

Knight of the Year - Raymond Cole, Msgr. James T. McKenna Council 2969, Clarksdale, MS

This Brother Knight has been a member of the Knights of Columbus since 1958 and a member of the Fourth Degree since 1959, the entire time with the same council. He has always been active and deeply involved in his council life. He has held most of the offices in his council and has effected profound changes in his council.

At one point, the council had become very apathetic, and the council was turning into more of a men's club than a Christian organization. A move even began to sell the home and disband the council. This Knight went to what should have been the final meeting and made an impassioned speech about the importance of brotherhood and family and commitment to Christian fellowship, with the statement that not only should this council not disband, it should relocate and put the focus on family involvement where it ought to be. By the end of that meeting, one committee had been formed to find a location for a new council home and another committee to find out about the costs of building the new hall and putting in a swimming pool so families could come there too. Nothing further was ever said about disbanding the council, and the old hall was eventually sold to help pay for the new one.

When the architect's blueprint for the new building was delivered, it was so far from the needs of the council that this knight sat down and drafted a new plan himself, one that specifically fit the council's needs. It was adopted and used. Not only was the man involved in designing the building, but when it was at last built, complete with swimming pool, he put his self-taught skills as a carpenter into use. While others were seen enjoying the water and having a good time, he was up on the roof of the pool house building the deck to shade the mothers who had come out to watch their young children while they swam. He then built the shed to house the pool pump and cleaning equipment, again single-handedly.

When the council had a hard time raising the money to meet the notes for the building, he started a weekly bingo that was open to the public. It was expanded to a twice-weekly event, and the council's financial worries were a thing of the past for a long time. At one point, the council was making over \$4000 a week from this project, a minimum of \$200,000 a year. And he chaired this project for over 15 years. From this money, the council debt on the building was retired, all operating costs were covered in full, charity projects were funded, and people in need in the community were helped also. New air conditioners were paid for and installed, and an addition to the hall, again inspired by his building design, was completed, this time with an area where teens could meet for Catholic Youth activities.

With all of this, it hardly seems likely that he could find time to have other community involvement, but he was deeply involved in several important projects. When the Tootsie Roll Drive was first proposed, the state deputy, this man to spearhead the organizational efforts in this area. Because he is the father of a child with some severe handicaps, he was already deeply committed to anything that would help handicapped children. He and his wife had petitioned the local board of supervisors and had gotten their commitment to open a training center for severely handicapped children, those for whom no other educational setting would do. Within a year of that first step, the center came into existence and later served as the model for others in this area of the state, finally becoming part of the local school district's special education services program when the federal law requiring education for all handicapped children went into effect. This couple was the ideal duo to spearhead the organizational effort for the Tootsie Roll Drive. They went around to all the area councils and presented a program to generate interest and

commitment to this cause. They visited all councils within a sixty mile radius of their home and got each council excited about being involved with such a worthwhile program. At that time, he also had become president of the Association for Retarded Citizens for this county, which had been in a dormant state for years until its reactivation following the opening of the training center.

During this period, he also became Northern District new Council Development Chairman for the Knights of Columbus, and in this capacity visited church families within a 150 mile radius. He made the initial contact and was responsible for the development of a Southaven council, and it was his visit that sparked interest in the K of C in the Tupelo area. Until that time, they had only a men's club.

Ardently interested in improved health for the poor, he was nominated to a position on the board of directors of our local community health center, a position he has held for over 15 years now. In that organization, he has been chairman of the budget and building committees, again involved in designing a special project, a new health center for one of the outlying counties served by the health center. His commitment to that organization stands to this day.

Despite some serious health problems, he retained his involvement in the local K of C council, and when this council again began to lose focus and its membership, he decided that it was time to get involved once more. He became financial secretary and started out to purge the rolls. In his efforts to straighten out the membership rolls, he and the New Haven office representative for this area got on first name terms just through the number of calls he made to try and correct the records. When all the shots had been fired and smoke cleared, the council had been pared down to the exact number of active members that really were within reach. He then set out to get more young people involved and did exactly that, quickly reaching and targeting all the young men in the area. Befriending them and bombarding them with calls and literature on the Knights of Columbus, he got most of them to commit themselves to becoming Knights, then set about organizing the first local K of C exemplification in over ten years. It set records in this area! He has since received a Supreme Council certificate of commendation for the outstanding job he did of reviving this council.

Health problems forced his retirement from the service industry job he held for over forty years, during which he served for over twenty years as an executive board member as well as being the local union representative for his coworkers, taking part in contract negotiations as each contract came up for renewal and acting as an advocate for any of the men who had grievances with the company. He now donates many hours to church activities, including a weekly hour and a half in the wee small hours of the morning spent at Perpetual Adoration, and often serving as a substitute for others, again for those early morning hours. Now that he has the time to do so, he also has been known to provide transportation to a city near us for area people who need medical treatments.

His involvement with the Knights of Columbus has not ended and his commitment remains strong to his brotherhood, which he sees as a vital force in our church family. He is content to work from behind the scenes, serving as the need arises and not seeking any higher office in the council. He feels that there are others who are better suited to those roles; he does not see himself as a diplomat! But however he sees himself, it is clear that others see him as a deeply committed Christian man, one who is devoted to God, his family, his community, and his fraternal brotherhood, who is willing to stand up for what he believes in, and who believes that the best way to effect change is by being there to have a part in it. He serves as an example to us all.

Much of the activities and projects discussed above covered many years of involvement by this outstanding Knight. However, it fails to reflect what he has done for his council this year. Prior to him being appointed as Financial Secretary, dues notices were not being mailed out to most of the membership. The council was truly in a state of decay. The meetings had become a gathering of about 4 to 6 members. Limited activities were planned or carried out. No minutes were being kept. This Knight helped turn the council around mostly because of his continued involvement. Our council is now in line to receive several awards at convention, despite being almost inactive for part of the year. In summary, the activities this year and the history of his involvement in this council, his church, his family, and this community all justify him being honored as the Knight of the Year.