

Features

Returning gifts he received

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Man uses his personal motto to fuel his service to those around him.

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Charles Mason could be considered a self-made man. When he was 10, his mother died of heart failure and his father had already left the family, leaving Mason and his two older sisters orphaned in Noblesville, Ind., a town of 9,000 people.

Their neighbor, Myrtle Cosgrove, took the three children in for four years. She had lost her husband six months prior.

"A lot of friends and neighbors came and helped me," Mason said.

That experience colored the way Mason lived, he said, proving to him that it is better to give than to receive.

"That's what the Midwest is all about," Mason said, "Neighbors helping neighbors and friends helping friends. That's why I help other people."

He went on to major in business administration at Montgomery College and studied finance while serving in the U.S. Air Force Reserves.

That service has also shaped him, said his wife, Chris Mason.

"It gave him discipline," she said.

They met at Montgomery College and married in 1968.

Soon after, the two took a trip to her hometown of Glendale, where Charles Mason decided California was his next destination of residence.

"I looked at the mountains and said 'This is paradise,'" he said. "I decided to stay here."

After they moved to Glendale in 1971, he decided to donate time to charity and live by the motto of his household — to whom much has been given, much is expected.

Mason served as president of the Glendale chapter of the American Red Cross in 1981. He was awarded the Clara Barton Award for service during the L.A. Riots in 1992.

"It was horrible," Mason said. "I had never seen anything so horrible, not even in the military service."

The chapter administrator, Ron Farina, called Mason the night of the riots, telling him that as the chairman of the Glendale chapter, his service was needed.

"L.A., at that time, was like a war zone," Farina said. "I commend Charles for having the guts to go into that area when there was so much gunfire occurring in the south part of L.A."



Charles Mason served as president of the Glendale chapter of the American Red Cross in 1981. He was awarded the Clara Barton Award during the L.A. Riots in 1992. (Alex Collins/ News-Press)

That night, Charles Mason went into the Los Angeles Police Department's Rampart Division to treat those who were wounded.

"The first thing I saw was a guy who came running to us with a bullet in his right hand," he said. "We treated him on the spot."

They handed out care packages to residents of an apartment complex that had been set on fire in South L.A. As he was handing out packages, an elderly lady came up to him, shivering and wet from being caught in the water spray.

"I had my all-time favorite Red Cross sweatshirt on," Charles Mason said, "I just had to take it off and give it to her."

He also helped with the Malibu fires in 1993. A resident pleaded with Charles Mason to help him retrieve his Arabian horses from his evacuated residence.

"I had two Red Cross trucks with me," Mason said, "So I told the man to follow behind the trucks so that they would allow him in."

They went to the top of the mountain, amid the blazing fires, and the horses were saved.

"All you have to do is tell Charlie you can't," Chris Mason said, "And it'll happen."

Another situation he found himself in was in 1985, when Charles Mason spotted a young girl lying on Verdugo Road near the gutter after she had been hit by a car. He realized that because there was a lack of parking for students near Glendale Community College, they would often zoom down the street to find parking. He decided it was time for the city of Glendale and the college to work together in creating more space for students to park. He got the mayor and the president of the college to collaborate and provide more parking spaces for students. His efforts culminated into building the parking garage structure near the college.

He uses his profession as one way to support the American Red Cross, Farina said.

"On Christmas, Charles custom creates earthquake kits for his top clients," Farina said. "It supports the Red Cross by giving us income."

Charles Mason, a life planner, established his company in 1988.

"It has evolved into a full-fledged family service," he said. "We make financial arrangements for families. We go beyond helping people with their wills and trust funds."

His company was named by Worth Magazine as one of the nation's leading wealth and legal advisors in their 2009 debut issue. He runs the company with his eldest son, Brent Mason.

"Because of my background, you just had to survive to live," Charles Mason said, "Your survival instincts kick in and you start going faster than other people. You go to the top."