

Installation Speech – Kevin Connolly

GER Hidley, PGER Carr, Members of the Advisory Committee, fellow Elks, friends and family: I accept with humility the honor which has just been conferred upon me. I accept it with a resolve to do all that I can for the welfare of the New York State Elks Association and of the great Order of which we are a part.

In performing the duties of my office, I need the help and the prayers of every one of you. I ask for your encouragement and for your support. The tasks that many of our Lodge's face are difficult. We can best accomplish them by working together.

Each period of our history has had its special challenges. Those that confront us now are as considerable as any in the past. Today marks the beginning not only of a new set of officers, but of a period that will be eventful, and perhaps decisive, for us. Today, as I stand before you, I make the promise that I'm here to support the Elks that do the work that make Elks great.

My motto for this year is – Elks...Feel the Energy! Let me share what it means.

When I joined the Elks, I received a bizarre admonition from a cynical member, who, in

retrospect, was probably feeling left out. I'll share that with you, "*the faults of our members we write in concrete, their virtues we dump in the sand*". What that statement did was alert me to the battle of attrition that we must all resist.

Since hearing that, I've always held the belief that when you belong to an organization like the Elks, it's important to check your ego at the door. Embrace compassion and, when it comes to matters of the Lodge, never put yourself ahead of the Lodge.

Yesterday, you heard my father recall the time when he installed a punching bag in the basement of our family home. That punching bag became a metaphor for the fighting spirit he installed in me from that day forward. What makes me tick is I'm a fighter, and I will fight for you with every breath in my body, and I will never, ever give up.

Tonight, we stand at the birth of a new era for Elks; for we have begun to grow this Order and this Association again. It's a time to let pride in our achievements stir our love for the Order of Elks. It's a time to remember that, as Americans, we all enjoy the same freedoms, and we all salute the same American Flag. And whether you were born in the south Bronx or the Southern Tier, in the Adirondack mountains or the shores of Long Island, in Brooklyn, Binghamton or Buffalo, as Elks, we hold dear the

Cardinal Principles of our Order – Charity, Justice, Brotherly Love and Fidelity!

Charity, Justice, Brotherly Love, Fidelity: these four respected words dictate what we ought to be, what we can be, what we will be. They bind us together as Elks. They are what we have, and they are all that we need! They encourage us to work together.

When we work together, we succeed. Inside this Association are many fine examples of working together. Service up to the highest level in our Order; Scholarships and activities for youth; service and assistance to Veterans; our amazing Major Projects Corporation and much, much more. Let's have a show of appreciation for all the volunteers that make the NYS Elks Association what it has become. I encourage every member here tonight to be involved in the success of their Lodge, the NYSEA and of the BPOE.

Every Lodge is unique and special – local lodges make things happen. Strong Lodges make a strong state association.

In the words of the Leading Knight, “...*the influence of a good deed, honestly and promptly performed, lasts forever...*” As we turn our thoughts to Membership and Lapsation, in other words - giving encouragement to each other to invite new members

and their families into the *'living rooms'* of our Lodges; and, as importantly, to encourage each other in the work of the Order and of the State Association. When we do these 2 things, we connect 2 of the most important things we do as Elks – Charity and good deeds. Invite them in – get them involved. By eliminating the disconnect we move ahead. Simple, but effective.

Growing up, you might imagine that I had a few challenges to overcome. You might also say that I came up through the College of Hard Knocks. As I matured, I grew to understand what it takes to endure and persevere.

For this reason alone, and others which I'll share in the future, I am deeply committed to our Major Projects – it's important because helping others is a tenant of the Elks. When you help others, you feel good about yourself. When you help others, it changes lives for the better – it gives purpose & meaning, a hand-up. You pay it forward; and the benefits multiply many times over. Let's keep this important work at the front and center of all that we do together! **ELKS FEEL THE ENERGY!**

I have always loved the Fellowship enjoyed by all Elks. I could share my sense of humor, self-deprecating, I can laugh at myself & I don't take myself too seriously These past 3 years the world has

changed – let's be enthusiastic about bringing the fun back; get back to doing what we're good at. Let's use the kind word – say thank you – before the harsh word. Always remembering that our actions speak louder than our words.

The BPOE and America itself were built not by people who relied on someone else to take care of them. They were built by American citizens who took charge of their own lives and had the courage to forge ahead with a sense of fairness. They did it with an unbeatable determination and enough boldness to take the necessary risks. Some would call this resourcefulness, individual enterprise, or backbone; whatever it may be called, that self-reliance is what characterizes Americans as Americans.

As we return to our Lodges and prepare for Flag Day, let's remember that it is our privilege to assert our American Patriotism and inspire it in others. Let it be visible in a way that encourages the next generation of leaders!

Thank you for the honor of serving you as President of the Association. May God bless the NYSEA and the Order of Elks; and may God bless the United States of America!