

## GER Ron and First Lady Nancy Hicks' Visit to Houston Convention

We left home at 8:30 am on Tuesday, June 28, riding with my Administrative Aide Ray Dameron and his wife Elizabeth to DC Reagan Airport for our last trip as Grand Exalted Ruler and First Lady to Houston, Texas, and the 152<sup>nd</sup> Grand Lodge Convention. Our direct flight to Houston was scheduled for two hours forty-five minutes, but took nine and one-half hours because of heavy storms around Houston. We circled the George Bush Intercontinental



Ron with his Administrative Aide Ray Dameron

Airport for an hour before being diverted to Austin, where we sat on the tarmac for three hours through a thunder storm and heavy rain. Planes were diverted from Houston to Austin, Dallas, Shreveport, and New Orleans, with nineteen going to Austin. Finally, a gate opened and we were allowed to go into the Austin Terminal. Since no one knew exactly what was going on, a number of passengers decided to leave the plane and seek other arrangements to reach their destinations. However, a little over five hours after touching down in Austin, we were headed back down the runway for Houston, where we could still see lightning in the distance as we landed at Bush Airport. It was about a thirty minute ride to the Hilton Hotel, where we were greeted by PGERs Roger True, Millard Pickering, and Dwayne Rumney and his wife Sandy, and Committee on Judiciary Member Dave Bailey. It was a long day.

Wednesday and Thursday Ron attended Sub-Committee meetings, including Budget and Investments, Programs, Evaluations, Insurance, Conventions, Publications, Veterans Memorial Restoration Trust, Laws, and ENF Trustees. Wednesday night we attended the Welcoming Grand Lodge Dinner and Thursday night we attended a dinner hosted by Mike Balzer, the Elks representative with AON Insurance. Friday was the Grand Lodge Advisory Board Meeting, where all Sub-Committee recommendations were brought



Ron and Past Grands after Advisory Meeting

forward and Reports were presented by the Grand Secretary, the Grand Trustees, and Judiciary. Ron and incoming Grand, Mike Zellen, also provided Reports and discussed their programs. I hosted a Luncheon for the wives of the Advisory Committee at the hotel. Friday night we were invited to dinner by the New Jersey Convention Committee at the hotel, where Ron thanked those present for the State's membership gain and many great programs, and talked about our family connections with New Jersey. We then stopped by the Massachusetts Hospitality Room to visit with Mike and Donna Zellen on the way back to our room.



Ron and incoming Grand Lodge Chaplain, Father Steve McNally from Bedford, Virginia Lodge 2844

Saturday morning Ron went to the Convention Center for the final review of the Convention Sessions. At 2:00 pm we went to the Virginia Hospitality Room for a special event in our honor and to welcome our friends from Virginia to the Grand Lodge Convention. While there, Ron installed State President Bobby Fender, who was unable to attend the Virginia Elks Convention in June due to the death of his Mother. At 4:00 pm we attended the Massachusetts Elks Reception in honor of incoming Grand Mike Zellen and his wife Donna. Then, we rushed to the Judiciary Committee Reception at the III Forks Restaurant before attending a fun evening at the ENF Major



Virginia State President Bobby Fender carrying the Virginia State Flag during the Opening Ceremonies



Ron joins in the fun at the ENF Dinner trying to blow an Alp Horn



Virginia Elks Lynn Rutherford Snow and Bev Hamby yodeling at the ENF Dinner. Lynn also won the GER Wine Raffle.

Donor Dinner held at the Saint Arnold Brewery, with a German Band, polka music, and lots of entertainment. After dinner, Susan Good, Fresno, California Lodge 439, was



Community Investment Program (CIP) Volunteer of the Year, Susan Good, from Fresno Lodge 439. L to R. Larry Torres, Jack Geiger, Dave Wilson, Susan Good, Ron, Daryl Sensano, and Bob Ostini

presented the Award for Community Investments Program Volunteer of the Year. Ron helped raise over \$55,000 for ENF this year through the signing of Membership Cards and his GER Wine Raffles, and 1,653 Lodges achieved his Per Capita Goal,

the highest percentage to ever make the GER Goal and the first time donations to ENF exceeded \$8.00 per Member.

Sunday morning Ron attended a practice for the Opening Grand Lodge Ceremonies and sat for an interview with Brooke Lewis, a reporter for the Houston Chronicle. Ron encouraged the reporter to stay for the Opening, which featured our Elks National Foundation and introductions and comments from our Hoop Shoot winners and from the two top Most Valuable Student Scholarship recipients, Jay Little

(Mississippi) and Nayda Okamoto (Oregon). Sunday's Convention News contained a full page article, with three photos, about Virginia Beach, Virginia, Lodge 2268 being the First Place Winner in Division I of the All-American Lodge Contest, and, on Monday, a very positive article about the Elks and the impressive Opening Ceremonies was published in the Houston Chronicle.



Ron with Karyn Swenor, Exalted Ruler of All American Lodge Virginia Beach 2268, Virginia Beach, Virginia

The Opening also included an impressive presentation of the Colors and State Flags, beautiful Patriotic Music, preceded by a video of many wonderful photos of our travels, shown on the



Ron with the Getty Powell Hoop Shoot Winners



Ron and Nancy with Most Valuable Student Scholarship recipients, Jay Little from Mississippi and Nayda Okamoto from Oregon



Ron and Nancy being introduced at the Opening Ceremonies on Sunday

big screens with Willie Nelson's "On The Road Again" playing



Nancy speaking at the Opening Ceremonies on Sunday

in the background. I spoke briefly and thanked everyone for their part in our incredible journey across this great nation this year. Ron gave his farewell address at the Sunday Opening, speaking about our travels, how we took pride in the accomplishments of all Elks, reviewed many of the State Major Projects and Elk achievements, and explained why he was so optimistic about our future. He ended his comments by stating "We are ordinary people, proud Americans, quick to recognize



Ron and Chief Justice of the Grand Forum Priscilla Schwab

God and Country, joining together to do extraordinary things," and, as he had done all year, encouraging everyone to be "Loud and Proud, Let our Bright Lights shine, Pay it Forward and Be Salesmen for the Success of our Lodges and this great Order." Sunday night we visited the DC, Delaware, Maryland Reception at the Hilton, the Oklahoma Reception at the Hyatt Regency, and attended the Indiana/Michigan Elks Dinner at The White Hall Hotel.

Monday morning started early as we attended the Nebraska Elks Breakfast at 6:30 am at the Hyatt Regency Hotel. The First Business Session started at 8:00, with preliminary reports, awards, the Legislative Session to discuss proposed Resolutions, and the election of the Grand Lodge Officers for 2016-2017. Mike Zellen, from the Saugus-Everett, Massachusetts Lodge, who served with Ron on the Board of Grand Trustees, was elected Grand Exalted Ruler. He was nominated by his daughter, Jennifer, his brother Tom, and Judiciary Member Frank Oliveri. Mike spoke about growing up in the Lodge with his father as ER, and how he feels a personal debt to the Elks after receiving an Emergency Grant from ENF, following his father's death, that allowed him to complete college. Mike's theme for the year is "Elks –



Ron took this photo from the podium of GER Elect Michael Zellen and his Escorts after his election on Monday

Leading the Way.” Monday afternoon we had time to visit the Virginia Hospitality Room briefly before preparing to head out for the evening to the Zellen’s Grand Exalted Ruler's Grand Reception and the Pennsylvania/West Virginia Elks Dinner.

The Second Business Session was on Tuesday with a number of final reports and Awards, voting on the proposed Constitutional and Statutory Amendments, and the Ritual results. First Place All-American Lodges were: Virginia Beach, Virginia; Lake Hopatcong, New Jersey; Columbia, Missouri; Apache Junction, Arizona; Sun City, Arizona; and Orange, California. First Place winners in the ENF Per Capita were: Seneca/Foothills, South Carolina; Walnut Creek, California; Harlingen, Texas; Fullerton, California; Pompano Beach, Florida; and Bristol County, Rhode Island. The Ritual Teams in the final four competition were: Lincoln, Nebraska 80 (Looking for a three-peat), Phoenix Arizona 335, Kenton Ohio 157 and Bridgeport Pennsylvania 714, with the Bridgeport Lodge coming out on top as National Ritual Champions for 2016.



Ron and Nancy with Top ENF Donors Exalted Ruler Patricia Heller-Jackson and her husband Jack of Daytona Beach Lodge 1141

I hosted the First Lady’s Luncheon at the Hilton Tuesday afternoon. PGER Mike Smith welcomed all of the ladies on behalf of the Grand Lodge Committee. After lunch I shared a few comments from some of our travels this year and told the story of my pin. The pineapple is for friendship and hospitality, the Dogwood is the state flower of Virginia, and the Apple Blossom is the state flower of Michigan. This is in remembrance of our good friends Eric and Barb Mulholland who were to be the Grand and First Lady this year. Ric was diagnosed with cancer and withdrew last February and died this past October. Please keep Barb and her family in your prayers. I told about some of the Major Projects we visited and the children, Veterans and



Maureen Piccolo, Donna Zellen, Nancy, and Elizabeth Dameron after the Ladies Luncheon



Sandra Smith, Lucia Grillo, Claudia Bates and Sue Klatt resting and trying to stay cool in the shade during our NASA Tour

adults these programs benefit. I also thanked everyone for their friendship and warm, friendly hospitality during our visits. What an unbelievable year of amazing memories. Donna Zellen spoke. She and Mike are looking forward to visiting all of the states and meeting everyone.

Tuesday evening was busy with Reception visits to the Grand Trustees in the Hilton, Wisconsin in the Embassy Suites Hotel, Pacific Southwest at the Hyatt Regency, Rhode Island also in the Hyatt Regency, and Florida Elks in the Four Seasons Hotel before attending the Exalted Rulers Ball.

At the ER Ball, Ron and Mike spoke briefly, with Ron thanking everyone for helping to make 2015-2016 a very successful year and wishing the ERs another very successful 2016-2017. Ron also held one last GER Wine Raffle during the

Grand Lodge Convention with ticket sales handled by Virginia PSP Bev Hamby and Virginia Vice President Frank Burns and his wife Sandy. The Raffle raised \$650 for the Virginia Elks Association Charitable Trust Fund and \$714 for ENF, with the

winner being Virginia District Deputy and State Chaplain Lynn Rutherford-Snow. Although we had attended five Receptions and the ER Ball that evening, we had not eaten, so after the Ball, we returned to the room, changed clothes and went for a quiet dinner at a hotel restaurant about 10:00 pm. Our year in the spotlight now completed, it was nice to relax, exhale, and just enjoy each other's company for a few minutes. And, no speeches after dinner!



Ron with the two "newbies" for the Board of Grand Trustees, Warren Johnson and Keith Mills, in "Special" dress for the Grand Trustees dinner



Another successful GER Wine Raffle led by Bev Hamby and Sandy Burns



Ron enjoying a visit to the Exhibit Hall



Ron and Mike celebrating Mike's being sworn in as Grand Exalted Ruler

Wednesday was the Closing Session with the Grand Lodge Memorial Service, Installation of Officers for 2016-2017, and presentations to incoming and outgoing Officers, and as part of the concluding ceremonies, Ron



Nancy pinning Ron's PGER Badge on his coat

was presented with the keys to a new SUV from the Elks

of Virginia. After the Closing we attended the Grand Exalted Ruler Luncheon, hosted by the Massachusetts Elks and honoring Mike and Donna. Wednesday night dinner was with the Grand Lodge Convention Committee, Texas volunteers, and staff



Ron at the podium one last time as Grand Exalted Ruler in Houston at Grand Lodge Convention

Thursday morning we joined Ray and Elizabeth for breakfast, finished packing and then left for the airport and our 12:30 pm flight to Washington, DC. This flight

went without a hitch and we arrived in DC just in time for the rush-hour traffic, but with Ray driving, we enjoyed our last ride down I-95 to Fredericksburg. Then, just like when we returned from our trip to Indianapolis Grand Lodge Convention last year, the four of us stopped at Kentucky Fried Chicken for our Welcome Home Meal!



Arriving at Reagan National Airport in Washington, DC from our return trip from Houston. Ron, Nancy, Elizabeth and Ray Dameron

Soon we will take the time to sit, reflect and plan, but for now, we'll just enjoy being home with family and friends. Thank you Elks for a great year!!!

Submitted by Ron and Nancy Hicks

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