

Alexandria 758 Featured in Local Newspaper Article

Alexandria Lodge 758 and the Virginia Elks Association Youth Camp were featured in an article in the September 29 issue of the Mount Vernon Gazette.

NEWS

Local Elks Club Serves Its Community

Club organizes annual camp among other activities.

BY ORRIN KONHEIM
THE GAZETTE

When Washington Mill Elementary School parent Brad Myers received a notice three years ago from his son's elementary school that an organization would send the first 10 children who applied to summer camp for free, he was skeptical but couldn't pass up the opportunity.

"Like anything else, I researched it. Once it passed my tests, [I decided to enroll]," said Myers. "It's really been wonderful since."

Myers son Bobby, now 12, has now attended the Virginia Elks Association Youth Camp for three summers. This past summer, he was joined by 17 other campers from Hollin Meadows and Washington Mill Elementary Schools to go to overnight camp in Bath County, Virginia for a week. Their entire stay was sponsored by the local chapter of the Elks.

The Elks have been sponsoring summer camp experiences for the youth of Alexandria since 1949. Over the last decade Bob Higham and his wife Haddie have been organizing the program for the Elks.

"It's a lot of hard work," Haddie Higham said. "We have to organize the mailings, process the forms, check everything."

The Highams manage every aspect of the program including providing the kids with free transportation.

"They said don't bring a cell phone [and] don't bring any money and we'll take care of everything," said Myers.

The Highams advertise to local schools and ask candidates to apply for the program. Bob Higham has a yearly membership-based quota over how many campers he can send, but he said, "We've never had to turn anybody down yet."

The camp is coed and for ages 8 to 13 and youngsters are allowed to attend for more than one year.

"We really had a great group of kids this past year," said Haddie Higham. "Some of them are homesick but we talk to them about that and talk it through."

Bob Higham originally joined the Elks in 1992 when a hunting friend of his invited him to have a beer at the Lodge. Higham believes the Elks are just ordinary people who follow a natural instinct to help people. In Higham's case, the call to service was quite literal and immediate.

"I didn't know the guy from



The Virginia Elks Association Youth Camp operates an annual overnight camp in Bath County.

Adam, but he said 'I need help,'" said Higham about his encounter with a stranger on his first visit to the Elk Lodge. "And that's how most people come to do it, they're sitting there and someone says 'I need some help.'"

Jim Estep, a former Exalted Ruler — or chapter president — explains that the summer camp program is a small fraction of the community service undertaken by the Elks. Estep believes that there is no other fraternal organization that can match the Elks in terms of dedication to the community.

"If there's a need in our community we fill it," said Estep.

Other community service projects undertaken by the Elks include planting four garden beds and teaching children how to garden, running a soup kitchen every



The Elk lodge.

weekday at lunch for the homeless, and collecting clothes to give to hospitalized soldiers in Europe.

The Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks was founded in 1868 and has chapters all over the

country. Chapter 758, which serves Alexandria and Mount Vernon, was founded in 1902. The Lodge is located at 7120 Richmond Highway and members can be reached at 703-660-8734.