Greetings Brothers All,

It was requested that I prepare a “How to and frequently asked questions” document to assist in complying with the requirement that each petitioner provide a background check with their petition for Initiation and Advancement.

Guarding the West Gate is operated by Pasquale Imbimbo, a licensed Private Investigation, Retired Law Enforcement Captain and currently District Deputy Grand Master. Guarding the West Gate was created at the request of the Grand Lodge of the State of New York.

Guarding the West Gate hereinafter referred to as GTWG, does not determine if a Petitioner is favorable or unfavorable. The GTWG report is a tool to be used by The Lodge Appointed Investigation Committee to determine if the Petitioner is favorable or unfavorable.

The data utilized to compile these reports comes from various public records and data repositories. New sources of reliable data tools are added to our tool box as made available. GTWG has a panel of retired Law Enforcement Officers for discussion, suggestions and modifications, all of which are Past Masters.

It should be noted that review of GTWG Report is only one tool to be used by the Investigation Committee, the Chairman should cause a local media and reference review to take place before rendering a favorable or unfavorable decision. The GTWG report lists known convictions, so the local media and reference check is required to ascertain the events that lead to the convictions if any. Let it be noted that less than **5%** of the Petitioners to date had a Felony Criminal History.

The GTWG report, is not to be discussed in open lodge, is not to be handed out, this report is given to the Investigation Committee in trust for the purpose of determining the eligibility of the petitioner to proceed with Initiation and Advancement.

Guarding the West Gate will be adding a reference blog to the Portal to assist Investigation Committees.

What is the fee for the GTWG report? $16.00, which the petitioner pays, there is no cost to the Lodge. GTWG keeps the cost to a minimum as a service to the Craft and can accomplish by the system being electronic. The petitioner can request the complete report if desired.

Who can use the GTWG Portal? Any petitioner for Initiation and Advancement in any Masonic Entity may use the GTWG Portal. This Portal is provided at low cost to assist the Craft. Currently in addition to New York Lodges, the Grand Lodge of the District of Columbia and several Lodges in Alabama are using the GTWG Reports.

Why does the Petitioner have to advise his date of birth and social security number? In order to determine that we have discovered the correct records all of the requested information is entered, many of our petitioners have common names, without individualized information, we would have to sort through hundreds and sometimes thousands of records. GTWG does not store or share any dates of birth or social security numbers with any person or organization except with the petitioner himself. Once the request is marked completed the Social Security Number is destroyed and not stored in the GTWG system.

The petitioner receives his report, what now? He reviews his report, if he has any questions he can contact GTWG. After his review he attaches the report to his petition and surrenders the Petition and Report to the Lodge Officer as required by the Lodge. GTWG has assisted several petitioners in disputing information attributed to them. One petitioner records reflected that he was deceased. He and his father had the same name, the social security numbers were switched accidently by the Coroner’s office. GTWG worked with the petitioner and the County Clerk and the petitioner was resurrected.

How long does it take for the report to be emailed to the petitioner? Normally, without discrepancies it takes 3-5 business days. If there is a discrepancy, GTWG will contact the petitioner and work thru the discrepancy.

What is on the GTWG report? If the petitioner has no Criminal History, Bankruptcies, Liens, Judgments or Negative Media, the report will consist of one page. If there are criminal records discovered the face sheet will indicate how many records were discovered, and then the source info and discovered details will be attached and so on Sex Offender Registries, Liens Judgments etc. Reports are sent in a PDF format. Very often, background reviews will be as large as 60-125 pages. Guarding the West Gate is only concerned with criminal history and derogatory matters. We will review and analyze the raw data and generate a standardized report with all discoveries and derogatory information listed and will provide the sources where the information was discovered.

What happens if the is a criminal history? If there is a felony criminal history, a copy is sent to the Grand Secretary’s office, who then in turn notifies the Lodge that was listed as the lodge the person intends to petition. This procedure is set for felony convictions only and may be adjusted by Grand Lodge as needed. Note that all discovered criminal records will be listed; red flags are felony convictions and any Sexual Offender Records at any level.

Why are Bankruptcies, Liens, Judgments and Defaults listed on the report? Bankruptcies are extremely common in this day and age. 3-5 Bankruptcies are not. A few Liens and Judgements are also common; however excessive liens and judgments may be a red flag. The record to date is one petitioner with 52 liens and judgments, both governmental and private filings. This may be important in determining eligibility for Initiation and Advancement as well as the Lodge Treasurer. Again the GTWG report is not to be discussed in lodge, or made part of the minutes or distributed in any way.

What happens to the Petitioners personal information? GTWG requires personal information in order to provide the Petitioner with the required documents to complete the Petition for Initiation and Advancement. GTWG is a secure site. Once the background review is completed, the personal information destroyed. No storage of personal data will occur on the site. The report will be filed/archived by the Petitioners Name. Additionally, financial information for the payment process will not be stored or archived on the site. Pay Pal Pro is the preferred method of payment. PayPal collects the payment information, processes and protects the transaction. GTWG Staff never sees or has access to the petitioner’s financial information.

What does the Investigation Committee do when there is a criminal history? GTWG will verify the information before issuing the report. If a criminal history exists, the petitioner should be contacted by the Investigation Committee and allowed the opportunity to offer an explanation and surrender the circumstances under which the incident occurred. Hence, depending on the severity and age of the incident, an arrest or conviction may not preclude a petitioner as being looked upon favorably. The contents of the background review should not be discussed in any open or public meetings and is restricted to use by the three persons appointed to the Investigation Committee. I use this example on many occasions. A petitioner was 19 years old, walking home from a party, had a little too much to drink. The petitioner observes a Jeep in a parking lot with the keys in ignition. The petitioner jumps in a drives the Jeep three blocks to his home and goes to bed. The petitioner is arrested and convicted of Grand Theft Auto. The petitioner is now 40 years old, has had no other arrests or convictions, now married and is family man and has respectable employment. Should this incident preclude this petitioner?

As you can see from the information provided, the petitioner pays for the report, reviews his report, has the opportunity to discuss the report with GTWG staff and decides if he wishes to continue with the process for Initiation and Advancement. The petitioner is given several warnings throughout the process that by paying the fee and entering his personal data, he understands and gives consent for GTWG to communicate with the lodge he intends to petition and the Grand Lodge staff.

My apologies for the long document, but this is important information and this document was developed based on questions received from Lodge Officers and Petitioners.

Please feel free to contact GTWG directly with questions and suggestions.

Until we meet again,

R:.W:. Pasquale Imbimbo, DDGM

Tiler, Guarding the West Gate