

## GER Ron and First Lady Nancy Hicks' Visit to the Apple Blossom Festival (With Apologies to Oregon for Missing their Convention)

Because of Ron's kidney stone, we missed our visit with the Oregon Elks. Ron called PGER and State Sponsor Jim Damon to advise him of his pain and that we would have to delay our trip to Oregon by one day, then play it by ear. Jim, realizing that Ron had more of a problem than he realized, wisely suggested that he see to his health and cancel the trip. As it turned out, we could not have made the trip anyway, and after a week of pain, Ron ended up having a procedure to remove the stone. Ron spoke with Jim after the Convention. The GER Wine had been shipped to Oregon and ENF Chairman Steve Malone proceeded with the Wine Raffle which raised \$590 for ENF.

With us having the following week off and Ron pretty-much recovered from his stone ordeal, we left Fredericksburg late Friday afternoon, April 29, and drove to Winchester, VA, for the eighty-ninth Annual Shenandoah Apple Blossom Festival. The Festival is a week-long extravaganza begun in 1924 to celebrate the passing of winter's hardships and the glory of springtime and the miles of pink and white apple blossoms that blanket the Virginia apple-growing belt this time of

year. Ron and I were invited to the events of the week and participate in the Grand Feature Parade on Saturday by John Rosenberger, Festival Director and Past Virginia Elks Association State President. We opted for only the Parade. We were sponsored by Winchester



Let the parade begin!!!



Nancy, Executive Director of the Apple Blossom Festival PSP John Rosenberger, and Ron

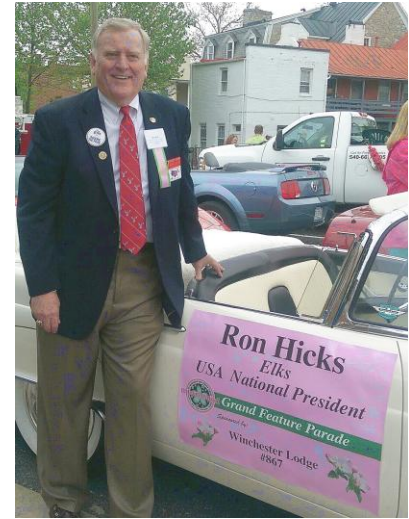
Lodge 867 and escorted throughout the weekend by Lodge Members



Nancy, PSP Don Netchke, PSP Steve Culbert, and Ron

and Past State Presidents, Don Netchke and Steve Culbert, who we joined for dinner Friday night at the Lodge. The Firefighters' Parade, one of the world's largest firefighters' parades, was held on Friday night, along with an evening-ending fireworks display at the local high school.

The Festival is as American as Apple Pie and each year draws crowds of more than 250,000 to the small town of Winchester. The Theme this year was "Unforgettable!" and the hundreds of volunteers did everything they could to make it unforgettable for the participants and guests. The Festival features a carnival; country, blue grass, and jazz events; pro-am tennis and golf tournaments; many parties, dances, breakfasts, luncheons and dinners; a prayer brunch; tours; a fire truck rodeo; charitable fundraisers; arts and craft events; car show; a Funday in the Park; the Kid's Blooming Mile Race; concert band



Ron standing beside his "ride" for the parade

competition; Queen's dinner and coronation; fireworks; and many guest speakers and celebrities. You name it, they have it, all capped off with the Grand Feature Parade.



Ron meets "Crime Dog"

The Festival has played host to many entertainment legends, celebrities, and personalities such as Patsy Cline (from Winchester), Bob Hope, Lucille Ball, Mary Tyler Moore, Bing Crosby, Barry Sanders, Johnny Bench, Chevy Chase, George Hamilton, Wayne Newton and President Gerald Ford, to name a few; and has included as its Queens Laura Boon, Luci



Baines Johnson, Ashley Landon, Cissie Graham, and Jazz Dorsett. And for the first time, an Elk's National President and First Lady!!



Entertainer and TV Star  
Wayne Brady and Ron

This year's Grand Marshall was Wayne Brady, actor, singer, voice actor, comedian, and television personality; the Sports Marshall was MLB Hall of Famer, Cal Ripken, Jr; Queen Shenandoah LXXXIX was Ahna



Ron, MLB Hall of Famer Cal  
Ripken, Jr, and Nancy

Cameron, daughter of Kirk Cameron; Miss Apple Blossom, Cameron Smith; and

the Firefighters' Marshal was Jeff Hammond. Other Festival Guests included Miss Virginia 2016, Savannah Lane; former NBA star Larry Robinson; Virginia Tech Coach Kevin Dresser; and retired Washington DC sports TV commentator, Ken Mease.

the Firefighters'



Queen Shenandoah  
LXXXIX Ahna Cameron  
and Ron



Miss Virginia 2016  
Savannah Lane and Ron

Nine-year old Reese Burdette was the Honorary Firefighters' Marshall, dubbed the "Fierce Little Survivor" after surviving a 2014 house fire, four months of induced coma and 662 days in the PICU Unit at Johns Hopkins Hospital.



A Handsome Couple and  
a Beautiful House and  
Fountain!

Saturday morning began with a 10:00 am gathering with the Festival Queen and Princesses in the hotel lobby for



NBA Star Larry Robinson  
and Ron

our police escorted bus ride to the Celebrities Reception and Brunch, held at the estate home of Mike and Liz Coffman in the rolling countryside just

outside of Winchester. From there, we were again escorted with police lights and sirens through barricades, stop signs and traffic lights into the heart of downtown Winchester. All of the Marshalls and other Parade Guests gathered in the reception hall of a Church awaiting the start of the Parade. Our chariot for the Parade was a Mustang Convertible, a tight fit for our driver Moe, Don, Steve, Ron and myself, but with Ron sitting on top of the back seat, we made it work. We rode in front of the Winchester Elks Lodge float, a very nice “Say No To Drugs” train with a steam engine, built by Lodge Members, that fired confetti into the crowd, had children on board and was driven by Elroy the Elk. The Winchester Lodge is the only organization that has had a float in the Parade every year since 1924, and this year’s version won First Place in the Civic and Service Organization Division. The day was overcast, cool and threatening rain, but fortunately the rain held off, the crowd was large and everything seemed to go off without a hitch.



Winchester Lodge 867 Float



The parade route passes by the former downtown Winchester Elks 867 building

Winchester, long known as the “Apple Capital,” also has an interesting Revolutionary and Civil War History. Located at the entrance to the Shenandoah Valley, in one of the most beautiful areas of Virginia, the area was the political training ground for George Washington, who was elected to his first public office as its representative to the House of Burgesses. Also, because of its locations and roadways into Virginia, it was a strategic prize during the Civil War,



and is said to have changed hands between the Confederate and Union Armies seventy times during the War years.



Grandstands and Judges Station

streets and sidewalks, the homeowners would be entertaining large parties on their property. Winchester is a lovely setting for this fun, hometown, family-oriented



Parade Route Photo 2

Festival, conducted with corporate and volunteer donations and no public funds, that not only brings the community together, but has delighted many residents and guests for over ninety years.

We did not attend the festivities Saturday evening or Sunday, opting instead to return home, recover from a long day, and relax for the remainder of the weekend. Both the Firefighters' Parade and the Grand Feature Parade can be viewed by going to "thebloom.com," and our appearance in front of the Judge's Stand with the Winchester Elks Lodge Train is shown at the eighty-seventh minute of the Grand Feature Parade.

The Parade Route took us through the historic downtown and past many of the revolutionary and civil war era homes, with their lovely lawns and large porches. Seating along the many streets was sold by area churches as fundraisers, and often behind the rows of spectators along the



Parade Route Photo 1