opens itself up to the public (with the exception of approved Community Service activities, consult the fraternity's General Laws book), that Lodge puts the entire fraternity at risk of:

- Relinquishing the BMI/ASCAP/SESAC exemptions,
- Losing our right to operate under our own rules, and
- Losing the right to choose our own members.

If your Lodge officers tell you that non-members are allowed purchasing privileges because "that's the way it's done around here," or "we have to do it to make ends meet," or "what Moose International doesn't know won't hurt them," you should know that your Lodge is placing its tax-exempt private status in jeopardy - and that of the entire fraternity as well.

Showing your card may be a slight inconvenience, but it is worth it to protect our Mooseheart kids and Moosehaven seniors entrusted to our care. Even (perhaps especially!) if you've been a member for many years, be proud to show your Moose card every time you walk into your Lodge - even if you're not asked! It shows that you're the sort of person who believes in doing something for the betterment of kids and seniors in need, and in making our communities better places to live - and in maintaining our fraternity's legal ability to do what we do, for many years to come.

**In Canada, the tax issue isn't a factor, all food and drink establishments, public or private, pay all applicable taxes.*