

## GER Ron and First Lady Nancy Hicks' Visit to New Mexico

After the week off for Easter and participation in a few Fredericksburg Lodge events, including a Lodge Dinner, Children's Easter Party and Sunrise Service, we left DC Reagan early Thursday morning, March 31, for our visit to the New Mexico Elks Association Convention. We traveled through Dallas-Fort Worth and arrived at the Albuquerque Airport about 2:00 pm, where we were greeted by State President Dan Gerth and his wife Connie, SDGER Rick Callaway and his wife Tracey, Board of Grand Trustees Member Larry Tomberlin and his wife Ellen, Grand Lodge Government Relations Committeeman Bob Guillen and his wife Fabiola, and several others. After a short ride to the Isleta Resort and Casino, the Convention Site, we met President-Elect Larry Curtis and his wife Joyce and a host of other New Mexico Elks and guests. PGER and State Sponsor John Amen and Marcia were not able to arrive at the



Ron and Nancy with out-going State President Dan Gerth and his wife Connie



Ron and Nancy with in-coming State President Larry Curtis and his wife Joyce



State Sponsor John Amen and Marcia with Ron and Nancy

Convention until mid-morning on Friday.

Immediately after arrival, Ron was interviewed by Rick Nathanson, staff writer for the Albuquerque Journal, the largest newspaper in New Mexico. Ron had an opportunity to talk about our travels and how the Elks are "Spanning America and bridging the gaps in the Communities we serve." He also praised the New Mexico Lodges for their support of Grand Lodge Programs and meeting the needs of their communities, especially with their Veterans and Scholarship Programs and work with Cerebral Palsy, the State Major Project. A very positive article about the Elks appeared in the Saturday morning edition of the newspaper on April 2.

Thursday night we attended an informal Grand Exalted Ruler Reception and then had dinner at the Hotel with State and Grand Lodge Officials, Past State Presidents and guests, including Colorado State President Richard Stolte and his wife Sandy, Texas President-Elect Donnie Cagle and his wife Brenda, and Grand Lodge Area six Ritual

Committeeman Allen Lennart and his wife Kim from Colorado. With New Mexico being two hours behind Virginia, and it being a long travel day, we retired to our room after dinner.

The ladies met Friday morning for a "Bloody Mary Bar" before the Spring Luncheon hosted by Connie Gerth, First Lady of New Mexico. After the luncheon several awards were given and Connie explained the meaning of her beautiful pin and shared memories of the travels she and Dan had made throughout New Mexico. Marcia Amen thanked the ladies for being so gracious to her and John. This is the first Convention they have attended since John became the State Sponsor. Nancy gave the story about her pin, talked a little about some of the experiences and travels from this year, and thanked the ladies for their wonderful hospitality in beautiful New Mexico.

The Past State Presidents Breakfast was Friday morning, where Ron urged the PSPs to use their talents and experience to "stay in the game" and help lead their Lodges to a successful year. The breakfast raised \$410 for the ENF and another \$366 for the New Mexico Charitable and Benevolent Trust. At the Friday Business Meeting, after introductions and remarks by Ron, and Reports from the four District Deputies, Grand Lodge Membership and Public Relations Director Rick Gathen, presented a workshop on Membership, urging the Lodges to have an active Membership Committee, accept dues on-line, use his Fifty Tips for Membership, and other information provided on the Grand Lodge Website, and to "Market their Product." He also advised that while final numbers are not in for the year, our Order will take in over 74,000 new and re-instated Members this year, the most in thirty-five years, and that the number of Members dropped for non-payment will be the lowest ever!



Dan Berth, Elk of the Year Barbara Venturi, and Ron

After Rick's presentation, there were a number of State Committee Reports. It looks like New Mexico will have a Membership gain this year and that all but one of the Lodges will achieve the GER's Per Capita Goal for donations to ENF. New Mexico finished tenth in the Hides Program for Veterans, the New Lodge Development and Drug Awareness Committees are active, and New Mexico had five Most Valuable Scholarship winners and two recipients of Emergency Educational Grants. New Mexico has a State Per Capita Goal for donations to its Veteran's Programs and this year the Artesia Lodge had the highest per capita of \$38.94 per Member. With its history of National Ritual Contest Winners, New Mexico had four Lodges compete in the Ritual Contest on Friday morning, while the Ritual Toast Contests were held in the afternoon. Friday night we attended a dinner with the PSPs and their wives.

The Exalted Ruler/Past Exalted Ruler Breakfast was Saturday morning, followed by the Saturday Business Meeting. Albuquerque Mayor Richard J. Berry welcomed the Association and thanked the Elks for all they do in his City and throughout the State. It was reported that the value of the New Mexico Elks Association services to the State in 2015-16 was \$2.4 Million, the State Investments were able to hold their own in the down market, the New Mexico Bowling Tournament raised \$3,300 for Elks National Foundation, three Members received Presidential Service Awards and Pins, and Barbara Venturi was named Elk of the Year. Four Members were recognized for their cumulative giving to ENF: Billy Johnson, Bill Mann and Frank Love (Silver Level) and Don Hamilton (Bronze Level). The Artesia Lodge had the highest ENF Per Capita at \$27.40 and also the highest per capita to the State's Charitable and Benevolent Trust at \$33.97. Three Lodges, Lordsburg, El Paso and Los Alamos, each received three ENF Grants last year. The Tucumcari Lodge won the Robert E. Boney Award for Community Service.

The Report on the State Major Project, Cerebral Palsy, included the appearance of eleven year old Manny Turner, who, at eighteen months old, sustained severe brain damage from abusive shaking. While he was not expected to survive, with the love and assistance of his sister and grandparents and good medical care and support from the Elks, he is making significant progress. The New Mexico Elks, among other things, have provided the family with a wheelchair, van, and most recently, a tricycle for Manny to ride (with help). His grandmother, Theresa Mesa, thanked the Elks for their unbelievable support for Manny and the family.



Ron talking with twelve year old Manny Turner and his Grandparents

Special Deputy GER Rick Callaway spoke about the Lindsay Callaway Memorial Toy Drive, which he and Tracy started in memory of their daughter, Lindsey, who died from brain cancer at the age of sixteen. Rick spoke about how difficult it was to accept their daughter's death, but that with the love and support of their family, friends, and the Elks, they were able to find their way through the worst of the times. The Toy Drive was started in 2001 with the delivery of a few toys by Rick and Tracy to the Covenant Children's Hospital in Lubbock, Texas, where Lindsey was treated for her disease. Now, the Elks of Colorado and Texas have joined with the New Mexico Elks, and the toys are delivered in a large trailer arriving at the Hospital with a motorcycle escort and Santa Claus. Santa (ENF Chairman Jeff



Special Deputy GER Rick Callaway and Tracy with Ron and Nancy

Gordon) and his helpers then distribute the toys throughout the Center. The toys have been delivered to thousands of children through the years, some of whom are now helping in the Drive. Lindsey's sister, Jessie, was inspired to become a nurse and now works at the same Hospital. In addition to the toys, the Drive and the Elks also raise money in support of the Hospital and in 2015 presented a check to the Covenant Foundation in the amount of \$25,000.

Before closing the meeting, the Officers for 2016-17 were installed as follows: President - Larry Curtis; Kandy Barks - President-Elect; Keith Barker – Vice-President; and Jason Crockett – Secretary. In the afternoon, Ron attended a meeting with PGER Amen, SDGER Callaway, then State and GL Officials and wives visited the Hospitality Rooms. Also attending the Convention were Kristy Marney, Supreme President of the B.P.O.Does, from Artesia Drove #45, and Bobby Meyers, wife of PSP and District Leader Greely Meyers, and daughter of Past GER Robert E. Boney (1967-68) from Las Cruces Lodge #1119. The ladies joined the Business Session after meeting for coffee and danish.

At the Banquet Saturday night, Ron spoke about getting the new Lodge Year off to a good start, encouraging the Lodge Leaders to be enthusiastic and have a positive attitude, saying “You have to have positive thoughts, if you want to achieve positive results.” He also congratulated New Mexico on their Membership Gain, encouraged the Lodges to take advantage of the ENF Grants and to use Ritual to bring their Officers together as a real “team” for the Lodge.

The Ritual Winners were announced at the Banquet. The Carlsbad Lodge won Division I and will be representing New Mexico at the GL Convention, and the Rio Rancho Lodge won Division II. The Toast Contest winners were: Eleven O’Clock Toast – Aaron Balou (Carlsbad); Jolly Cork Toast – Linda Rogers (Rio Rancho); and the Flag Tribute – Tracy Dearing (Carlsbad). The GER Wine Raffle raised \$1,145 for ENF and was won by Linda Jones of the Carlsbad Lodge.



Winning Ritual Team from the Carlsbad Lodge

Sunday morning, we rode with PSP Dan and Connie Gerth back to the Albuquerque Airport, while John and Marcia Amen rode to the airport with Rick and Tracy Callaway. Arriving early, and with nearly identical departure times, we had time to share breakfast with John and Marcia before leaving. We arrived home about 10:30 pm Sunday night.