

History Of The Project

In 2003 Tom Reddin, a vice chairman of the National OA Committee, met with the staff of the BSA Information Systems Division (ISD) about including the Order of the Arrow membership management requirements in their development of ScoutNet. This meeting concluded that the financial cost to the Order was going to be prohibitive. Plus, the needs of the Order were significantly different from those of the BSA. The Order's records of honors bestowed and dues had to be maintained in perpetuity; this was not true in ScoutNet.

The one thing that could be developed though ScoutNet was a routine to verify that current OA members were also members in good standing of the BSA. A contract was entered with ISD and funded by the National OA Committee to develop this membership verification routine in ScoutNet. Fitting into the ISD development schedule, the ScoutNet routine and documentation were released to councils, nationwide, in February 2005.

For many years lodges all over the country had been developing software systems on their own to manage their membership. Significant investments had been made in both system development and maintenance. Now, knowing that the Order could not develop anything as part of ScoutNet, the only solution was to draw upon the experience and computer skills of OA members around the country.

In the mid-1970s Tom Reddin had developed a membership management system and converted the manual records for his lodge in Bethesda, MD. In October 2003 he performed a requirements analysis that resulted in a list of system requirements for a standard lodge membership management system. Tom also conducted a Lodge Membership System Survey to gather what lodges were currently doing to record membership and conduct lodge business. This was concluded in early 2004.

Responses were received from 66% of the councils having OA lodges. 97% of these lodges had developed automated lodge membership systems; 95% used Windows; 42% used Access; 37% used Excel; 99% printed labels; and 72% printed membership cards. 72% manually verified BSA membership at some point; 28% never checked (this confirmed the need for the ScoutNet Membership Verification Routine). In addition to other useful data items, the survey collected names and email addresses of lodge advisers and programmers, technical writers, graphic designers, and testers to assist in the development of the new standard lodge membership system.

During 2004, Tom contacted a number of developers, including the author of TroopMaster software. TroopMaster turned down the development opportunity because it was limited by the number of lodges in the Order. Initially, the system was to be named LodgeMaster; but the author of TroopMaster expressed concern that LodgeMaster would be confused with his product. To avoid this, it was agreed to name the new membership management system - OA LodgeMaster (OALM).

In September 2004, two undergraduate University of Washington roommates, Rob Rosamond and Matt Harris, volunteered to lead the development effort as co-project managers. Rob was majoring in Business Administration – Information Systems and Matt, in Informatics. Using classic development and planning techniques, they proceeded to define the system software, hardware, Internet processes, budget, staffing, standards, and documentation. Tom Reddin became their sponsor and interface with the National OA Committee.

Both Rob and Matt had served as lodge officers and lodge chiefs in Portland, OR. The original design concept for OA LodgeMaster stemmed from work initially done by Rob around 2000. The database the lodge was using was DOS-based and could only be used on certain computers. It was very tedious getting the chapters to enter election and induction results, and for a lodge of 2,000 members the system was not efficient. Many of the ideas for OALM started locally and then grew into best practices to be modeled on a national scale.

The main challenge they had to design around was the idea that there needed to be multiple simultaneous users of the system who were not necessarily in the same physical location. There was also a need to take the lodge database to an Ordeal weekend where there was no Internet connectivity. So the system needed to accommodate an offline mode with merge replications back to live servers once the database was taken home at the end of a weekend event. At the time the only back-end technology that could accommodate all of these requirements was Microsoft SQL Server. The front-end user interface was originally built in Microsoft Access with a local Microsoft SQL Server Express instance in the background. Later on, this front-end was switched to Microsoft Silverlight which adds support for Macintosh users and does not require the installation of any software unless the user needs to be in offline mode.

In February 2005, following a design summit meeting over a weekend in Seattle, Matt and Rob completed the database entity relationship diagrams and refined the development standards, system description, hardware/software requirements and staffing needs. In addition to Matt and Rob the original developers included: Kevin Stock, Mike Philbrook, Bobby Brock, and Ken Hayashi.

On November 1, 2005, Rob Rosamond had to step back from co-project manager due to his other commitments. Matt Harris took the lead as the OALM Project Manager. Rob continued as a consultant to help with brainstorming ways to make OALM even better and overcome several complex limitations due to the system requirements. He also helped with the migrations over the course of several years after. Matt was the Web Specialist and Hardware Architect. In addition he recruited and led the key developers. Mike Card joined the team as the Deployment Lead, Support Lead, and Developer in 2005. Mike Philbrook became the Desktop Development Lead. In 2006 Mike Gaffney joined as Migration Lead and later moved to Help Desk Support in 2007.

Craig Salazar was instrumental in negotiating and finalizing contracts for the critical server infrastructure that underpins OA LodgeMaster. He also helped to validate the technical architecture and navigate the necessary behind-the-scenes processes to put those components into place.

The system went through several alpha and beta test iterations in the spring of 2006. OA LodgeMaster was officially released July 28, 2006 at NOAC 2006. Several launch presentations were held at NOAC and a migration center was staffed to assist lodges convert their data. The contributions of Mike Philbrook, Mike Card, and Mike Gaffney cannot be underplayed, especially during the migration process. This team worked directly with every lodge in the country to convert and migrate the myriad of existing lodge databases to the OALM format. The dedication of these Arrowmen to offer OALM service to lodges (a process that sometimes took hours or days per lodge) is what allowed such widespread use in such a relatively short period of time.

In 2008 Matt Harris stepped down as Project Manager and Michael Card moved into that role. Through Michael's efforts and leadership, OALM has grown to support much more than just membership. The system now facilitates management of lodge events, ceremonies teams, service hours, lodge assets, finances, unit contacts, and trading post inventory.

Version 1.1 of the OA LodgeMaster software was released in 2008, which included upgraded interfaces in Access, an improved and more compatible installer, and improved database software. The initial installation, downloading of data, and synchronization of data were also simplified and the program added more detailed user level security.

In 2009, new members were added to the development and support teams: Rob Anstett took the role of development lead, Scott Jeslis was added as a developer, and several people joined the support and documentation teams. The first version of the online portal was released, which allowed lodge administrators to access member data without having to install any software. The portal, while limited in functionality, allowed easier and highly configurable access to a lodge's data.

In late 2009, another milestone was achieved with the release of version 2.0, which included major enhancements to the client program that administrators use. The versions of Access and SQL Server were upgraded. The interface was upgraded to use a ribbon menu, aligning it with the new version of Microsoft Office. A new finance module was added and new reporting tools were included, along with a number of smaller changes.

An incremental version 2.1 was released in 2010, which allowed greater usage offline, with one computer serving as the host and multiple other computers connecting to it and working off its database. Version 2.2 was released in late 2010, which added a new inventory manager and updates to align with changes to the Quality Lodge Program.

In late 2011, while maintaining the existing program continued, work to completely re-write the lodge client began. The goal was to move off the existing Access platform and onto a new web-based platform, while still retaining the ability to run the program offline. Microsoft Silverlight was selected for the client interface with new server architecture for the backend data services. The program added customizability for lodges, custom fields, custom reporting, and easier ways to search and find members and other data they needed. The program could now also run online on both Mac and PC computers. New development also included functionality to align with the new lodge charter renewal and Journey To Excellence (JTE) processes being rolled out to lodges. Development continued over the next year, and version 3.0 was released in February 2013.

Development has continued on version 3.0. JTE and charter data submission were built into the program at the end of 2013, allowing lodges to submit data directly to the national office. New finance and inventory modules were added. Many smaller pieces of functionality were added, including improved reporting and exporting, event attendee emails, a new event check-in process, and a ceremonies module.

Chadd Blanchard joined the team in 2016 as the Project Manager and Mike Card became the Project Adviser. The OA LodgeMaster team embarked on the next chapter and began developing version 4.0. This version will remove Silverlight as the user client interface and move the whole program forward with a modern HTML and JavaScript interface, along with improving and standardizing the data transmission application program interface (API).

The original system did not force lodges to migrate from what they were currently using. The system was promoted based on what it had to offer in comparison. This eventually attracted 97% of the lodges to switch. However, with the incorporation of lodge charter renewal and JTE into the system, all lodges needed to convert to OA LodgeMaster. Full migration was achieved on December 31, 2015.

Today, OALM is an integral part of lodge operations throughout the BSA. Lodges could not function, achieve, or fulfill their mission without it.