

GER Ron Hicks' Programs Message to All Elks



Ronald L. Hicks, Fredericksburg 875, was nominated, elected and sworn in as the first Grand Exalted Ruler from Virginia in over 60 years.

With **Elks Pride – Community Focus** being the theme for his year as our Grand Exalted Ruler, all Lodges are reminded that this “speaks to our responsibility to each other and our obligation to the communities we serve.”

Ron’s fabulous attainable goals for this year are noted in his Introduction and Message below:

INTRODUCTION and MESSAGE TO ALL MEMBERS

Ronald L. Hicks, Grand Exalted Ruler

(Grand Lodge Programs – 2015/16)

I thank you for this opportunity to share the enclosed information about our Order, my 2015-2016 Grand Exalted Ruler Program, and the Programs offered by the Grand Lodge, which will enhance your ability to better serve your Lodge and your Community. The very fact that you are taking the time to review this material shows that you are an interested and dedicated Elk, willing to seek new ideas and find better ways to facilitate, maintain and advance your Lodge and our great Fraternal Organization. As you read through this booklet, I'd like for you to consider two questions: What are the goals for your Lodge, its Members and your Community? What do you see as the challenges to accomplishing these goals, and how can you overcome the challenges? Not everyone will have the same goals or perceive the same challenges, but the information provided herein addresses many topics and will assist each of you in helping your Lodge become the best it can be.

Our Order had a modest beginning in 1868 as a small social club, known as the "Jolly Corks". The club was formed mainly to evade the laws of New York City governing the hours of operation for public taverns. It was not until after the death of a member, leaving his wife and children impoverished, that this club took on a more benevolent and protective role. Thus began a new meaning for the club, and the desire to adopt a more suitable name for its new purpose. The fifteen members of the Jolly Corks sought the name of an animal indigenous to America that was keen of its surroundings and quick to respond, sturdy and strong, yet gentle in nature. After much discussion, the club voted 8-7 in favor of the Elk, over the Buffalo, and the new name, The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks.

The Order of Elks has evolved into this Nation's oldest and largest fraternal organization. The influence of our Order has reached every State in our Union, and its impact is Spanning America, Bridging the Gap throughout the communities we serve. No other organization can or will put together the depth or quality of programs that we offer to our Members or the Communities we serve.

The Order of Elks that we know today was not achieved without significant change and growing pains, which have been followed more recently by years of constant shrinking pains. In 1980, the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks enjoyed a membership of 1,649,267. Since then, membership numbers have been in steady decline, and today, we stand at approximately 850,000 members, an almost 50% reduction in Membership. While every Lodge faces its own challenges, Membership is where I believe

we face our most serious challenge as a fraternal organization. We talk about it every year, but the question remains , “What should we be doing to retain our current Members and to attract new Members?” This brings me to my theme for the year “ELKS PRIDE — COMMUNITY FOCUS.”

“Elks Pride” represents our dignity, joy and self-respect. It is about creating a positive attitude in your Lodge, and it starts with You. You are the vital link in Elkdom. Find a reason to be positive, give it your best effort and believe you can make a difference. Be enthusiastic in all you do, learn to share your pride and energy, listen and take time for others, overlook faults, and don’t dwell on the negative. Be optimistic and get excited, let others see and feel your excitement, be quick to compliment and show appreciation, look for the best in others, expect success, be grateful and celebrate your successes.

Seek out the talents around you and other Members of like-mind. When communicating, be constructive and choose your words carefully. The words you use have the power to put spring into a Member’s step and give them confidence, or, just as easily, create ill-will and friction. Members are easily drawn to an enthusiastic leader, and your positive attitude will become infectious and cause others to follow your lead. You will begin to see the change in the Attitude and Pride of your Membership and you can leverage this change for the betterment of your Lodge.

You can help promote “Elks Pride” by identifying new ways to make your Lodge more comfortable, consistent and welcoming for all Members, their guests and families – a home away from home. Offer a variety of activities and events that will appeal to your Members, draw them to the Lodge and allow them to have fun and interact in a friendly environment that will foster a sense of togetherness and comradery.

Your Candidates for Membership deserve to receive an informative and inspiring orientation on your Lodge and our Order. You have already done something right to pique their interest and make them want to join the Lodge, and the Lodge Orientation is where you “seal the deal.” It will be your first, and best, opportunity to explain what it means to be an Elk, inform them of our wonderful Programs, let them know who we are and what we do, and the benefits and rewards of Membership. They may never be more attentive or receptive, so use this time wisely to make a good first impression and motivate them to be more than they may have imagined.

The value of a good Orientation is sometimes discounted, but it is essential that it not be taken for granted, treated lightly or thrown together at the last minute. Use it to put your best foot forward, show your Pride, and brag on your history and accomplishments. Be positive and let the Candidate know they are taking the first steps

on what could be a magnificent journey. Where it takes them and what they achieve will be entirely up to them, but the opportunities will be there for them. You should always avoid the negative and resist the urge to tell the Candidate that you “need” their help. Keep the Program light, but informative, hit the highlights and don’t get bogged down in details. A good Orientation Program should take approximately one hour.

We need to think about Orientation as “The First Step in Member Retention” and a “Process” that begins with the filing of the Application and does not end until the new Member actually gets involved in their first Lodge activity, program or event. To accomplish this, it is always a good idea to have a “sign-up sheet” at Orientation and/or a good follow-up plan. If you present a positive and informative Program, that inspires the Candidate, they will embrace the opportunity to get quickly involved and “jumpstart their career in Elkdom.” This “Orientation Process” will assimilate your new Member into the Lodge and put them on the road to becoming a true and faithful Member, less likely to fall by the wayside and be dropped from your Lodge within a few years.

Following a good Orientation, do not overlook the importance of the Initiatory Ritual to help create “Elks Pride” in your Lodge. It’s no accident that the Lodges that strive to perform impressive Rituals seem to be the most successful Lodges. Whether it’s the opening or closing of the Lodge, Initiation, or Special Events, the extra effort your Officers put into Ritual will bring them closer, unite them as a team, and capture the attention and appreciation of your Membership.

While there is no requirement to memorize the Ritual, if you do not memorize your part, it is important that you understand it and read it impressively. To conduct an impressive Ritual, don’t let good enough be good enough, even the best professional teams must continually work at their craft and practice before every game. The use of a “Degree Team” composed of Officers, Members and/or PERs with an interest in preserving Ritual can also be an effective way to initiate your new Members.

“Community Focus” is the service, compassion and commitment of your Lodge and the Order to our Communities, and it is greatly enhanced when driven and supported by Lodge Pride. Service to our Communities is a responsibility that we all share, and should be a priority for every Lodge. Our roots in the Community run deep. They are strong and getting stronger, as we seek to find new ways to unite with our neighbors in a shared purpose. The Grand Lodge has designed specific Programs and Grants that offer valuable resources to assist the Lodge in accomplishing that mission. Put these tools in your tool box and don’t leave the Grant money on the table.

While other organizations may focus on a single goal, the Order of Elks is dedicated to a total “Community Focus.” We are committed to our youth, patriotism, drug

awareness, Veterans, the disadvantaged and those with special needs. We believe in charity to all mankind, and contribute regularly to our schools, fire departments, police, hospice care, disaster relief, hospitals, and many other charitable, non-profit and civic causes. As we donate our time, talent and resources to our Communities, we are noticeably improving the lives and increasing the opportunities for those we serve. When you touch one life, you will never know how many lives are touched from you.

By strengthening our “Community Focus” and our presence in the Community, we have the opportunity to put a face on our Lodge, as we introduce our friends and neighbors to our good works and the Pride that comes with being an Elk. Unfortunately, sometimes our commitment may go unnoticed because we fail to acknowledge our good deeds and blow our own horn. It is time we stop moving quietly through our communities and hiding our light under a bushel. Our Order offers great appeal to those who are aware of our service and many accomplishments, so be Proud and be Loud. As our Communities begin to look to us more and more as a reliable partner, the next logical step is to use your “Community Focus” to help attract and bring new Members into your Lodge.

We cannot deny what is happening around us. Times and things have changed and continue to change, and we can no longer “be our Daddy’s Lodge.” While we must respect the past, our history and traditions, we must also look to the future. We must be able to recognize change and be flexible in adjusting to it. If you don’t like change, you could soon become irrelevant, and you will like that even less.

Much of our decline in Membership can simply be traced to the modern-day realities of life, the two-job parent, long commutes to work, single parent families and the increased competition for time from a variety of sources. And, while we must embrace the new technologies, we can be put in overload from the exposure to television, computers, e-mails, cell phones, texting, Twitter, and Facebook, making interaction on a personal level less important to the new Members we seek.

The combination of Elks Pride and Community Focus sends a powerful message to our Members and the Community. It will raise the reputation and status of your Lodge, bring recognition and praise for your good works, and return many benefits, including the attraction of new Members. I believe we can reclaim some of the new realities and readjust attitudes by embracing the theme “ELKS PRIDE — COMMUNITY FOCUS” in your Lodge.