

Quorum's '30 Acts of Kindness' Hits Very Close to 'Home' for Project Manager

BY JOHN HENRY DEC. 15, 2021 9:05 A.M.



Courtesy of Quorum Architects

Quorum Architects rented out a theater to go watch the story of the Masonic Home, "12 Mighty Orphans," with their friend and colleague Arthur Calcaterra, who was raised at the Home. Top Row, from left, Trevor Jackson, William Moore, Larry Lockhart, Arthur Calcaterra, David Lee, Scott Wilson, Billie Williams. Bottom row, from left, Marissa Davis, Molly Schurtz, Cles Follett, Patty Potter, Jodeen Lee, Arte Limani, Tania Lecona

Arthur Calcaterra's experience at the Fort Worth Masonic Home wasn't made for Hollywood scripts like this summer's "12 Mighty Orphans," starring Dallas-native Luke Wilson, though he actually made the movie as an extra.

That's Calcaterra among the throng cheering on the Mighty Mites of yesteryear in the movie.

But that does not mean the story of his experience, just as transformative as those football players of yore, isn't worth telling.

Specifically, one episode that has unquestionably stuck with him 25 years after graduating from the historic home and school for orphans on Fort Worth's southeast side, which dates to the late 19th century but closed in 2005.

He was in high school and wanted to take a trip to see his mother's gravesite.

When he got there, he couldn't find it. The cemetery gave him the difficult news that she had been placed in an unmarked grave because no one had purchased a marker.

Young Arthur went back to his new home, where he had been for one

year at that time, and "mentioned" the incident to his dorm's house parents. House parents were those adults who oversaw dormitories at the Home. You get the feeling talking to Calcaterra now that "mentioning" is probably not the right word because you can tell three decades later that the incident shook him.

This was his mother, who was chronically ill and chronically poor, but who cared so much about her son that she gave him up to the Masonic Home, desperate to see that he got a chance at living. He was 11 at the time he arrived and 12 when she died. She was essentially his only family.

And now, seemingly only Arthur would know she ever existed, left without a proper burial or a place for her son to come visit her.

Somehow, Calcaterra said, word of the incident got to Doug Lord, one of those guys who played football for the Mighty Mites all those years ago and who remained devoted to the Home's boys and mission throughout his life. Lord would take the kids to the State Fair every year, Calcaterra says.

A few months later, Lord came to the Home to speak to Arthur. The elder man told Arthur that he and some others in Dallas would see to it that his mother had a headstone at her final resting place.

“Here I am in high school, it was a couple hundred dollars, but that meant the world to me,” Calcaterra says. “Whenever I go to the cemetery, I think, ‘that’s there because someone took the time. Someone cared who did something that they didn’t have to do.’”

“It’s something I can’t repay to anyone in anyway except to reach out and help other people.”

Today, Calcaterra is closing in on 17 years as a project manager at Quorum Architects in Fort Worth. The company is celebrating its 30th year in 2022 with 30 acts of kindness.

A 30 for 30, in the ESPN parlance of our day.

Through gifts of time, talent and treasure, Quorum says it hopes to amplify their charitable activities and have some fun while giving back.

The company’s first act: adopting a stretch of West Vickery Boulevard,



home to company headquarters. The group committed to keeping it clean for the next two years. In addition to the cleanup, other group volunteer activities include working at Taste Project’s urban farm, a build day for Texas Ramp Project, and multiple shifts at the Tarrant Area Food Bank.

“Some of our efforts are very simple but have significant outcomes like our Care to Wear Jeans Jar,” says David Lee, a Founding Principal. “If we choose to wear jeans on Fridays, we add a few bucks to the jar, and that money along with a company match will go to the three area nonprofits that the staff selected.”

Says Mario Valdez, a project manager: “When we first started planning, we were concerned about accomplishing 30 acts, but that hasn’t been a problem. We will exceed our goal, and we’re fine with that.”

And then, of course, is a place near and dear to Arthur Calcaterra.

It’s the All Church Home, better known as ACH Child and Family Services, on part of the site of the former Masonic Home. The mission beyond the chain link fence continues for children and families in troubling situations, as Calcaterra says.

“Most of the older buildings on campus are still there,” Calcaterra says. “They have a very similar mission: helping kids and families. When we came around to this 30 acts of kindness, my first thought was let’s take the All Church Home. Let’s do something for them over the whole year. It seemed like a good fit.”

More like a perfect fit. Calcaterra has stayed connected to his Home family over the years. There was always an instant bond with anybody who ever went there, whether they be an 85-year-old man and a man in

his 40s like Calcaterra. They all ate at the same cafeteria and lived in the same dorms.

They all experienced tragedy in childhood.

“The first day someone is there, there is an instant connection,” says Calcaterra of his days at the Home. “They have a story, you have a story, and we told them, ‘You’re one of us now.’ That’s what is so great about it.”

As CEO of ACH, Wayne Carson has embraced the children of the Masonic Home days. For Masonic Home all-school reunions, Carson has gone out of his way to welcome back the family that once lived there, Calcaterra said.

“Wayne Carson will always let us come out and have lunch in our old dining hall” for reunions, Calcaterra says. “He personally would go open up the elementary school. He’s the CEO and he’s taking time out on a Saturday to walk us around to make sure we feel welcome.

“He said, ‘This is your home. I want you to feel welcome here. I’m here and we’ll open up our doors for you.’ He’s an incredible person.”

Quorum has identified ACH as one beneficiary of its 30 acts of kindness, including pro bono work on the old milk barn and shop building of the Masonic Home days.

They’ve already participated in a “trunk-or-treat” at Halloween with the children of ACH, as well as a toy drive. There will also be a clothing drive.

And architectural design work.

Quorum, specifically Calcaterra, will conduct a concept study, pro bono, on the old milk barn, which in Calcaterra’s day was where his shop class was located.

The ACH has a vision for the building to become a gathering place where children can visit family, visitations that are often required to be supervised. Calcaterra says he could envision a design harkening back to the buildings days as a milk barn, though that’s all too early to tell at this point.

That project, he says, won’t kick off in earnest until after the first of the year.

“It was a chance for me to take on something close to my heart,” Calcaterra says.

Calcaterra spent his entire life from the fifth grade to his high school graduation at the Masonic Home.

He was there ultimately because his mother died when he was 12 years old, but she had seen to it that he got there sooner. She had several health issues, Calcaterra says, making stable employment next to impossible. Poverty was their way of life. “Super broke” is the term Calcaterra uses to describe it today.

“We even spent one summer at the Union Gospel Mission, between my first-grade year and second-grade. They helped her find an apartment. It was tough times. She was always afraid that at some point, I would be taken away from her because she couldn’t care for me.”

Her brother, a Mason, helped him gain admittance into the Masonic Home. Entry to the Home required a family connection to the Masons. At least there, she could keep custody of him and see him.

That was her only chance. As it turned out, it was young Arthur’s only chance, too.

“At first, I thought it would be temporary,” he says. “When she got better, I thought I would go back and live with her. Almost a year later, she passed away.”

Staying at the Home turned out to be the best decision ever made for him, he says today. There was no safety net for him.

And, in turn, he now repays whatever debt he feels he owes to Doug Lord and anybody else by doing the same good deeds for others that were done to him.

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