Elks Helping Veterans

100 Years of Service

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Since 1917, the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks has demonstrated its compassion for veterans of our Armed Forces through a number of programs. This is why, since 1946, the Order has pledged that, “So long as there are veterans, the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks will never forget them.”

There are 14 Veterans Administration Medical Centers located throughout New York state. Many Elks members, through their local lodges or districts, host events for our veterans. Some of the events include socials, concerts, bingo games, movies, pig roasts and sporting events, just to name a few. Also, while visiting the VA Medical Centers, the Elks not only entertain veterans, but also frequently provide much needed supplies and equipment to the hospitals as well as a wide range of smaller items for the veterans. Some districts host Veteran Stand-downs that offer everything from clothing to medical and dental services.

The Elks National Veterans Services, the New York Elks Major Projects, and the local lodges provide the funding to the VA Medical Centers for all of these events/services, as well as many more programs for our veterans who have sacrificed so much for our country.

An Army of Hope has been established that is dedicated to helping lodges that are undertaking a project to assist a veteran or family that costs more than the lodge can afford.

The New York State Elks will continue to support and promote all of our Veterans’ needs.

James Peace
Past New York State National Veterans Service Chairman
Elks National Veterans Service Commission

For nearly 100 years, the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks has had an outstanding history in supporting our Veterans who have served our country so selflessly. Through the Elks’ support of the Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service program, these service men and women receive not only personal contact with our Elk volunteers, but also numerous items to help make their days in the nation’s Veterans hospitals a little brighter.

Our VAVS representatives along with the Deputy VAVS representatives throughout the 172 Veterans medical centers nationwide, volunteer thousands of hours to help make the lives of our Veterans a little easier. In our New York State Elks Association, the representatives from local lodges visit the vets at least once a month and set up bingo or card games and supply coffee and pastries, not to mention setting up special parties for the holidays, or birthday parties. Many also provide such items as televisions for the common room or books, magazines and clothing. The Elks NVSC helps to provide the necessary funding.

Our Elks members can also join the Adopt-A-Vet program, begun in 1980 by Elk George Schwarz, whereby hospitalized vets are visited or even, if they are able, taken out for lunch or to the local lodge for the Veterans’ Day dinner. How it must please a vet to be remembered in this way!

The Elks National Foundation is the key to providing funds to the Commission. It is through the generous donations to ENF from Elks members that we are able to provide so much for our veterans. For more information, please visit our website at Elks.org.

“So long as there are Veterans, the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks will never forget them” is a motto of which we can all be proud.

David R. Carr, B.P.O.E. Past National President
Secretary/Treasurer
Elks National Veterans Service Commission

THE ELKS’ ARMY OF HOPE

In February, 2003, the Elks National Veterans Service Commission announced a program of mobilizing an “Army of Hope” to assist the families of military reservists and the National Guard who have been called to active duty during this time of crisis.

The response from our members and non-Elks has been overwhelming. The news media has called some of our lodge and national leaders to obtain a local perspective on our program. Our elected government officials at the local, state and national levels have been greatly impressed, and responded favorable to our initiative. The “Army of Hope” has many facets, and any activity that supports our troops and their family falls under this vital program. Lodges have partnered with local and state organizations to adopt units and families to help them through these trying times.

VETERANS AFFAIRS VOLUNTARY SERVICE (VAVS)

Since its inception in 1930, the Department of Veterans Affairs has encouraged and sought citizen volunteer assistance in its Medical Centers and Domiciliaries.
By 1946, it became obvious that in order to function effectively and eliminate duplication, a viable organization was needed. Thus, the VAVS was established to provide members of veterans, service and fraternal organizations an opportunity to assume important roles in determining the quality of life for hospitalized veterans. The plan included an Advisory Committee comprised of National Representatives of participating organizations.

The Order is represented on this prestigious committee by the Director of the National Veterans Service Commission. Through its involvement with VAVS, the Elks provide effective use of its Lodges, members and State Associations in “Serving Our Nation’s Veterans.”

The VAVS is made up of 60 National Organizations and meets annually to conduct business, elect officers and hold workshops for the instruction of its members. Regional organizations also render meaningful support to several of these activities.
The organization first began in New York City as the “Jolly Corks,” a group of artists and thespians led by London-born comic, singer and dancer, Charles Vivian. The Jolly Corks originally congregated for their own amusement, but when one of the Jolly Corks died leaving his wife and children without income, they decided to dedicate the group to helping the needy.

On February 16, 1868, the Jolly Corks formed the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, lead by Mr. Vivian. As social activities and benefit performances increased, the popularity of the group swept across the country. Soon, groups from other cities were requesting permission to form their own Lodges.

The Elks then asked the New York State Legislature for a Charter that would allow the Grand Lodge to establish lodges anywhere in the United States. The Charter was granted and on March 10, 1871, and the founding group received the first local charter as New York Lodge No. 1.

During World War I, the Elks funded the first two field hospitals in France, and also built a 72-room community house in Camp Sherman, Ohio. They also built a 700-bed rehabilitation hospital in Boston and raised money for the Salvation Army’s frontline Canteens.

The Elks continued in World War II and was one of the only civilian organizations that helped recruit construction workers and contributed books to the Merchant Marines.

During the Korean conflict, the Elks donated more than 500,000 pints of blood to help wounded soldiers, and also donated money for a recreation pavilion at the Navy Hospital on Guam for casualties of the Vietnam War.

Even more recently, the Elks showed their dedication during Operation Desert Storm by writing letters to help build the morale of the soldiers. And still today, the Elks of New York continue the tradition and uphold the four cardinal virtues of the Lodge... Charity, Justice, Brotherly Love and Fidelity.

Times have changed since its institution all those years ago. In an era when technology rules and computers set the pace, the Elks spirit of dedication to the community remains constant. The organization is dedicated to service to the community; specifically handicapped children and veterans. It sponsors community activities such as food basket donations to the needy, scholarships for high school students and many other charitable functions.

Massena Lodge #1702 sponsored a Wounded Warrior turkey hunt that took place at the John & Resa Wing’s Veterans Retreat on Route 131 in Massena. This event was funded by the Beacon Grant, which paid for shirts, turkey game calls and a steak dinner after the hunt.

During the hunt, volunteers take a warrior and/or their family out to hunt turkeys. They assist the wounded warrior out into the woods, whether they are in a wheelchair, prosthetic limb — no matter what their disability is, the Massena lodge’s volunteers make the vet’s day in the field priceless. Pictured above in the top left row is committee Member Ed Ryder and in the bottom left row are trustees John Root and Jeff Root... with all the Wounded Warriors who took part in the turkey hunt and activities.

The Cobleskill Elks Lodge #2040 presented a check in the amount of $357 to Greg Furlong, President of Leatherstocking Honor Flight. The Leatherstocking Honor Flight is dedicated to providing transportation and escorts for our aging WWII veterans to the WWII War Memorial in Washington, D.C. Most of the veterans have not seen the memorial dedicated to them and without the help of Honor Flights around the country would not be able to.

Pictured left to right: Jay Heasler, Cobleskill #2040, PDDGER and Lodge Secretary; Jim Suschinski, Exalted Ruler, Cobleskill #2040 and Greg Furlong, President, Leatherstocking Honor Flight.
Lowville Elks Lodge #1605

Lowville Elks Lodge #1605’s annual Veteran’s Appreciation Luncheon was a great success with over 90 Lewis County veterans from World War II, Korea, Vietnam and more recent service attending. Following the luncheon, the World War II veterans assisted in raising new flags to replace weather-worn ones at the front of the parking lot of Lowville Lodge. These flags are the American flag, the POW/MIA flag, the New York State flag and the Lowville Elks #1605 flag.

MECHANVILLE-STILLWATER ELKS LODGE

Lodge helps WWII vet finally get his high school diploma

WWII veteran Stephen Dennis had never received his high school diploma. Stephen attended Mechanicville High School until March of his senior year, but had to leave school to work to help his family after the death of his older brother Andrew. Later, when the war broke out, he enlisted in the Navy and served most of the war in the Pacific theater. When the war ended, Stephen returned to Mechanicville, where he made an attempt to return to Mechanicville High School to finish what he thought would be only the remaining three months of his senior year.

He hoped to be able to receive his diploma. However, he was disappointed to learn that it was required to complete his entire senior year in order to do so. As this was not an option, he returned to his job and never achieved his goal of receiving his high school diploma.

During Mechanicville-Stillwater Elks Lodge’s 2014 Veterans breakfast, Stephen and his family were guests of honor seated with other with dignitaries, and with help from the Mechanicville Central School District Stephen received high school diploma. He was totally surprised and grateful!

Walk to the Heroes

Sponsored by the Mechanicville-Stillwater Elks Lodge, Walk to the Heroes was held on Saturday, Nov. 8, 2014. This event was not limited to just walkers. Everyone was welcome to to participate in this event, even those unable to walk, including bicyclists and motorcycles. The 5K Walk from the Saratoga Historical Battlefield to the Gerald B. H. Solomon Saratoga National Cemetery generated funds that were used to help support the Elks National Foundation Veteran’s Program and the Saratoga County Rural Preservation Veteran’s Programs.

Stars For Our Troops

For almost two years, the Lodge has hosted monthly “star parties” to assist Stars For Our Troops in cutting; pouching and distributing stars to our past, present and future veterans. Thousands of veterans have benefitted from receiving these stars, which let them know they are appreciated.

YORKTOWN LODGE #2324

During the summer, Yorktown Lodge #2324 treated veterans and staff from Montrose VA Hospital to a picnic and a ball game. These veterans experienced the war eras of Korea and Vietnam. They were assisted by six staff members and four Elk volunteers.

The vets in wheelchairs were assisted by Veteran Chairman Ted Izzo (shown standing in the foreground of the picture), ER Mike Adamovich, PSVP Rich De Silva, and State Trustee Mary De Silva.

The veterans were overjoyed, as they stated that they were never invited to a picnic before. It was made even more special when various members of the armed services came over to thank them for their service in the military and for our freedom.

MALONE ELKS LODGE # 1303

Malone Elks Lodge #1303’s first annual “Ride for Veteran’s” motorcycle rally raised $1,500 for the Disabled American Veterans of New York. Lodge activities the day of the event included a breakfast, pig roast and musical entertainment. The rally consisted of visits to Potsdam Elks Lodge #2074, Massena Elks Lodge #1702 and Ogdensburg Elks Lodge #772. Boy Scout Troop #61 played taps during a recognition ceremony, and the Blue Knights Chapter 13 law enforcement motorcycle group guided the bikers along the rally route.

Approximately 50 area Veterans participated in the event. Exalted Ruler Richard Walczak and Leading Knight Carol Robinson of the Malone Elks are pictured presenting a $1,500 check to Chester Wisnesky, Past Commander of the Department Of New York DAV and Jim Phillips, Commander of Chapter 182 of the DAV.
Boonville Lodge #2158 held a benefit for Patrick Greene, their Adopt-a-Vet. Mr. Greene is a member of the Special Forces - Green Beret and 18 Charlie Jumpmaster. Patrick had been diagnosed with kidney failure and needs a kidney transplant. The benefit raised $500 to aid in his medical needs. Pictured are Mr. Greene and Daniel Rundle, ER.

Staten Island Elks Lodge #841 celebrated Memorial Day by treating its veterans to a BBQ. Members made delicious homemade dishes as well as homemade desserts. SVP Richard Ryan and Leading Knight Gary Reider placed a memorial wreath at the base of the lodge’s flag. Before the festivities began, Past County Commander Mary Lamanna and Richmond County Commander Dennis McLoone performed the POW/MIA Ceremony remembering those still who are missing but will never be forgotten.

The New York East District Veterans Service Committee took 40 veterans from the Northport VA Hospital for a round trip ferry ride from Port Jefferson, NY to Bridgeport, Connecticut and back. The ride lasted about three-and-a-half hours and the Elks fed the veterans while on the ride. Participating were PER Jack Stein; SVP Gerald Kraus; PDDGER Robert Ryan; PER Nicholas Feliciano, District Veterans Service Chair; PER Norman Newkirk; PER Dennis Casey; Ted Farkas and Bill Bernhalter.

Esperance Elks Lodge #2507 helped dish out the food at the BBQ event at the Albany Stratton VA Medical Center in September of last year. In the photo, ready to serve are (from left to right) PDDGER George Manor’s wife Ellen, PER Dominic Giuliano’s wife Louise, Melanie Munger and PER Dominic Giuliano. Also in attendance, at the pits, was PDDGER George Manor, PER Charlie Schoeffler, Lecturing Knight Donny Schoeffler, Member Charlie Hurst and Volunteer John Turner. Photo by Exalted Ruler Bill Vazal, also in attendance. This was the Esperance Lodge’s 17th year of the BBQ. Those that could not make it outside had their meals delivered to them. Another demonstration of Elks helping out the nation’s veterans.

Potsdam Elks Lodge #2074 annual Veteran’s Day visit to the United Helpers Nursing Home in Canton was a great success. Thirteen Lodge members along with 25 Clarkson University ROTC Cadets and members of Cub Scout Troop # visited with Veterans and provided each veteran with a gift bag and decorative plaque. Veterans from the home met with Clarkson ROTC Cadets, Potsdam Lodge and Cub Scout members. Potsdam Lodge provided a complimentary lunch following the presentations.

Ogdensburg Lodge #772 presented a Medal of Valor to the family of Marine Corps Lance Cpl. Nicholas J. Sovie. Lance Cpl. Sovie was killed in a helicopter crash in 2006 while on a special training mission. This was the first Medal of Valor presentation by the Ogdensburg Lodge. Pictured (left to right) are Exalted Ruler Ted McDonald and North Central District Veterans Chairman Jerry Reed, Lance Cpl. Sovie’s parents Mary and Steve Sovie and their son Jesse Sovie.
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