

GER Ron and First Lady Nancy Hicks' Visit to Albuquerque for Grand Lodge Advisory Committee Conference

We were awake at 4:00 am on Wednesday, February 10, for our flight from New Orleans through Dallas-Fort Worth to Albuquerque, New Mexico and the February Advisory Conference with Past Grand Exalted Rulers. We were joined for the flight by PGER Millard Pickering and his wife Susanne, fellow Mardi Gras revelers and arrived at the Albuquerque Airport at 11:15 am. At the airport, Millard introduced us to our first experience with an Uber driver. Unfortunately, all of our luggage would not fit into the Uber vehicle, so we ended up taking a cab to the Sheraton Uptown Hotel (At over double the cost of Millard's ride).

After unpacking, Ron went to the afternoon meeting of the Insurance Sub-Committee. We bypassed the Hospitality Room before dinner in favor of some much-needed rest. Wednesday's dinner was at the hotel with PGERs and staff members from Chicago. After dinner, reports were given on those



Ron, Nancy, and PGER
Jim Varenhorst



Ron and ENF
Director, Jim
O'Kelly

who were not able to attend the Meeting, including our own Sponsor PGER Ted Hess who is awaiting heart surgery. Ron and I spoke briefly about the honor of representing our Order and the great hospitality and inspiration we receive from all our visits. ENF Director Jim O'Kelly was recognized for his twenty-five years of service. In recognition of his Director experience on many ENF videos, he was presented with his very own Director's Chair. Sheldon Staubitz was also recognized for his years of service in the Insurance Department and it was announced that he would be retiring on March 31.

Sub-Committee meetings continued on Thursday with Ron attending Budget and Investments, and Law in the morning, and ENF Trustees, Evaluation, and 150th Anniversary in the afternoon. For dinner we joined the Advisory Committee (PGERs and wives) at Marcello's in a nearby shopping center. After dinner we had the opportunity to visit with the Grand Trustees

and their wives in their Hospitality Room. It is always good to get back and spend time with the many friends we have made on the Trustees and other Grand Lodge Committees.

Advisory Committee held its first full meeting on Friday, receiving the many Sub-Committee reports and recommendations, voting on the myriad proposals, and discussing other topics concerning the Order. This was Ron's first chance to sit in on all of the Advisory Meetings with the PGERs and it was quite interesting to watch the Past Grands "making the sausage" and bringing it

together for the future of our Order. We did have free time every evening and Friday night the PGERs and GTs were invited to the Albuquerque Lodge for dinner.

At the Lodge we were met by State President Dan Gerth, and other State and Lodge Officers. Albuquerque is an all-volunteer Lodge with 250 Members and is very active in the community with its Dictionary Program, Drug Awareness, Veterans Service, Food Bank, and many other Elk Programs. During the Reception, we met many



Ron with New Mexico State President Dan Gerth, his wife Connie, and New Mexico State Sponsor PGER John Amen.

Lodge Members; however, noticeably missing were ER Tom Kizer and his wife, Lodge Secretary Shirley Kizer, who were in the kitchen cooking. Tom and Shirley eventually joined us in the dining room for a short while before all the State Officers and Lodge Officers helped serve the meal.

Saturday morning Ron met with the Board of Grand Trustees, then at 9:30, he, along with all other Conference attendees, attended a seminar presented by Rick Gathen on Public Relations and Membership. Rick, always enthusiastic and insightful, explained how our Order is so close to a Membership gain this year, the first gain in thirty years, and what must be done for that to happen. Also, what we need to do to "market" our Order and continue to grow and retain our Members. Rick had brought Ron a sweatshirt from his Lake Hopatcong NJ Lodge from its seventh Annual Polar Bear Plunge, "The Leap in the Lake," which was taking place over Valentine's Weekend in zero temperatures.



Ron with Albuquerque Lodge ER Tom Kizer and his wife Shirley



Ron and Nancy having lunch at "The Plaza Cafe" on the square in Santa Fe.



Jane Helsel, Sandy Rumney, Donna Zellen and Nancy in front of a carving in a tree in front of the San Felipe De Neri church in Old Town Albuquerque.

Saturday afternoon we were free and rode with Millard and Susanne to Santa Fe, the Capital of New Mexico, about an hour from Albuquerque. We arrived a little after 2:00 and parked near The Plaza, the historic area of the City, a very artsy/craftsy area. We had lunch at the Plaza Café (Mexican), shopped with the many street vendors, and listened to the musicians performing on the Plaza. We also toured the La Fonda Hotel and visited the Loretta Chapel, built in 1873, home to the "Miraculous



Ron and Nancy with PGER Millard Pickering and his wife Susanne in front of the "Miraculous Stairway" in the Loretta Chapel in Santa Fe.

Stairway." We then rode out to the Santa Fe Lodge before heading back to the hotel for the closing Conference dinner. At the dinner, GER-Elect Mike Zellen and his wife Donna spoke about his program for next year and how they were looking forward to the coming year.

the dinner, GER-Elect



Ron and Nancy with Endorsed Candidate Mike Zellen and his wife Donna.

The weather in Albuquerque was unusually warm for this time of year, however, the drier air and higher altitude did cause a few issues for the attendees. Sunday morning we were up at 5:00 am for our 8:00 flight to Dallas-Fort Worth and on to DC Reagan. When we arrived in Washington, we were met by our Transportation Chairman, Steve Ravinsky, who presented Nancy with a basket of fruit and chocolates for Valentine's. Next up, Georgia.