

GER Ron and First Lady Nancy Hicks' Visit to Utah

We left Little Rock, Arkansas, at 2:00 pm on Sunday, February 28, for St. George, Utah, by way of Dallas-Fort Worth and Las Vegas. We arrived at the extremely busy McCarran Airport in Las Vegas a little after 6:00 pm and PGER and Utah State Sponsor Tom Brazier arrived a few minutes later. We rented a car, which took forever, and started on our two-hour-plus drive to St. George, Utah, where the Utah Elks were holding their State Convention, arriving about 10:00 pm.

We traveled to St. George a few days early at the invitation of SDGER Dick and Geri Lyons, long-time Elk friends, who had visited us previously in the East and had arranged a timeshare in St. George. The visit had been planned for almost a year, but unfortunately Dick died unexpectedly on December 31, just after we finalized our travel plans. Geri insisted that we still come and Tom and his wife Venita, who had arrived earlier that afternoon, joined us for two days of touring and relaxation before the start of the Convention.



Tom and Venita Brazier, Ron and Nancy, and Dave and Joann Aldridge



Ron and Nancy with our Utah Escorts, Jared and Steffanee Wanlas



Venita Brazier, Geri Lyons, Ron, and Tom Brazier in front of the Tuacahn Facility

Monday morning we had a late breakfast at "The Egg and I" before visiting the Tuacahn High School for the Performing Arts and the adjacent Tuacahn Amphitheater. The popular charter school with 400 students, selected by lottery, teaches all aspects of the theater and the students have the opportunity to perform at the adjacent theater with professional groups. We also visited Kayenta, a trendy arts and crafts center with numerous shops and offerings of the Southwest. Monday afternoon,

Geri, Venita, and I went shopping, while Ron and Tom went to Rowdy's Range to fire Tom's Glock 26 pistol. Tom is very experienced with all types of firearms, but Ron, while a life-long hunter, had never been to a shooting range. After some good instruction from

Tom, Ron and Tom enjoyed about an hour of shooting. Monday night the five of us went to a nearby rib and steak restaurant for dinner.

Tuesday morning we ate at the condo, then were off to Zion National Park for some of the most breathtaking scenery on earth. The Mormons were the first to settle in this area and gave it the name "Zion," a Bible reference to a place of quiet sanctuary. In



Photo from Zion National Park 1



Photo from Zion National Park 2



Photo from Zion National Park 3

1909, President Taft named the area a National Sanctuary and in 1919, its 15,000 acres became our eighteenth National Park. With over 5,000 cars per day during the summer months and only 495 parking places, the Park instituted a bus



Cactus in the Utah desert

shuttle system in 1994 to move visitors through the Park. However, this time of year, we were allowed to drive along the thirteen miles of roadway, which includes a one-mile tunnel opened in 1930 after three difficult years of digging. Tuesday night we met with State President Dave Aldridge and his wife, PSP and SDGER JoAnn, for dinner in a nearby Italian restaurant.



Ron "helping" cook steaks at the Dixie Lodge for Steak Night

We had another lazy morning on Wednesday before leaving for the Convention site a few miles away. Arriving at the Ramada Hotel around 3:30 pm, we were met by President Dave and JoAnn, PSP and GL Ritual Committeeman Peter Bravo and his wife Regina, President-Elect Bob Pagnani and his wife Adel, St. George Dixie Lodge ER Dan O'Mara, and a number of other State Officials. After unpacking, we left for Steak Night at the St. George Dixie Lodge, which was host to all of the Convention activities, for a reception and dinner. The "Dixie" Lodge is located

on a hill, above a golf course, with a beautiful view of the surrounding mountains. The steaks were grilled on the back patio and there were over 230 people there for the regular Wednesday dinner. The Dixie Lodge also has regular Friday night dinners and all meals are prepared by volunteers. The Lodge is very active in the Community, and in the lobby there is a continuous-running video of Lodge volunteers having fun and participating in various activities at the Lodge and throughout the community.

The Dixie Lodge has 1,020 Members and has received all ENF Grants, including an ENF Impact Grant the last two years. In addition to their many typical programs, the Lodge provides support for the Mill Creek Alternative High School for disadvantaged and challenged children with family, drug, or other problems; support for the City's Smart Start Program, teaching sports fundamentals to youngsters 3 to 5 years old with the active involvement of their parents; and support for the nearby Veterans Home.

Thursday began with two early interviews at the St. George News and KCSG-TV, where Ron had the opportunity to answer questions about the Elks and talk about the programs of the Utah Elks. The ladies then joined the guys for a visit to Mill Creek Alternative School. The



Day Care inside the Mill Creek Alternative School in St. George

School has about 200 students with challenges that prevent them from functioning well in a traditional setting because of family or behavioral issues. Many of the students live in foster homes, while others are classified as homeless, have a child, or even have to parent their parents or support younger siblings. The goal of the school is to meet their basic needs and help them gain confidence and self-esteem, so they can achieve a high school degree and become a productive member of society.

The St. George Dixie Lodge, with help from the Impact Grant, is very active in support of the school, especially with its Food Pantry Program and providing other essentials that help make the students' lives more manageable. The difficulty in obtaining food is a major reason why these children drop out of school, so the Pantry relieves them of that concern. There is also a nursery with eight babies served by volunteer workers that care for babies while their mothers attend classes. It seems to be working because since the introduction of the Pantry and Nursery, graduation rates at the school have doubled, with a 100% graduation rate from the Nursery. Mill Creek expects to graduate seventy-six students this year, many of whom would have had little opportunity without the alternative program.

Lunch was at the cafe at Kayenta, the arts center that we had visited earlier in the week. We then visited the Southern Utah Veterans Home and were given a tour of the facility by Admissions Director Bre Sutherland. Veterans Service Chairman Bob Pagani and several other Elks joined us on the tour. The Home, which is managed by Avalon Health



Geri Lyons presenting 95 year old Mel Brewer one of the many blankets she has made for many veterans

"Love One Another." Ron presented an Elks Veterans Pin, his GER Pin and a star from a retired flag to each of the Veterans we met, and Geri Lyons presented each of them with a lap blanket or shawl. Geri has crocheted these items for Veterans for many years.

A reception was held at the hotel before Thursday dinner at the Lodge. The Business Sessions began on Friday with a number of good Committee reports in the morning and meetings and breakout sessions in the afternoon. Ron attended meetings with the State Advisory, Trustees, Camp Wapiti Board, and the Utah Benevolent Elks Trust Board. Camp Wapiti, started in 1990, and situated on eleven acres near Salt Lake, is the State Major Project and welcomes other state organizations to help provide over 800 medically challenged children per year with a great camping experience, while receiving information on how to control and manage their diseases. Each Lodge has built a cabin at the Camp and the Ladies of the Elks have provided over \$300,000 in support of the Camp since its inception. Friday afternoon, Joann Aldridge, wife of the State President, hosted a luncheon at the Dixie Lodge. Nancy, wives of the State Officers, wives of Grand Lodge Officers, and a few other ladies were in attendance. Joann thanked the ladies for the support they had given her during this past year during David's presidency. Her decorations centered around the "beehive", which is the Utah State emblem.

Care, is only a few years old and is one of four Veterans Homes in Utah. We had the opportunity to meet and thank several residents, including Dick Olsen, a Marine and Purple Heart recipient; ninety-five year old Mel Brewer, an Army Veteran who serves on the residents board; Gil Mullen, an Army Veteran and Bronze Star recipient, suffering from Agent Orange who flew on twenty-six combat assault missions in Vietnam, and who at 6'6" played basketball at Utah State and was a former Elks Scholar; and 95 year old Delores Foster, a former Navy nurse who we found playing a piano in the recreation room, and who led us in the singing of



Ron giving his pin to a veteran at the Southern Utah Veteran's Home

Early Friday evening Ron attended the St. George City Council Meeting with several members of the Dixie Lodge who presented an \$8,000 check to the City to assist in the building of an "All Abilities Park" for physically challenged children. Mayor Jon Pike received the donation and thanked the Elks for their continued support of the Community. Dinner Friday night was back at the Lodge, and afterwards the Members of the "Dixie" Lodge entertained everyone with a fun and enjoyable old-west musical variety show. The Business Session continued on Saturday morning with final reports and the Ritual Contest. All Utah Lodges participate in the Contest in either the short-form or original Ritual, which they are allowed to read. This was the first time that Ron had seen the short form presented and said it was great to see all Lodges "making the effort" to retain this part of our history and tradition, and to see so many young officers participate. Ron also met with Tom and the current and incoming DDs, who were announced at the meeting.



Dixie Lodge donating money to the City of St. George towards funding an All Abilities Park

The Utah Ladies of the Elks held a luncheon meeting at the Dixie Lodge Saturday. The meeting was led by the State President, Ada Nelson. They discussed their contributions to the State Major Project, Camp Wapiti, and other business. The ladies held a raffle and gave a number of door prizes. Nancy spoke to the ladies about some of the adventures and travels she and Ron have taken this year.



ENF Chairman Judy Gutherier raised money from the GER Wine Raffle

Saturday night it was back to the Lodge for the closing Banquet. Ritual Awards were presented and the GER Wine Raffle was won by Tracey Connors from Provo Lodge 849. Judy Gutherier, ENF Chair, was in charge of the Raffle which raised \$1,040 for ENF in the winner's name. Gary Nelsen of the Dixie Lodge provided a limousine for our travels throughout the weekend.

Submitted by Ron and Nancy Hicks

Send comments to webmaster@virginiaelks.org

