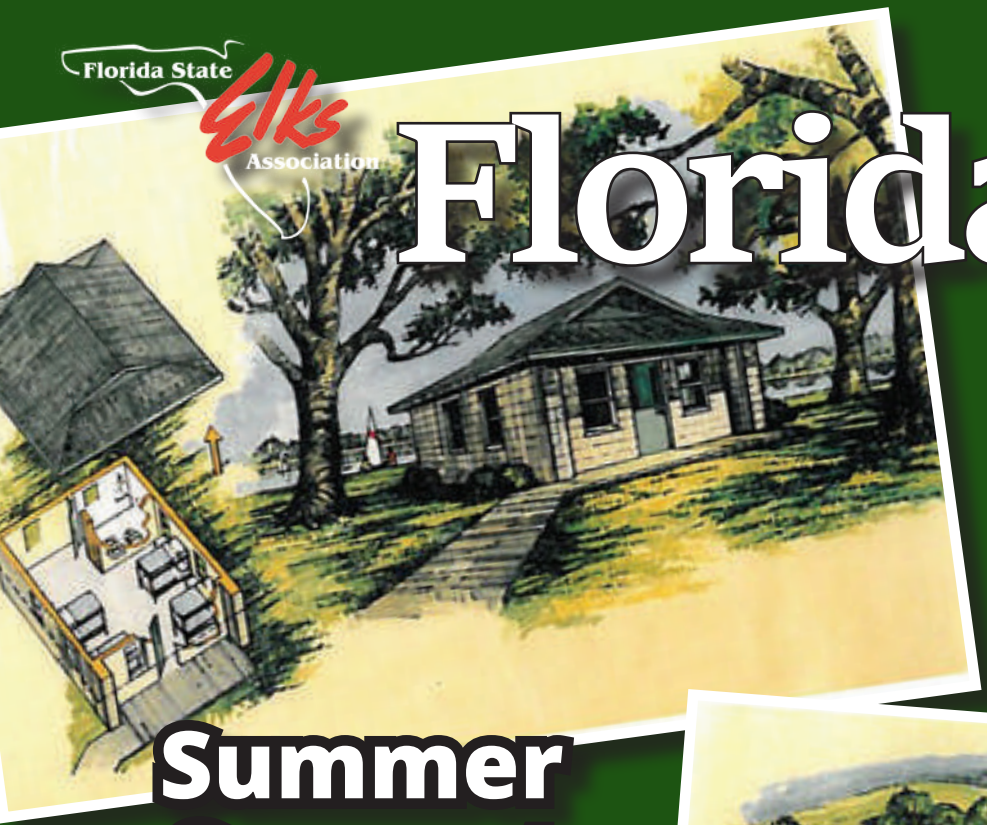
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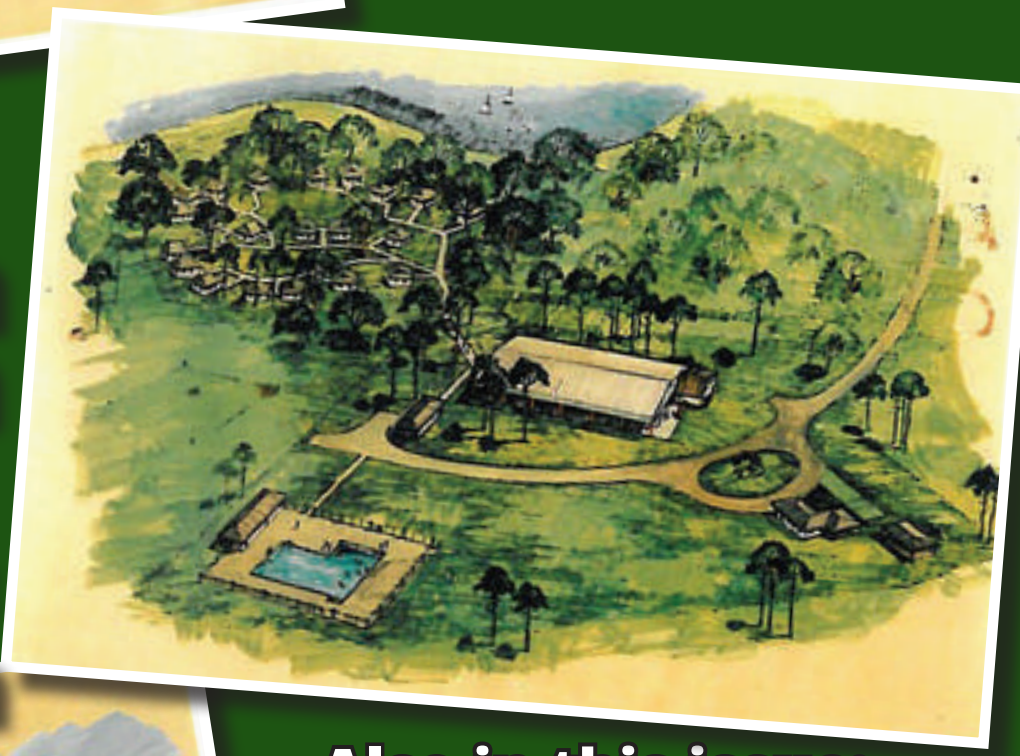
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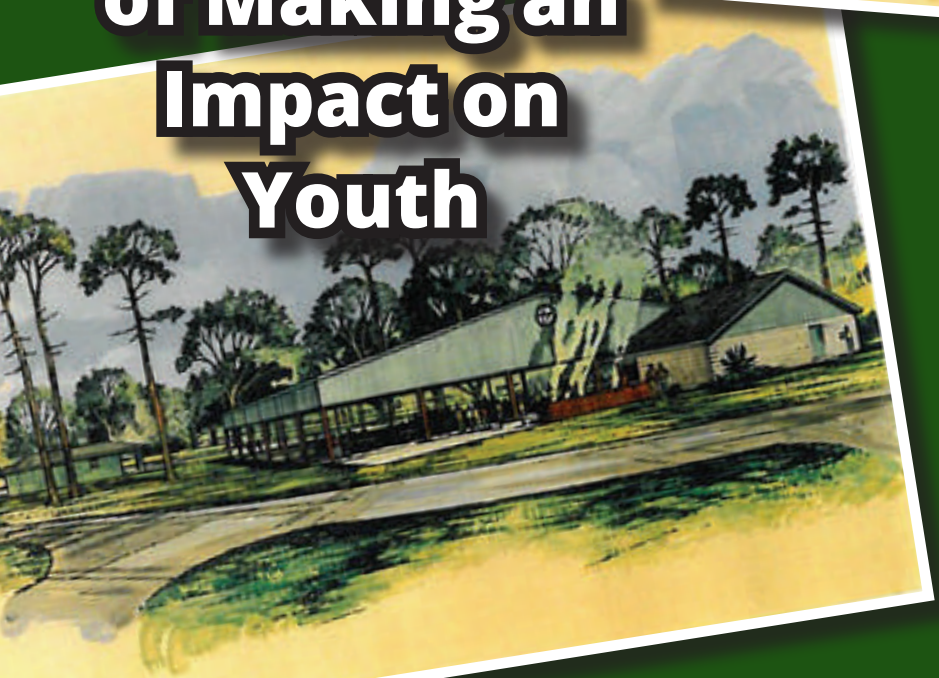
Florida Elks Magazine

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Summer Camp at the Florida Elks Youth Camp: Thirty Years of Making an Impact on Youth





Also in this issue:

FLOE Conference

Navigating Autism Gala

Elks of the District

Elks Day at the Rays

MICHAEL F. SMITH, PNP, STATE SPONSOR & ROBERT GRAFTON, PNP, STATE SPONSOR EMERITUS



Well hello, Florida State Elks Association! Last fall's article started with "MEMBERSHIP, MEMBERSHIP, MEMBERSHIP." That is a pretty good place to start. The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks completed five years in a row of having a positive membership gain. We are well on our way to make it six years, with your help. That is an amazing accomplishment. Our State Membership Chair, Jim Rodriguez, and his team have us on track to set another record. We jumped 45 states last year in membership gains and were recognized nationally at our national convention. With State President, Lenny DiLorenzo, along with his wife, Lauren, and the leadership team, we have an excellent opportunity to place the FSEA in a proud position in every category. Please help them attain greatness.

The FSEA and Harry-Anna Investment Fund are embarking on a very exciting stage of our order. You will be seeing and hearing about the two entities throughout Florida on TV, social media, billboards and radio. This has the potential of a massive increase in our membership while providing a vehicle for keeping us a nonprofit organization. This will be very exciting to witness. Our State Secretary, Nick Miller, with his wife, Emily, at his side, will guide an incredible team to ensure our success. Congratulations go to Colleen Gallant, Therapy Services Director, and her amazing team of therapists for providing services to nearly 700 children per week! Our Youth Camp Director, Elliott Gilbert, with his wife, Jaren, by his side, along with his team, continues to grow our camp and make positive impacts for 20,000+ children per year. Remarkable! Your FSEA is so blessed to have so many unselfish and thoughtful employees. We are truly blessed.

Sandra and I recently returned from the Florida Ladies of Elks conference in Daytona and came home charged up with enthusiasm after witnessing all the work they do to support our association. Thank you, FLOE. We thank President Pam Snyder and her team for all their efforts. We also send our best wishes to the newly installed State President, Sue Crady, and her team for a successful year.



If you have not made your reservations for our midyear convention, please do so and come join us. It will be held at the Rosen Centre in Orlando Nov. 12-14. Mark your calendars to attend the February quarterly at the Florida Elks Youth Camp and meet our new Grand Exalted Ruler, Tim Jaeger, and first lady, Sandy. They are great ambassadors of the order.

Sandra, Bob Grafton and I look forward to being with you and we wish you and your families a Happy Thanksgiving. May God bless all of us and our United States of America.

Michael F. Smith, PNP, State Sponsor
& Robert Grafton, PNP, State Sponsor Emeritus
Florida State Elks Association

SUBMIT LODGE NEWS TO YOUR DISTRICT REPORTERS:

Submission deadlines:

Spring:	**March 25**
Summer:	**June 25**
Fall:	**Sept. 25**
Winter:	**Dec. 25**

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Florida Elks Magazine

Autumn 2026



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A five-star publication, awarded by the Elks Grand Lodge

To learn more about the Florida Elks, please visit floridaelks.org.

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Email Rachael King, Editor, for more information at r.king@floridaelks.org.

LEONARD "LENNY" DILORENZO, STATE PRESIDENT



When I introduced my motto, Florida Elks: United & Driving Forward, I talked about the road ahead. Now, several months and thousands of miles later, Lauren and I are experiencing firsthand what makes Florida Elkdom so special.

Every district has its own personality, and every lodge has its own story, but everywhere we go, we continue to see the same thing — Elks making a difference. We have seen Elks feeding children and families, helping veterans, supporting individuals with autism and developmental disabilities, sending children to the Florida Elks Youth Camp, and raising funds for our Children's Therapy Services and other major projects.

Some of our most meaningful experiences have happened beyond our lodge walls. At Arc Broward, we saw programs providing education, training and meaningful employment opportunities for individuals with autism and developmental disabilities. At Bay Pines VA, we witnessed the tremendous commitment our Elks have made to those who served our country. Throughout our travels, we have met children, veterans and families whose lives have been touched by the programs we support.

These experiences reinforce something important — the dollars we raise, grants we receive and hours we volunteer are more than numbers on a report. There are people behind every one of them.

We have also witnessed incredible resilience. We have visited lodges devastated by hurricanes that have rebuilt, or are still rebuilding, because their members refused to give up. Yet through it all, they continue serving their communities. Seeing those lodges once again filled with fellowship and service is a powerful reminder that a lodge is much more than a building. It is the people inside it.

Our Harry-Anna Investment Fund remains a major priority. We set an ambitious goal of $1 million this year, and I have been incredibly encouraged by the generosity of Florida Elks who continue to step forward. Every donation makes a difference, while our sustaining donors provide dependable monthly support for our Children's Therapy Services, Youth Camp, autism initiatives and other programs changing lives throughout Florida. If you have not yet become a sustaining donor, I encourage you to join us at floridaelks.org/donate.

And somewhere along the way, a certain traveling elk named Elroy got involved. What started as a little fun on our district visits has become another way to bring members together, create smiles and raise additional dollars for our major projects. Sometimes the simplest ideas really can make a difference.

Membership remains just as important. Through "Invite a Passenger," I challenge every Elk to introduce someone new to our organization. Through "I Will," we are encouraging our newest members to get involved from the start. Recruiting a member is only the beginning. We must welcome them, involve them and give them a reason to stay.

Lauren and I cannot adequately express how much your hospitality has meant to us. The attention to detail, thoughtful touches reflecting my theme, and most of all the warm welcomes and friendships have made each district visit uniquely special and this journey something we will never forget.

There are still many miles ahead, more lodges to visit and much work to accomplish. We look forward to continuing this incredible journey and seeing everyone at the midyear convention.

Florida Elks:
United & Driving Forward

Leonard "Lenny" DiLorenzo,
State President
Florida State Elks Association



State President's Grant Recipients July - September 2026

Southwest District

Parrish #2889	$900
Bradenton #1511	$600
South Hillsborough #2672	$500

North Central District

Inverness #2522	$900
Winter Park #1830	$600
Eustis #1578	$500

South District

Florida Keys #1872	$900
Miami #948	$600
S. Miami/Coral Gables #1676	$500

South Southeast District

Hollywood West #2365	$900
Boca Raton #2166	$600
Oakland Park #2407	$500

Southeast Central District

Cocoa Beach #2387	$900
Viera #2817	$600
Suart-Jensen #1870	$500

East Central District

Sanford #1241	$900
Ormond Beach #2193	$600
DeLand #1463	$500

West Central District

Largo #2159	$900
Saint Petersburg #1224	$600
New Port Richey #2284	$500

South Southwest District

Naples #2010	$900
Greater Pine Island #2781	$600
Fort Myers #1288	$500

NICK MILLER, STATE SECRETARY



Florida Elks,

As I write this, the midyear convention is about 30 days away. Attendance has grown over the past couple of years, and this year's convention is on track for another record. To make the most of that turnout, Florida Elks Charities will host a new reception Friday night of the convention. Over food and drinks, members can visit tables for our state projects and committees; learn about the services, competitions, awards, and scholarships they offer; and pick up ideas to take back to their lodges. I hope to see you there.

Now for two housekeeping items.

First, donations. The Florida State Elks Association supports a host of charitable missions, thanks to the generosity of our members and lodges, but knowing how to give can be confusing. Do I make my check out to the program? To the FSEA? To my lodge? Let's make it easy.

Our charitable work starts with the Harry-Anna Investment Fund (HAIF), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that has powered our mission since 1951. The HAIF is the primary funding source for the Florida Elks Youth Camp; Florida Elks Children's Therapy Services (including diagnostic testing for autism); and Florida Elks Charities, which in turn runs our Army of Hope veterans' grants, Hoop Shoot, Soccer Shoot and student scholarships.

That means a gift to the HAIF supports all the FSEA's charitable work. To direct your donation to a specific program, make your check payable to "Harry-Anna Investment Fund" and name the program in the memo line. For example, write "Veterans" to support Army of Hope. Mail checks to P.O. Box 49, Umatilla, FL 32784-0049. Donations are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Second, a note for lodge officers and trustees. Although Directors and Officers (D&O) insurance is listed as "optional" during District Deputy visits, the FSEA strongly recommends that every lodge carry it. D&O insurance protects officers and trustees who are personally named in a lawsuit over decisions made on the lodge's behalf, such as member discipline or expulsion, employment decisions involving lodge staff, contract disputes, or allegations of financial mismanagement. A lodge's general liability policy typically doesn't cover these claims, and even a baseless lawsuit can cost thousands in legal fees before it's dismissed. Without D&O coverage, those costs may fall on the lodge treasury or on you personally. The premium is small for the protection it provides. This coverage is not required to go through Gallagher and may be sourced from any local agency. If you need assistance in getting a quote, just let me know.

As always, thank you for all you do. You make me proud to be an Elk.

Nick Miller, State Secretary
Florida State Elks Association



Officer Training Seminar

March 12-14, 2027

at Rosen Centre Hotel in Orlando

All members are encouraged to attend, especially 2027 candidates for Exalted Ruler, Secretary, Leading Knight & Treasurer.

Attendance is also encouraged for Secretary & Treasurer Office Assistants, Board of Director Members, Trustees, & House Committee Members.

floridaelks.org/officer-training

PAM SNYDER, FLORIDA LADIES OF ELKS PRESIDENT



Wow! The expression "Time Flies When You're Having Fun" means something new to me. A year ago when I was installed as the 2025-2026 Florida Ladies of Elks President, I never imagined a year would go by so fast and with so many wonderful memories of all that FLOE accomplished.

In the fall for the past three years, FLOE members and friends volunteered at the annual Hulaween event in Live Oak at the Spirit of the Suwannee Music Park to help offset FLOE's annual conference expenses. This lively, exciting, musical event draws more than 10,000 music lovers from across the country and other countries. The Elks midyear convention in November had a sellout bunko Ladies event, with delicious pastries and cocktails. Thank you to the Florida State Elks for sponsoring this annual event. In December, FLOE decorated a Florida Elks Youth Camp cabin with Christmas decorations and provided games and snacks. This will be an annual event, and FLOE is looking forward to participating again. In April, FLOE descended upon the Smith Conference Center for a fabulous tie-dye weekend featuring sound healing, chair yoga, Hula-Hoop exercises, fine dining, music and dancing. This annual event is sure to sell out next year. The fourth annual RV Rally in May was a huge success, with more campers participating each year. Funds raised through various weekend activities are donated to the Florida Elks Youth Camp. Thanks go to FLOE PSPs Becky Long, Connie Kalel Poage and Suzi Simonelli for their dedication to growing this event each year. This year's Elks national convention was the third year that Pauline Talbott, PSP-FLOE has conducted the well-attended Ladies fundraising workshop. Thank you, Pauline, for continuing this worthwhile and informative event.

The annual FLOE conference was held Sept. 24-26 at the Hard Rock Hotel in Daytona Beach. Guests started arriving Thursday and enjoyed the beautiful beach and hotel. The annual fundraising shop featured raffles for gift baskets, flamingo-themed items, chance auctions, jewelry and "bottle" ring toss. Deep Creek Ladies of Elks, Live Oak Anna Miller Circle, Ocala Ladies of Elks and Punta Gorda Elkettes participated.

On Friday, there were two workshops. One was "Why FLOE?," which was hosted by FLOE PSPs Becky Long, Pauline Talbott and Felicia Vuletich. The workshop was a lively Q&A session, with participants asking how to become a FLOE delegate and a FLOE officer. The second workshop featured guest speaker Rena Koontz, award-winning mystery author. Rena is from Deep Creek Lodge, where her husband, Jed, is the Exalted Ruler and a former FBI agent. Rena shared insight into how she prepares to write her novels, drawing on her fascinating journey as a frontline crime reporter. Many of the ladies attending had already read one or two of her books and are looking forward to the launch of the third book in the "Justice" series.



Pauline Talbott, PSP-FLOE presents a $2,544.65 donation from the 365 Club to Tressy Guadagno, Florida Elks Children's Therapy Services Assistant Director.



Elliott Gilbert, Florida Elks Youth Camp Director, addresses attendees at the FLOE conference.

Friday evening started with a fun group of male Elks in bodybuilding T-shirts dancing to "It's Raining Men," which was lip-synched by Laura Sardella, PSP-FLOE; Adella Ashton, PSP-FLOE; and Terri Ciesla, incoming Secretary, who were dressed in rain gear. This raised $1,000 in floor donations. After dinner, versatile entertainer and comedian-magician Todd Bogue entertained and kept us in stitches with his magic tricks and hilarious audience participation.

On Saturday morning, Elliott Gilbert, Florida Elks Youth Camp Director, spoke about the new programs and camp initiatives and thanked FLOE for donating $2,544.65. Several Ladies organizations donated from the floor, with a total of $11,850.

Saturday's luncheon guest speaker was Russell "Russ" Smith, PSP. Russ spoke about the important role Ladies organizations play in the lodges and the hard work and dedication of FLOE to raise funds for Florida Elks Children's Therapy Services and the Florida Elks Youth Camp. His sense of humor and sincerity were evident in his talk.

The annual memorial service, led by Becky Long, PSP-FLOE and Andrea Fernandez, FLOE Chaplain, was a beautiful tribute to the ladies who passed away this past year.

Tressy Guadagno, Assistant Director of Florida Elks Children's Therapy Services, said therapists see 690 children each week. FLOE donated $2,544.65 and floor donations totaled $16,000. FLOE also donated $4,200 from the Angel reverse draw, which will go to Florida Elks Children's Therapy Services.

Becky Long, PSP-FLOE presented an overview of the fourth annual FLOE RV Rally and presented a check for $8,635 to the Florida Elks Youth Camp from the 2026 rally.

The afternoon concluded with Becky Long, PSP-FLOE conducting the installation of officers for 2026-2027.

FLOE's Facebook page has more than 450 members and continues to grow. Thanks go to all who have joined and posted your events.

Each Ladies organization and its members are vital to FLOE's success. Their fundraising efforts and events are what make being a member of FLOE so meaningful and worthwhile.

Ladies organizations recognized for their donations, given April 1, 2025 through March 31, 2026, to

Florida Elks Children's Therapy Services:

$2,000.00+:

$5,000.00 — Deep Creek Ladies of Elks
$4,000.00 — Punta Gorda Elkettes
$3,000.00 — Ocala Ladies of Elks

$1,500.00–$1,999.00:

$1,500.00 — Pensacola Beach Ladies of Elks
$1,500.00 — Tampa Ladies of the Elks Auxiliary
$1,500.00 — Winter Garden Ladies Auxiliary

$1,000.00-$1,499.00:

$1,000.00 — Plant City Ladies of Elks

$500.00-$999.00:

$750.00 — Sebastian El-Does
$750.00 — West Palm Beach Ladies
$500.00 — Fort Myers Ladies of Elks
$500.00 — Rotonda Elkettes

Highest Per member giving:

$187.50 — Winter Garden Elks Ladies Auxiliary (8 members)
$84.75 — Deep Creek Ladies of Elks (59 members)

Total Ladies Donations:	**$20,250.00**
Florida Ladies of Elks Donations:	**$12,339.00**
Total:	**$32,589.00**

FLOE PROGRAM AWARDS

Boosters:
1st Place — Punta Gorda Elkettes
2nd Place — Ocala Ladies of Elks & Pensacola Beach Ladies of Elks
3rd Place — Brandon Ladies of Elks

Ads:
Most Ads — Tarpon Springs Ladies Auxiliary

Yearbook Contest:
Brandon Ladies of Elks

Scrapbook:
1st Place — Ocala Ladies of Elks
2nd Place — Tarpon Springs Ladies Auxiliary
3rd Place — Pensacola Beach Ladies of Elks

Ladies organizations recognized for their donations, given April 1, 2025 through March 31, 2026, to the

Florida Elks Youth Camp:

$2,000.00+:

$5,500.00 — Ocala Ladies of Elks
$4,000.00 — Punta Gorda Elkettes
$2,640.00 — Eustis Anna Miller Circle
$2,000.00 — Winter Garden Ladies Auxiliary

$1,500.00–$1,999.00:

$1,500.00 — Pensacola Beach Ladies of Elks

$1,000.00-$1,499.00:

$1,000.00 — Plant City Ladies of Elks

$500.00-$999.00:

$750.00 — Sebastian El-Does
$750.00 — West Palm Beach Ladies
$500.00 — Fort Myers Ladies of Elks
$500.00 — Rotonda Elkettes
$500.00 — Tarpon Springs Ladies Auxiliary

Highest Per member giving:

$250.00 — Winter Garden Elks Ladies Auxiliary (8 members)
$114.58 — Ocala Ladies of Elks (48 members)

Most campers sent:

Punta Gorda Elkettes — 18

Total Ladies Donations:	**$20,005.00**
Florida Ladies of Elks Donations:	**$10,865.74**
Total:	**$30,870.74**

ATTENDANCE AWARDS

Most Members Present:
Punta Gorda Elkettes — 20

Largest Percent of Members in Attendance:
Punta Gorda Elkettes — 40%

Most Miles Traveled from Lodge to Conference:
Pensacola Beach Ladies of Elks — 6,301.96 miles

Please remember, if a lady is an Elk, a spouse of an Elk or a widow of an Elk, she is a member of FLOE. There are no dues to join.

FLOE officers are always ready to speak to ladies about the steps to form a Ladies organization in their lodge.

Finally, I would be remiss not to mention the inspiration and support I received from the Punta Gorda Lodge #2606 Elkettes. Their generosity, kindness and encouraging words made this year as President possible. Thank you, all, for a memorable year.

Pam Snyder, 2025-2026 President
Florida Ladies of Elks

Photo credit/Laz Suarez



Newly initiated Florida Ladies of Elks officers for the 2026-2027 year are Donna Urban and Pam Snyder, PSP-FLOE, 4-year Advisory members; Marilyn Fratello, Historian; Wendy Lombard, Chaplain; Semone Caron, Parliamentarian; Terri Ciesla, Secretary; Amy Ellery, PER, Vice President; and Sue Crady, President.



Meet the 2026-2027 FLOE President

Hello. I am Sue Crady. I was born in Jamestown, Tennessee, and moved to Fairborn, Ohio, in 1964. I graduated from Fairborn High School, Modina's College of Cosmetology and John Hondrus School of Real Estate. I've been an entrepreneur my whole life.

My late husband, Jerry Crady, was an air traffic controller stationed at Wright Patt AFB in Ohio. He served his country for 32 years in the Air Force and Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). Together, we lived in Okinawa, moved around the U.S., and ended up living in Port Charlotte, Florida, for the last 20+ years. Throughout my life, I owned my own beauty salon, became a realtor, and was a leader in community organizations, as well as being a devoted wife and mother. I have two wonderful children, Tim (and Kerri) and Kimberly (and Chris Hendren). I also have two grandchildren (Ryan and Taryn) and three more boys from Kerri (Evan, Eli and Ian).

After retirement, Jerry and I became more involved and instrumental in the planning and execution of the Southwest Florida International Air Show and other air shows in the U.S. and abroad. I organized the logistics for the pilots, and Jerry was an Air Boss, controlling the air acts. In Florida, Jerry joined the Elks initially to play on the softball traveling team, and then he loved the social aspect of it, so he introduced me and his friends to the organization. Over the years, we made friends around the world and enjoyed 54 loving years of an unforgettable marriage and life together.

Soon after I joined the Elks, I quickly became an integral part of the Ladies of Elks. Right away, I stepped into several leadership roles: LOE board member, House Committee member and volunteer, and I held the LOE President position for three terms at Deep Creek Lodge #2763. My team and I supported fundraisers for the Florida Elks Youth Camp and Florida Elks Children's Therapy Services, and we collected donations that supported autism. In 2025-2026, our lodge was again awarded No. 1 in the state for Unmasking Autism lodge donations. In addition, I had always been deeply touched by those close to me who were affected by breast cancer, so I felt the desire to head a fundraiser during my last term to support the Florida Breast Cancer Foundation. I am proud of the generosity of my lodge, where we raised and donated more than $12,000 to support the foundation. None of these remarkable events and donations could've happened without your ongoing support. It's always been in my nature to help and make great things happen, so I'm honored to have been the recipient of the Leadership Award, Elk of the Year and honorary lifetime member.



It's a privilege for me to step into the role of FLOE President for 2026-2027! The intelligent dolphin is a symbol of balance, communication, empathy, harmony, joy and teamwork. Therefore, I've chosen this animal as my personal guide this term. I believe that with these traits and an engaged team, or pod, when we focus on one purpose, we will achieve shared success! Let the qualities of the dolphin remind us all to work together as we flow through this time of growth.

COLLEEN GALLANT, FLORIDA ELKS CHILDREN'S THERAPY SERVICES DIRECTOR



We have certainly been busy at Florida Elks Children's Therapy Services.

Our CHAMP, Georgia Stemann, along with her parents, Julie and Curtis, joined the Florida Elks at the annual Day at the Rays. While I was unable to attend, Tressy Guadagno, Assistant FECTS Director, filled in and said that Georgia absolutely wowed the crowd at Tropicana Field.

Tressy Guadagno just returned from the 63rd Florida Ladies of Elks conference in Daytona Beach. Congratulations go to the Florida Ladies of Elks for all they do to support our major projects. For the year 2025-2026, FLOE donated a total of $32,589 to Therapy Services. At the conference, donations from the various Ladies organizations to Therapy Services for the current 2026-2027 year totaled $16,000. We also received checks from the 365 fund for $2,544.65 and reverse draw for $4,200. A special thank you goes to all the Ladies organizations for your incredible support of Florida Elks Children's Therapy Services.

As we go into the holiday season, so many of our lodges as well as Ladies organizations like to help the children by having parties at their lodges or by making donations to the therapists to help purchase Christmas gifts for our patients. As a reminder when making donations for Christmas gifts, please make your checks payable to the Harry-Anna Investment Fund and note "FECTS Christmas gifts" in the memo section and send to FECTS, Attn: Colleen Gallant, P.O. Box 49, Umatilla, FL 32784-0049. This way your lodge will get proper credit from HAIF and we will make sure the therapist knows it is from your lodge. Please do not make checks payable to the therapist. If you would like a therapist to come to your lodge for any event, please be sure to complete the therapist participation form on the website.
FECTS therapists along with our contract speech therapists continue to treat more than 680 children each week.

Since we began Florida Elks for Autism, we have tested 130 children. We continue to bring families to the Florida Elks Youth Camp six times a year to test children. Each family is offered a room to stay in if they travel a distance to camp and we provide all meals while they are there. Once the children are tested, parents are provided with a detailed report with a diagnosis and resources available in their community.

Florida continues to stand as one of the leaders in Elkdom with two amazing major projects — Florida Elks Children's Therapy Services and the Florida Elks Youth Camp. It is a result of your hard work that Elliott and I, along with all the employees of FECTS and FEYC, can work with so many children in Florida. Thank you for your support of our major projects.

Best wishes for a safe and happy holiday season!

Colleen Gallant, Director
Florida Elks Children's Therapy Services



Photo credit/Rosen Centre Hotel

ELLIOTT GILBERT, FLORIDA ELKS YOUTH CAMP DIRECTOR



Greetings, members, and to nonmembers being shown this magazine to inspire you to become an Elk:

The school season is upon us here at the Florida Elks Youth Camp. This means a few things for us. First, it means our Extended Camp Leadership Program is going full swing. Second, it means outside organizations are here and utilizing the facility to provide special experiences to the youth and adults they serve.

The theme for ECLP this year is "Life at Sea." During their time in the program, our campers, who are freshmen in high school, will set goals, meet with a camp counselor twice a month over Zoom, and learn and develop life skills to prepare them for not just life at sea but their approaching adulthood as well. Part of the program is problem-solving, decision-making and budgeting through a story that takes the campers around the world aboard a ship run by themselves and seven others. They determine a captain and a first mate and make decisions as to how they will address the different events they may encounter aboard the ship as they sail. They purchase what they determine are the necessary supplies to face the ocean, illness, hunger and any other condition they may face, requiring the campers to budget accordingly to ensure they can keep sailing through any adversity.

On top of the life at sea activity, campers have learned how to turn their pants into a life jacket and how to create a human life raft. They have learned how to read a compass and use it to navigate. They'll be learning how to make bread, tie knots, make a net for fishing, make minor repairs with a sewing kit, tread water, read the weather, do basic first aid, and be intentional and present with their behavior.

Beyond our summer program and ECLP, the camp has provided support to many youth-serving organizations during the school year. A few highlights from this season included the Muscular Dystrophy Association conducting their camp; Miami Arts Charter doing a week of school; and Gretchen Everhart, a school for kids with disabilities, bringing their families here for a few days.

If you want to support ECLP, be on the lookout for our wish list to be active Nov. 1 at feyc.org and see what supplies we could use to teach our campers. As always, if you want to learn more about what's happening here at camp, schedule a tour and learn what it truly means to be an Elk. Contact Jessica Yeager at jessica@feyc.org to schedule a date.

Elliott Gilbert, Camp Director
Florida Elks Youth Camp

Camper registration opens Dec. 1!

FLORIDA ELKS YOUTH CAMP & CONFERENCE CENTER

BUSINESS PRACTICES: Financial Practices the BPOE Does Not Allow and Why Those Rules Exist

The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks is one of the most recognized fraternal organizations in the United States. Since its founding in 1868, our organization has promoted charity, patriotism, community service and fellowship. Elks lodges manage millions of dollars through membership dues, charitable fundraising, property ownership, social operations, scholarships, veterans' programs and community outreach. Because the BPOE operates on trust and shared responsibility, financial integrity is one of the most important parts of lodge leadership.

Members expect their dues and donations to be handled honestly, carefully and transparently. For that reason, the BPOE has established financial expectations for lodge officers, trustees, committee members, and anyone responsible for managing money or property. These rules are designed to prevent fraud, protect charitable resources, maintain legal compliance and preserve the reputation of the Elks.

Misuse or Theft of Lodge Funds — BPOE Statutes 12.050, 12.060, 12.070
One of the most serious violations within the BPOE is the misuse, theft or unauthorized handling of lodge funds. Lodge money is organizational property, not personal property, and officers are expected to protect the financial interests of the membership.

The BPOE does not allow personal use of lodge accounts, unauthorized withdrawals, using lodge debit cards for private expenses, cash skimming, paying personal bills with lodge funds or concealing transactions from financial reports.

These rules exist because financial abuse destroys trust. Members contribute dues and donations expecting their money to support community programs, building maintenance, scholarships and charitable activities. Misuse of funds can create conflict, discourage charitable giving, damage public confidence, trigger investigations, lead to lawsuits or insurance problems, and potentially force a lodge into debt or closure.

Unauthorized Spending and Lack of Approval Procedures — BPOE Statute 12.070
The BPOE requires significant expenditures to be approved through proper lodge procedures. Officers are not permitted to spend large amounts independently without authorization from the trustees, the board or the membership, as required by governing rules.

The Board of Trustees controls lodge funds, investments and property, subject to the control of the lodge. It prepares a segregated budget and provides that expenditures remain within adopted appropriations, with all expenditures outside the budget referred to the board for consideration.

These procedures provide accountability and shared oversight. Lodges are member organizations rather than privately owned businesses, so financial decisions should reflect the will of the membership. Approval requirements also reduce the risk of impulsive or self-serving decisions and provide continuity when leadership changes.

Poor Bookkeeping and Inaccurate Financial Records — BPOE Statutes 12.050, 12.060, 13.040
Accurate recordkeeping is one of the most important financial responsibilities in the BPOE. Lodges are expected to maintain documentation for income, expenses, payroll, charitable contributions, inventory, tax filings and bank reconciliations.

The BPOE prohibits missing receipts, incomplete ledgers, unrecorded cash transactions, failure to reconcile bank accounts, hidden accounts, delayed financial reporting, and altered or falsified records.

Poor bookkeeping creates opportunities for fraud and financial mismanagement. Even when theft is not occurring, inaccurate records can create confusion and mistrust. If a lodge cannot clearly explain how money was raised, deposited, spent or distributed, members may suspect misconduct.

Proper bookkeeping protects both the organization and the officers handling money. Clear documentation supports audits and helps ensure compliance with tax and reporting requirements.

Failure to Conduct Audits and Financial Reviews — BPOE Statute 13.040
Regular audits and financial reviews are essential safeguards within the BPOE. Lodges are expected to review financial activity and verify that records match bank statements, receipts, invoices and financial reports.

The BPOE prohibits skipping required financial reviews, allowing one person full control over finances, failing to review bank reconciliations, ignoring discrepancies and avoiding independent financial oversight. Elks audit guidance identifies financial reviews in July, October and January and requires the Auditing and Accounting Committee to report its findings to the lodge.

The purpose is prevention. Fraud can develop gradually when too much authority is concentrated on one person. Regular reviews help detect errors, identify suspicious activity, protect lodge assets, ensure transparency and prevent long-term financial damage. They also protect honest officers by providing documented, independent oversight.

Conflicts of Interest and Self-Dealing — BPOE Ethical Standards; Applicable Lodge Bylaws
The BPOE expects officers and trustees to avoid conflicts of interest when making financial decisions. Leaders should act in the best interest of the lodge rather than for personal financial gain.

Improper conduct may include awarding contracts to family members without disclosure, steering purchases toward businesses owned by officers, receiving vendor kickbacks, profiting from lodge construction projects or influencing purchases for personal benefit.

Such conduct is often referred to as self-dealing. These practices undermine fairness and transparency. Even when prices are reasonable, undisclosed conflicts create suspicion and weaken trust in leadership.

Improper Use of Charitable Funds — Applicable BPOE Charitable Program Rules and Lodge Financial Controls
Charity is one of the central principles of the Elks organization. Lodges regularly raise money for charitable purposes, and funds collected for those purposes are expected to be used for their designated mission.

The BPOE does not allow redirecting charitable donations into general operating budgets, using scholarship money for unrelated expenses, misrepresenting fundraising purposes, spending restricted donations improperly, or mixing charitable accounts with entertainment or social funds.

These restrictions exist because donors contribute with specific expectations. If money raised for veterans, children, scholarships or other charitable purposes is spent elsewhere, public trust can quickly collapse. Misuse of charitable funds can also create serious legal consequences and damage the credibility of the organization.

Excessive Debt and Financial Irresponsibility — BPOE Statute 12.070
The BPOE discourages reckless financial management. Excessive debt without proper planning can place a lodge in serious financial distress. Examples include ignoring tax obligations, operating with chronic deficits, overspending on social facilities, delaying essential maintenance and relying on unstable revenue sources. Declining membership, rising operating costs and poor budgeting can also contribute to financial difficulties. Financial discipline and responsible planning help ensure long-term sustainability.

Failure to Separate Duties — BPOE Statutes 12.050, 12.060, 13.040
One of the most important financial controls is the separation of duties. The BPOE's financial structure distributes responsibilities among the Secretary, Treasurer, trustees or board, and Auditing and Accounting Committee. Separating responsibilities reduces opportunities for fraud and mistakes. When multiple people review transactions and financial records, irregularities are more likely to be detected quickly. Internal controls are one of the first lines of defense against financial misconduct.

Why These Financial Restrictions Matter — BPOE Statutes 12.050, 12.060, 12.070, 13.040
The BPOE depends heavily on trust, volunteerism and community reputation. Members pay dues and donate time because they believe the organization operates honorably and responsibly.

Financial restrictions are not simply about preventing theft. They protect charitable missions, preserve public confidence, ensure fairness, encourage accountability, maintain legal compliance, protect lodge property and assets, and safeguard future generations of members.

Strong financial rules also help maintain harmony inside the lodge. Clear procedures reduce confusion, limit opportunities for abuse and create confidence in leadership.

Financial integrity is directly connected to survival. A lodge with strong financial practices can continue supporting veterans, students, families and local communities for decades. A lodge plagued by financial misconduct may quickly lose members, donors and public respect.

Ultimately, these restrictions exist because trust is the foundation of the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks. Without financial honesty and accountability, the charitable and fraternal mission of the Elks cannot be sustained.

Erminia "Minia" Cain, PDD, Regional Chair
Business Practices Committee

Disclaimer: The Business Practices Committee of the Florida State Elks Association has prepared this information to assist the lodges of this fraternal order. The FSEA Business Practices Committee is neither responsible nor empowered to be responsible for the establishment of such procedures. The Business Practices Committee acts as a resource to assist lodges. You should always consult your lodge's tax and legal advisors before engaging in any endeavors or transactions to ensure compliance with federal, state and local laws.

DAN MASI, DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR



Happy fall! I am looking forward to cooler weather and celebrating the many ways Florida Elks give back to our communities and serve our veterans.

That spirit of kindness was on full display at the inaugural Navigating Autism Gala, benefiting Florida Elks for Autism, held Oct. 17 at the Embassy Suites in West Palm Beach. The evening brought together members, friends and supporters to raise awareness and support for children and families affected by autism spectrum disorder.

A heartfelt thank you goes to the event chairs, Vincent Como, PSP and Sean Maguire, PSP, and their committee for their dedication to making this first Navigating Autism Gala such a wonderful success. Their hard work, along with the generosity of volunteers, donors and attendees, created an evening filled with hope and community spirit.

Michael Marino, Director of the Dan Marino Foundation, was honored with the Humanitarian Award for the foundation's work in the community.

Auctioneer Tom Curran of Fisher Auctions, assisted by Francis Santos of Fisher Auctions, energized the crowd and inspired spirited bidding. Two standout items made the auction especially memorable:

An alligator bench was handcrafted by Don Shedlock and beautifully painted by Peyton Shedlock in a colorful puzzle piece design. This unique bench brought in $3,500!



Event chair Vincent Como, PSP auctions a football autographed by Dan Marino, which sold for $1,000 to Leonard "Lenny" DiLorenzo, State President. Michael Marino, Director of the Dan Marino Foundation, looks on.

"Baum" by Ricardo Salazar was a meaningful painting that drew an impressive winning bid of $10,000 from Raina Ruelle of the Richard & Min Vondrak Foundation Inc. The foundation plans to display the painting in its office as a reflection of its commitment to giving back. "Baum" is a tribute to the countless ways people give, grow and connect. Its many branches symbolize the diverse paths people take, while its vivid colors reflect the unique perspectives, talents and inner worlds of autistic individuals. Though the branches reach in different directions, they remain part of one living whole, reminding us that our differences enrich us. Its deep roots represent the families, caregivers, advocates, and communities whose love and support help each individual flourish. A symbol of acceptance, belonging and hope, the painting encourages us to nurture a world where every person is valued exactly as they are.



Event chairs, Sean Maguire, PSP and Vincent Como, PSP, present the Humanitarian Award to Michael Marino, Director of the Dan Marino Foundation, center.

Guests also enjoyed a cocktail reception, time to browse the silent auction offerings, a delicious dinner, dancing, and opportunities to connect with others who share a passion for helping children and families.

As we head into the holiday season and look ahead to spring, two upcoming events will keep that generosity moving forward, so mark your calendars!

Get your clubs ready for the Florida Elks Golf Classic in Sebring April 2-3,



This alligator bench, handcrafted by Don Shedlock and painted by Peyton Shedlock, sold in the live auction for $3,500.

features a cocktail reception, dinner, dancing, silent and live auctions, and opportunities to connect with fellow supporters. This year brings an extra touch of excitement as we



Raina Ruelle of the Richard & Min Vondrak Foundation Inc., left, had the winning bid of $10,000 for "Baum," painted by Ricardo Salazar, right. Looking on is auctioneer, Tom Curran.

2027! This annual event offers golfers of all skill levels a chance to enjoy friendly competition, Florida sunshine and time with friends, all while supporting our charitable mission. Whether you are playing for a trophy or simply for the love of the game, your participation makes a difference. Make sure your lodge's name is on a hole sponsorship!

Then, join us May 1, 2027, at the beautiful Don Cesar in St. Pete Beach for our premier statewide fundraising event, the seventh annual Unmasking Autism Gala, themed "Racing Toward Acceptance." This black-tie event

Photo credit/Ryan Maker

celebrate Kentucky Derby Day while racing toward greater acceptance and brighter futures for children and families affected by autism.

This special evening benefits Florida Elks for Autism, which provides free diagnostic evaluations for children when autism is suspected. By helping families obtain answers and connect with appropriate services, the program opens the door to earlier support and greater opportunities for children to reach their developmental goals.

Thank you for the kindness, generosity and commitment you bring to our Florida Elks family. Together, we can continue bringing answers, hope and support to the families who need us.

As always, thank you for all you do. God bless you and your families, and best wishes for a happy holiday season!

Dan Masi, Development Director
Florida State Elks Association



Danielle Terrell, psychometrist; Nicole Clark, MSN, BA, PMH-RN; and Dr. Mariel Paralitici-Morales, MD, of Adult and Pediatric Institute for Health and Wellness, partners with Florida Elks for Autism



Mike & Jody Barber, pictured with first lady Lauren Dowd-Shedlock and State President Leonard "Lenny" DiLorenzo, made a $5,000 ask donation.

HONOR ROLL OF SUSTAINING & ANNUAL DONORS

The Florida State Elks Association thanks its monthly sustaining donors and annual donors (as of Sept. 30, 2026) for supporting Florida Elks Children's Therapy Services and the Florida Elks Youth Camp. To join them, please scan this QR code.

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Cape Coral
Clewiston
Cocoa
Cocoa Beach
Deep Creek
DeLand
Delray Beach
Dunedin-Clearwater
Edgewater-New Smyrna Beach
Englewood
Eustis
Florida Keys
Fort Myers
Fort Walton PER Association
Gainesville
Gainesville 990 Knights
Greater Pine Island
Green Cove Springs
Holiday Isles
Holley-Navarre
Hollywood West
Inverness
Jupiter
Kissimmee
Lake Placid
Lakeland
Lakewood Ranch-Sarasota
Largo
Live Oak
Manasota
Marathon
Merritt Island
Miami
Naples
New Port Richey
North Fort Myers
Oakland Park
Orange Park
Orlando
Palmetto
Parrish
Pensacola Beach
Plant City
Pompano Beach
Port Orange
Punta Gorda
Rotonda
Saint Petersburg
Sanford
Sarasota South
Sebastian
Sebring
Seminole
South Hillsborough
South Lake
Tallahassee
Tampa
Tarpon Springs
Titusville
Venice-Nokomis
Vero Beach
Viera
Viera PER Association
Warrington
Wesley Chapel
West Citrus
West Palm Beach
Zephyrhills

Districts
Northwest District PERs
South District
South Southwest District PER Association

Ladies of Elks
Brandon Ladies
Deep Creek Ladies
Dunedin-Clearwater Ladies
Eustis Anna Miller Circle
Florida Ladies
Fort Myers Ladies
Palm Coast Ladies
Lake City Anna Miller Circle
Ocala Ladies
Plant City Ladies
Southshore Lady Elks
Southwest Central District Ladies
Tarpon Springs Lady Elks
West Citrus Ladies

Businesses/Trusts/Funds/Foundations
American Online Giving Foundation
AOH Anonymous
Ass-Whip Acres, Inc.
Bill Fraser Construction Inc.
Claude & Linda Hutson Family Living Trust
Coconut Grove Bankshares Inc.
Community Foundation of Tampa Bay Inc.
Diane M. Kazi Charitable Fund
Eagletree Capital
Florida Atlantic Securities Corp.
Genesis Construction & Management Inc.
Gulf Coast Community Foundation
OCC Road House & Museum LLC
Osaic Foundation
Palm Beach Capital
Parks of Gainesville
Plant City Garden Club
Professional Health Care of Pinellas LLC
RCM Utilities LLC
Richard & Min Vondrak Foundation Inc.
Rough Riders Inc.
Slate Family Giving Fund c/o Fidelity Charity
Socially Funded
Spinal Solutions Health and Wellness PLLC
Tampa LB Sales Inc. - DBA N41
The Garner & Connie Koons Charitable Gift Fund
The Miami Foundation
United States Sugar Corporation
University of North Florida
Volusia Regional Community Charities Inc.
William D. Pruitt Jr. Living Trust
GFWC Mount Dora Women's Club

**** To update your lodge affiliation, please notify us at fsea@floridaelks.org so your new lodge will receive credit. ****

Spotlight on the Elks of the District

At each of the 14 district visits, the State President recognizes an Elk of the District. It is the Exalted Ruler's responsibility to see that a member is nominated and to submit that name to the district leadership team, made up of the District Leader, District Vice President and District Deputy. The team chooses one name for the district and submits it to the State President to announce at the district's State President's visit.

Below is the next set of 2026-2027 Elks of the District. We hope these profiles throughout the year not only help you get to know members in your lodge and district but also inspire you to get more involved — there is no shortage of ideas here! Perhaps you will be the next Elk of the District!



Southwest District — July 17-18 Visit
Alex Burke — Lakewood Ranch-Sarasota #2855
Nominated by Mark Liddell, Exalted Ruler

Regularly active within their lodge. Mr. Burke was originally hired as a bartender and became engaged in the purpose of the Elks and then became a lodge officer. He significantly increased his involvement with Lakewood Ranch-Sarasota. He is very active with two of the weekly activities (Tuesday Feather Your Nest and Sunday bar poker). Alex founded and led the Lakewood Ranch-Sarasota Elks Riders as president. He also regularly visits our lodge to donate time and support the events.

Speaks and acts with kindness and integrity. Mr. Burke always speaks and acts with courtesy and respect, whether it be socially in the lounge or at events. Alex never talks down to or about anyone. Instead, he often helps others work through personal issues and encourages others to participate in Elks. To Alex, facts are important and he avoids conversations negative to one's character, no matter the situation.

Communicates openly and collaborates effectively. Mr. Burke is the youngest officer on our current board and an Elk under the age of 40. He frequently presents new and innovative ways to help our lodge. He respects our history and the ideals, but Alex is assertive in board meetings, infusing new ideas accepted by other board members following a path to improve our future progress, whether it be promoting Elkdom, fiscal reductions or financial improvements.

Works extremely hard and is dedicated to Elkdom. Throughout his Elk lodge participation at Lakewood Ranch-Sarasota, Alex was exposed to all levels and aspects of the lodge and frequently steps in when needed. As president of the Elks Riders, he led multiple efforts and promoted to multiple lodges to raise over $15,000 for two local children who have medical issues. Alex can work hard, but the results he produces show he works harder.

Active in district and state events. Once an officer, Mr. Burke regularly attended all district meetings. This year he attended the state convention in Orlando to meet others and learn.

Has a team-minded spirit. Mr. Burke said to me that "we all are vital cogs in this big clock we call Elkdom. Each of us has a part, and without interlocking with our fellow Elks to accomplish our goals, we would be spinning in place." With any Elk member dedicating their time and effort to an Elk cause, you can find Alex standing next to them to get the job done.

Has fun. From themed events to live music, Alex will usually go out of his way to stand out in the name of fun. His personality is contagious and is respected by all others. When working at events, you can find Alex making announcements of importance for future social and fundraising events.

Keeps members informed and involved. Mr. Burke has a positive "can-do make-it-happen" attitude. Anyone at the lodge can tell you Alex is no stranger to a microphone. He announces upcoming events and ventures our lodge/district/state has to offer. Alex will also make a point of attending these events to promote and support them.

Treats our guests and members with dignity, warmth and respect. Mr. Burke treats everyone, our Elk members and prospective members, with integrity and respect. Alex shows this when he speaks and the way he acts not only reflects the kind of person he is but what our lodge represents. Alex respects lodge leadership that has led us to where our lodge is today.

Practices the foundation and groundwork of our order. "To do unto others as we would have them do unto us" is a motto that Mr. Burke exhibits. Alex leads by example in performance of assignments for the good of others. Alex also works to promote others to shine when it is best for that member to grow and for our organization. Mr. Burke doesn't expect praise and gratitude for what he does.

North Central District — July 24-25 Visit
David Tousseau — Ocala #286
Nominated by Carlos A. Quiles, Exalted Ruler



David Tousseau, Leading Knight, is one of the most active and dependable members of the lodge. He works closely with the Exalted Ruler in developing, planning, and implementing programs and initiatives that benefit the lodge and its members.

David is also an active member of the Membership Committee, which has successfully welcomed 47 new members and transfers into the lodge. Through his efforts to engage prospective members, promote the values of Elkdom, conduct new-member orientations, and ensure new members feel welcomed and involved, he has helped strengthen the lodge's membership and contribute to its continued growth and success. After transferring from another Florida lodge, David immediately became involved and volunteered wherever assistance was needed.

David's dedication and commitment were recognized almost immediately by the membership. After only five months as a member of Ocala Lodge, he was selected as Elk of the Month in recognition of his outstanding volunteerism, leadership and willingness to step forward whenever help was needed. This honor reflects the positive impact he made in a remarkably short period of time and the respect he earned from his fellow members.

When the lodge faced a shortage of volunteers to wash dishes, David stepped forward and assumed responsibility for three evenings each week, filling a critical need when few others were willing to do so. When one of the lodge's paid cooks recently resigned, David volunteered to assist in the kitchen and has taken over shifts to ensure the remaining cook has time off while a replacement is being sought. David also accepted leadership of the Soccer Shoot Committee with only two months remaining before the event. He successfully coordinated with the local soccer club, selected a suitable date, designed and built the competition netting, organized volunteers, and conducted a highly successful event. Several participants from our lodge advanced to the state competition, with multiple winners moving on to the regional competition. Additionally, David volunteered to chair Ocala Lodge's participation in the annual Ocala Christmas parade. This will be the lodge's first appearance in the parade, and he has already begun organizing volunteers and coordinating float construction and decorations.

David consistently demonstrates kindness, honesty and integrity in all his interactions. He treats fellow members, guests, and community partners with respect and professionalism, serving as a positive representative of both the lodge and the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks. His actions reflect a genuine concern for others and a commitment to doing what is right, regardless of recognition or reward.

David is an excellent communicator who works well with others. He encourages collaboration, welcomes input from fellow members, and keeps committees informed of progress and upcoming activities. His ability to bring people together and foster teamwork has contributed significantly to the success of numerous lodge programs and events. David routinely volunteers for difficult tasks that others may be unwilling to undertake and completes them with enthusiasm, professionalism and attention to detail. His commitment to service extends beyond the lodge through his volunteer work with a local Methodist church that assists individuals experiencing hardship and homelessness. Whether serving within the lodge or in the community, David consistently demonstrates the work ethic and dedication that exemplify the values of Elkdom.

David's contributions extend beyond the lodge. Due to his successful leadership of the Soccer Shoot, he has been selected by the District Vice President to serve as District Soccer Shoot Chair. He was instrumental in ensuring that lodge winners advanced to both district and state competitions, helping promote the Elks youth programs throughout the region and increasing participation in this important program.

David consistently seeks opportunities to involve others and build teamwork. He understands that successful programs depend on engaged volunteers and he works hard to encourage participation while recognizing the contributions of others. His leadership style focuses on bringing people together and creating an environment where members feel valued and motivated to contribute.

David approaches every responsibility with enthusiasm and a positive attitude. He genuinely enjoys serving the lodge and participating in its activities, helping create an enjoyable and welcoming atmosphere for everyone involved. His enthusiasm is contagious and encourages others to become more active in lodge events and programs.

Whether serving on a committee or acting as its chair, David ensures members remain informed and engaged. He communicates openly, provides regular updates and encourages participation so everyone has the opportunity to contribute to the success of the lodge.

David is one of only three members responsible for conducting orientations for new members. He helps introduce new members to the principles, programs, charitable activities and opportunities in the Elks, ensuring they feel welcomed, informed and prepared to become active participants in lodge activities. His commitment to educating and mentoring new members has contributed to member retention, engagement and the continued growth of the lodge.

David approaches challenges with optimism, determination and a solution-oriented mindset. Rather than focusing on obstacles, he focuses on finding practical solutions and implementing them effectively. A notable example involved the lodge's inventory system. David reorganized and revised the existing system to make it more efficient and user-friendly. A process that previously required several volunteers working over the course of two days can now be completed by the same number of volunteers in approximately one and a half hours. David firmly believes that every problem has a solution and consistently demonstrates the initiative and determination necessary to make positive things happen for the lodge.

David is known for his welcoming nature and positive demeanor. Whether interacting with longtime members, prospective members or guests, he consistently offers a warm greeting and makes everyone feel valued and appreciated. His friendliness and respect for others help create an environment that reflects the principles and hospitality of the Elks.

David exemplifies the principles of charity, justice, brotherly love, and fidelity through his actions and service to others. His volunteer work at a local Methodist church reflects his commitment to helping those in need. Through this ministry, he assists in providing showers, clothing, toiletries, bicycles, Florida identification cards, copies of birth certificates, hot meals, prayer and utility assistance for individuals facing difficult circumstances. David has volunteered in virtually every aspect of this outreach program and freely gives his time and energy to improve the lives of others. His dedication to serving those less fortunate demonstrates the true spirit of brotherly love and charity that forms the foundation of our order.

For these reasons, David Tousseau is exceptionally deserving of this recognition and honor.



South District — July 31 - Aug. 1 Visit
Jennene Ricard — Miami #948
Nominated by Jose Morin, PER, Exalted Ruler

I cannot think of someone more deserving for this award than Ms. Ricard. In the venue rental manager position, she continues to meet and exceed all expectations of the position by continually breaking records on the proceeds of venue rentals in our lodge.

Her charming personality and ability to strike a good rapport with the renters is one of the many reasons for her success. She manages the personnel and facilities very efficiently and is a very proud Elk member.

She started with the lodge as one of our bartenders some years ago and continued to move on her professional development, just recently completing a bachelor's degree in hospitality management.

She also devotes a lot of her personal time in preparing meals for our membership meeting collations. At this moment she is deeply involved in the reception and menu for our State President's and VPAL visitation, working in direct concert with the host. In the past she contributed immensely to successful charity fundraising events like our annual charity ball gala, Flag Day ceremony, Mother's Day brunch, Fourth of July picnic and many others.

Her ingenuity, resourcefulness and people skills make her a superstar in our lodge and she richly deserves this award.

South Southeast District — Aug. 7-8 Visit
Denise May-Carter, PDD — Oakland Park #2407
Nominated by Gloria Hamze, Lodge Secretary

An Elk of the District is not just a ceremonial title. It is an active leadership role with concrete examples, such as chairing charity committees, coordinating lodge activities, overseeing initiation processes, auditing finances, organizing fundraising events and ensuring proper protocol at lodge gatherings. These duties help maintain the BPOE's mission of charity, justice, brotherly love and fidelity. Denise May-Carter embodies these virtues and qualities for Oakland Park Lodge #2407, such as her unending, long-term, consistent service to the lodge; her unwavering willingness to step in and help with events, committees, and daily operations; her proactive participation in auxiliary groups or community service; and her steadfast benefit of representing the lodge's values of loyalty, dedication, and "Elks Care — Elks Share."



Denise is a valued member who has always helped her fellow members, and she has played a significant role in the success of many events at the lodge. The lodge, the district and the state truly appreciate her contributions, commitment, the wonderful example she has set in place for success of the lodge, and her steadfast guidance in what it means to be an Elk. Thank you for everything you do and continue to do for your lodge. She leads with confidence and unending merit and shows fellow Elks great examples of what being an Elk is all about. Please, give her a big congratulations on the job well done!



Southeast Central District — Aug. 14-15 Visit
Charles "Chuck" Marchetti, PER — Sebastian #2714
Nominated by Michael "Kevin" Edes, PER, District Vice President

Charles "Chuck" Marchetti has been a dedicated member of the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks since Feb. 21, 2017. From the beginning of his Elks journey, Chuck has demonstrated the true meaning of Elkdom through service, leadership, commitment and an unwavering willingness to help others.

Chuck is the type of Elk every lodge hopes to have as a member. When there is work to be done, Chuck does not wait to be asked. When his lodge, his fellow Elks, a veteran or his community needs assistance, Chuck shows up — and he gets the job done.

Over the years, Chuck has volunteered countless hours supporting numerous lodge and community activities, including the annual car show, seafood festival and many other lodge functions. His commitment to our veterans is particularly noteworthy, including volunteering his time and skills to assist with repairs at a veterans facility in Brevard County. His service reflects the Elks' commitment to our nation's veterans and demonstrates that Chuck is willing to put service into action wherever it is needed.

Chuck has also demonstrated strong leadership within Sebastian Lodge #2714. He has served with distinction as Esteemed Lecturing Knight, Esteemed Leading Knight and Exalted Ruler. His willingness to accept leadership responsibilities and his continued service after holding those positions are a testament to his dedication to the lodge and the order.

Chuck's service does not end when the meeting is over. He has willingly cooked for numerous lodge functions and has consistently stepped forward to help make lodge activities successful. He currently serves on the House Committee and remains an active member of the PER Association, continuing to give his time and experience to the lodge.

Chuck's commitment to our youth programs is another example of his willingness to step up when needed. During last year's Elks Hoop Shoot, Chuck volunteered his time and effort to help Sebastian Lodge successfully participate and advance three contestants. His involvement helped ensure that our lodge could provide this important opportunity to young people in our community.

What distinguishes Chuck, however, is not simply the number of positions he has held or the events in which he has participated. It is the consistency and character of his service. Chuck is the Elk you can call when something needs to be done. Whether the task is large or small and whether it involves the lodge, our veterans, our youth or our community, Chuck can be counted on to be there.

He represents the very best qualities of an Elk: service without seeking recognition, leadership through example, loyalty to his lodge, dedication to our veterans and youth, and a genuine willingness to help others.

For these reasons, Charles "Chuck" Marchetti is an outstanding representative of Sebastian Lodge #2714 and the Southeast Central District and is highly deserving of recognition as the 2026-2027 Southeast Central District Elk of the Year.

Chuck does not simply belong to the Elks — he lives the principles of Elkdom through his actions.

East Central District — Aug. 21-22 Visit
Tammy Reynolds — Titusville #2113
Nominated by Heather Heineman, Exalted Ruler

Tammy embodies true Elkdom in every cell of her body. Though she has only been an Elk for 4.5 years, her service to Elkdom started when she was only the spouse of an Elk. Before she became an Elk, Tammy spent many years volunteering for our local food pantry, Hummingbird Pantry. She has done several fundraisers for them, raising over $7,000.



Her service to our community and even other states continued when she joined us. She has spent hundreds of hours cooking, baking, cleaning and helping anyway she can around the lodge. Tammy has helped with bingo, camp bus trips, Elk lodge bus trips, and keeping the lodge safe and up to code as the Accident Prevention manager for the past two years. Recently she took on the duties of a cleaning, coming after we lost our cleaning company, by keeping all areas of the lodge clean.

She headed up the building of two Christmas parade floats, where, in year one, we were the grand champions. This year she spearheaded our participation in our city's first 4th of July parade. She has also helped to pack boxes of food and treats for active military through Oasis. In the past three years, she helped with the Stamp Out Hunger project in Titusville.

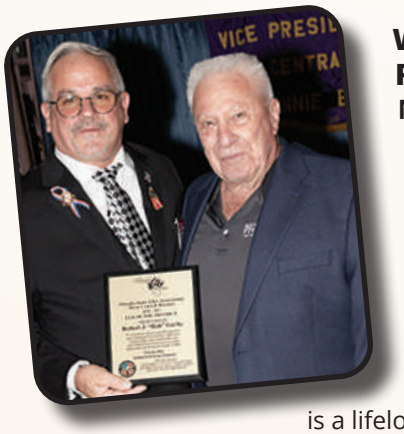
She currently is our Harry-Anna Lodge Chair, where she has increased Harry-Anna giving in Titusville over 50%.

She has four years of service to Hummingbird Pantry in passing out food twice a month to well over 10,000 people a month.

She has worked many Elk functions, currently doing a rummage sale fundraiser for Elks National Foundation, Veterans Services and Harry-Anna. She has devoted many hours during the Christmas holiday gift-wrapping Christmas gifts as a fundraiser for lodge charities. Last year she started a crochet group that has made hundreds of lap blankets for local nursing homes. Two years ago, during the flooding in Carolina, she led a group in making mittens and blankets for residents up there who lost everything. She herself crocheted 200 hats for local homeless people and veterans here in Titusville. For the past two years, Tammy has led a quarter auction that has raised over $5,000 for our lodge and local charities. All of these amazing accolades are only a small part of what Tammy does and they don't even scratch the surface of who she is.

Our four pillars of charity, justice, brotherly love and fidelity are all encompassed in her. She truly is what every Elk on the planet should strive to be.

Titusville Lodge #2113 is a blessed lodge to have her as a trustee and member. As her Exalted Ruler, I can say no one has been more of my right hand than her. She has fiercely protected me and my fireside. I can't ever repay her for her service or her compassion.



West Central District — Sept. 11-12 Visit
Robert J. "Bob" Gorby — Tarpon Springs #1719
Nominated by Pete Kolnicki, Exalted Ruler

Brother Gorby exemplifies the highest ideals of Elkdom through his unwavering dedication to our veterans, our lodge, and the principles of the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks. His service is not occasional — it is a lifelong commitment that has positively impacted countless lives at the local, district and state levels.

His passion for serving our nation's veterans is evident in everything he does. Robert regularly volunteers with veterans programs throughout Florida and is a familiar face at our local VA hospital. There, he personally delivers donated clothing to veterans in need, ensuring they receive essential items with dignity and compassion. He also volunteers his time serving meals to long-term patients, providing not only nourishment but also friendship, encouragement and heartfelt gratitude to those who have sacrificed so much in service to our nation.

Equally impressive is Robert's dedication to Tarpon Springs Elks Lodge #1719. He serves as Chair of the lodge's Flag Day Committee, Memorial Day Committee and Veterans Services Committee, where his leadership has helped ensure these important programs are carried out with professionalism, respect and unwavering commitment to our order's values. In addition to these leadership roles, he has volunteered countless hours supporting these committees and virtually every aspect of lodge operations. Whether assisting with charitable events, patriotic ceremonies, fundraising activities, community outreach or countless other lodge functions, Robert is always willing to lend a helping hand wherever it is needed.

Rather than seeking recognition, Robert quietly leads through action. He consistently volunteers before being asked, mentors fellow members, represents our lodge with pride throughout the district and state, and remains until every task is completed. His humility, dependability and servant leadership have earned the admiration and respect of everyone privileged to serve alongside him.

Robert truly embodies the Elks motto, "Elks Care — Elks Share." His compassion, patriotism, generosity and steadfast commitment to serving others exemplify the very qualities this award was established to recognize. He is an outstanding ambassador for the Elks and a shining example of what it means to put the needs of others before one's own.

It is without reservation and with the highest respect that I recommend Robert Gorby as your District Elk of the Year. His exceptional service, selfless leadership and unwavering devotion to our veterans, our lodge and our communities make him eminently deserving of this honor. I can think of no member more worthy of your highest consideration.

South Southwest District — Sept. 18-19 Visit
Stephanie Helgeland — Deep Creek #2763
Nominated by Jed Koontz, Exalted Ruler

It is with great pride and enthusiasm that I recommend Stephanie Helgeland for District Elk of the Year. For nearly two years, Stephanie served as Lodge Secretary, and throughout her tenure, she demonstrated an extraordinary level of dedication, professionalism and commitment to Elkdom. She approached every responsibility with kindness, integrity and an unwavering willingness to serve. Her door was always open to our members, and she consistently made herself available to listen, answer questions, offer assistance and help in any way she could.

Stephanie worked tirelessly to ensure that the records of our lodge were complete, accurate and up to date. She took great care to ensure that our members' information was properly recorded and maintained in the system. Her meticulous attention to detail was evident in the timely and accurate submission of every report required by Grand Lodge, the state and the district.

She also took on the important responsibility of writing and submitting grant applications, and her efforts resulted in $15,000 of grant funding to support our communities. These grants provided valuable resources for our charitable efforts and allowed our lodge to expand its ability to serve those in need. Her work securing these funds is yet another example of Stephanie seeing what needed to be done and taking the initiative to make it happen.



What makes Stephanie's service truly remarkable is that she consistently went far beyond the responsibilities of her position. In addition to her duties as Lodge Secretary and her extensive community volunteerism, Stephanie wholeheartedly embraced and supported the Exalted Ruler's vision to pay off the lodge's monumental mortgage, a financial burden that had been dragging down Deep Creek Lodge #2763 and threatening its very future, almost to the point of having to close its doors.

Stephanie became the consummate ambassador for Elkdom and Deep Creek Lodge #2763. She understood the importance of the vision and made it her mission to share that message with our members, our community and everyone she encountered. Day after day, she worked tirelessly to communicate why eliminating the mortgage was so important to the lodge's financial stability and long-

term future.

She didn't simply support the vision — she championed it. Stephanie talked about the importance of the goal, encouraged others to believe in what was possible and continually helped keep the vision at the forefront of our lodge's efforts. Her enthusiasm, persistence and ability to connect with people helped build support for an undertaking that, at the beginning, seemed almost impossible.

Then, just 14 months later, Deep Creek Lodge #2763 held a mortgage-burning ceremony. That extraordinary accomplishment was the result of many people working together, but Stephanie's tireless efforts as an ambassador for the lodge and its vision played an important role in helping make that dream a reality. She helped turn what had once seemed like a monumental obstacle into a defining achievement for the lodge and its future. This accomplishment perfectly represents Stephanie's approach to Elkdom: She sees a need, believes in what can be accomplished and then gives everything she has to make it happen.

What began as what was expected to be a part-time position became so much more because of Stephanie's extraordinary commitment. She never tracked the countless hours she devoted to Elkdom, but based on the time she spent performing her responsibilities, assisting members, supporting lodge activities, advancing the mortgage payoff vision and serving our community, it is estimated that she averaged more than 50 hours each week in service to our lodge and the Elks.

There was truly no task too great for Stephanie to take on. When something needed to be done, she stepped forward, found a way to accomplish it and followed through. Her dependability and determination made her someone our lodge could always count on.

Stephanie has consistently demonstrated the true meaning of the Elks' commitment to community service. She volunteered her time to deliver food to local food pantries, helping ensure that those in need within our community received assistance. She also helped provide school supplies to local children, supporting families and giving students the tools they needed to begin the school year prepared to learn.

Her service to our lodge has been just as generous. Stephanie volunteered countless hours to set up and prepare the lodge for special events, often taking care of the work behind the scenes that was necessary to ensure that events were successful. Whether preparing for a major lodge function, assisting with a community project, handling administrative responsibilities, writing grants, promoting the mortgage payoff or simply helping wherever she was needed, Stephanie could always be counted on.

And she did all this while carrying the responsibilities of Lodge Secretary with exceptional dedication and attention to detail. She gave her time freely, without hesitation and without expecting recognition. Her willingness to serve has been an inspiration to our members and an example of what it means to truly live the principles of Elkdom.

Stephanie's dedication to Elkdom is unsurpassed. She faithfully attended all lodge meetings and participated in the majority of district, state, and Grand Lodge functions and conventions. Her commitment went far beyond simply attending events — she actively supported the work and mission of the order wherever she could.

Membership is one of the keys to success for any lodge. Stephanie received two Grand Exalted Ruler awards for her outstanding membership work — recruiting and reinstating 29 new members during the Grand Lodge year ending June 30, 2026.

Most importantly, Stephanie exemplifies the five pillars of Elkdom — charity, justice, brotherly love, fidelity and patriotism — not only in words but through her daily actions. Her kindness toward our members, her charitable service to our community, her dedication to the lodge, and her willingness to give her time and talents demonstrate these principles every day.

Stephanie Helgeland represents the very best of what it means to be an Elk. She has demonstrated that service is not simply a responsibility — it is a way of life. From maintaining the lodge's records and submitting reports and grants to securing $15,000 in community grant funding; from delivering food to those in need and providing school supplies to children to preparing for lodge events; from dedicating more than 50 hours a week to Elkdom to becoming the voice and ambassador for a vision that helped save the financial future of Deep Creek Lodge #2763, Stephanie has continually put the needs of others and the mission of Elkdom first.

Fourteen months after embracing an ambitious vision that once seemed nearly impossible, Stephanie stood with her fellow Elks at a mortgage-burning ceremony celebrating the elimination of that enormous financial burden. Her story is a testament to what can happen when dedication, perseverance, belief and service come together.

Her service, dedication, kindness, generosity and tireless commitment have made a lasting impact on our lodge, our members and our community. She has given countless hours in service to our order, often quietly working behind the scenes to make sure things get done while also stepping into the spotlight when Elkdom needed an ambassador.

For all these reasons, I wholeheartedly and proudly recommend Stephanie Helgeland for District Elk of the Year. She is exceptionally deserving of this honor and recognition. Stephanie doesn't simply belong to Elkdom — she embodies it. She is the kind of Elk who makes a difference, strengthens her lodge, serves her community, inspires those around her and leaves Elkdom better than she found it. I cannot think of a more deserving Elk to receive this distinction.

Deep Creek Lodge held a celebration for Helgeland Oct. 2, as she was unable to attend the State President's visit. They gave her a small Elk statue and a special parking spot as recognition.

Elks Day at the Rays Puts the Fun in Fundraising!



A win for the Tampa Bay Rays was also a win for Florida Elks fundraising Sept. 13 at the annual Elks Day at the Rays event. The Rays won 14-4 against the Houston Astros at Tropicana Field in St. Petersburg. The Tampa Bay Rays donated $5 per ticket to the Harry-Anna Investment Fund. With 249 Elks and guests in attendance, that totaled $1,245 for Florida Elks Children's Therapy Services and the Florida Elks Youth Camp.



State President Leonard "Lenny" DiLorenzo threw out the ceremonial first pitch, and FECTS CHAMP Georgia Stemann made the "Play Ball!" announcement. Georgia's parents and therapist, Jeanne Martin, OTR/L, joined Georgia on the field as well. Martin shared that "Georgia did a spectacular job and definitely showed her true 'CHAMP' abilities."

When asked what the day meant to him, President DiLorenzo noted, "Throwing out the first pitch at the Tampa Bay Rays game was an incredible honor and a moment I'll never forget. What made it even more special was representing Florida Elks and sharing the field with Georgia, this year's Children's Therapy Services CHAMP, as she called 'Play Ball!' It was a proud day for Florida Elkdom and a wonderful reminder of why we do what we do."



One of the game's attendees was New Port Richey Elks Lodge's Lecturing Knight, Jason Bihlajama, who attended the game with a Past Exalted Ruler from his lodge. He described the event as "a good time because the Rays had just clinched a playoff spot. ... And looking out into the crowd seeing all the white and blue Elks/Rays hats made us feel like we were with family."



Steve Harmon, Elks Day at the Rays Coordinator, is already working on next year's event, so be sure to join in the fun and attend the 2027 Elks Day at the Rays!

Clockwise from top left:

Announcer Nate Kurant with FECTS CHAMP Georgia Stemann; State President Leonard "Lenny" DiLorenzo throwing the ceremonial first pitch (Photo credit/Tampa Bay Rays)

Curtis, Georgia & Julie Stemann (Photo credit/Jeanne Martin, OTR/L)

Georgia Stemann & therapist Jeanne Martin, OTR/L (Photo credit/Tressy Guadagno, OTR/L, Assistant FECTS Director)

Pompano Beach Elk Craig A. Pugatch Takes the Bench as U.S. Bankruptcy Judge:
Past Exalted Ruler of Pompano Beach Lodge #1898 Celebrated at Miami Investiture

On June 1, 2026, the United States Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit appointed the Honorable Craig A. Pugatch, a Past Exalted Ruler of Pompano Beach Elks Lodge #1898, as a United States Bankruptcy Judge for the Southern District of Florida, Fort Lauderdale Division. The Eleventh Circuit appoints all bankruptcy judges in Florida, Georgia and Alabama.

On Sept. 18, Judge Pugatch was formally invested at the Wilkie D. Ferguson, Jr. United States Courthouse in Miami. Longtime friends and family, members of the public, and representatives of local bar associations joined him to celebrate.



Pictured at Judge Craig Pugatch's investiture are Chad Pugatch, Craig's father; Judge Robert Mark; Cheryl Price, Craig's mother; Judy Pugatch, Craig's wife; and Alana Pugatch, Craig's daughter. His wife and mother are Pompano Beach Elks and his daughter is a Pompano Beach Antler.

Photo credit/Eduardo Bezerra de Lima - Blackmoon Productions

The ceremony opened with a moment of special pride for Lodge 1898. The colors were presented by Judge Pugatch's daughter, Alana Pugatch, President of the Pompano Beach Lodge 1898 Antlers, which she and a group of friends founded in 2025. She is very involved with the Antlers' charitable activities and fundraising. She was joined at her father's ceremony by fellow Antlers representing the Pompano Beach High School JROTC Tornado Battalion. The Antlers' presentation set a tone of patriotism and youth leadership that reflected the values of the order.

Elks turned out in force. Attendees included Florida State Elks Association Secretary, Nick Miller; District Leader, Vincent Como, PSP; South Southeast District Deputy, Stuart Howitt, PDVP; and many members of Pompano Beach Lodge #1898.

The ceremony featured both humor and music. Among the highlights were performances by world-renowned countertenor Reggie Mobley, a longtime friend of Judge Pugatch. In his remarks, Judge Pugatch spoke about values Elks hold dear, including service to others and empathy. He described these as qualities that guide both good citizenship and the fair administration of justice.

An Elk at Heart

Outside the courtroom, Judge Pugatch is committed to community service and has been an active member of the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks since 2023, when he joined Pompano Beach Lodge #1898. He was introduced to the Elks by his good friend Ryan Maker, who had recently become involved with the organization and believed that he would be interested in the objectives and activities of the Elks. He has served as trustee and Leading Knight and was Exalted Ruler for 2025-2026. He is currently serving as the Harry-Anna Investment Fund Lodge Chair, the Government Relations District Chair and the Americanism State Vice Chair.

He is also an avid cook, musician and scuba diver. He enjoys these pursuits with his wife, Judy, and daughter, Alana, especially while traveling and camping.



Alana Pugatch and fellow Pompano Beach Antlers present the colors at her father's investiture.

Photo credit/ Daniel Portnoy Photography

The members of Pompano Beach Lodge #1898, Elks across Florida and the Florida State Elks Association congratulate Judge Pugatch on this well-deserved honor.

Summer Camp at the Florida Elks Youth Camp: Thirty Years of Making an Impact on Youth

By Rachael King

From 1996 to 2026, the Florida Elks Youth Camp has hosted 30 years of summer camp, taking into account that the 2020 season was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. But the story of the Florida Elks Youth Camp begins about 12 years earlier, when the land was purchased before even knowing how it would be used. And the story continues today, in 2026, with summer camp continuing to make tremendous impacts on young people's lives.

Origin Story

On May 24, 1984, at the 78th annual Florida State Elks Association convention, Past National President and State Sponsor, Bob Grafton, shared that he could foresee a time when the Florida Elks Children's Hospital would no longer be needed and that he thought the Florida Elks should therefore create a second major project. He made a motion for the Florida State Elks Association to appoint a seven-person committee to find approximately 250 acres near Umatilla, Florida, which is where the hospital was located, at a cost not to exceed $1.5 million. The motion was seconded by Past State President George Dominianni. That same year, 365 acres of land eight miles from the hospital was purchased, with an additional 20 acres purchased later that had access to County Road 450.

A land use committee then took its time deciding how best to use the land. State Secretary Nick Miller, who started at the camp as Aquatics Director and then moved to Assistant Director before becoming Camp Director, explains that "over the next 8-10 years, they considered a retirement home for Elks, a hotel for Elks, a camp for kids and several other ideas. Eventually, PGER Grafton pushed them toward a youth camp. It's safe to say that we wouldn't have a youth camp without Bob's persistence. … I always find it neat that they built the pavilion waaaaay bigger than what they needed (it's 15,000 square feet), but the logo on the floor back then was "Build It and They Will Come." As much as the camp has grown in the last 30 years, the pavilion still (barely) accommodates every single camper and staff for meals during summer camp. Neat to see their vision was that big."



Photo of mealtime in the pavilion, dated July 28, 1996

In May 1997 at the annual state convention, Tom Ryan, Florida Elks Youth Camp Board President, reported that the 1996 summer camp season hosted 437 campers in the weeklong sessions and that there were 898 campers signed up to attend the 1997 weeklong sessions, more than doubling the camper census.

Summer Camp Grows



A photo of cabin construction, dated Oct. 15, 1994

As the camp grew, more facilities were added to enhance the summer camp experience (as well as for the year-round groups). The following is not an exhaustive list, but it serves as an example of how much growth has taken place in 30 years.

In 1999, Building 9, known as the Albertus "Boots" and Eleanor Van Duren Educational Complex, or the educational building, was dedicated.

In 2001, the Grafton Center, which housed the gymnasium, opened.

In 2002, the amount of cabins doubled, from



A photo of the camp land, dated Oct. 15, 1994

An undated photo of Tom Ryan, FEYC Board President, orienting counselors and CITs



21 to 42, by adding the Palms cabins. This allowed the number of campers to double, too, and for girls and boys to attend camp at the same time. The alpine tower and grotto were added to the ropes course as well.

In 2009, Camp Director Lynn Warburton reported at the state convention that they had teamed with the Army of Hope to make summer camp's Week 7 for dependents of deployed military members. He also reported that the new shelter building was almost completed. As for programming updates, he noted that each week, campers would receive one hour of drug awareness information from the camp's partnership with the Saint Augustine National Guard. These military weeks (with the exception of years 2015 through 2021) also brought soldiers to the camp each year. Warburton also reported that they were adding frisbee golf and that they built a new and better slip and slide on property. Finally, he added that the new 54-foot climbing wall had just been completed.

In 2011, 10 camper cabins were added — five to the Oaks and five to the Palms — as well as 15 executive cabins for adult staff members and guests.

In 2013, the Bates Aquatics Center opened. This added a second pool as well as shade cover.

In 2014, the new infirmary was added.

In 2016, additional fire pits were built.

In 2017, summer camp saw many changes. The "Inspire. Connect. Expand." motto was introduced — newly hired Activities Director, Elliott Gilbert, came up with the new motto. (Gilbert began as a counselor in 2013 before transitioning to Activities Director, to Program Director, to Assistant Director and finally to Director in May 2025.) Miller notes, "We completely redesigned our staff training. We got away from seven days of staff sitting in the same room for six-eight hours a day just listening to lectures. Instead, training occurred in smaller groups in the actual area related to the instruction." A new nature program was implemented, consisting of hikes and educational games, to help campers connect with nature. Voluntary service projects were also added, where cabin groups, with the help of staff leadership, chose a project to complete during the week that would help the camp, staff members or campers.

The 2017 summer camp was also the first year that online camper registration was used. Director Miller reported in his Florida Elks Magazine summer article that "despite the challenge of such a new system, you broke all previous records in getting kids signed up for camp. ... The new registration software has made it easier than ever to keep our camper families updated and for them to update us. Due to this, we can pull from our waiting list to fill the beds of campers who drop out last minute better than ever before. The software has also proven to be more accurate at check-in and checkout. For parents and chaperones, this shortens our processing time. For camp staff, this ensures that all camper information is correct and instantaneously available to staff management."

In 2018, family-style dining made its debut in place of cafeteria-style dining, where campers waited in line — sometimes up to 40 minutes — before being served through a window. With family-style meals, a camper and staff member deliver a tray of food bowls to their cabin's table, where each person fills their plate and then passes the bowls to the next person, much like a holiday dinner. Many campers don't get this dining experience at home, so this setting gives them the opportunity for making conversation, practicing manners and bonding with each other. Another addition to the summer camp program this year was extending the campfire slot to include time for campers to discuss their day, week or life beyond camp. To prepare counselors for this, staff members were trained by a nationally-recognized child psychologist to be active listeners.

In 2019, summer camp had its highest attendance to date — 2,338 campers and only 14 empty beds all summer.

To keep everyone safe, summer camp had to be canceled in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Summer camp returned in 2021 with protocols and precautions, which allowed them to get through six weeks of camp before ultimately having to cancel week 7. But when many camps had to shut down in the first or second weeks due to outbreaks, the Florida Elks Youth Camp did an outstanding job keeping campers safe.

Also in 2021, a professional fireworks show was added to the camp lineup. The Extended Camp Leadership Program began after camp ended. This program is held each year from September through May. In the first year, eight of the best summer camp





The 25-meter, seven-lane, heated pool, then and now: Oct. 26, 1996, and summer camp 2026

In 2013, the Bates Aquatics Center opened, adding a second pool and shade panels.

staff members and 40 13-year-old campers (those who would be past the age limit to continue the following year as campers) were chosen to participate. The staff members were paired and given 10 campers to keep in touch with monthly via Zoom (an online video platform) as a group to bond, play games and discuss what's going on in their lives. Counselors also met with each camper individually twice a month via Zoom to act as mentors and discuss their goals, struggles and successes as a way to continue making an impact on them after camp.

Additionally in 2021, two-week sessions were offered for the first time. These were available to the oldest campers, and all slots were filled. They arrived on a Sunday and stayed two full weeks. The first week was a typical week of camp, like all the other campers had. However, in the second week, they were given the choice of activities that focused on creativity, adventure or service. Director Miller explained how this worked in his 2022 annual report. "These activities ranged from entertaining other groups with talent shows to camping in tents to helping acclimate the youngest campers to camp upon arrival. Campers from the 14-day sessions also earned the opportunity to be the first participants in our Extended Camp Leadership Program … all of the participants were invited to the camp for three in-person weekends. These weekends focused on leadership and what it takes to someday work at camp."

In 2024, ECLP expanded to include the Extended Counselor-in-Training Leadership Program.

In 2025, the pavilion got a new kitchen.

In 2026 to commemorate 30 years of summer camp, Jeremiah's Italian Ice was available at check-in. On one of the water days, Kona Ice was offered.

A 30th anniversary logo was placed on the front of all camper and staff shirts. And, for three days, about 10 alumni counselors came back to camp as guest counselors, participating in activities, talking with campers and spending time with staff members.

A Shift in Summer Camp Goals

Equally important over the years, in addition to the infrastructure and programming growth, has been the shift in the camp's goals and philosophy regarding the impact it makes on campers. In the early years, the focus was simply on keeping the kids safe while they were having fun at summer camp. The camp offered many facilities, activities and experiences kids had not previously had access to, so this was a place they could come to be a kid and parents didn't have to worry about them.



A camper shows off a tie-dye shirt with the 30th anniversary logo.





The slip and slide, then and now: In an undated photo and at summer camp 2026

Eventually, though, the focus shifted more to intentional programming, described here by Miller. "Over the years, I saw the impact we had on their character and life choices, and that led me to push to be more intentional in our programming. Kids having fun was a delivery tool for more important work like growing their confidence, their empathy and their desire to give back. We started gearing activities to be fun while also presenting opportunities for these traits to flourish. Flag was no longer just raising or lowering the flag. It now involved discussion between staff and kids about why we were doing it — because we were thankful. Instead of staring blankly at the service, kids were encouraged to think about what they were thankful for and what they could do to make someone else thankful. It's one of the reasons why Elliott [Gilbert] was always such a great addition to the camp. He understands intentional programming and is very good about creating and implementing it. I feel like these changes have led to a much more powerful impact on the kids that attend."

Elliott Gilbert became Camp Director in May 2025. He explains this approach further. "Our programs have adapted as we shifted into becoming what we call an 'intentional camp.' This means every activity we do has a purpose beyond fun. We are addressing some aspect of youth development and supporting our campers. We've developed a motto to stand behind and help us achieve our mission, using "Inspire. Connect. Expand." to help kids develop

into adults that we would be proud to have as American citizens. This means intention is important for every activity we lead, and staff must be looking out for how they can best support their campers beyond fun. This will always remain my goal and philosophy for the camp — to provide the youth of Florida with the tools needed to help us accomplish our mission." He adds that the Extended Camp Leadership Program fits into this mission because it helps campers "create goals that will help them grow as a person and learn the habits of successful individuals."





National Guard members at summer camp 2026

Director Gilbert says that "the needs of the kids of Florida will always come first. While keeping up with the world isn't easy, in this ever-changing world of technological advances, the true needs of youth have remained true. Kids need to feel safe, to learn how to solve problems, to address conflict, to come up with solutions and ideas, to regulate their ever-changing emotions, to understand that there's a world outside their own that deserves attention, and the ability to develop their independence. With time spent indoors increasing and new experiences decreasing, we are dedicated to … providing our campers with more opportunities to try something new, encourage time spent outdoors, and increase their desire to impact the world around them. Providing more opportunities to show mindfulness, develop the concept of intention and develop independence — all skills that lead to making a lasting impact in their worlds and set them up for success."

What does this look like in practice? Gilbert gives examples. "We create opportunities at camp where campers will encounter struggles. Staff are trained to assist campers work through these struggles themselves and not just provide the 'answer.' While providing the 'answer' would save time and in many cases be easier, it won't provide the growth critical for youth development. Our cabins have campers from all walks of life, with campers coming from many different neighborhoods and cities across Florida. It creates opportunity for campers to see the world outside their own and connect with others who they have met back home. When campers ask questions about rules to activities, games and the camp, we encourage our staff to ask the camper, 'what do they think should happen?' giving campers autonomy and influence on the world they are interacting in."

Special Camp Connections

Whether it is fondly remembering summer camps of the past, keeping in touch with camp friends, being a second-generation camper or even owing your career to having been a camp counselor, summer camp at the Florida Elks Youth Camp fosters special memories, bonds and life-changing opportunities. Four former campers and counselors recount their time at summer camp and what it still means to them.

Kiley Peer was a camper from age nine in 2012 to age 13 in 2016. "Because of that, I wanted to come back to work as a CIT at 16 and help to give other kids the magical camp experience I had. Some of the greatest memories I have of being at camp were the over-the-top bonfires we would throw with s'mores, campfire songs and dancing. Those memories often come in my mind. I still keep in touch with one of my fellow CITs from the summer I was working. Her and I have even made the time to see each other as adults."

Kamron Graham attended camp as a camper from ages nine to 13 and was a counselor-in-training in 2016 and 2017, a counselor in 2018, and an ECLP counselor in 2024. He says, "The friendships over the years were memories I will never forget. I learned many skills from FEYC that I never had thought would be transferable. Teaching the campers had become a big part during my years. Instead of just focusing on having fun at summer camp for myself, I put all of my attention on teaching the campers and mentoring some of the older ones. I remember all the different personalities of everyone I met at the camp. I still keep in touch with a few counselors I met over the years. Some of the relationships are beneficial for both people, while others are ones who became closer friends."

Camp Director Gilbert started at the Florida Elks Youth Camp as a counselor in 2013. He, too, stays in touch with many past counselors. "The friendships I have made here have created some of the realest and longest lasting friendships I've had in my life. I've been a groomsman in their weddings, texted them the morning of my daughter's birth … We never know the moments that will stick with those we meet in our lives, but I know that camp creates life-changing relationships."

Something special that can happen because there have been so many years of summer camp is that second generations of campers and counselors are making their way through summer camp at the Florida Elks Youth Camp. Anna Cervera shares her story. She was a summer camp

counselor in 2002, after her first year of college. She had seen an ad in her University of Central Florida school newspaper and "thought it sounded fun and something new! It was a chance to do something different, make money, make new friends. I was always babysitting and was comfortable working with kids. I tried to get a few friends to go with me, but they were too nervous."

She still recalls a lot about summer camp. "I remember mealtime being busy, fun and noisy! Everyone talking about their day reconnecting since the last meal! Chicken patty day was everyone's favorite meal. Standout memories would be Week 1 when my campers did a song and dance to 'Hey Mickey You're So Fine,' accidentally flipping our canoe during instructor training, sleeping in bunk beds and bonding with other counselors during training, water day and the slip n slide." She remembers her campers, too. "When I look back I remember their silliness, excitement and fun. ... I had a few campers that wrote me letters after they left (it was such a treat to know that in a small way I helped them to have a great camp experience)." After camp, she kept in touch with a few people but lately they stay updated on social media.

Cervera wants Florida Elks to know "what a lasting impact [camp] had on me. As a kid I was able to do a lot of local day camps but never sleepaway camp. This was an opportunity for me to experience sleeping away camp as a college student. I was challenged to step out on my own and try something new, different and a little scary. I walked away a little more confident and maybe a bit braver!"

In 2026, her 10-year old son, Ryan, attended summer camp at the Florida Elks Youth Camp for the first time after hearing lots of stories about it from his cousin, Samantha (Anna's niece), who has been to the camp three years, and from his mom, who shared plenty of stories and pictures with him from her time there as a counselor. His favorite activities were swimming with his friends, archery and water day. He definitely wants to attend summer camp next year.

Judith Philpott, who was a counselor-in-training in 2018 at age 16 and a counselor in 2019 at the camp, credits her career to having worked here. She recalls that Camp Director Gilbert "took the time to learn about our individual goals. He knew how badly I wanted to become a nurse, so he gave me opportunities to spend time in the infirmary and shadow the nurses and medics. I remember helping take care of sick campers and even helping pick lice out of a few heads! At the time, those experiences may have seemed small, but they gave me early exposure to caring for others and helped reinforce what I wanted to do with my life. FEYC also gave me a scholarship that helped me pay for college. I can proudly say that FEYC played a significant role in shaping the person I am today as an Army ICU nurse.

"Later in my time at FEYC, I began to realize that camp was much more than just a summer job. In many ways, it instilled a lifestyle and a set of values in me that transitioned incredibly well into my military career. Before campers even arrived, we went through a full week of staff training. We learned first aid, how to support campers through difficult emotions, how to work together as a staff and how to follow a disciplined daily schedule. At the time, I remember thinking, 'Why is this so strict?' Looking back now, I completely understand. They were preparing a group of young adults to be responsible for little human lives. Parents were trusting us with their kids whom they cared about most, and FEYC took that responsibility seriously. That environment taught me responsibility, teamwork, discipline, leadership, empathy and accountability, which are all qualities that have continued to serve me throughout college, nursing and my military career.

"FEYC was genuinely life-changing for me. I originally showed up as a 16-year-old who wanted to earn some money for a senior trip. I had no idea that I was walking into a place that would help shape my values, my



2002 counselor Anna Cervera and her niece and son, all at the archery range, a generation apart

Ryan Cervera, 2026 camper, poses next to a photo of his 2002 counselor mom, which hangs in the Grafton Center at the Florida Elks Youth Camp.

friendships, my education, my career and ultimately the person I would become. FEYC taught me how to care for people, how to lead, how to listen, how to work as part of a team and how important it is to create a place where someone feels safe enough to simply be themselves. I hope that over the years I was able to teach the campers even half as much as they taught me. When I look back now as an Army ICU nurse, I can see pieces of what I learned at FEYC in the way I lead and care for people today. I came to FEYC because I needed a summer job, but I kept coming back because it became a community I wanted to be a part of."





Judith Philpott, 2018 counselor-in-training and 2019 counselor, with campers and fellow staff members

The Future of Summer Camp

When current Camp Director, Elliott Gilbert, is asked what his vision is for the future of summer camp, he says, "Looking around the camp it's easy to see how incredible a job we've done in such a short amount of time. When thinking about what to do next or where I'd like to see us in the next 30 years, the answer is simple. I don't know. Society has changed an incredible amount in a short amount of time, making our needs ever-changing themselves. What I'd like to see in the short-term is growing our programs that connect with nature and mindfulness. Revamp our lake and boathouse. Create an indoor space with a learning center for our nature program along with a bait tank for our fishing program. Build a mobile floating dock so campers of all needs can go from the shore out to the middle of the lake and engage with those out on the lake, along with allowing campers to fish from any spot on the lake. What we've created here at FEYC is incredible. We are at a point where we can focus on developing our current programming and activities into ones that provide a unique experience for any camper or user group that comes through our gates. An example of this is I'd like to see our Arts & Crafts program evolve from basic crafting to include learning new skills such as pottery, ceramics, sewing and crocheting. Over these next five years we are looking to feed our alumni and develop an organization of past staff and campers who have the desire to make an impact on the camp and its current generation of campers, whether it's through money, donations, or even time spent providing service in developing our camp and its programming. We've changed countless lives over the past 30 summers, and I know they want to help us continue that tradition."

Some of Gilbert's standout memories are when he receives letters from past campers who are older who write to thank him for the impact the camp or he made on their lives. "Many times it's a little moment that I never gave much thought other than the fact that I took the moment to speak with them." He also enjoys "seeing past campers come back to camp as staff members because they can't imagine spending their summer anywhere else. Camp was too large of an impact that they want to give campers the same experience they received. It reminds me that the power of camp is real."

Camp Director Gilbert invites you to see the power of camp, too. "Schedule a lodge tour and learn more about the impact of this incredible place. Hear my stories and those of many others. The cost of the bus is reimbursed up to $2,000 in full if at least 40 members attend, with partial if there are less. Your members will find out what it truly means to be an Elk." ■

Florida Elks Youth Camp Bus Tours:

Once a year, lodges can be reimbursed for a camp tour. For reimbursement, lodges must:

- **Attend a 2-hour tour of the property.**
- **Submit the invoice for the bus rental.**
- **Submit a roster of everyone in attendance the day of. The Lodge Secretary, Exalted Ruler or other chair position must be in attendance. Forty members or prospective members must be on the tour to receive full reimbursement. Any less will be prorated based on percentage of the requirement (e.g. 36 members is 90% reimbursement).**

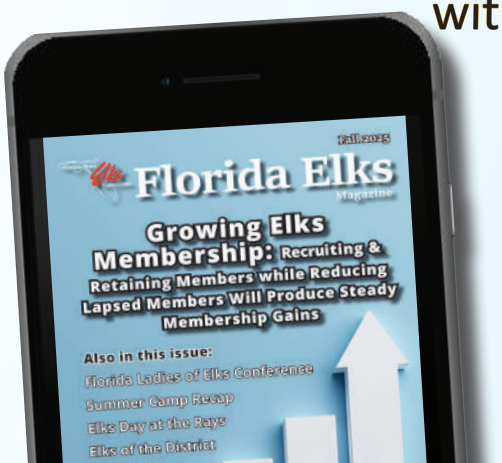






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Request from Florida State Elks Association Museum Curator

As the curator of our Florida Elks museum, which is housed in the Grafton Center at the Florida Elks Youth Camp, I am trying to add a pin or small piece of memorabilia from every lodge that was ever chartered in Florida. Below is a list of the defunct and merged lodges. If you have a pin or other small piece of memorabilia from any of these lodges that you are willing to part with for the sake of preserving history, please mail it to me or the state office for inclusion in the museum.

My address is 9671 Crescent View Drive N., Boynton Beach, FL 33437.

Thank you!

Vincent P. Como, PSP, Florida State Elks Association Museum Curator
ddger2463@aol.com

Memorabilia Needed from the Following Defunct & Merged Lodges:

Belle Glade 1716
Boynton Beach 2676
Charlotte County 2153
Clearwater 1525
Coral Gables 1676
Daytona Beach 1141
DeFuniak Springs 2612
Deltona 2739
Dunedin 1525
Fernandina 795
Fort Lauderdale 1517
Hialeah 2352
Hollywood 1732
Homestead 1754
Jacksonville Beach 1901
Lady Lake 2793
Lake Wales 1974
Lake Worth 1530
Land O' Lakes 2600
Lehigh Acres 2602
Madison 2205
Mandarin-St. Johns 2866
Margate 2463
Marianna 1516
Miami Beach 1601
Miami Springs-Hialeah 1775
Miami West 2479
Milton 2377
North Miami 1835
North Miami Beach 2341
North Palm Beach 2069
North Tampa 2745
North Port 2632
Okeechobee 2558
Pahokee 1638
Palatka 1232
Palm Beach Gardens 2718
Panama City 1598
Pensacola Beach 2256
Pinellas Park 2217
Plantation 2273
Port Charlotte 2153
Quincy 1111
San Juan, Puerto Rico 972
Sarasota 1519
Silver Springs Shores 2730
South Broward 2830
South Dade 28xx
South Marion 2730
South Miami 1888
South Orlando 2694
Southside Jacksonville 2014
Southwest Palm Beach County 2741
(renamed Sandalfoot in 1990)
St. Lucie West 2823
Starke 1802
Sunrise 2273
Tampa Bay 2255
Wauchula 1700

LODGE NEWS

NORTHWEST DISTRICT

Holley-Navarre #2787



On July 3, Holley-Navarre Elks Lodge #2787 donated $680 to L&R Rescue Inc., a nonprofit animal rescue in Navarre. There is no housing facility, so all rescue animals are placed into foster homes. L&R Rescue operates in Northwest Florida. **Pictured are Jeff Grady, PER; Melanie Hawkey, L&R Rescue director; and Marianne Catyb, lodge charities coordinator.**

On Sept. 22, Holley-Navarre Lodge donated



$500 to Pirates on the Panhandle, which supports the Exceptional Student Education program of Soundside High School. **Pictured are Buddy Eliott, Lecturing Knight; Jeff Grady, PER; Ray White, Pirates on the Panhandle member; Tom Stevens, PDD, Exalted Ruler; Bart Pullum, Loyal Knight; and Bob Catlow, Leading Knight.**

NORTH DISTRICT

Perry #1851

Perry Elks Lodge #1851 donated $1,000 Aug. 11 to Big Bend Technical College to the Adult Education Department. **Pictured are Jeanne Harden, Leading Knight; Marie O'Steen, scholarship chair;**



Donna Johnson, BBTC adult education instructor; Felisa Calhoun, Exalted Ruler; and Shelbi McCall, BBTC director.

NORTHEAST DISTRICT

Gainesville #990



On Sept. 29, Gainesville Elks Lodge #990 donated $2,500 to Family Promise of Gainesville, an organization that provides shelter and support to families with children experiencing homelessness. **Pictured are Ayme Cepeda, Betty J. "BJ" Sullivan, Abel Cepeda, and Tony Espetia, members; Rachel Ryan, Family Promise executive director; Sarah John and Farrah Tindall, members; Bonnie Mott, Lodge Treasurer; and Leigh Scott, Family Promise director of community engagement.**

Green Cove Springs #1892

On Aug. 8, Green Cove Springs Elks Lodge #1892 hosted a story hour in Spring Park, funded by the Elks National Foundation Beacon Grant. Twenty children visited and received snacks and a copy of the book "The Best Chef in Second Grade." Members of the Green Cove Springs Police Department and Clay County Sheriff's Office joined the Elk volunteers to greet families, read to the children and give tours of their vehicles.



On Aug. 21, Green Cove Springs Lodge recognized Girl Scout Josie Wilcox for achieving the Gold Award, the highest level of achievement for Girl Scout seniors and ambassadors. Members and guests of the lodge met Josie, heard her present information and received the brochures she created for her community project on the importance of educating people on the role bats serve as natural pest control. **Pictured are Josie Wilcox and her mom, Rebecca, sharing brochures with Stuart Williams, Lecturing Knight, center.**



On Sept. 1, Green Cove Springs Lodge donated $1,000 each to the Green Cove Springs Food Pantry and to Clay County Early Literacy, which provides books to children through the Dolly Parton Imagination Library. **Pictured are Jennifer Parker, PER; Ed Weston, PDD; Jean Gloudemans, food pantry volunteer; Ruth Paine, Clay County Early Literacy volunteer; Joe Russell, PER; Pat Litterick, Clay County Early Literacy volunteer; and Mary Bolla, member and Clay County Early Literacy volunteer.**

Jacksonville #221

On July 4, Jacksonville Elks hosted a Fourth of July celebration open to the public to recognize the nation's 250th anniversary. The celebration was funded through donations. More than 60 members, guests and residents attended. Children participated in a Pledge of Allegiance contest and families enjoyed carnival and field day activities. Guests enjoyed burgers, hot dogs, snow cones, chips and drinks. The dunk tank raised funds to support future lodge activities. Members donated baskets and prizes to be raffled to fund future events. Veterans were presented with commemorative coins, pens, bracelets, bookmarks, and coloring pages created by students from The Cathedral School and Early Learning Center of Jacksonville. **Pictured are member Tony Langhals and students from the pledge contest.**





On Aug. 8, Jacksonville Lodge supported the Surfers for Autism event, a free community program for children and adults with autism and other developmental delays. Three members — Kelly Paulson, Brian Pastorini and Patrick Phelan — volunteered at the event. Paulson served on walkie-talkie duty, coordinating with the event's main coordinator, while also helping direct surfers and families and assisting with weather-related conditions. Pastorini and Phelan served as watermen, a role that required strength, focus and a deep commitment to safety. Each participant in the water was accompanied by a lead volunteer and was supported by three watermen, creating a secure environment that allowed the surfers to enjoy the experience with confidence. The work was physically demanding and exhausting but Pastorini and Phelan found it rewarding. Lunch was provided by local restaurants. Jacksonville Lodge also donated $500 to help cover event costs. **Pictured are Kelly Paulson and Patrick Phelan and Patrick Phelan and Brian Pastorini.**

On Sept. 11, Jacksonville Elks visited eight law enforcement and fire stations near the lodge to honor first responders on the 25th anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks. The group met with the Jacksonville Honor Guard at the Fraternal Order of Police; Jacksonville Beach Police Department; Jacksonville Police Department District #2 and Station #28/72; and fire stations #60, #50, #65, and #20. Members presented a tray of cookies at each visit.

Saint Augustine #829

On Aug. 28 and Sept. 16, Saint Augustine Elks donated 50 backpacks filled with school supplies to South Woods Elementary and Webster Elementary, Title I schools. Using $500 from the lodge's bingo funds, members purchased the supplies and filled each backpack with care.

When Saint Augustine Elks delivered the backpacks to Webster Elementary Sept. 16, they also delivered approximately $400 in nonperishable food as well as a $5,000 donation to Children's Home Society of Florida, a partner in Webster's on-campus food pantry. The nonprofit has worked with Webster through the Community Partnership Schools model since 2017, helping connect students and families with food, clothing, supplies, health care, counseling and educational support. Webster later earned certification through the University of Central Florida's Community Partnership Schools program, and its full-time Parent Resource Center gives families access to a food and clothing pantry, educational assistance and after-school family programs. **Pictured are Lashonda Watson, Webster Elementary staff member; David Everhart, member; Pat Shipley, PDD, Lodge Advisor; Denelle Everhart, Exalted Ruler; Bethany Grove, principal; Raleigh Burney, Children's Home Society director; Jessica Allee, Webster Elementary staff member; and Sara McDavitt, member.**





On Sept. 17, Saint Augustine Lodge donated $2,000 to the theater program at W.D. Hartley Elementary School and the production of "The Lion King." The donation will help provide costumes, sets, props, sound equipment and other essentials. It will also help bring musical theater back to Hartley for the first time in more than a decade. **Pictured are members with students and teachers.**

NORTH CENTRAL DISTRICT

Eustis #1578

On Aug. 1, Eustis Elks held their annual Lake County teachers appreciation breakfast. There were 150 elementary school teachers from nine local schools who were served a full breakfast by 12 Elks. The lodge collected thousands of dollars worth of donated school supplies over a two-month period and the lodge spent $5,000 on additional school supplies, including more than $1,000 in gift cards. Each teacher was given a ticket to be drawn and each received a prize. David Roche, PDD, Lodge Drug Awareness Chair, gave out bags showing what's available to them, as well as lodge rulers and pencils. He also shared information about the annual Elks poster contest, Red Ribbon presentation and Hoop Shoot.

Ocala #286



Ocala Elks Lodge #286 held its annual Soccer Shoot Sept. 12 at the Big Sun Soccer Club. The soccer club's coaches and volunteers and lodge members helped make this event possible. The lodge also donated $1,000 to the Big Sun Soccer League. **Pictured are Fred Wright, PER; Carlos A. Quiles, Exalted Ruler; Rhonda Link'Cummings, league committee representative; Ginger Tousseau, lodge chaplain; Dave Tousseau, Lodge Soccer Shoot Chair and Leading Knight; Pat Gilbert, Loyal Knight; Jimmy Kash and Dave Renau, members; Becky Long, PSP-FLOE; and Andy Long, PDD, Esquire.**

CENTRAL DISTRICT

West Citrus #2693



On Sept. 23, using Elks National Veterans Service Commission Focus Grant funds and member donations, West Citrus Elks visited Floral City Elementary to present four boxes of new and gently used clothing, school supplies and a food basket for a family from the school. **Pictured are Jerry Hoven, secretary; Sean Furniss, principal; Debbie Lawrence, member; Cody Polland, vice principal; and Roxanne Bartosek, member. Not pictured is Susan Adams, member.**

SOUTHEAST CENTRAL DISTRICT

Cocoa #1532



On Aug. 7, Cocoa Elks enjoyed a Sip-n-Paint Night to benefit the Painted Hearts charity and raised $100. Painted Hearts is a self-help art therapy group taught by member Ladie Ripoll for veterans, law enforcement officers and first responders. Art therapy can be effective in reducing symptoms of anxiety, depression and other signs of PTSD. Cocoa Elks hold their Sip-n-Paint Party the first Friday of every month. **Pictured are members Ladie Ripoll; Ronnie Orblych; Theresa Bailey; Kasha Smith-Harrell; and Christine Bailey, Exalted Ruler.**

Cocoa Beach #2387



On Sept. 13, Cocoa Beach Elks prepared and served dinner to first responders to recognize their service and in honor of 9/11. The Cocoa Beach Fire Department was also given $125, which was collected Sept. 11 by passing the fire hat at the lodge. The team also presented cards created by Mrs. Clough's classat Roosevelt Elementary. **Pictured are Antlers Liam Russell, Leo Haddock, Jaden Haddock, Tristan Livingood, and Kael Russell; Bob Janes, Exalted Ruler; and members of Cocoa Beach Fire Dept. Station 50.**

Fort Pierce #1520



On July 15, Fort Pierce Elks Lodge #1520 celebrated its 100th anniversary, marking a century of service to its community. The event honored the lodge's history while reaffirming its commitment to supporting local residents. The lodge also presented $5,000 to Project LIFT, a nonprofit organization that provides young adults ages 17-24 with vocational training and mental health services at no cost. Mayor Linda Hudson also read the city's proclamation commemorating the lodge's 100 years of service. **Pictured are Diane Leveridge, Lodge Grants Coordinator; Sue Johnson, Exalted Ruler; Ron Weeden, anniversary chair; Rashard Alston, LIFT representative;**

Port Saint Lucie #2658



On Sept. 10, Port St. Lucie Elks Lodge #2658 used $1,470 from its Elks National Foundation Beacon Grant to donate to Care Bag, a nonprofit organization supporting individuals and families experiencing homelessness throughout Saint Lucie County. Care Bag provides hygiene and personal care items to unhoused individuals and children. The organization also operates a mobile shower unit, bringing access to clean, private showers directly to communities. **Pictured are members Patty Babcock, Care Bag administrator; Roxy Brown, founder; Joanna Albrecht; Barbara Iraci, Lodge Grants Coordinator; Frank Montemarano; Sally Mullins; and Artie Lander, Exalted Ruler.**

Vero Beach #1774



In June, Vero Beach Elks collected clothing, shoes, diapers and wipes for Care Net Pregnancy Center of Indian River County. This organization supports those facing unplanned pregnancies with free services. The lodge donated $500 to purchase additional items, and the Exalted Ruler gave a matching donation. The value of supplies was about $3,300 and were donated July 1. **Pictured are members Kevin O'Connell, Secretary; Deb Stuller; Karen Guidry; and Tom Rinehart, Exalted Ruler.**

Viera #2817



In July, Viera Elks held a back-to-school drive for the Friends of Children of Brevard. Members donated more than $1,000 worth of supplies. **Pictured are Susan and Danny Weeks from Friends of Children of Brevard and lodge House Committee chairs Dawn Mailloux and Barbara Johnson.**

WEST CENTRAL DISTRICT

Holiday Isles #1912



On Aug. 1, Holiday Isles Elks presented 50 prefilled backpacks to Ridgecrest Elementary School. Members donated $1,250 for the purchase. **Pictured are Katia Texeira, House Committee member; Pattie Cloud, Secretary; and Tracy Gardner, principal.**

Tampa #708



On Aug. 2, Tampa Elks Lodge #708 welcomed students and families to the lodge for the back-to-school party. Hosted by the Youth Activities Committee, this event brought together members, volunteers, families and children for an afternoon filled with school supplies, food, crafts, games and smiles. This year, 51 students from pre-kindergarten through 12th grade received backpacks filled with school supplies. Guests enjoyed hot dogs, chips and ice cream. The afternoon also included several rounds of back-to-school bingo. **Pictured are members enjoying the event.**

Tarpon Springs #1719

On July 23, Tarpon Springs Elks prepared 150 backpacks filled with school supplies for students attending Tarpon Springs schools. The project was led by member Bob Gorby and was funded using the Elks National Foundation Beacon Grant. The Tarpon Springs Police Department School Resource Officers distributed the backpacks to the students.

SOUTHWEST DISTRICT

Bradenton #1511



On July 25, there was a partial roof collapse at Aviata at Palma Sola Bay Nursing Home in Bradenton. Emergency responders worked late into the night to evacuate and relocate 157 residents. By the next day, all residents had been relocated to other nursing homes in the area. Displaced residents left with nothing and lost what few possessions they owned. Suncoast Aging Network put out an emergency request for donations of towels, pillows, blankets, clothes, shoes, socks, personal items and other things the residents would need in the coming days, and Bradenton Elks immediately responded. Sherry Sims-Gillaspy, spouse of trustee Ron Gillaspy, organized a lodge drive. On July 29, they delivered donations to Windsor Nursing Home, where many of the evacuated residents are now being cared for. **Pictured is Sandra, a coordinator at Windsor, accepting the first load of donations from Bradenton Elks.**

On Aug. 1, Bradenton Elks held a back-to-school bash. Members set up tables representing lodge charities and activities, including the Harry-Anna Investment Fund, Veterans, Membership, Elks National Foundation, Soccer Shoot, Hoop Shoot and EFELT, to inform the community about them. Each table distributed school supplies and backpacks, which were donated by members. In total, 179 backpacks were given out. The event drew 300 community members. Local community services were also present, and entertainment was provided by Kona Ice, Chick-fil-A, the Crewe of DeSoto, and bands Tony LaPera and Terrance & Co. A donation jar yielded $292.

Bradenton Lodge hosted its endless summer carnival Sept. 5-6. The public event featured music, games, prizes and a dunk tank. Members and guests enjoyed food and drinks from the tiki bars and spent time in the pool. Lodge volunteers and staff members cooked, served food and drinks, ran the games, gave out prizes, and participated in the dunk tank. The event served as an Elks National Foundation fundraiser, raising $500, and a membership drive, gaining 10 new member applications.

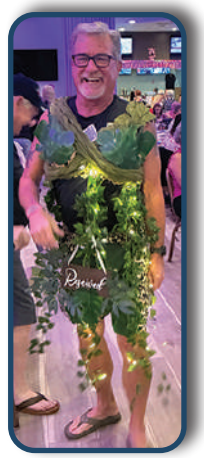
On Sept. 26, Florida Elk Riders raised $2,400 for Elks for Autism, which tests 60 children a year for autism at the Florida Elks Youth Camp. Bradenton Elks Chris Hitchens and Elsha Duquet organized the ride, with participation from 65 bikes with riders from Elk lodges in Palmetto, Bradenton, Lakewood Ranch-Sarasota, Manasota, Aripeka, Ormond Beach, Tampa, and New Port Richey, as well as the West Coast Florida Riders, a law enforcement club. All riders made stops at Peggy's Corral, Woody River Roo, Beer Shed and Salty Shamrock.

Bradenton #1511 & Lakewood Ranch-Sarasota #2855



On Sept. 4, members from Bradenton and Lakewood Ranch-Sarasota Elks lodges began a new year with Elks Feeding Empty Little Tummies. Every Friday, volunteers pack and deliver food bags to 12 local schools to ensure between 550 and 700 children have meals over the weekend. These members shop, manage inventory, bag the food and deliver it to the schools. Funding is from Elks National Foundation grants and donors, with bread and snack donations provided by Bimbo Bakeries in Sarasota. **Pictured are Elks Tony Devita, Paul Reddy and Brian Dunne.**

Lakewood Ranch-Sarasota #2855



On Sept. 12, Lakewood Ranch-Sarasota Elks Lodge #2855 had its first Save the Tatas event to raise awareness about cancer and to benefit women in need of mammograms. There were close to 30 male models who all created a themed bra. They had three minutes to walk the room with their theme song playing and were announced by their stage name. The audience was encouraged to tuck a buck in the bras and raised more than $1,400. The whole fundraiser, which also included a silent auction of donated designer purses, made a little more than $9,000. There were 140 people in attendance. Kathy Suter was the chair of this event. **Pictured is Mark "Mark of the Jungle" Liddell, Exalted Ruler.**

Palmetto #2449



On July 11, Palmetto Elks and Elks Riders held an event called Revved for Nathan, which raised $2,500 for Diane Kammer and her son, Nathan. Nathan has a rare form of bone cancer and has to undergo numerous surgeries each year for the condition. The event featured a poker run to various Elks lodges in the district and numerous baskets, which were donated by Palmetto and Lakewood Ranch-Sarasota Elks, were raffled off. The event was supported by numerous other Elks Riders chapters in the district as well as Elks members. **Pictured are Diane and Nathan Kammer and Matt Burdette, Palmetto Elks Riders president.**



On July 27, Palmetto Elks Leesia Wolfe and Estrellita Moore held a pool-themed party at Manatee River Assisted Living Facility. The residents were dancing and singing while enjoying popcorn and Kool-Aid in their colorful sunglasses. The volunteers spent time partying and painting nails for 20 residents, including the men's unit. The lodge donated $60 for the party items. **Pictured with Wolfe and Moore are ladies in the memory care unit: Miss Susie; Julie; Marcy, who is 100 years old; Kay; Leesia Wolfe, member; Claire; Estrellita Moore, member; Kathryn; and Tracey.**



On Aug. 18, eight Palmetto Elks held a back-to-school bash for Beacon Preparatory Academy, attended by students, parents, guardians, teachers and the principal. Palmetto mayor, Dan West, spoke about the importance of saying no to drugs, alcohol, tobacco and all other illegal substances. He impressed upon the students to study hard and make good grades. Students had their pictures taken with Elroy the Elk and received Drug Awareness goody bags, which included pamphlets, coloring books, stickers and pencils. They also received a backpack, stuffed animal, commemorative 250th birthday of America coin from the mayor and gum. Supplies for students and teachers were purchased by members and given to the school. The lodge spent $1,030.28 on this event. **Pictured are Dee Gowarty, Leesia Wolfe, Jackie Sosville, Estrellita Moore, Ann Mahoney and mayor Dan West.**

Parrish #2889



On Aug. 30, Parrish Elks held a school supply giveaway for students in need from Parrish Elementary School. Members used $4,000 from the Elks National Foundation Gratitude Grant to purchase backpacks, paper, pencils, crayons, notebooks, water bottles, scissors, wipes, tissues and more. They also offered each child who attended a free hot dog, chips and drink. Elroy the Elk was there as well to greet all the families. Members donated the remaining supplies to the Annie Lucy Williams and Barbara A. Harvey elementary schools in Parrish Sept. 4. **Pictured at the lodge with supplies are Matt Carter and Laura Bradford.**

Venice-Nokomis #1854



On July 30, Venice-Nokomis Elks Lodge #1854 used $6,500 from its Elks National Foundation Spotlight Grant to donate new clothes and healthcare essentials to The Twig, which provides children in foster care with needed items at no cost to them or their families. **Pictured are Sally Pisciotti, member; Audrey Riggs, Secretary; Alice Leonard, member; Shannon Campbell from The Twig; Laura Wood, member; and Mike Pisciotti, Exalted Ruler.**

SOUTH SOUTHWEST DISTRICT

Fort Myers #1288



On Aug. 18, Fort Myers Elks Lodge #1288 donated $1,000 to Eva's Closet & Foundation to purchase school uniforms for area children in need. Eva's Closet provides clothing, food, hygiene products, school supplies and other essentials at no cost to more than 1,500 people in need each month. **Pictured are Mike Grafe, PER; Kay Tvrdik; Jessica Goodall, MSW, Eva's Closet founder; Vicki Carter; Irma Spencer, Loyal Knight; and Roger Spencer, PDD, Exalted Ruler.**



Fort Myers Lodge hosted a 9/11 remembrance ceremony, bringing together Elks, guests and members of the community to remember the lives lost; honor the heroes; and reflect on the courage, sacrifice, and unity that followed that unforgettable day. The evening began with a reading of a proclamation from Fort Myers mayor Kevin B. Anderson, proclaiming Sept. 7-13 National Patriotism Week. Members of Cape Coral Elks Lodge #2596, Greater Pine Island Elks Lodge #2781 and North Fort Myers Elks Lodge #2742 also joined in the ceremony. Afterward, attendees were invited to place a candle around the eternal light of remembrance, creating a symbol of remembrance, gratitude and unity. Attendees collected and donated $317 to Tunnel to Towers Foundation, whose mission continues the legacy of service and sacrifice inspired by the heroes of Sept. 11. **Pictured is the eternal light of remembrance table.**

SOUTHEAST DISTRICT

Clewiston #1853



Clewiston Elks Lodge #1853 hosted the sixth annual Refuse to Sink fundraiser Sept. 11. They are a nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote mental health education and awareness and suicide prevention. **Pictured is Abbey Garcia, Refuse to Sink founder.**

West Palm Beach #1352



West Palm Beach Lodge Exalted Ruler, Jeff Buhrman, was selected by Gwen Parker, Grand Lodge Flag Chair, to carry the MIA flag across the floor of the national convention in Chicago July 5.

SOUTH SOUTHEAST DISTRICT

Delray Beach #1770



On Sept. 20, Delray Beach Elks Lodge members Bill Rogers, Loyal Knight; Lynn Hakala; Joe Civitano, Exalted Ruler; Kathy Glynn; Janelle Antoine; and Ken Goatly, trustee, purchased a cobblestone in the lodge's name in memory of fallen heroes. It will be placed in the walkway at the 9/11 Memorial Plaza in New York City, New York, and a replica will be displayed at the lodge in a place of honor for members to reflect.

Hollywood West #2365



Hollywood West Elks Lodge #2365 used $500 from its bingo fundraiser to sponsor the Cooper City Optimist 2026 summer basketball girls team, which ran from mid-June to the end of July. **The lodge received a team sponsor plaque, pictured, which is displayed in the lodge's social quarters.** In addition, a sponsor banner with the lodge logo was displayed in the Cooper City High School gymnasium during the basketball season.

Oakland Park #2407



On Aug. 29, Oakland Park Elks Lodge #2407 used its Elks National Foundation Gratitude Grant to organize the annual fishing rodeo for youths ages 6 to 15. This event served the Cub Scouts in Broward County and 4Kids of Broward County, an organization which helps foster families. The $493.39 that was spent over the budget was donated by member Scott Slinko, who had a feeling there would be a big turnout, and there was. This year's event had more than 100 participants, the largest ever. The event was recognized by the City of Pompano Parks and Recreation Department, the South Florida Council Boy Scouts, the American Legion and the Pompano Beach Seaside Community. The free outdoor event was held at the Pompano Pier. There were no electronics — just fishing. Additional fishing gear was presented to 4Kids of South Florida for children in the foster care system. **Pictured are member Scott Slinko, two 4Kids representatives, and member Denise May-Carter, PDD.**

SOUTH DISTRICT

Florida Keys #1872



On Sept. 8, Florida Keys Elks Lodge #1872 donated $2,000 to the Caring Closet at Plantation Key School. The closet provides school clothing and supplies to students in need at the school. **Pictured are Madia Court, principal; Sheryl Spear, lodge and school Treasurer; and Monica Horsley, vice principal.**

VETERAN NEWS

NORTH DISTRICT

Perry #1851



On Sept. 8, Perry Elks Lodge #1851 donated $1,000 to Taylor County Veterans Memorial Park for the fund to place an additional memorial wall in the park. The Perry Elks Riders Auxiliary donated an additional $500. **Pictured are Jamie Sheffield, TCVMP board member and lodge member, and Felisa Calhoun, PER, Exalted Ruler.**

NORTHEAST DISTRICT

Green Cove Springs #1892



On Sept. 11, Green Cove Springs Elks Lodge #1892 used a portion of its Elks National Foundation Gratitude Grant to donate $1,300 each to K9s for Warriors, an organization that trains therapy dogs for local veterans, and the Green Cove Springs Police Department to support their station dog, who was adopted through K9s for Warriors. **Pictured are Kristine Watson, Exalted Ruler; Nik Conte, K9s for Warriors development director; Amanda Damasiewicz, Navy veteran, with Lazer, service dog; GCSPD Officer Josh Lee with Princess Leia, station therapy dog; Carol Thorsen-Hood, K9s for Warriors puppy raiser, with Bubbles, puppy-in-training; and Tracy Carroll, PER, Lodge Grants Coordinator.**

Jacksonville #221



On July 11, Jacksonville Elks delivered a Welcome Home Kit to USN Boatswain Mate veteran Barry, who graduated from Five STAR Veterans Center. He was grateful for the pantry items, pillows, bedding, blankets, dishes, pots and pans, kitchen towels, toiletries, shower liner and rings, paper goods, light bulbs, trash can and bags, cleaning supplies, bed, lamp, end table, two nightstands, and a dresser. A handmade quilt made by members of Comfort 'n Quilters, a local sewing group, was also donated. Members John and Robin Pipkins delivered his kit. **Pictured are Karen Tracy, Veterans Lodge Chair; Barry, veteran; and Robin Pipkins, member.**

Jacksonville Elks delivered four Welcome Home Kits in August. On Aug. 9, they delivered a kit to Nowell, a U.S. Army Signal Corps veteran who had recently graduated from one of the programs at Five STAR Veterans Center. He was grateful for the furniture pieces included with his kit. David Graham, PER and Shannon Graham helped load and deliver his supplies. On Aug. 21, they delivered a kit to Vivienne, a U.S. Army Signal Corps veteran who completed a program with Women Veterans Ignited. On Aug. 22, they delivered a kit to Keith, a retired U.S. Army heavy equipment operator. After arriving at Five STAR Veterans Center last November, he worked diligently to graduate from its grant per diem program and move into his own place. on Aug. 28, they delivered a kit to Gregory, a U.S. Navy data specialist. Because his apartment paperwork is still being finalized, they delivered his supplies to him at Five STAR Veterans Center. All of the veterans were extremely grateful for the household supplies, pantry items and Publix gift cards they received.



Jacksonville Elks delivered a Welcome Home Kit to USMC veteran Paul Sept. 7. He completed the grant per diem program with Five STAR Veterans Center after leaving the VA Domiciliary in North Jacksonville. He was very happy to receive his household supplies, pantry items and small pieces of furniture.



On Sept. 14, Jacksonville Elks delivered a Welcome Home Kit to U.S. Air Force veteran Frank. He was a parachute rigger while in uniform. He is a dad of two young girls, and he appreciated the household supplies, $25 Publix gift card and pantry items.

NORTH CENTRAL DISTRICT

Inverness #2522



Inverness Elks Lodge #2522 donated $10,000 Sept. 10 to Vincentian CARES at their mid-Florida office in Citrus County. The donation will help veterans pay for security deposits, pet deposits, and other move-in expenses as they leave the Bridge 4 Veterans Inc. shelter and transition to their own home. Very often, unhoused veterans will not take a home if they can't keep their animal with them. **Pictured are Elks Richard Howe, Amy Hoffmeyer, Robert Hoffmeyer, and Anthony Kopka; Ian Peltier of Bridge 4 Veterans; Regina Wright and Judith Warren of Vincentian Cares; veterans Melody Kannel and Robert Rabuck of Vincentian Cares; and Michael Rabuck, Penny Douglas-Clemmons, Matthew Miller, Jason Dearing, Kholoud Hamadeh, Ashley Plante, and Ed Wilsek of Vincentian Cares.**

CENTRAL DISTRICT

West Citrus #2693



On Sept. 3, the West Citrus Elks Lodge Veterans Committee assembled and presented 10 Welcome Home Kits to Bridge 4 Veterans for distribution to veterans who are transitioning from homelessness to housing. The kits consist of household items such as brooms, toasters, Crock-Pots, dish soap, towels and many other items that a home needs. Members purchase the supplies and are then reimbursed by the Elks National Veterans Service Commission. The program usually runs about $2,500 each month. **Pictured are Linda Goretski, volunteer helper; Terri Harrison, Leading Knight; members Jill Jeroski, Joanne Hepner, Orlan Hayes, Donna Hayes, Dolly Hall, Darlene Acker, Pat Leman, and Monta Burnett; and Trish Grove, chaplain. Not pictured are Susan Adams, Veterans Chair; Roxanne Bartosek, Debbie Lawrence, Charlie Mattingley, George Seely and Ron Powell.**

SOUTHEAST CENTRAL DISTRICT

Cocoa Beach #2387



On Aug. 26, the Cocoa Beach Elks shopping with a veteran program achieved a remarkable milestone. Since Jan. 1, 2026, the program has shopped with 100 veterans, providing approximately $40,000 in assistance to help veterans transition into their new homes. **Pictured is the 100th veteran, Nickoy Borda, and Susan Janes, Lodge Secretary.**

Port Saint Lucie #2658



On Aug. 11, Port Saint Lucie Elks Lodge #2658 used $1,000 from its Elks National Veterans Service Commission Freedom Grant to purchase needed items for Fisher House. Fisher House provides free lodging for the families and relatives of hospitalized veterans, allowing them to stay close to their loved ones during treatment and recovery. All items were purchased from the Fisher House Amazon Wish List, ensuring that the organization received products specifically requested to support the comfort and needs of the families they serve, such as restaurant gift cards, soap, toiletries and personal care items. **Pictured are Kathy Borrelli, Veterans Chair; Barbara Iraci, Treasurer and Lodge Grants Coordinator; Shelley Prickett, Fisher House manager; Rose Orlowski, Veterans Secretary; and John Gravina, Veterans Co-Chair.**

Stuart-Jensen #1870



On Sept. 28, members of Stuart-Jensen Elks Lodge #1870 donated $1,100 in gift cards to Martin County Veterans Services, which provides essential resources to veterans. The funds were raised from a comedy show fully sponsored and organized by the lodge and hosted at the Jensen Beach Golf Club in July. **Pictured are Lee Kuhl, trustee; AJ Hurd, Treasurer; Don Nilsson, Veterans Lodge Chair; Michael Drost of Martin County Veterans Services; and Mike Totoro and Kathy Russell, members.**

Viera #2817



On Aug. 30, members of Viera Elks Lodge #2817 prepared 200 bag lunches for a Space Coast Honor Flight orientation, where each veteran has a brief medical visit and they are oriented on the itinerary of their upcoming flight. This orientation was for 50 local veterans and their travel partners, as well as Space Coast Honor Flight staff members, medical staff members and multiple volunteers. Later that day, lodge members and Viera Antlers members gathered at the Wickham Park Senior Center to serve the meals. Space Coast Honor Flight flies veterans to Washington, D.C., several times a year so they can visit their respective war memorials and receive the gratitude they deserve for their service. For the past five years, Viera Elks have prepared all orientation lunches for these meaningful trips. Each bag lunch includes a choice of a ham or turkey wrap, a bag of chips, a cookie and a beverage. **Pictured are lodge members Jeff Allen, Bob Gula, Diana Blakemore, and Alison Ditscheit; Viera Antlers Miles Ditscheit and Emilie Ditscheit; and Wendy Carns, PDD, Exalted Ruler.**

WEST CENTRAL DISTRICT

Holiday Isles #1912



Throughout July, Holiday Isles Elks Lodge members donated requested items for the Bay Pines Veterans' Hospital in Saint Petersburg, including clothing, toiletries, food, bedding and air mattresses. The estimated value of the items was $4,000. **Pictured Aug. 1 are Charlene Morris, Bay Pines Veterans Service Center volunteer; Sara McNulty, House Committee member and volunteer; and Mike McNulty, member and volunteer.**



Using the Elks National Foundation Spotlight Grant, Holiday Isles Lodge donated $1,100 in air mattresses, bedding and 20 pairs of shoes to the Bay Pines VA Service Center Sept. 10. **Pictured are Mike Marten, VA Service Center assistant manager; Mike McNulty, member; Pattie Cloud, Lodge Secretary; Sara McNulty, House Committee member; and Sam Webb, VA Service Center manager.**

Largo #2159



Largo Elks Lodge's Veterans Committee celebrated a milestone July 21 by delivering its 300th Elks National Veterans Service Commission Welcome Home Kit. The recipient was Army veteran Rosalyn Bragg. Working in partnership with the HUD-VASH social workers at Bay Pines VA Healthcare System, the committee has helped furnish apartments for 300 formerly unhoused veterans transitioning into permanent housing. Each kit includes essential household items, such as cookware, dishes, small appliances, cleaning supplies, and, when needed, a bed. The program is led by Jeanne Reinhart, PDD. **Pictured are Carolyn Wilson, HUD-VASH social worker; Sandy Behm and Georgia Greene, members; Rosalyn Bragg, Army veteran; Jeanne Reinhart, PDD; Bob Harback and Bob Behm, members; and John Wilson, PER.**

Tampa #708



On Aug. 7, the Tampa Elks Lodge's Veterans Committee hosted a party of eight veterans from the Salvation Army Redd Shield Center in downtown Tampa. The center, which also provides overnight shelter for non-veterans, holds beds for up to 40 veterans for round-the-clock support and shelter in partnership with the VA. The committee hosts for the evening were Tommy Spate and Michael Griffin, both veterans. The table and decorations were set up by veteran Chris Ragusa, Committee Chair and trustee, and Rita Smith, PER, trustee. The veterans enjoyed a catfish dinner, prepared by Tracy Horrell, PER, West Central District Esquire, and her husband, Addison Horrell, PER. Dessert was homemade peach cobbler a la mode. The committee covered the cost of the meal using its earned funds. **Pictured are seven of the veteran attendees.**

SOUTHWEST CENTRAL DISTRICT

Lakeland #1291



On July 25, Lakeland Elks Lodge #1291 hosted a veterans pot roast dinner and karaoke in celebration of America's 250th birthday. Dinner and raffle proceeds totaled $3,100, all of which will support the veterans fund and help purchase food for an upcoming lunch for patients at James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital. **Pictured is Charlene Fisher, Veterans Chair.**



On Aug. 2, Lakeland Lodge's Veterans Chair, Charlene Fisher, and several lodge members assembled welcome home kits for veterans transitioning out of homelessness. Donated items included cleaning supplies, toilet paper, paper towels and bath products. The kits also featured towels, bath

rugs, blankets, floor sweepers, a microwave, dishes, glasses, cookware, kitchen utensils, coffee makers, a toaster and many other household essentials. Purchases for the kits totaled $6,500 and were funded by the Elks National Foundation Spotlight Grant. Veterans will pick up the kits at the lodge when needed. **Pictured are items donated for the kits.**

SOUTHWEST DISTRICT

Bradenton #1511



Many veterans describe the Honor Flight as one of the greatest days of their lives, but unfortunately, many are physically or mentally unable to make the trip. To ensure they were not left out, Bradenton Elks Lodge #1511 brought Honor Flight to them. On Sept. 26, Bradenton Elks hosted a luncheon and show for 62 veterans to honor them while also raising $1,432 — $770 for Honor Flight and $662 for lodge veteran charities. **The Rosies, pictured, are a group of ladies founded by Janet Orr, co-chair of the Lodge Veterans Committee, who volunteered as servers during the luncheon and presentation assistants during the show and were available for photos with veterans.**

Palmetto #2449





On July 1, in celebration of America's 250th birthday, Palmetto Elks distributed goody bags to veterans at C.W. Bill Young VAMC in Saint Petersburg. Volunteers prepared 100 bags, each containing 13 items, including hygiene products, a patriotic bracelet, candy, a pinwheel, an American flag, a lapel pin and a personalized card from students at Beacon Preparatory Academy. Michael Martin, assistant chief of the Center for Development & Civic Engagement, expressed his gratitude and said he hoped the Elks would come back again, which they did. On Sept. 25, Palmetto Elks delivered food and clothing, which will be distributed to veterans in need through their weekly distribution program. All items were purchased with a $2,000 matching grant from the Florida State Elks Association. **Pictured July 1 are Michael Martin, assistant chief, center, and members Leesia Wolfe and Estrellita Moore. Also pictured is a card from one of the students.**



Palmetto Lodge hosts a veterans support group the third Tuesday of every month. Each meeting has a guest speaker, and attendees participate in a discussion and story time, encourage each other, and share fellowship with other veterans. Past speakers have included a retired Air Force colonel and a Veterans Administration attorney. Veterans do not need to be a member of the lodge to attend. Each new veteran receives a goody bag filled with patriotic items. **Pictured are some of the veterans who attended the July 21 meeting: Ray Jones, Dick Adams, Maureen Mack, Joseph Moore, Francine Paracka, Jeff Albritton and Zeke Eckersen.** All but Mack and Paracka are lodge members.

Parrish #2889



On July 16, 13 Parrish Elks Lodge members, along with others close to the cause, attended the Gary Sinise Foundation's smart home dedication ceremony for retired U.S. Marine Corps Lance Corporal John "JT" Doody, a severely wounded veteran living in Parrish. The lodge's commemorative brick with inscription that was donated in February 2025 while the house was being constructed had been laid at the base of his front yard flagpole. One of the foundation's programs is building specially adapted smart homes for the nation's severely wounded veterans. JT and his mom, Chris Ott, were given this new, custom, smart technology home that is built for his needs. The ceremony included guest speakers who have known JT throughout the years. Videos were also displayed on two large TVs, one video from Gary Sinise to Doody and another of a walkthrough of the inside of the home. Chris Ott thanked everyone for their support. Afterward, everyone went to the front yard of the home, where the American and Marine Corp flags were raised up the pole. **Pictured are 11 of the Elks who attended the event.**

SOUTH SOUTHWEST DISTRICT

Punta Gorda #2606



On July 14, the Punta Gorda Elkettes donated paper supplies and food to Veterans Village in Punta Gorda, which they had collected since June.

SOUTHEAST DISTRICT

West Palm Beach #1352



On July 11, the West Palm Beach Elks Lodge Veterans Committee donated 24 pairs of leather gloves and 30 decks of playing cards for disabled veterans at Thomas H. Carey VA Medical Center in Riviera Beach. These items cost $250 and came from the committee's donations and raffles. **Pictured are Dennis Montgomery, Center for Development and Civic Engagement chief at Thomas H. Carey VAMC, and Luis Oms Sr., PDD, Elks Representative for West Palm Beach VAMC.**

SOUTH DISTRICT

Florida Keys #1872



On Sept. 11, Florida Keys Elks took veterans out with the lodge's Vets on the Water program. This program is fully funded through the lodge's bingo games and other donations and is a free outreach initiative offering therapeutic outdoor water activities for U.S. active-duty personnel and honorably discharged veterans. **Pictured are Don Duck, Army; Dan Chase, Marines; Pam Flynn, Air Force; Mike Cisco, Army; and Charles Garnes, Army.**

LODGE PLANNING CALENDAR

November 2026

November is Elks Veterans Remembrance Month

11/12-14 • Midyear convention – Rosen Centre – Orlando, Florida

Deadlines:

11/12 • ENF MVS scholarship applications due at 11:59 p.m. PST
11/20 • Every third Friday, monthly Financial Reporting System (FRS) upload due

Non-Grand Lodge Reports & Taxes:

11/16 • Deposit payroll taxes for prior month to U.S. Treasury (Lodges may be eligible to pay quarterly if certain conditions are met.)
• Deposit withholding to U.S. Treasury from gambling winnings if more than $2,500 cumulative for the year
11/19 • Sales tax for prior month to Florida Department of Revenue (electronic payment and filing no later than 5 p.m. EST)

Statutes

Nov • Membership report due on or before Nov. 5 (§12.050)

December 2026

12/1 • Florida Elks Youth Camp camper registration opens

Deadlines:

12/1 • Enrique Camarena nomination letters to State Drug Awareness Chair
12/2 • Lodge ENF Scholarships Chairs to log on to elks.org/mvsjudges/ to judge applications
12/6 • Elks memorial service (Mandatory service – Sec 2.020)
12/14 • ENF Impact Grant Renewal applications close
12/15 • Lodges to receive essays from contestants for the FSEA Americanism Essay Contest
12/18 • Every third Friday, monthly Financial Reporting System (FRS) upload due
12/21 • Lodges to complete judging of received ENF MVS Scholarship applications *Scores/applications are automatically forwarded by online system*
12/25 • Submissions for winter issue of Florida Elks Magazine to Editor (r.king@floridaelks.org)
12/31 • Submit ENF Emergency Education Grant applications to ENF
• District ENF Scholarships Chairs to log on to elks.org/mvsjudges/ to judge applications

Non-Grand Lodge Reports & Taxes:

12/15 • Deposit payroll taxes for prior month to U.S. Treasury (Lodges may be eligible to pay quarterly if certain conditions are met.)
• Deposit withholding to U.S. Treasury from gambling winnings if more than $2,500 cumulative for the year
12/18 • Sales tax for prior month to Florida Department of Revenue (electronic payment and filing no later than 5
• p.m. EST)

Statutues

12/6 • Elks memorial service (mandatory service Sec. 2.020)

January 2027

Deadlines:

1/13 • District Chairs to complete judging of received ENF MVS Scholarship applications *Scores/applications are automatically forwarded by online system*
1/15 • By 5 p.m. EST for FSEA to receive Van Duren Scholarship applications in Umatilla, Florida
• By 5 p.m. EST for FSEA to receive C. Valentine Bates Memorial HOPE Scholarship applications in Umatilla, Florida
• Every third Friday, monthly Financial Reporting System (FRS) upload due
• Lodges to complete FSEA online committee reporting for the quarter ending 12/31
• Lodges to submit entry for FSEA Best Lodge Bulletin Contest to State Lodge Activities Vice Chair
• Lodges to submit lodge Veterans' report to DDGER
1/20 • Lodges to submit applications for ENF Beacon, Spotlight and Gratitude Grants to ENF (ENVSC Freedom Grants close earlier than 1/20 as the maximum amount of grants are awarded. ENF Beacon, Spotlight and Gratitude Grants remain open until 1/20 for all eligible lodges.)
1/31 • State Drug Awareness Chair to receive posters for FSEA/GL Drug Awareness Poster Contest
• State Drug Awareness Chair to receive essays for FSEA/GL Drug Awareness Essay Contest
• State Drug Awareness Chair to receive videos for FSEA/GL Drug Awareness Video Contest
• Lodges to submit top three essays per division for the FSEA Americanism Essay Contest to District Americanism Chairs
• Lodges to submit nominations for Male and Female Veteran Volunteer of the Year to State Veterans Chair

Non-Grand Lodge Reports & Taxes:

1/15 • Deposit payroll taxes for prior month to U.S. Treasury (Lodges may be eligible to pay quarterly if certain conditions are met.)
• Deposit withholding to U.S. Treasury from gambling winnings if more than $2,500 cumulative for the year
• Sales tax for prior month to Florida Department of Revenue (electronic payment and filing no later than 5 p.m. EST)
1/29 • Form RT-6 — Report wages for prior quarter to Florida Department of Revenue (electronic payment and filing no later than 5 p.m. EST)
• Form 941 — report wages for prior quarter to U.S. Treasury
• Deposit FUTA (Federal Unemployment Tax Act) tax for prior quarter to U.S. Treasury (Quarterly deposits of federal unemployment insurance tax are required when cumulative amount owed exceeds $500.)
• Form 940 — Report FUTA wages for prior year to U.S. Treasury
• Form 945 — Annual return of withheld federal income tax due to U.S. Treasury (if withholding was required on gambling winnings)
• Copy A of Form W-2 and Form W-3 to Social Security Administration
• Copy B & C of Form W-2 to employees
• Copy B of Form 1099 NEC to independent contractors
• Copy A of Form 1099 NEC and Form 1096, reporting payments for non-employee compensation
• 1/29 Copy B & C of Form W-2G to recipients of gambling winnings
• Copy B of Form 1099-INT to recipients of interest
• Copy B of Form 1099-Misc to other than independent contractors

NOTES: Florida sales taxes, if filed and paid by paper, are due the 20th day of each month. Many, if not all, lodges are required to pay and file electronically. Due dates for electronic payments are moved back to ensure that funds are received by the state on the tax due date. See each month's due date reflected.

Quarterly reemployment tax returns (Form RT-6), if filed on paper, are due the last day of April, July, October and January. If electronic filing is required, the due dates are reflected.

Effective Jan. 1, 2024, anyone filing 10 or more 1099 (entire series 1099 NEC, 1099 Misc., 1099 Int., etc.) forms combined is required to electronically file.

Depository dates of taxes to the U.S. Treasury are reflected. An earlier date may apply depending upon whether your payment is directly deposited through your bank or through a bank utilized by the payroll program of your lodge's choice. PLEASE DETERMINE FROM YOUR BANK OR YOUR PAYROLL PROGRAM HOW SOON BEFORE THE DUE DATE YOU NEED TO AUTHORIZE PAYMENT.

Florida State Elks Association
P.O. Box 49
Umatilla, FL 32784-0049

Florida Elks Quarterly Meeting

Feb. 4-6, 2027

at the Florida Elks Youth Camp



Be there for Florida's Official Visit from National President Tim Jaeger!