

Shriners celebrating its 50-year charter

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or using his left arm.

But after nine surgeries, Youngblood's son could walk and had limited use of his arm.

The experience was Youngblood's first with the Shriners, a group he had heard about for years but knew little about. It left an indeli-

ble mark in Youngblood's life.

In following years, Youngblood and his wife financially supported the Shriners and volunteered when they could.

"The only way I saw to repay what the Shriners had done for us was to work," he said. "My wife and

I have worked and supported the Shriners since, and it's been a labor of love."

On Saturday, the Sharon Shrine Temple in Tyler will celebrate its 50-year charter with Youngblood serving as potentate, the Shriners equivalent of a CEO.

The Sharon Shrine includes members from 17 East Texas counties from Atlanta to Hemphill, the Texas-Louisiana border to Gun Barrel City, and Mount Pleasant to Linden.

J.B. Glaspie was a charter member. **SHRINERS >> PAGE 6A**

SHRINERS

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ber when the Sharon Shrine was officially chartered in July 1963 after a yearlong process. Most members came from other temples, including the Karem Shrine in Waco, which had members to share.

The new temple's members immediately held the first circus to benefit children in September 1963.

At the temple's peak, Sharon Shrine boasted more than 4,000 members, said past commander Gerald Emmons, a 50-year member.

Today, more than 1,300 members attend monthly meetings for business and pleasure.

Emmons said the Shriners have helped more than 1 million children worldwide since the group's inception in 1872. Shriners have built 22 hospitals on Canada, across the United States and in Mexico City, which focus on orthopedic needs and burns free of charge.

The Sharon Shrine temple members conduct dozens of fundraising efforts to ensure children receive needed care, from treatments to surgeries. There are annual Easter egg hunts, turkey shoots, a rodeo and Christmas parties, and all are in the name of helping children, Youngblood said.

Shriners also solicit funds via "paper days," when members visit area businesses and stand on streets for passersby to drop donations in their fez.

Joe Barron, assistant rabban, third in command, said the organization draws members from all walks of life. Businessmen, blue-collar workers, professionals and retirees join to find camaraderie and focus the fellowship toward helping crippled and sick children, he said.

"It takes a complete effort," he said. "There is too much going on and too many needs."



MARK MARTIN/STAFF

MEMBERS OF SHARON SHRINERS TYLER include (from left to right), Joe Youngblood, current potentate; J.B. Glaspie, potentate 1976; Joe Barron, divan; and Gerald Emmons, past commander.

CLOSER LOOK

LEADERSHIP

The Sharon Shrine leadership includes, Joe Youngblood, potentate; James Handshaw, chief rabban; Joe Barron, assistant rabban; H. Dwayne McDonald, high priest and prophet; Marvin Henderson, Oriental guide; Melvin Ruyle, treasurer and Scott Kelly, recorder.

Volunteers man and maintain the Shriners units, including various mini-cars, associated with community parades.

Youngblood said the jeeps, clown cars and horse patrols manned by men wearing fez hats are public relations tools to reach people who know little about the organization.

But, the volunteer members also are on standby to drive children and family to and from hospitals in Houston and Shreveport, La. throughout the week as needed.

Negative rumors and folklore about the group are common and misrepresent it as anything from a cult to devil worshippers to Islamic extremists, he said. The symbolism used by the organization was born in the Middle East at the turn of the century when it was popular and gave the group a clear identity, he said.

Youngblood said Shriners believe in God and the group's call is to do His work on behalf of children.

Youngblood said people who don't have a clear idea of what Shriners do should visit its hospitals. He said seeing what children and families endure is heart-wrenching, but that the help they receive will bring tears of joy.

"A lot of people don't really understand what we do," he said. "We do like to party and have fun but when it's time to work, we work, and we do it for a great cause."

The Sharon Shrine "Bull Fest" in Lindale on Oct. 12 will be the next big fundraising event.