FLORIDA ELKS:
HONORING OUR DEFENDERS OF FREEDOM
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54TH ANNUAL FLOE CONFERENCE:
A CELEBRATION OF TEAMWORK AND DREAMS
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RE-CREATION USA:
FLORIDA ELKS BESTOW SCHOLARSHIPS TO AMERICA’S AMBASSADORS TO HOSPITALIZED VETERANS
p. 21
Bob, Val and I hope all of you have recovered from a very busy storm season and are moving forward with promoting our order. We have had many opportunities to help our lodges that sustained damages and it is inspiring to see the resiliency of our membership.

The FSEA is at full throttle helping us all achieve a positive membership growth this year. Make your plans to attend our midyear convention at Crystal River Plantation and hear our guest speaker, Rick Gathen, Grand Lodge Membership and Marketing Director, give us inspiration and direction on how to maximize membership. You can find the details on the FSEA website.

Our order will be celebrating its 150th anniversary at our national convention in San Antonio, Texas. This convention will be one to remember with a huge opening evening with top-ranked entertainment and many other special events. Make plans to join us for the festivities and celebration. Information is on the Grand Lodge website, elks.org. You do not want to miss this convention. If you need additional information, you may contact our State Secretary/COO, Carl Seibert, and the competent staff of our FSEA offices.

Congratulations to our Florida Ladies of Elks (FLOE) for their recent 54th convention in Maitland, Fla., Sept. 22-23. We all thank FLOE for their caring and continuous support they provide the FSEA. Their generosity and volunteering seem to have no limitations. We thank the officers and members for their dedication.

We want to recognize the great achievements of our Children’s Therapy Services guided by our capable Director, Colleen Gallant. We are treating more children than ever and growing. We need to be very proud of our dedicated therapists for their caring.

Our Florida Elks Youth Camp is having another record year in spite of our maintenance building burning down with the laundry and camp supplies included. We had one more week of camp and our Camp Director, Nick Miller, and the staff never missed a beat. We hosted 2,265 children at this past summer session. It is exciting to see us grow. In addition to summer camp and all our visiting groups, they have managed to complete the Smith Conference Center which is now opened to host groups for educational and team-building conferences.

Bob Grafton, Val Bates and I attended the August Past State Presidents workshop in August where we review our position and adapt for the future growth of the FSEA. We spent approximately 10 hours planning and responding to the issues of the FSEA.

Mark your calendars for some of our upcoming events. On Nov. 11, our members and lodges should plan to honor our veterans with a Veterans Day activity and let your respective communities know of the event. The memorial service is to be held the first Sunday in December (Dec. 3). Make this a special event remembering our departed members. The Florida State Elks golf tournament will be held April 7-8, 2018. Information and registration will be on the FSEA website. Come join the fun, get a villa and we will find you golfing partners. The FSEA softball tournament is April 27-29, 2018. Come support and have fun.

Don’t you love our quarterly publication’s new format?!?

Bob Grafton, the Bates and Smiths wish you and your families a safe and enjoyable holiday season.

Michael F. Smith, PNP
State Sponsor
Florida State Elks Association
Cathy and I along with Frank and Sally Malatesta hope that all our Elks family is doing well after Hurricane Irma. We should all stand ready to help all our Elks family who need aid.

We have enjoyed our travels through the state. We enjoy meeting all Elks and guests and visiting the lodges. You have lifted us up with the great deeds the Elks do throughout the state. You make me proud to be an Elk! We look forward to continuing our travels and meeting more Elks and seeing your great lodge! We would like to see as many Elks as possible who can make it to our visitation in your district.

Membership is the lifeblood of our organization. I would like to encourage everyone to recruit new members into our order. With more help, we can serve more children and veterans and make stronger lodges for all to enjoy. It is not enough just to recruit new members; we have to teach them what it means to be an Elk. We should get them involved showing them what Elks do – our good charity works. If we build strong relationships with our new members, we can close the back door through which so many of them leave. By building stronger relationships with our members, we can build stronger relationships with our communities. I challenge each Elk to bring in one new member. We can double our size and double the charitable works we do and bring all our lodges to a stronger position. By bringing in five new members, you can earn the State President’s 2017-2018 membership pin which is a conch shell. I know we can do this!

Keep up the hard work, Florida Elks! We hope to see everyone at the midyear convention in November at The Plantation in Crystal River. We have a great convention planned for all!

God bless. Take care.

Carl Gerace, State President
Florida State Elks Association

WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU!

To share lodge news in between Florida Elks Magazine issues, please email articles and photos to rachael@floridaelks.org.

They will be posted to the Florida Elks News Online section of the state website and to the state Facebook page.
A Republic, if we can Keep It

I f it just me or does it seem like our American way of life has been under increasing attack as of late? Just this week alone, we continue to reel from the antics of the NFL and their players demonstrating against honoring our flag and those who sacrifice(d) for it and now the politicization of the horrific murders in Las Vegas! When will the insanity end?

As an optimist, I am always on the lookout for us as Elks to turn misfortune into opportunity and believe it or not, I think there is gold to be mined in these turns of events!

Adversity often brings out the best in people and as Elks we often go above and beyond! Take the recent hurricanes, Harvey and Irma. In these, Elks across Florida came together, even sometimes forsaking their own needs and those of their lodges, to aid those more severely affected by these disasters. Marathon Lodge, for example, stood proud and strong in their support of the first responders in the Keys offering food, water and shelter from the heat. Our very own Past State President, John Harris, as did many other Elks, gave of their time and money to support victims of the flooding in Texas. Who would have ever thought of the Elks as the first responders to the first responders? It seems I wrote about this a little over a year ago after the disaster that befell Orlando after the Pulse nightclub shootings. Once again, we have done ourselves proud and we should never miss the opportunity to market ourselves to others as the remarkable people we are and welcome other like-minded citizens to join us in our caring and sharing pursuits.

Another area I believe we often sell ourselves short in is our undying commitment to our values as citizens of the USA. Elks members everywhere bleed red, white and blue and espouse daily the virtues of being American. We vow to preserve and defend our republic and we stand (yes, stand) proudly and salute every time we cross paths with Old Glory! One thing that drew me to the Order of Elks some 32 years ago was the pride exhibited by Elks for the flag, the Heritage Corners in our lodges and our proud history of devotion to Americanism: conducting bond drives, promoting civil defense programs and Flag Day observance. In 1961 the Order of Elks went even further adopting a “Declaration of American Principles.” In this is addressed our responsibility to moral values, our freedom of choice, and our individual responsibility and duty to citizenship. It also addresses our ability to self-govern and the use of orderly process to accommodate the changing needs of our nation. It emphasizes the need for more freedoms, not less freedoms, and promotes interests common to our nation as a whole, not just those who yell the loudest. Finally, it asks all citizens who believe in these principles to speak up for them and set an example by applying them fully in their daily lives.

Who better than the Elks to promote a wider understanding of these principles and their practical application? For years we have been leaders in promoting drug awareness education to our youth. Let’s now add youth patriotism education! Presently, at our Florida Elks Youth Camp, campers in our summer program are exposed to the proper raising, lowering and folding of our flag and are instructed in the proper salute and respect for our flag. Perhaps we should take that a step further and develop an off-season camp curriculum around helping children develop the skills needed to become active participants in American democracy. Our camp director, Nick Miller, is an educator and has passion for teaching children. Perhaps Nick could develop different-length curriculums that could be marketed to schools across Florida combining the camping experience with education and the promotion of youth patriotism.

Ben Franklin was asked after signing the U.S. Constitution if the founders had created a monarchy or a republic. Franklin was said to reply that America would be “a republic, if you can keep it.”

Developing our youth and their respect for our country while rededicating ourselves to our American values and promoting our lodges as a place where like-minded people gather to do good by others and support and practice being good citizens – what a draw that would be! Our bars and restaurants are a draw but they do nothing to distinguish us as different than all the others. We are more than just a fraternal organization; we are a fraternal and patriotic organization. After WWII, our ranks soared with Americans proud of our nation and wishing to celebrate their love of country. Are we in the midst of another opportunity to grow our ranks? Will we take advantage of the popularity of being American or will we lose yet another opportunity to attract new members?

My aim in these articles is to inform, educate and instill a sense of responsibility in our success. I do this by sometimes offering ideas that are not your normal run-of-the-mill thoughts and ideas. We are not perfect and sometimes we have to look at ourselves as others see us before we realize the need to improve. So, how am I doing? Let me know what you think! Email me at carl@floridaelks.org.

Carl Seibert, COO/State Secretary
Florida State Elks Association
Youth Camp Director, Nick Miller, presented the annual report and presented awards for the most money contributed from April 2016 through March 2017. Money given to the FEYC for the 2016-2017 year was $39,567.43, an increase of nearly $13,000 from the previous year. Great job, ladies! Silver, red, blue and purple ribbon certificates were distributed for the year’s monetary donations. The contributors of $2,000 and above were St. Augustine Elks Club, $2,542; Fort Pierce Elkettes, $2,722; Cape Coral Ladies of the Elks, $3,250; Punta Gorda Elkettes, $4,910; and the top contributor, Eustis Anna Miller Circle, $8,119. St. Augustine Elks had the highest per capita, $111.68. The most sponsored campers were by Cape Coral Ladies of the Elks, 97; Punta Gorda Elkettes, 92; and St. Augustine Elks Club, 44. Nick introduced Angel Collins, a 12-year-old who attended camp this past July. She told the audience about her experience at the camp, everything she did and all that is available at the camp. Congratulations to every ladies organization contributing to the best

Our business meeting was Saturday. There were eight FLOE Past State Presidents present and we were honored to have First Lady Cathy Gerace and Sally Malatesta in our meeting. After the roll call of lodges, members who were attending a FLOE conference for the first time were recognized. Nineteen first-timers registered for the conference. All district delegates were recognized for their year of service. Becky Long, PSP, Chairlady of the Bylaws Committee, presented six proposed changes/additions to the FLOE bylaws. One of the proposed additions was regarding the FLOE hospitality suite at the May’s Florida State Elks Association convention. There was much discussion about it. Including this one, all passed as read or modified. At the upcoming November meeting, the changes/additions will be provided as a document for attachment to the existing November 2016 bylaws handbook.

Carol Deresh, PSP, Chairlady of the 365 Club, reported this year’s 365 Club had an impressive amount of $7,220.57. During the two reports, she presented a check in the amount of $2,610.29 to Nick Miller, Director of the Florida Elks Youth Camp, and a check for $4,610.28 to Colleen Gallant, Director of Florida Elks Children’s Therapy Services. Pennies do add up. Thank you, ladies! Congratulations to all of you who came to the conference. Without you, the conference wouldn’t have been possible.

The Friday evening banquet was a night of good food, music by a DJ, dancing, entertainment and lots of fun. To everyone who attended the banquet, thank you. FLOE officers Mary, Felicia, Adella and I; our spouses; FSEA State President Carl Gerace and First Lady Cathy; and FSEA VPAL Frank Malatesta and his wife, Sally, were contestants in the Not So Newly Wed Game. Joe Rogers, PDD was the emcee. Congratulations to the game winners: the Geraces. Many thanks to the contestants, especially to the Geraces and the Malatestas, who agreed to participate just before the game began.

Joe, DJ Ray, Jane and Don Moon, Becky and Andy Long, Marlene Evans, and Walt Skirven, thank you for your help during the game.

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youth camp. You are truly amazing. After Nick’s report, he was presented with the water guns and water balloons ladies organizations donated to this conference’s project. He was surprised to see how much was collected. Thank you, ladies, for contributing to this project.

Dan Masi, FSEA Director of Development, was our workshop speaker. He has such enthusiasm and is looking forward to working with the ladies in the future.

We were honored to have many FSEA dignitaries for lunch and the afternoon session. I can't list everyone in the article but thank you for attending the conference.

The afternoon session began with a memorial service for our departed sisters under the direction of FLOE Chaplain, Judy Schall.

Our guest speaker was occupational therapist, Paula Tarver, of the Southwest Central District. She has been with FECTS since its inception in 1999. She and the other FECTS occupational and physical therapists do so much for the children they serve. If there are children with special health care needs, we shall continue to support this Elks project.

Colleen Gallant, Director of Florida Elks Children’s Therapy Services, gave the FECTS annual report. Ladies have donated $1,472,986 since the program began in 1999. For April 2016 through March 2017, the largest amounts of money were donated by Punta Gorda Elkettes, $5,200, and Fort Pierce Elkettes, $3,182.50. St. Augustine Eland Club donated the largest amount of money per capita, $91.12. Silver, red, blue and purple ribbon certificates were given for a total donations value of $35,064.70.

Program book awards were presented by Jane Moon, PSP, Chairlady of the program book. Most boosters were from Fort Pierce Elkettes, $165; Brandon Ladies of Elks, $86; and Plant City Ladies of Elks, $64. The award for most ads supporting FLOE went to Punta Gorda Elkettes with two ads.

The awards for scrapbook, attendance and traveling trophy were presented by Martin Wierzbicki, PER, FSEA Ladies Organization Chairman, and Steve Carruthers, PER, Vice Chairman. The first-place scrapbook plaque was presented to Punta Gorda Elkettes. It was quite a beautiful scrapbook. The attendance award with most members present at roll call went to Punta Gorda Elkettes with 23 members present. The award for largest percentage of members in attendance went to Ocala Ladies of the Elks with 27.5%. The award for most miles traveled from lodge to conference times the number of ladies attending the conference went to Punta Gorda Elkettes – 23 members in attendance and 4,163 total miles traveled. The traveling trophy was awarded to West Central District for a calculated dollar amount of total hours worked ($317,446.40), dollars spent ($9,095.28) and miles traveled ($18,981) for a combined total of $345,522.68 Congratulations, West Central ladies!

The traveling trophy is awarded to the district that has reported the most cash, most time and most miles for the year. The award was presented to West Central District and was accepted by Adella Ashton, FLOE Treasurer and president of the St. Petersburg Ladies of Elks. Also pictured are Marty Wierzbicki, PER (right), Chairman of Ladies Organizations, and Steve Carruthers, PER (left), Vice Chairman.

Installation of the new officers and new Advisory Council members was performed by FLOE PSP, Beverly Messerschmidt. Installed were President, Mary McCoy; Vice President, Felicia Vuletich; Secretary, Adella Ashton; Treasurer, Marlene Evans; Parliamentarian, Susie Harlow; Historian, Dee Spivey; and four-year Advisory Council members, Linda Rittenhouse and PSP Connie. Incoming chaplain, Nancy Gorby, will be installed at the November meeting. Congratulations, ladies!

Several were recognized for their contribution to FLOE: outgoing Advisory Council members, Chairlady Carol Phelps, PSP and Judy Fournier; conference committee chairladies, and longtime conference attendees. This conference was the 54th annual. I recognized ladies who had attended 30 or more conferences: Judy Fournier, 30; Debbie Farris Mortka, 30; Rosella Morrissey, 37; Carolyn Milot, 40; and Faye Bryant, 52. Two Elks were recognized for their years of attendance at FLOE conferences and for their support of FLOE: Frank Palladini, FSEA PSP and Carl Seibert, FSEA State Secretary/COO.

The FLOE President banner was presented to Dunedin-Clearwater Lodge Exalted Ruler, Art French, and Ladies of Elks President, Barbara Carroll, by Brandon Lodge Exalted Ruler, Delores Westfall, and Ladies of Elks President, Julie Ebert. President Mary McCoy and First Man Al were introduced after the traditional crowning by Henry and me. Again, I congratulate President Mary and her officers.

My term as president has come to an end. It has been such a tremendous honor serving as your president. Ladies, I thank you for your commitment, hard work, dedication and loyalty to our organization. Please be proud of all you have done for our two major projects, our fundraisers, your lodge and your community. You are making a difference every day by what you do.

It has been a privilege working with so many of you this year. Thank you for a fabulous year. FSEA officers and the two Ladies Organizations Chairmen and Vice Chairmen, I have enjoyed working with you. Brandon Ladies of Elks, Plant City Ladies of Elks and Southwest Central District ladies, thank you for your support, friendship and the work you did again this year. Elks and Ladies working together – “Teamwork Makes the Dream Work.”

Connie Kalel Poage
President, Florida Ladies of Elks
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Welcome back, my fellow Florida Elks. Maybe I should say awesome Florida Elks!

When I began this journey May 15, 2017, after what has to be the worst start ever to a new year, losing my beloved husband of 30 years to cancer, I could never have imagined how my life would change and how blessed I am to be surrounded by all the wonderful Florida Elks as well as everyone I have met on a national level. My extended family of therapists and Florida Elks has truly been uplifting and gives my life an amazing purpose.

We as Florida Elks are so blessed to have 25 of the most caring and compassionate therapists treating our children and grandchildren.

I have been fortunate enough to be able to travel to all the districts with State President Carl Gerace and Cathy along with VPAL Frank Malatesta and Sally. In each district, we have your local therapist speak at the president’s dinner Saturday evening. Each therapist has been so inspiring when they speak and you can genuinely see how much they love the Elks of Florida and how much they love their patients.

This year at the Elks Day at the Rays Sept. 17, State President Carl Gerace said that he would like for one of the therapy children to throw out the first pitch. Christian Scanlan, one of Yvette Lambert’s patients, was chosen to throw the first pitch. What fun it was to watch Christian throw and then kick the ball. It surely was a sight for sore eyes. Christian was so precious and really seemed to enjoy the attention. Thanks go to Yvette Lambert, PT and the entire Scanlan family for their participation.

Earlier this summer, Jeanne Martin, OT from Fort Myers and I went to the national convention in Reno, Nev. So many of our Florida Elks and their spouses/significant others volunteered to help make our booth an incredible success. Thank you to all of you who volunteered; we could not have done it without you. We had so many people stop and visit our booth to learn about our major projects: Therapy Services and the Florida Elks Youth Camp. We had several of the scholarship recipients stop by and thank the Elks for all their support.

Our many volunteers sold chances on an elk’s tooth, and we raised $2,500 for Therapy Services. The winner of the tooth was Sven Nelson, one of our great Florida Elks. Thank you to all who purchased chances and made this such a great success.

Every year, we have Family Camp. This is when our therapists invite families to the youth camp for the weekend. In addition to the therapists and their families, we have many volunteers who help our very special families. The camp staff along with the therapists and volunteers work very hard to make this a special weekend for the therapy families. Thank you to all the therapists, their spouses and children along with our many volunteers for making this year’s family camp so special. State President Carl Gerace and Cathy, VPAL Frank Malatesta and Sally, and several other dignitaries stopped by the camp to visit with the therapists and all their families. Everyone really enjoyed the visit at camp with our special guests.

Always remember that you, our very generous Elks of Florida and our very generous ladies organizations, are the reason that Florida Elks Children’s Therapy Services can continue to treat the children of Florida who so desperately need our help. Please continue to support our major projects so that we can continue to grow and treat more of our very special children. Thank you for all your generosity when it comes to Florida’s major projects.

Colleen Gallant
Florida Elks Children’s Therapy Services
Director
Summer Camp 2017 was another great season, largely in part to you! I think this was probably our best season ever for Elks getting the word out about camp and sending campers our way. I know at times it was more of a struggle for Elks than it has been in the past due to our new online software, but this technology is really paying off. Distributing pertinent medical information such as who needs critical medicines, inhalers or EpiPens was faster and more accurate than any previous summer. The time needed for us to get a camper or staff member on the road for medical help was cut in half without having to wait for their papers to be located, compiled and copied. Finally, having data available to be quickly searched and sorted allows us to dig in to the reasons behind why some staff don't make the cut or why some campers don't show up for camp. Through this, we can actually solve some problems before they happen.

However, as much help as this software has been this past year, there's always room for improvement! We've been working nonstop at the camp to brainstorm better ways to use the system, but we need your help. At the midyear convention in November, the camp will have a session dedicated to discussion on the software and the changes that will be made for 2018. This is our only chance to hear your thoughts and to share our ideas before the 2018 enrollment process begins in February. If you don't read any other part of this article, please, read this: find the people at your lodge who are responsible for getting kids to camp and tell them to meet with us at midyear convention!

As many of you know, not all of Summer Camp 2017 was fun. During the early morning of Thursday, July 27, a fire destroyed the maintenance and laundry facility here at the youth camp. No staff or campers were anywhere near the building, and the response of our Marion County firefighters was outstanding. The building was a total loss, but we are already under way with plans to rebuild. I need to take a moment, however, to thank some very special people. Camp Boggy Creek and Lake Yale Baptist Conference Center both opened their doors to us without hesitation when they heard of our misfortune. They have allowed us to use their laundry facilities without any charge whatsoever until we can get our new facilities. They may not be Elks, but they sure act like it.

Since the fire, we've also weathered Hurricane Irma. I'm happy to say that the damage to the camp was minimal, although the cleanup was massive. Fortunately, we've got an incredible team here, and everyone from full-time to part-time was on hand to help out. With our kitchen closed, executive chef, Cliff Richard, even led a kitchen crew – originally scheduled to be feeding 400 high schoolers for the week – out to rake and load debris alongside our grounds and maintenance staff.

These efforts from your FEYC crew had the camp looking like new and ready for the next group of kids in just over a week.

And, man, have there been some kids! Tallahassee Elks Lodge once again brought the Gretchen Everhart School to camp for an incredible weekend for their special-needs students. Tampa Elks Lodge brought a group of at-risk students from Robinson High School to experience a day of team-building and confidence-boosting on the ropes course. Miami Arts Charter School brought 400 students for a week of school-away-from-school. And, best of all, your very own Children's Therapy Services was just here for Family Camp! During Family Camp, every family that has been served by our therapists over the last year is invited to spend a weekend at camp. Therapists, volunteers and camp staff provide supervision and activities for the kids while Mom and Dad get to relax at what one mom called “nothing short of a resort!” For families that can have a difficult time taking a vacation, this weekend is critical, and we are so proud of our therapists for giving the time to make it happen.

As always, thank you for the opportunity to serve as the director for your Florida Elks Youth Camp, and thank you for all you do as Florida Elks. Due to your efforts, we will mold the next generation of youth into amazing American citizens!

Fraternally,

Nick Miller
Florida Elks Youth Camp Director
NOVEMBER DEADLINES

11/9-11  Midyear Convention - Plantation at Crystal River
11/15  Van Duren Scholarship Applications Available from FSEA

NON-GL REPORTS & TAXES DUE DATES

11/15  Deposit payroll taxes for prior month to U.S. Treasury (Lodges may be eligible to pay quarterly if certain conditions are met.)
11/20  Sales tax for prior month to Florida Department of Revenue

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

November is Elks Veterans Remembrance Month

STATUTES

November - Membership Report Due on or before Nov. 5 ($12.050)

DECEMBER DEADLINES

12/2  ENF MVS Scholarship Applications Due to Lodges
12/3  Elks Memorial Service (Mandatory Service – Sec 2.020)
12/18  Submissions to Florida Elks Magazine – Winter Edition to Managing Editor

NON-GL REPORTS & TAXES DUE DATES

12/15  Deposit payroll taxes for prior month to U.S. Treasury (Lodges may be eligible to pay quarterly if certain conditions are met.)
12/20  Sales tax for prior month to Florida Department of Revenue

STATUTES

Elks Memorial Service (Mandatory Service Sec. 2.020)

JANUARY DEADLINES

1/4  Lodges to Complete Judging of Received ENF MVS Scholarship Applications and Forward to District Chairman
1/6  Lodges to Receive Essays from Contestants for the FSEA Americanism Essay Contest
1/12  Postmark Deadline for FSEA to Receive Hope Scholarship Applications

NON-GL REPORTS & TAXES DUE DATES

1/15  Deposit payroll taxes for prior month to U.S. Treasury (Lodges may be eligible to pay quarterly if certain conditions are met.)
1/20  Sales tax for prior month to Florida Department of Revenue

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

State Soccer Shoot - FEYC – Umatilla, Fla.

STATE PRESIDENT VISITS

1/12-13  North District - Live Oak #1165
1/26-27  Northeast District - St. Augustine #829
In Defense of Our Nation

In times of war and international conflict, the Elks have made considerable contributions to the nation's armed forces. The Elks consider their work done to aid in the defense of the nation as one of their proudest and most lasting achievements. That Elks hold veterans and active military in high esteem is evident by their actions.

WORLD WAR I
In 1917 the world was at war. Through the Elks’ patriotism and generosity, $2 million was raised to assist U.S. soldiers. The Elks organized and equipped the first two base hospitals in France, and to accommodate the maimed and wounded, they built a 700-bed Reconstruction Hospital and gave it to the War Department in 1918. This hospital was the forerunner of today’s VA Medical Centers.

 Following the war’s end, the Elks made 40,000 rehabilitation, vocational and educational loans to disabled veterans who were ineligible for government help or who were waiting approval of their applications. This service was so effective that the government followed the Elks’ example and established a revolving fund that was the precursor of the G.I. bill.

More than 70,000 Elks served in the armed forces during World War I. More than 1,000 made the supreme sacrifice.

WORLD WAR II
In 1940, it was becoming quite apparent that war was quickly approaching our shores. Right after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Grand Lodge sent a telegram to President Roosevelt placing the Order of Elks at the nation’s disposal.

The Elks War Commission was formed in 1942 with an initial war chest of $35,000. The United States Army asked the War Commission to help recruit 45,000 young men for the ground crews of the Army Air Corps. The commission, with the help of the local lodges, recruited 97,000 men. By the time hostilities ceased, the Grand Lodge had spent more than $1.5 million and local lodges spent hundreds of thousands of dollars providing assistance to our men and women in uniform.

When thousands of wounded and disabled members of the Armed Forces were returned to the States for recuperation at government hospitals, the Elks again stepped forward offering their services. It was through this work with hospitalized veterans that today’s pledge had its genesis: “So long as there are veterans, the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks will never forget them.”

For returning servicemen still stationed far from home, the Elks sponsored 155 Elks fraternal centers across the country where GIs were invited to relax, socialize and enjoy the hospitality of the Elks. For those serving overseas, the Elks prepared and sent care packages containing candy, personal grooming supplies and other comforting items.

KOREA AND VIETNAM
When war broke out in Korea in 1950, the Elks responded by sending gift packs to those serving their country as they had done in World War II. In 1951, the Secretary of Defense appealed to the Elks for help in procuring blood for the wounded. Within a few months, Elks lodges obtained more than half a million pints.

During the Vietnam War, the Defense Department was concerned with the morale of our 400,000 troops because of the anti-American sentiments being reported on the home front. The Elks answered the call and flooded our troops with letters expressing our gratitude for the sacrifices they were making for our country.

When the Elks National Service Commission learned that wounded veterans from Vietnam were sweltering in Tripler Army Medical Center that lacked air conditioning, they provided air-conditioning units so that these military personnel might recover in relative comfort.

OPERATION DESERT STORM AND BEYOND
As in previous conflicts, the Elks stood ready to aid men and women of the U.S. Armed Forces when the Gulf War commenced. Once again, the Elks mounted a letter-writing campaign to thank our troops for their dedicated service, and gift packs were provided as they had been in the past.

At the close of the Gulf War, many Elks lodges made arrangements to host ceremonies honoring our returning military from the conflict in the Middle East, making the Elks one of the first organizations to formally welcome them home.

During the 2003 war with Iraq, the Elks once again stepped forward. In addition to helping families of deceased and disabled military, our Army of Hope assisted families suffering financial distress caused by their primary Military Reserve and National Guard breadwinner being deployed to active duty.

In times of war and international conflict, the Elks have made considerable contributions to the nation's armed forces. The Elks consider their work done to aid in the defense of the nation as one of their proudest and most lasting achievements. That Elks hold veterans and active military in high esteem is evident by their actions.
Lodge Budget Planning: 
Managing Lodge Income and Expenses

The purpose of budgets is the planning of the income and expenses of the lodge. It is a management tool that is most effective when actual revenue and expenses are compared to the budget amounts periodically during the year by the board of trustees to see whether the expectations have been met. Then management decisions are made to adjust operations as needed. This enables the trustees and House Committee to manage operations in order to attain a profit sufficient to finance the lodge’s fraternal and charitable objectives, provide for growth, and prevent year-end losses.

Statutory Requirements

A budget is required for every entity of the lodge as expressed in Sections 12.070 (lodge), 16.030 (separate corporation) and 16.040 (club and other facilities). These statutes also require that each entity report monthly to the lodges their actual progress as compared to the budget. Budgets must be presented to the lodge for approval no later than the final meeting in April.

Preparing the Budget

The initial action should be the Exalted Ruler-elect requesting from each of his or her committee chairmen their best estimate of fundraising income and estimated expenses. The secretary, treasurer and trustees should meet early to assemble estimates of the budget line items that do not require actual data, such as dues and fee income, mortgage principal, interest expense, insurance, etc.

With an effective accounting system where postings are kept current, the general ledger should provide actual income and expense data for the prior year within a short time after March 31. The trustees and other entity managers convene a budget meeting or series of meetings and develop the best available estimates, giving considerations to the Exalted Ruler’s plans, the committee estimates and prior-year experience.

The following should be considered:

- Prepare worksheets in advance.
- Budget by the same line items that are used to record income and expenses.
- Prepare income section first on the theory that you should not spend more than you expect to receive. Be realistic and conservative.
- When preparing the expense section, estimate fixed and semifixed expenses first, i.e. those over which the lodge has little or no control.
- Prepare separate schedules.
where more detail is desired, such as a detailed list of charity donations to be made.

- When budgeting activities which generate income such as bingo or fundraising events, always budget gross receipts and expenses – never the net income.

- Do not overlook capital items which are not expenses such as purchase of equipment, mortgage principal, etc.

- Budget may include an amount for contingent purposes to cover unforeseen emergencies. Expenditures therefore require a two-thirds affirmative vote of the lodge.

- It is not a good business practice to prepare a deficit budget. Keep expenses within the limits of anticipated income.

- It is advisable that the lodge trustees coordinate the various budgets to prevent overlapping and duplication.

Operating within the budget, Section C. 12.070 of the statutes clearly states that after the budget has been adopted, all expenditures must be kept within the limits of appropriations made and specifies action to be taken when proposals are made for an expenditure in excess of the budget or an expenditure requiring use of any amount for contingencies.

The following guide should be used in interpreting strict statutory requirements:

- Line items budgeted for operating expenses are estimates. It is to be expected that actual expenditures will exceed or fall short of the estimates on specific items. Approval of the lodge should not be required to formally change the budget accordingly. This would seriously hinder day-to-day operations.

- Binding contracts and major expenditures of an unusual nature, such as purchase of major equipment or major repairs, even if included in the budget, should be submitted to the lodge for approval after receipt of proposals and estimates from the vendor. Trustees should make appropriate recommendations.

- The supervising or managing body of the club or other entities should be authorized to make purchases in support of day-to-day operations but should not enter binding contracts extending over a period of time or purchase major items of equipment without prior approval of the lodge.

- Approval of expenditures which exceed the total amount budgeted must specify the source of funds. If savings are to be used, the trustees should so indicate in their recommendation.

- Amendment of a budget requires lodge approval but does not require resubmission of a new budget.

**Financial Operations**

It is of extreme importance that the members recognize that each entity of the lodge is to be financially self-sufficient adhering to their own budget and understanding that the funds from the lodge are not to be used to maintain or support any other entity of the lodge such as the club (bar and dining room), swimming pool, bingo, tear tickets, corporation, etc. The only exception to the above will pertain to the institution of an entity wherein a bank is required. However, in this case, the funds transferred from the lodge will only be considered as a loan and are to be returned to the lodge as soon as possible.

**FSEA Business Practices Committee**

**Budget Reviews**

This is a most important phase of the budget process. The trustees, the club
So long as there are veterans, the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks will never forget them.” This is the Elks’ pledge to veterans. It is well-known that Elks are adamant supporters of veterans. While this article cannot describe all the Florida Elks do for our defenders of freedom, it does describe the vast variety of programs carried out by our dedicated members for the sake of veterans and military members.

Veterans Services Committees:
Honoring Veterans in their Communities

It is well-known that Elks are adamant supporters of veterans. While this article cannot describe all the Florida Elks do for our defenders of freedom, it does describe the vast variety of programs carried out by our dedicated members for the sake of veterans and military members.

The Florida State Elks Association has a state Veterans Services Committee, and all the lodges have chairmen who initiate and oversee participation in veterans activities. Among the lodges, members show support in a variety of ways.

At Brandon Elks Lodge #2383, for example, PER Steve Sawdey, retired Colonel, U.S. Army, has chaired the take-a-veteran-to-church program for well over 10 years. Members assist veterans from James A. Haley Veterans Hospital to church services during the month of February. The local ROTC is now part of this program as well. Liberty Manor for Veterans has been adopted as the lodge’s Adopt-a-Veteran program. Liberty Manor houses homeless veterans and helps them transition to living on their own. Many are temporarily left homeless as they wait for their VA benefits. The VA severely lacks funding for housing as well. These veterans are always welcomed at any of the lodge’s functions such as picnics and special events.

PER Bernie Hiskey, retired Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Air Force, started a monthly dinner for veterans in 2011. It began by inviting veterans from James A. Haley Veterans Hospital and later expanded to include the veterans from Liberty Manor as well as the Home Health Care Unit of the veterans hospital. Hiskey had no trouble getting volunteers to help with this monthly function. He and his team coordinate with the hospital and Liberty Manor each month and handle all the setup and cleanup for the function. He has a cooking team and members jump in to help with serving the veterans. Brandon’s members appreciate the opportunity to thank veterans for what they have given for our country.

Brandon Lodge has also partnered with an outside company for the past 10 years that hosts a Thanksgiving dinner the Thursday before Thanksgiving for the active military of the MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Fla., and their families. The Brandon Ladies of Elks are proud to cook the turkeys and all the trimmings.

These programs are only from one lodge; imagine the impact the Elks make when you multiply all this support by our 98 lodges.

Contributor: George R. Scribner, PER, State Vice Chairman of Veterans Services Committee and 2016 recipient of the VAVS Volunteers of the Year award

Arts and Crafts:
Veterans’ Work on Display

For more than 10 years, the Florida State Elks Association has sponsored a veterans arts and crafts display at the annual state convention.

The many art pieces are created by veterans from Bay Pines VAMC, James A. Haley VAMC and Gainesville VAMC. The pieces are auctioned off to raise money for the arts and crafts departments at each of the VA facilities. The association awards ribbons and monetary prizes for first place, second place, third place and 10 honorable mentions. The works are judged by Past State Presidents and the outgoing Veterans State Chairman.

The arts and crafts programs at the VA facilities add enrichment to the veterans’ lives. Not only do the veterans have the enjoyment of accomplishing something, it also gives them something to look forward to – arts and crafts time in the dining room.

All supplies are provided for the veterans in the hospital as well as for the in-patient care and mental health wing. The VA assigns recreational therapists to oversee the arts and crafts time. Also, volunteers come in daily to help the veterans. Each hospital has an annual arts and craft show held at their facility. In turn, the VA has an annual convention and they have a display there as well.

Contributor: Richard Jacobs, PER, State VAVS Coordinator

“S
Army of Hope:
A State Association Program Funding
Military Families in Need

Established in 2007, Florida’s Army of Hope mission is to provide assistance to the families of deceased, disabled and deployed members of the military.

The families of Florida active duty military personnel, military reservists, Coast Guard, the National Guard and/or their dependents are eligible. The help we give through the Army of Hope allows the military members to safely concentrate on their duties without worrying about their family at home. The Army of Hope also assists returning veterans with costs to re-establish their civilian life after deployment.

The Army of Hope started with zero funds and a desire to assist the families of deployed military members either from or stationed in Florida. To date, the program has received nearly half a million dollars from generous member contributions and fundraising events.

The Army of Hope has issued grants exceeding $350,000 to or in support of the troops. In the beginning, the Army of Hope focused on assisting the families of deployed personnel with minor repairs and financial assistance. Grants were also issued to families for travel expenses to join wounded members in medical facilities long distances from their home. As combat operations slowed, the need for assistance changed to assisting returning military members and families with financial assistance. Many, especially Reserve and National Guard members, whose bills had been held in abeyance while they were on active duty now became due. They had not received their normal pay and did not have the money to pay the amounts due. Many were at the point of losing their homes and cars and were not able to provide for their families.

One such member was medically discharged and suffering from PTSD. He had three children and their power was about to be cut off. The family had limited funds because he was unable to work. They had limited access to a computer and transportation making it extremely hard to find employment. The stress of all this was affecting their marriage and he was threatening suicide because he could not take care of his responsibilities. The Army of Hope was able to assist him by clearing his outstanding debts. He later sent a thank-you letter to the Army of Hope and stated that the Elks had restored his faith in humanity and his ability to function.

A deployed member returned on leave to be with his family and newborn son. Travel expenses for his leave were his obligation. Prior to his deployment he was unemployed and behind on bills; his pending deployment had hindered him from being hired anywhere. The family did not have money to buy the basic items they needed for the baby. The Army of Hope provided funds to purchase food, diapers, clothing and other items and to help the family during the remainder of his deployment.

A combat decorated Air Force pilot with multiple deployments developed Stage IV brain cancer after his return. His home was constructed on pilings and had 15 steep steps to the ground level. When his home was constructed, the framework was put in place for an elevator with the intentions of an in-law apartment. The member now required this area for living space due to his weakening condition. He desperately needed this elevator to be able to get out of his house. His family requested assistance but because he was a humble man, he would not accept more than half the quoted cost. The Army of Hope was able to assist in making this combat veteran’s life more independent and maintain his dignity. Sadly, within a few months of the elevator’s installation, he passed away. His family told the Army of Hope how much he appreciated being able to get out and enjoy what time he had left. They were most grateful to the Elks for making that possible.

Thanks to the generous donations from Florida Elks, the Army of Hope is able to increase the quality of life for our military members and their families. We give them support when they are most vulnerable and provide them with hope for their future. It is the least we can do for what they have done for us.

Contributor: Vic McClellan, PSP, Army of Hope Grants Chairman

“So long as there are veterans, the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks will never forget them.”

This is the Elks’ Pledge to Veterans
Historic Programs:
Honoring Veterans on a Grand Scale

Perhaps the most glamorous project associated with the Florida Elks’ support of veterans is the partnership we have had since 2014 with Historic Programs. Historic Programs is a not-for-profit organization committed to remembering people, places and events that have shaped the world.

They work as a commemorative partner with the Department of Defense Office of Commemorations. In the words of Rudolph Masi Sr., Florida Elks Historical Commemorative Projects Liaison, “Our partnership recognizes and celebrates historical moments in the history of our nation helping to ensure that the sacrifices made by many in our nation are never forgotten and that they are passed on to future generations of Americans. This partnership is a living example supporting our Elks motto, ‘So long as there are veterans, the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks will never forget them.’

70TH ANNIVERSARY OF D-DAY
Normandy, France – 2014

Twenty-one Florida Elks, family and friends took part in the many commemorations held throughout the Normandy region of France for the 70th anniversary of D-Day. Prior to departing for France, Masi visited Audie Murphy VA (San Antonio, Texas) and C. W. Bill Young VA (St. Petersburg, Fla.), the veteran-care facilities housing the most and second-most number of World War II veterans in the nation. The veterans signed banners that would be carried in the parade. One of the banners is mounted in the Grafton Center at the Florida State Elks Association headquarters. The other was donated to the University of Texas where it is displayed along with a photo of their band in Normandy holding the Audie Murphy facility banner.

The parade was in St. Mere Eglise, the first liberated town which was made famous in the movie “The Longest Day” and the “Band of Brothers” series. This town of 3,000 residents swelled to over 120,000 with visitors and dignitaries attending from all over the world. The Florida Elks were the smallest group marching in the parade but had the most applause with their banner honoring all veterans. Toward the end of the parade, the onlookers crossed the security lines to hug and thank Florida Elks for their participation and
support of veterans. The Elks were on national and international news as well as the front page of the Paris newspaper.

Those who went on this trip took a two-day tour of battle sites, memorials, and veteran cemeteries in the Normandy and Burgundy regions of France.

70TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE END OF WORLD WAR II
Washington, D.C. – 2015

The 70th anniversary of the end of World War II festivities took place in Washington, D.C., and were held at the World War II Memorial. Thirty-three Florida Elks including 12 World War II veterans participated. Each Elk veteran was presented a medal honoring them for their service to our nation. St. Petersburg Lodge #1224 veteran, Retired Commander Jack Raquepau, gave the keynote speech at the event. He shared what it was like to be a young man coming off the farm to go to war. He is famous for shooting down two Japanese Zeros and a Japanese patrol boat saving President George (41) Bush’s life when his plane was shot down. He also led the 2,000-plane flyover during the Japanese surrender ceremony held in Tokyo Bay. Everyone jumped to their feet with applause when he spoke his final words: “When asked why we left our families, farms and homes to fight, the answer is easy. The world was under tyranny and oppression. It was the United States to the rescue and we won!”

During this three-day trip, Florida Elk veterans were given a tour of our nation’s capital, visited many memorials, dined in historical locations and enjoyed a Potomac River dinner cruise. The veterans were honored with applause in the airports and everywhere they toured. The group was greeted by Elks from around Florida upon arriving back home. State and local print and broadcast media covered this event.

FLORIDA STATE ELKS ASSOCIATION MAGAZINE
75th Anniversary of Pearl Harbor
Honolulu – 2016

A total of 73 veterans, medical staff, caretakers and Florida Elks traveled the farthest and were the largest group of World War II veterans from one group to attend the 75th anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor commemoration and parade. There were 26 veterans from six Florida districts including Bradenton

World War II veterans and were introduced, given leis and honored for their service. Everyone in the Florida Elk group participated in the parade. Both events were televised worldwide. The History Channel, another partner of Historic Programs, is making a documentary on the event. Other highlights were a dinner and award ceremony hosted by Honolulu Elks Lodge #616, a breakfast and award ceremony hosted by Kailua Lodge #2230, a tour of the World War II Valor in the Pacific National Monument, the USS Arizona Memorial, the USS Missouri Battleship Memorial, the Polynesian Cultural Center, beautiful beaches and the Dole Plantation.

Elk Ruth Heckering, the only female combat veteran to attend the festivities. Along the parade route were 130,000 spectators from all parts of the world. Some veterans were pushed in wheelchairs for the parade while others rode behind in a trolley.

Florida Elks participated in the public ceremony at Ft. DeRussy which was attended by over 100,000 people from all over the world. The Elk veterans sat on the stage platform with generals, admirals and other

The week was capped with a goodbye dinner where each veteran was presented with a Certificate of Participation honoring their service and a commemorative edition of the Honolulu newspaper showcasing the event.

Funds for this trip were raised by holding a golf tournament, USO-type shows, dinners and Historic Programs presentations. Donations were also made by Florida Elks Charities and from lodge charity accounts.
Veterans and Family: In their Own Words

“The veterans rode in an open bus during the parade with a big sign [that said] World War II Veterans. I had an outside seat and saw the people 15 deep for over 2 miles, everyone cheering and taking pictures. I bet I am on a thousand cameras. I have never gotten glory like this before and it will stick with me forever.”
-- Ervin Stark

“As we left the USS Missouri, Frank turned to me and said, ‘My heart is now full of peace and joy; my heart is now complete. I have met many Japanese people and realized they went through what we did. I learned to love them.’ Thank you, Elks, for letting Frank find the peace he looked for for 75 years.”
-- Judy Vergason on behalf of Frank Campbell who passed away April 29, 2017

“My trip with the Elks...was one of the highlights of my life....Most of us were in our 90s and some required wheelchairs. One of the things that most impressed me was the applause and respect that was shown us as we traveled down the streets or entered a restaurant. I think that many of us were slightly embarrassed although it was wonderful to observe that there was still a large amount of patriotism in the country we had once served. I am not ashamed to admit that a lump formed in my throat and a tear in my eye.”
-- Louis Serrabella

“This trip meant so much to all the vets. It was an honor and a privilege and humbling for me to spend this week with them. These people are truly an integral part of the Greatest Generation – aptly named for sure. [I] wasn’t sure Dad could physically do the trip, but he was a trooper. He will never forget this, and I was so happy to be able to take this trip with him and share that special time.”
-- Sandy Papsin

Parade of Heroes
Washington, D.C. – 2017

The 2017 project will honor veterans from three wars: World War II, Korea and Vietnam. There are 37 Florida Elk veterans being sponsored by the Florida State Elks Association, lodges, districts and private donors. A total of 50 Elks will depart airports in Tampa and Ft. Lauderdale to participate Nov. 9-11. The ceremony will begin with a wreath presentation at the Lincoln Memorial followed by a parade to the World War II, Korean War and Vietnam War memorials where veterans who fought in those wars will be recognized before proceeding to the next memorial. Highlights will include visits to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, the Kennedy gravesites, Arlington National Cemetery, museums and numerous memorials as well as a Potomac River dinner cruise.

Contributor: Rudolph Masi Sr., Florida Elks Historical Commemorative Projects Liaison

Final Thoughts

From the smallest act of kindness done for a veteran to a veteran being honored by hundreds of thousands of supporters at a parade, each one matters. The visit a veteran receives in a nursing home means just as much to that veteran as a trip to Pearl Harbor means to another veteran. What’s important is that we are taking purposeful actions to show veterans how much we appreciate them. The effort is what counts.
Formation of the Benevolent & Protective Order of Elks: How the Jolly Corks Became the Elks

An actor’s life was quite insecure in 1868 and there was little protection for his family if beset by the misfortune of unemployment, sickness or death. This became even more evident when just before the holidays in December 1867, Charles Vivian, Hughey Dougherty, Harry Stanwood, Hugh Eagan and George Guy attended the funeral of a friend and fellow Jolly Cork, Ted Quinn, well-known in the local concert circuit. After the services, they dropped into a friend’s home where they found George McDonald, one of the original 15 Jolly Corks.

Upon learning that the contingent of comrades had attended the funeral for one of their Jolly Corks, McDonald suggested that the organization should consider forming a benevolent and protective society. McDonald did not leave it at that; in the next week he presented the idea to several of the Jolly Corks.

A meeting was scheduled for Feb. 2, 1868, and was presided over by Charles A. Vivian. George McDonald offered a motion to organize the Jolly Corks as a fraternal lodge. Further discussions proposed that the lodge should be along the benevolent and protective lines and that a committee be appointed to formulate rules and regulations for its government, prepare a suitable ritual and select a new name.

In forming the committee, they were focused on the adoption of an organization with a more serious policy than mere friendliness. It was a desire for companionship that had brought these men together originally, and it was that same intimacy that gave them the impetus to form a fraternal organization, but in addition to good fellowship they needed an enduring organization that would serve a more noble purpose of aiding those in need. The seeds for one of America’s greatest fraternities were about to be planted.

The appointed committee consisted of Richard Steirly, George F. McDonald and Thomas G. Riggs. Charles Vivian was an ex-officio member of that committee. Evidence points to the actual work of the committee being performed by George W. Thompson, Thomas G. Riggs, and William and Lloyd Brown.

One of the main issues was deciding on a new name. One of the more serious considerations was that of the Order of Buffaloes, an organization prevalent in Europe during the 1800s. Vivian had been a member of the Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes, (R.A.O. Buffaloes) and was familiar with their ritual. Influenced by his membership in the Buffaloes, he had set in his mind the establishing of a fraternity patterned after the English organization. The English order was named after the African buffalo, a name which Americans popularly called their North American bison. The committee, however, resisted this idea, expressing their desire that it bestow a more distinctive American title.

In search of a name and emblem for the new order, a visit was made to the Barnum Museum and the Cooper Institute Library. An elk’s head was conspicuously placed on the walls of the museum. It was so impressive that they decided to research it at the institute. They read that the elk was an animal fleet of foot that avoided aggressive combat and destroyed nothing but was ever ready to defend its own life and those of its females and young. The idea of an animal that lived in peace but would fight to defend its rights and to protect the weak and helpless appealed strongly to the Corks. The elk, with its spreading antlers, was not only a beautiful animal; it seemed to symbolize the ideas and values these men most wanted to stand for and perpetuate. The elk seemed to define the qualities they were looking for; they were admirable qualities that the members could emulate as members of a benevolent fraternity.

The first formal meeting was held Feb. 16, 1868. Fifteen people turned out, most of them young and undiscovered but budding artists who had gathered for companionship and to help their work peers. The first Exalted Ruler was George Thompson, elected May 24, 1868, when Vivian, who was slated for office, did not appear. W. L. Bowron had the distinction of being member No. 1 of Lodge #1.

The new order’s benefit performances and its convivial social activities brought great popularity, and the membership grew rapidly. Elks traveling to other cities in pursuit of their professions spread word of the order and soon there came requests for Elks lodges elsewhere than in New York. Responding to these appeals, the Elks asked for and received from the New York legislature a charter authorizing the establishment of a Grand Lodge with the power to establish local lodges anywhere in the country.

They received their first charter as New York Lodge #1 March 10, 1871. The second lodge chartered was Philadelphia Lodge #2 March 12, and the third lodge was San Francisco #3, chartered in 1876.

On Feb. 16, 1868, the committee reported recommending that the Jolly Corks be merged into the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks and the recommendation was adopted by a vote of 8-7, and as they say, the rest is history.
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The Florida State Elks are legendary supporters of Re-Creation USA and their generosity was especially poignant at a recent scholarship presentation as two young Re-Creation troupe members will be able to attend non-traditional schools that have little to no access to typical scholarships. Vic and Peggie McClellan spoke to the crowd about their appreciation of Re-Creation and presented these two young ambassadors with gifts of encouragement.

Below is a thank-you letter from Hannah Swanson.

To the wonderful folks of the Florida State Elks,

When I first joined Re-Creation in 2014, I was fresh out of high school and had no clue what I was getting myself into. It wasn't until my very first show that I realized I was a part of something much bigger than myself. I'll share with you a few vivid memories that have impacted me. I can remember ending my first show, shaking my first hand and being told, "This was the first time I've been thanked in a long time." I had to go backstage because I couldn't contain my emotions. I remember for the first time in my 18 years thanking my dad for his service at a show, all the while both of us crying, he because he probably just missed me, me because I realized I should have done it sooner. I have countless memories of marriage proposals, being told how special we are, and many, many kisses from men who have lost their wives and see them in us girls. Most of all, when I think back on my time, I think of the veterans who thank us, when in reality, they are the ones who deserve all the gratitude.

These memories would not have been made if Re-Creation didn't have the Elks behind us constantly providing us with things we need. We are especially grateful for the kindness and generosity we experience from the Florida State Elks. There is not a group of people more willing to make sure Re-Creation is able to get out on the road and thank the veterans. When we come to Florida, we are met by Elk members who are incredibly kind and ready to do whatever they can to keep our mission going. Whether it's feeding us, letting us stay at our favorite home-away-from-home (Florida Elks Youth Camp), or providing us with trucks and trailers in our time of need, the Florida Elks are always ready for the call.

I cannot begin to describe what it means to me to have received the Florida State Elks scholarship. I suppose I don't quite understand what I did to deserve it. I know I have done what was asked and beyond, because this mission is so important to me, but who knew that doing the right thing
would be rewarded in this type of way. I am completely humbled. This fall I’m moving to Brooklyn, N.Y., where I’ll be studying musical theatre at the New York Film Academy. If you know anything about New York, you know it’s not cheap, and the fact that I was chosen for this scholarship has taken such a weight off my shoulders. Thank you to the wonderful folks of the Florida State Elks. I have less to worry about in the big city, and I cannot say thank you enough.

Thank you, Florida State Elks, for all you have done not just with this scholarship but through your continuous support of Re-Creation. Times are tough here at Re-Creation, but we know we have folks like you in our corner ready to help fight to keep this mission alive, and for that, we are thankful. Thank you, all, so very much!

With deepest gratitude,
Hannah Swanson
Scholarship recipient

Re-Creation USA:
America’s Ambassadors to Hospitalized Veterans

Re-Creation was founded in 1976 and has performed thousands of concerts all across America. Re-Creation presents programs at fairs, banquets, conventions, schools, churches, and many other public and private venues. The group’s main service is to America’s hospitalized veterans in Veterans Affairs Medical Centers and state veterans homes. Since 1983, Re-Creation has provided the only continuing, live, therapeutic entertainment presence in the nation’s VA Medical Centers.

In the past six years, the FSEA has provided specific and vital support by providing Re-Creation with new road equipment, including new passenger vans, new trailers and a grant for new sound equipment.

The FSEA also houses the cast members at their youth camp in central Florida. The hospitality provided at the camp is crucial to the group’s ability to perform in commercial venues throughout Florida during January and February.

The FSEA Army of Hope also provides for the production and distribution of Re-Creation CDs and DVDs to every VA facility the group visits. This substantial gift is vital in extending the Re-Creation presence to the men and women in the hospitals and homes. Patients will listen to the show again on headphones during rehab sessions, and they’ll watch the show again on personal or large-room televisions, reliving the special day when America came to their bedside to say THANK YOU!

For more info on Re-Creation USA visit:
www.re-creationusa.org
www.Facebook.com/ReCreationUSA
Pensacola Beach #497

PER Don Padget of Pensacola Beach Elks Lodge #497 presented a donation to Sarah Ellis, founder of My Father’s Arrow. Located in Jay, Fla., My Father’s Arrow supports and serves youth from infancy to 23 years of age by seeking foster parents and adoptive parents.

The state provides the young adults with an unfurnished apartment. MFA provides all the furnishings. Last year they were able to fully furnish seven apartments.

The name of the organization comes from Psalm 127:4: “Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one’s youth. Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them.”

MFA currently operates out of a chapel in Jay which is becoming too small for them. They continue to provide services for northwest Florida and Southeast Alabama from generous donations made by the community and local organizations. Founder, Sarah Ellis, says, “if it doesn’t keep the orphans at the center, we don’t do it.”

Lake City #893

Lake City Lodge’s annual Elks family picnic was Saturday, July 22, at Jim and Carol Martin’s river house. The lodge furnished hamburgers and hot dogs while guests brought side dishes and desserts. Potential members were especially invited along with their families. The Martins host this event every year in a spirit of generosity to the lodge members.

Lake City Lodge is already collecting canned food items for the Christmas baskets. Canned food items needed are yams, green beans, corn, jellied cranberry sauce and turkey gravy. The lodge usually prepares about 100 baskets of food for needy families in the Lake City area.

Live Oak #1165

Live Oak Elks Lodge #1165 held their annual charity golf tournament Aug. 5 at the Suwannee Country Club. Eighteen teams participated in the three-man scramble. The lodge raised $10,000 for their charity account. Henry Roberson chaired the event.

The local bloodmobile visited Live Oak Lodge July 15 and Sept. 9. On the second visit, the lodge sponsored Flea Across Florida, a garage sale event in the parking lot where members could sell their gently used merchandise. The lodge rented spaces in its parking lot for $10 to each vendor.

Perry #1851

Perry Elks Lodge #1851 continues its monthly birthday bash, inviting all members who have a birthday during the month to come to the lodge for a birthday dinner. It is an evening of fellowship and socializing and shows the members that their lodge appreciates them. Officers are on hand to greet and wish everyone a happy birthday.

Perry Lodge is already making the changes voted upon at the Grand Lodge convention this summer. Beginning in September, the lodge returned to the long form of the initiation ritual.

Tallahassee #937

Tallahassee Elks Lodge #937 was the winner of the national ritual contest that took place at the Grand Lodge convention in July. Tallahassee took first place in the eastern division and advanced to the national finals. Personal All-American awards given to the highest-scoring competitor in each position regardless of the team score were awarded to Leading Knight, John Bozeman Jr.; Inner Guard, Ron Brown; and Candidate, Adrienne Bellflower. By virtue of the team’s top spot, Coach, Jan Thorburn, and Assistant Coach, Tracey Austin, were also awarded. The lodge was also given the Benjamin Trophy First-Place Winner plaque for excellence in ritual rendition. This plaque is given each year by California’s Napa Lodge #832 to the national winner in remembrance of Raymond Benjamin, Past Grand Exalted Ruler from Napa Lodge who was an inspired contributor to the initiatory ritual.

In making an effort to be visible in the community, Tallahassee Lodge adopted Ft. Braden School as the recipient of school supplies for its students. The lodge held a stuff-the-backpack event in which they provided dinner and asked those attending to bring a handful of school supplies with them. More than $2,000 in supplies were donated including 100 iTunes gift cards. The school administrators were elated.
In September, Tallahassee Lodge brought special-needs students from Gretchen Everhart School to the Florida Elks Youth Camp for their annual trip. This excursion allows students and their families to spend four days and three nights at the camp with all expenses paid. Kids come back home with tie-dyed t-shirts (as do the Elks who chaperone) and other souvenirs from the trip. The directive to the kids from one of the chaperones, ER John Bozeman, was to have fun and smile. Everyone did that!

Lodge #1892, and FLOE senior delegate and Past President, Judy Reyes of St. Augustine Lodge #829, combined talents to raise money for Florida Elks Children’s Therapy Services. They held a fashion show at Green Cove Springs Lodge June 26. Tiffany Ruff of Resort Fashions presented the fashions for sale. Her presentation was aided by six Green Cove Springs Lodge ladies who modeled the casual wear. Fourteen volunteers handled the setup and decoration of the lodge, meal preparation, and serving. There were 87 lodge ladies and guests from both lodges present. The event raised $1,086.85 for Florida Elks Children’s Therapy Services.

Gainesville #990

Gainesville Elks Lodge #990 held their annual Elks Splash Day in July. All proceeds raised will go to Autism research.

Jacksonville #221

Jacksonville Elks Lodge #221 participated in the annual Jacksonville Beach National Night Out event held Aug. 1 at the Sea Walk Pavilion. The theme for the event was crime prevention. Representatives from police, fire, military and other fraternal organizations attended the event which featured various booths and exhibits displaying anti-crime information. It was highlighted by a bicycle rodeo. Representatives from all local media outlets were present.

Mandarin-St. Johns #2866

Pack #484 of the Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts uses Mandarin-St. Johns Elks Lodge #2866 for their meetings and events. They had an end-of-summer squirt gun battle at the lodge.
Eustis #1578

Once again, the Anna Miller Circle of Eustis Lodge #1578 met for their July quarterly packing for The Haven of Lake and Sumter Counties. The Haven offers 24-hour crisis intervention and emergency shelter for domestic and sexual violence victims and their minor children. This is followed by support and resources for the victims and their children including courtroom advocacy, tutoring and life skills classes. Volunteers pack quart-size bags with travel-size items which are given upon arrival at the shelter. They also donate gently worn clothes and suitcases. Volunteers for this packing session included six Anna Miller Circle members and four Elks who made quick work of packing the $4,250.50 in-kind contribution. This very worthwhile charity has been serving victims since 1977.

The Eustis Anna Miller Circle also provided two area elementary schools with school supplies. In addition, they are making and have given some blankets to Autistic children.

The Florida Elks Children’s Therapy Services regional therapist saw a need in the Northeast District and acted on it by informing Eustis Lodge of the need. The lodge donated $500 to the family of a young girl in Jacksonville for a wheeled-appliance carrier that attaches to a vehicle and to have it completely installed on the family vehicle.

Eustis Lodge has cooked a spaghetti dinner including a salad and garlic toast for the Eustis High School junior varsity football team every week of their season.

Eustis Lodge also donated $450 to New Vision for a typing program for the blind that will support 35 people.

Inverness #2522

Inverness Elks Lodge’s Backpack for Success program supplied backpacks and school supplies to needy students. The program is funded by an Elks National Foundation Gratitude Grant along with a donation of 20 backpacks from Daystar Life Center. Lodge volunteers put together grade-appropriate backpacks with school supplies for the Citrus County Foster Parent Association, seven area high schools and middle schools, Guardian ad Litem, and Citrus United Basket. In the three years since the program started, the number of students helped has more than doubled.

Below is a letter from a Guardian ad Litem describing the children as they receive these new backpacks. It is an inspiring reminder that when Elks donate new backpacks and school supplies for students, some children receive much more than just the tangible objects donated.

The special little six-year-old’s smile never left her face as she unzipped every zipper; examined every pencil, every pad of paper, all the notebooks, and crayons; and then, after adjusting the straps to fit her small body, proudly put the backpack on. Prior to being placed in foster care, she lived in a homeless shelter, was accustomed to only having someone else’s hand-me-downs, and had never owned a new backpack – much less a PINK one – along with having her own school supplies. I also presented backpacks and school supplies from the Elks to two boys under the supervision of Child Services. They were equally thrilled and grateful. Their non-parent caregiver is on disability and has a limited income, so the gift from the Elks was truly appreciated. On behalf of the three children (for whom I’m the Guardian ad Litem), I wish to thank the lodge for the backpacks and school supplies. For those of us who have been blessed, it is an honor to share our blessings with those less fortunate.
-- Paula Pombier, Guardian ad Litem

South Marion-Villages #2730

South Marion-Villages Elks Lodge #2730 held a free back-to-school bash where students were given a backpack and age-appropriate school supplies. The Belleview Police came and played with the kids in the bounce house and the lodge served hot dogs and chips for lunch. The Belleview Elementary principal and a few teachers helped hand out school supplies. The parents and children left happy and excited for the upcoming school year.
Winter Park #1830

Winter Park Elks Lodge #1830 hosted their second spaghetti dinner to benefit a local high school football team. Team members invite their family, friends, classmates and neighbors to the lodge for fun, food and camaraderie. The team sets up, serves and cleans up; they also support the lodge at events.

A service provider asked Winter Park Lodge to assist a local child who needed therapy. After conferring with Florida Elks Children's Therapy Services, the lodge purchased a $1,500-trike which was presented at a dinner to a little boy named Saul, a boy with special needs, by ER Vivian Thomas and Therapy Services Director, Colleen Gallant.

DeLand #1463

DeLand Elks Lodge #1463 hosted the Brotherhood Riders July 25-26. The Brotherhood Riders are police officers, firefighters and other first responders who ride in tribute to members of their ranks who have fallen in the line of duty the previous year, raising funds for the families left behind. The riders had cycled 100 miles and arrived in DeLand with local police, firefighters and first responders cheering for them. The lodge hosted a buffet dinner with contributions from local restaurants. Tom Pollard provided music and karaoke for the evening before the riders settled down for the night at the lodge. In the morning, members of DeLand Elks Boy Scout Troop 531 made and served pancakes and sausage for breakfast while other breakfast fare was provided by the Elks and Let's Party & Catering. The riders headed out early to begin another 100-mile journey to their next destination. To learn more about their trip, visit brotherhoodride.com/our-story.

DeLand Lodge donated $1,000 for a trained service dog to assist a 14-year-old boy named Evan. Evan has several autoimmune disorders, a seizure disorder (a form of epilepsy) which causes generalized nocturnal seizures, a genetic connective tissue disorder, heart issues, severe asthma, anaphylaxis to many foods, an immune deficiency and a sleep disorder. Much of his life since infancy has been filled with medical visits, sickness and ICU stays. Despite that, he is very active when he is able and happy. In the past few years, some things have worsened for him and he has developed more problems.

A service dog who could watch over him through the night and respond to nocturnal seizures and when his oxygen levels drop to dangerous levels would be such a relief to his mom. The dog would help Evan with dropped objects when tremors get bad. The dog would also be trained to detect some of his food allergens that trigger his anaphylaxis. The family just needed a little help getting there. Maverick is Evan's long-awaited helper. The $1,000 donated by DeLand Lodge will go toward the dog and the complete service training by a professional which will take up to two years.

Edgewater-New Smyrna Beach #1557

Gifts of Love, a community-sponsored food bank and local project of Edgewater-New Smyrna Beach Elks Lodge #1557, received a Gratitude Grant of $2,500 from the Elks National Foundation. ENF is supported by all the lodges of the United States. From the interest on these donations, ENF gives $9.1 in grants to local lodges for community investments, $4.3 million in scholarships, $1 million for the Hoop Shoot, $1.5 million for veterans programs and $750,000 for drug awareness projects. Gifts of Love, located at 820 W. Park Ave. in Edgewater, is open Tuesdays and Thursdays from 9 a.m. - 2 p.m. It feeds from 150-200 families per week. There are 13
loyal workers (eight of whom are Elks) who work many hours. While receiving donations from many local organizations, it is still difficult and the need increases. Many thanks go to the Lodge Secretary, Mary Ann Bucci, and Esteemed Loyal Knight, Marci Skates, for their dedication to successfully obtaining the ENF Grant.

Kissimmee Lodge continues to support the USO Station at Orlando International Airport every Sunday with three members working a four-hour shift.

Kissimmee Elks hosted Osceola Cub Scout day camp for 82 scouts. In addition to sports activities and a bounce house, the Osceola County Sheriff’s Office provided a mock crime scene with canines and fingerprinting. Scouts also worked on rank requirements and helped the Elks by cleaning up the flower beds.

Orlando #1079

The Brotherhood Riders spent the night at Orlando Elks Lodge #1079 after having traveled from DeLand Elks Lodge. They arrived at approximately 1:00 p.m. and after having dropped their beds and personal items in the lodge room, they were transported to the Orlando Fire Station where they could shower. That night, the lodge served dinner to the ride participants along with the families of fallen officers Lieutenant Debra Clayton of the Orlando Police Department and Deputy First Class Norman Lewis of the Orange County Sheriff’s Office. After enjoying good food and fellowship in the ballroom, the riders retired for the night. The next morning after being served breakfast, they headed to Vero Beach Elks Lodge.

Zephyrhills #2731

Three years ago, Zephyrhills Elks Lodge’s Exalted Ruler at the time, Donna Moyer, and her husband, David (current ER), took on a passion for feeding the community’s less fortunate children. Many may have been forced to do without meals during their summer vacation.

Initially, the lodge was involved in the program sponsored by Pasco County serving cold meals. However, it did not include the adults who transported them to the lodge (either their parents or guardians). It was obvious how unsatisfied the children were with the cold meals nor did the lodge want to turn away the adults.

The lodge then started their lunch program, serving nutritious, hot, homecooked meals from scratch including fruits, vegetables, milk, an entrée and dessert. At this point they invited the parents or guardians to join them for lunch, no registrations and no questions asked. In week three of their third year, they had surpassed the total children fed the entire year before. It’s sad to see that the need has increased from year to year, but they are very satisfied to be reaching out to so many.

This year the lodge provided over 3,500 meals over the summer; the program ran Monday through Friday from June 5 through Aug. 11. In addition to feeding the families, the lodge added some activities. The entertainment director from Westbrooke Manor Assisted Living & Memory Support volunteered on Mondays to come in with crafts for the children. On occasion, ice cream sundaes and snow cones were provided. On Wednesdays they held a reading circle. They received many donations of new and mildly used books from Elks and children’s learning centers. Children were allowed to take a book home with them. The program has encouraged literacy and reading interaction within the family. Many of the students did not have books at home. On Thursdays and Fridays, the lodge had visitors come in to read to the children, color with them, or answer questions for them or their family. Some visitors included Interim Police Chief, Derek Brewer; Capt. Reginald Roberts Sr. and Officer David Wainright. The firemen came in for a visit with a fire truck and allowed the children to climb on board, ask questions and toot the air horn.

This year’s program ended with a luau for the kids and their families with food, dancing and entertainment. Each child was given a backpack filled...
with school supplies, joining the party were members of Zephyrhills Police Department, Zephyrhills Fire Rescue, Westbrooke Manor Assisted Living & Memory Support, and East Pasco Meals on Wheels. Susan H. Longman of Midlife Crisis Entertainers of Brooksville provided music.

The lodge hopes to grow the program each year. None of this would have been possible without the overwhelming support from the Elks and local volunteers giving their time and donations and the partnerships that helped with the food donations.

Stuart-Jensen #1870

Stuart-Jensen Elks Lodge #1870 held the annual Christmas in July party and hosted wheelchair-bound veterans from the VA hospital for lunch and bingo. They have also started their Elks Hearts Packs program again, feeding 72 kids each week at the Felix A. Williams school in Jensen Beach, Fla.

Vero Beach #1774

On July 27-28, Vero Beach Elks Lodge #1774 hosted members of the Brotherhood Ride which consist of police officers, firefighters and emergency care members who ride bicycles to honor those who have died in the line of duty and provide emotional and financial support to the families of fallen public safety officers. The 2017 ride honored 10 fallen heroes from Florida who died in the line of duty in 2016 while protecting their communities.

The lodge provided dinner for approximately 55 individuals. They stayed overnight in the lodge hall sleeping on their own air mattresses. On Friday morning, the lodge served them breakfast before they proceeded on their ride.

PER Paul Diaz, Exalted Ruler, and PDD Jack McClurken coordinated the event. Many lodge members turned out to welcome the riders, feed them, purchase shirts and hats, and donate to the ride. The Vero Beach Police and Fire Departments were also involved in welcoming the contingent.

Vero Beach Lodge is buying a new dictionary for all third-graders living in Vero Beach. Exalted Ruler, Paul Diaz, the force behind this project, recently met with the Indian River County District Coordinator for elementary education and the district is on board with the program. Kelly Baysura, coordinator, plans to attend some of the presentations and get the district’s public relations department involved.

Melbourne #1744

Melbourne Elks Lodge #1744 awarded Greg Hanson, General Manager of Second Harvest Food Bank of Brevard County, a Gratitude Grant. The $2,500-grant will be allocated among 10 agencies in the Melbourne/Palm Bay area that utilize Second Harvest as their main resource of food. As $2,500 equates to 13,890 pounds of food or 11,570 meals, this will be a great boost to the pantries struggling to keep their shelves stocked. Further, in Brevard County, approximately 15.6% of the population, which is over 86,000 people, are food insecure and do not know with certainty that they will have enough food to eat on any given day.

In a 2017 survey by the Florida Department of Education, of the 73,300 students attending Brevard County Public Schools that day, over 33,000 of them were eligible for a free or reduced-cost school lunch program, which is approximately 45% of the students. This grant will be used to help fight hunger.

Port St. Lucie #2658

The membership drive at Port St. Lucie Elks Lodge’s Labor Day picnic was a great success; they received 27 membership applications. Many volunteers helped make this a wonderful day, including Lynn Tripoli and Ed Rahrig who provided the food. There was a chili cookoff with 10 entries and a $50 gift card went to the winner, Jeff Chambers. There was a bounce house and games for the kids. The Boy Scouts helped provide snow cones, cotton candy and popcorn. There was a Chinese auction with 48 baskets including wine baskets, gift certificates for music lessons, a jewelry basket, a hand bag, a beer basket, car care baskets, kids baskets and Italian baskets. Terry Rahrig had a citizen application quiz for both kids and adults and only one person got 100%. Members donated sweets for a cake sale and its proceeds will benefit the lodge’s charities such as Grace Pack and veterans. Members and guests enjoyed the music by DJ Ralph. The lodge was filled with much camaraderie and patriotic spirit.

Sebastian #2714

In August, Sebastian Elks Lodge #2714 rallied the membership and the community in support of a lodge member who is going through difficult financial times because of medical issues. He is very active in the lodge and the community. He is a member of the Sebastian Clambake Committee and assists with the football and soccer teams at Sebastian River High School. Over 400 people attended the fundraiser held at the lodge that was sponsored by lodge members, the Sebastian El-Does and members of the community. The benefit spaghetti dinner, raffles and auctions raised over $17,000, and the funds were used to assist with his medical bills.

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as well. At present, the lodge will need to order about 1,400 dictionaries costing approximately $3,400. Thanks to the Gratitude Grant and Anniversary Grant from the Elks National Foundation and funds from the lodge’s Kards 4 Kids charity Texas Hold’em tournaments, they have the funds to make the purchase.

New Port Richey #2284

New Port Richey Elks Lodge #2284 donated $1,000 to Community Aging & Retirement Services Inc. (CARES). CARES is a not-for-profit organization that provides services to older people and their families. They offer a broad spectrum of services and programs to help older adults live as they wish – independently in their homes.

Largo #2159

During the Grand Lodge convention, it was announced that a new grant was created to celebrate the order’s 150th anniversary. The Anniversary Grant is worth $1,500 and Largo Elks Lodge #2159 is proud to announce that it has already been awarded this grant. The money from this grant will be used to assist Pinellas Safe Harbor, an emergency homeless shelter and a jail-diversion program designed to be a safe haven for those currently homeless and who require services to get back on their feet. They supply clothing and individual food products to the 400+ who walk through their doors every day.

Largo Lodge’s Gratitude Grant of $2,000 will be used for Boy Scout Troop #417 which is sponsored by the lodge. The Promise Grant of $2,000 will be used to promote the lodge work at Ponce De Leon Elementary School.

CARES is a not-for-profit organization that provides services to older people and their families. They offer a broad spectrum of services and programs to help older adults live as they wish – independently in their homes.

St. Petersburg #1224

Volunteers got into the spirit of Christmas with their festive Santa shirts, but elf shoes had to be traded for flip-flops for St. Petersburg Lodge’s annual Christmas-in-July pool party July 9. The event chair, Exalted Ruler Bonnie Barnes, planned a community-focused event to bring families to the lodge and to make it a day of yuletide fun for kids of all ages. The lodge incorporates many of the beloved eccentricities of the holiday without the stress for the families. Johnny Miller donated his time as a DJ, and Mr. and Mrs. Claus (who sometimes disguise themselves as Len Fromel and Tina Martell) made an appearance in their summer attire, much to the delight of the kids. A total of 97 kids ages 10 and under received a summer-themed Christmas gift. Besides the toys, the kids in attendance also received a free lunch of hot dogs and macaroni & cheese. Also on hand for the festivities was Elroy the Elk (Tom Mortka, PER). His assistant, Debbie Farris-Mortka, handed out candy to the kids. Activities included retrieving quarters from the pool and swimming and dancing contests for the different age groups.

On Tuesday, July 11, St. Petersburg Lodge donated $500 to Music Sweet Music Inc. (MSM) to assist in their fundraising campaign. The funds from this campaign will be used to pay MSM’s contracted board-certified music therapists. Joanne Matos, PER expressed that “St. Pete wants to make sure that the children of our community continue to get the care they need.” MSM has over 1,500 interventions yearly with hospitalized and non-hospitalized children at PARC, Morning Star School, Johns Hopkins All Children’s Hospital Outpatient Centers, St. Joseph’s Children’s Hospital in Tampa and Clearwater, and Shriners’ Children’s Hospital in Tampa. MSM is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization devoted to making a difference in the Tampa Bay community.

Ted Wagner, founder of the organization, commented that “Elks Lodge 1224 is making a difference in the lives of children with illnesses and diseases. Thank you on behalf of the children we serve!” For more information on MSM, please visit musicsweetmusic.org.

Once again this year, youth from St. Petersburg’s community entering...
May Graci, left, MSM administrative assistant, and PER Joanne Matos, right, presented St. Petersburg Lodge’s donation to Ted Wagner, president and founder of MSM.

kindergarten through 12th grade had the opportunity to receive free school supplies from St. Petersburg Lodge during their 2017 Back-to-School Splash Aug. 6. The event was chaired by PER Joanne Matos; volunteers worked tirelessly to make sure the lodge had supplies tailored for the different age groups. Lodge members donated very generously to supply students with backpacks and school supplies. Matos stated that the lodge back-to-school pool party is “something that people look forward to, from families looking to save on their back-to-school budget to volunteers who get a sense of joy when they see the smiles from kids and parents as they receive school supplies.” This year the lodge had 122 children attend the event. Besides the school supplies, there were games, dance music played by Fifi and swimming.

At the end of August, St. Petersburg Lodge donated $1,000 to help St. Anthony’s Health Care Foundation, better known as St. Anthony’s Hospital Foundation, which was incorporated in 1981 with the purpose of advancing the mission first established by the Franciscan Sisters of Allegany – to provide excellence in medical care with an emphasis on compassion. The foundation assists individuals with memory disorders, diabetes and breast health issues. It also sponsors healing touch.

On Sunday, Sept. 3, volunteers and members from St. Petersburg Lodge stopped by the lodge to start their Hurricane Harvey relief efforts. Members dropped off supplies for the victims including personal toiletries such as new toothbrushes, toothpaste, lotion, shampoo, and deodorant; household cleaning products; bottled water; diapers; baby wipes; dog food; and many other items as well as gift cards for immediate necessities. No clothing articles were accepted at the time. The lodge also collected $350 for the Harry-Anna Investment Hurricane Relief Fund. Lodge members Marty Sharp, Paul Williams and Mike Smith, donated six large tarps. This effort was organized by Georgette Keane and Dana Banning who had friends traveling to Houston and took a truck and trailer full of the items collected.

Seminole #2519

Members of Seminole Elks Lodge #2519 believe an integral part of a child’s success in school is to make sure they have proper classroom supplies. In a project spearheaded by PER Tom Mortka, West Central District Drug Awareness Chairman, lodge members presented over 3,362 school supplies to Seminole Elementary School. The school was very pleased and grateful to receive the much-needed carload of supplies.

Tampa #708

Tampa Elks Lodge #708 began its third year with Club Chivalry of Robinson High School in Tampa for the 2017-2018 school year. The club student success sponsor is Kristina Chowning, a member at Tampa Lodge. At Robinson, Ms. Chowning founded Club Chivalry, a group that encourages student involvement with a name that plays off the school mascot, a knight, and the idea of Camelot.

On July 29, Tampa Lodge held a pirate-themed back-to-school party. The 100 children and their families in attendance had a meal, played games, did crafts, met Elroy the Elk and received school supplies.

On Sunday, Sept. 17, State President, Carl Gerace; Vice President at Large, Frank Malatesta; Chaplain, Phil Gersbach; West Central District Vice President, Theresa Matthews; and State Secretary/COO, Carl Seibert,
helped Tampa Elks feed the homeless at Open Arms. It was the Tampa Elks’ week to serve as it is every third Sunday. PER Courtney Taylor, her dad and right-hand man, Whiz, were in the kitchen bright and early, and shortly thereafter all other regular volunteers began arriving. Volunteers received a special apron with the state president’s motto on it. There were 120 homeless people present, less numbers than in previous weeks due to some having to find special shelter during the hurricane, but as usual, these men and women were quite an interesting and grateful lot. One of the church members took the FSEA dignitaries on a special tour of the grounds, showing them the clothing closet and the bicycle repair shop among other hotspots. The lodge receives matching funds for the project from the FSEA, and the lodge was glad to have the opportunity to show how those funds are helping their community. Open Arms accepts donations of nonperishable food, clothing (especially men’s), travel-size toiletries, any size towels or washcloths, and plastic bags. They also appreciate the plastic food tubes that are used for the storage of ice cream, sour cream or deli food items that you would otherwise throw away.

Since the 1950s, Tarpon Springs Lodge has been used as an emergency operations center in emergencies and disasters. The lodge has always been open to members of the community in times of need but particularly when floods and hurricanes threaten the area. During Hurricane Irma, the lodge served over 100 meals to first responders and linemen. The lodge would have served more meals but their generator was taken away and used as a replacement on a pumping station. The lodge building is wired to accept the city’s power supply and therefore was able to provide walk-in coolers and food storage for the city.

Kathryn Conrad, fifth-grade teacher at Tarpon Springs Elementary, is pictured with some students and their new beanbag chairs for the library.

Bradenton #1511

During Labor Day weekend, Bradenton Elks Lodge #1511 held a talent show and dinner to raise money for the Harry-Anna Investment Fund. The show was emceed by Activities Chairman, Colleen Field, who added a comedic spin to the evening while gifted performers donated their time to entertain. Along with a 50/50 held on Labor Day, the lodge netted $1,463 for the Harry-Anna Investment Fund.

Lakewood Ranch-Sarasota #2855

On Friday, Aug. 1, Lakewood Ranch-Sarasota Elks Scholarship Chairman, Dawn Fallon, presented the 2017 lodge scholarship winners with their checks. First-place winner, Sierra Barber, was given $1,500 and second-place winner, John River Jr., was given $1,000. Both Sierra and John are recent graduates of Lakewood Ranch High School with Sierra attending the University of Florida and John attending the University of Mississippi. Lodge scholarships are for children, grandchildren, nieces or nephews of members in good standing at the lodge.
Palmetto #2449

Palmetto Elks Lodge #2449 became a shelter during Hurricane Irma for 23 adults, three children, five dogs and one cat. Everyone brought in food and water, and meals were prepared by ER Sandy Mooney. They were all safe and grateful for the group effort and support provided by the Elks.

Palmetto Elks had a backpack party for school supplies July 23. The lodge gave out 200 backpacks and provided hot dogs, drinks, chips and four piñatas. Eighteen Elk members and eight volunteers put it all together.

South Hillsborough #2672

South Hillsborough Elks Lodge #2672 sponsored several local children to attend the Hillsborough County fishing camp held at E. G. Simmons Park. Earlier this year, the lodge applied for and received a Gratitude Grant for $2,000 to introduce young people to fishing in the Tampa Bay area. Twenty-one boys between the ages of 12 and 15 participated in the program from July 14-25. Conservation, safety, knot-tying, species identification and fishing techniques were part of the curriculum. The highlight of the camp was a day trip of deep sea fishing on the Friendly Fisherman out of Hubbard's Marina. Many of the kids had never fished before let alone in the deep water of the Gulf of Mexico. At the conclusion of the camp, each participant was given his own rod and reel.

Venice-Nokomis #1854

Venice-Nokomis Elks Lodge #1854 donated school supplies to local elementary schools and the community center valued at $1,000. The lodge also donated towels, sunscreen, water bottles and items for the summer campers at the Sarasota Sheriff’s Youth Ranch. They donated food to the local Salvation Army for their homeless shelter and food to the local community center for their hot-meal program for homeless children.

Rotonda #2710

Spending a week at the Florida Elks Youth Camp in Umatilla, Fla., was an event the 26 youngsters from Rotonda Elks Lodge #2710 will not soon forget. They enjoyed archery, canoeing, swimming, friendships and air-conditioned cabins for a great night’s sleep after a busy day without any electronics. The kids thanked everyone and some are planning to sign up for the 2018 season. Even some of the
chaperones wanted to stay. All this was accomplished under the organized talents of a dedicated volunteer, Peggy Kehoe.

**West Palm Beach #1352**

Members of West Palm Beach Elks Lodge #1352 collected school supplies year-round to help with the needs of many of the local schools. The various school supplies are delivered by members at the beginning of each school year. Two of the schools that received donations are Royal Palm Beach Elementary School and Green Acres Elementary School. The schools were delighted to receive the donations.

**Cleistston #1853**

Like many other Elks lodges across Florida, when Hurricane Irma roared through Sept. 10-11, Clewiston Elks Lodge #1853 was without power. Having an abundant supply of food in their freezers and member volunteers who could take a break from their own clean-up, the Elks cooked and donated meals to the out-of-state linesmen who were staying in the area and helping to restore power to the community. The lodge served over 100 meals on both evenings. Those who took charge of this were DDGER Greg Westberry, PER Skip Simmonds, PER Jack Davis, PER George Duckstein and Harlan Griggs, Tiler.

**Lake Okeechobee #2871**

Lake Okeechobee Elks Lodge #2871 worked with the correctional sentence specialist for Martin County and put their Gratitude Grant to use. The lodge took care of their supplies and veterans’ cost for the dogs they will receive. These dogs are trained by veterans who are in jail for veterans who need special attention. All training and care are done at the facility.

In September, Lake Okeechobee Lodge hosted their annual Soccer Shoot with 35 children participating. Among the many member volunteers were Southeast District VP, Dave Monsour, and District Chairman, Martin Espinoza, from Clewiston Lodge.
Boca Raton #2166

With their Gratitude Grant, Boca Raton Elks Lodge #2166 provided 168 new dictionaries for third-graders in a local school. The lodge also presented the Boca Raton High School marching band with a check for $500 and held a Fourth of July picnic for lodge members. The lodge was presented a $500 President’s Grant for the continuation of their charitable work.

Delray Beach #1770

Delray Beach Elks Lodge #1770 was one of many organizations that partnered in Delray Beach’s National Night Out, a police event held in communities throughout the country to strengthen bonds with residents and raise awareness about issues in their areas. This year’s National Night Out focused on preventing bullying as well as crime and drug use. The free event included children’s games, music, food and entertainment.

Elroy, the Elks drug awareness mascot, handed out 350 Elks drug awareness bags filled with coloring books and antidrug pamphlets. Delray Beach Police’s SWAT team and motorcycle unit held demonstrations for residents. City officials, firefighters and paramedics also attended. The Delray Police Department gave away backpacks filled with school supplies to 600 children who attended the event.

“National Night Out represents the kind of spirit, energy and determination to help make neighborhoods a safer place year-round,” Police Chief Goldman said. “It is a wonderful opportunity for communities across the city to promote police-community partnerships, crime prevention and neighborhood camaraderie.”

The 2017 Brotherhood Ride made a stop at Delray Beach Lodge and honored Officer Christine Braswell, the only female member of the Delray Beach Police Department S.W.A.T. team. Braswell died in an off-duty accident. This year’s ride was dedicated to fallen heroes from Florida and New York. Thirty riders and 15 support members honored them by cycling through Florida in seven days covering over 600 miles and averaging 80-100 miles a day. The ride began July 23 in Naples and traveled up the west coast, over to the central part of the state and then down the east coast and ended July 29 in Miami. They stayed and ate meals at Elks lodges along the way.

Delray Beach Lodge’s biannual golf tournament raised $4,000 for local charities. The lodge also sponsored 13 children to the Florida Elks Youth Camp. They partnered with local businesses to provide transportation for the campers.

Recent donations by the lodge include $1,000 to the Delray Beach Fire Rescue-Explorer Scholarship; $1,000 for the Brotherhood Ride; $1,500 to the city of Delray’s National Night Out; $1,000 to the FSEA Historic Programs parade in Washington, D.C.; $1,000 to the Delray Community Wellness Center; $1,000 to an Eagle Scout; $1,000 to The Children’s Healing Institute; $1,100 to the Palm Beach School for Autism; $1,100 to the Harry-Anna Investment Fund and $3,000 to the Elks National Foundation.

Hollywood West #2365

At the Davie Rodeo, Hollywood West Elks Lodge members celebrated Youth Awareness Day. Over 4,500 children from area summer camps attended.
A Hollywood West Lodge member coordinated a motorcycle ride for the Harry-Anna Investment Fund, and another member donated a TV for a raffle which brought in $1,600 for the Florida Elks Children's Therapy Services and Florida Elks Youth Camp. Other donations included $3,626 for the Elks National Foundation and Harry-Anna Investment Fund presented at State President Gerace's visit, $200 to the local Police Athletic League, and $500 to the Hope Outreach Center where members volunteered at their annual Children and Families Social Fair. The lodge received a $500 President's Grant for their charity work.

SOUTH DISTRICT

Miami #948

Marisol Rodriguez was the 2017 state contest winner for the Florida State Elks Association's First Responder of the Year Award for Support Services Personnel. On behalf of the state association, members of Miami Elks Lodge #948 presented Miami-Dade Police Department Police Dispatcher Marisol Rodriguez with her award because she was unable to attend the awards presentation at the state convention in May.

Marisol Rodriguez was presented with the First Responder of the Year Award for Support Services Personnel at Miami Lodge #948. Pictured are Captain Thamy Gonzalez, Officer Ricardo Perez, Melissa Rodriguez, Dispatcher Rodriguez, ER Delfin Mule and Officer Frank Moreno.

The drug awareness trailer and Elroy the Elk were there to provide literature on drug awareness. Each child received a toy.

Hollywood West Elks celebrated Youth Awareness Day at the Davie Rodeo.
On Sept. 5, the Florida State Elks Association mailed a check for $25,000 to the Texas Elks State Association (TESA) for hurricane/flood relief. This check was paid from Florida Elks Charities and represents our members and their support of our charitable fundraising efforts over the years. We are so fortunate to be in a position to help!

Thanks from the Texas State Elks Association President and Secretary.

President Carl Gerace, Secretary Carl Seibert and all Florida Elk members:

You guys are fantastic! Please thank each and every one who donated.

On behalf of Texas Elks State Association and President John Oswalt, I would like to thank you and your members for your generous gift of $25,000. Your commitment to helping the victims of horrific Hurricane Harvey in Houston and the surrounding cities and counties is sincerely appreciated. Your willingness to help during times of crises will make the difference and help those affected in their day-to-day living.

The goal of the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks is to continue to help those in need during catastrophic events. With the help of donations from supporters such as you, we will continue to see improvements in the daily lives of those affected by the storm.

Thanks again for your generous support of our efforts to the Hurricane Harvey disaster. You are living proof that “Elks Care, Elks Share.” We love you guys!

Fraternally yours,
Orville W. Weiss, Secretary
Texas Elks State Association

P.S. With your own disaster, this was very generous! I hope we can return the favor.

We are humbled by your association’s kindness. We are truly thankful for your support. God bless all Florida Elks!

John Oswalt
Texas Elks State Association
President
Following the Pledge of Allegiance, the Old Glory ceremony was performed. At the end of the ceremony, the folded flag was presented to Orange Park Lodge’s senior retired Marine, Bill Ruffian, PDD.

Orange Park Lodge presented a check for $2,500 to the JAX NAS Sea Cadets. The Sea Cadet group participates in events at the lodge and helps with dinners and other functions held at the lodge. The donation will be used to help defray expenses for the Sea Cadets’ annual field trip.

**NORTHEAST DISTRICT**

The Northwest District lodges, Crestview #2624, Destin #2688, Warrington #2108, Twin Cities #2747, Holly-Navarre #2787 and Pensacola Beach #497, along with host lodge, Fort Walton #1795, held their Kids on the Water/Military Appreciation Day event Sept. 23. All five local military services, the U.S. Army, Air Force, Navy, Marines and Coast Guard, were invited to attend with local families. Over 80 volunteers and more than 300 attendees enjoyed pontoon boat rides, rock and face painting, arts and crafts, and Capt. Davy’s pirate and magic show. Food and drinks were available to all.

**CENTRAL DISTRICT**

West Citrus #2693

On Sept. 23, West Citrus Elks Lodge #2693 held the annual veterans dinner dance. Volunteers raised about $500 for the Veterans Committee.

**NORTHEAST DISTRICT**

Orange Park #2605

Orange Park Elks Lodge #2605 held the Northeast District Vice President dinner Aug. 26. The Atlantic Coast Young Marine Group served the meal and cleaned up afterward. The lodge plans to partner with this group on future events and presented a check for $1,500 to them the night of the dinner.

Mandarin-St. Johns #2866

Mandarin-St. Johns Elks Lodge #2866 partnered with the American Legion to paint the home of a veteran’s widow. The American Legion bought the paint and lodge members did the work. The American Legion holds their meetings at the lodge.

More than 150 attendees representing civic and fraternal organizations gathered at West Citrus Elks Lodge #2693 for Operation Welcome Home to honor three of Citrus County’s finest – Gunnery Sgt. Jacob Skiff, Capt. Peter Reins and Sgt. Eric Jacobs – who have completed or are about to complete their military careers.
Largo Lodge also held a men’s clothing drive to benefit Safe Harbor Shelter. New or gently used clothing for men was acquired and distributed.

Largo’s Beacon Grant of $2,000 will provide for the veterans housed at the C. W. Young VA Facility. Funds will be used to provide a barbecue for the residents and comfort kits and will assist with the Stand Down event to be held in April 2018.

Largo Lodge sends manufacturers’ coupons to deployed military families. Since April 1, the lodge has sent $1,947,595-worth of coupons to 13 Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine bases in Belgium, Germany, Japan, South Korea, the UK, Guam and Spain.
Jimmy Suvoy became a member of St. Petersburg Lodge earlier this year. He works during the day, but in the evenings, he really enjoys playing his guitar and singing at different local nightspots throughout Tampa Bay. He gets a thrill to see people singing along and dancing to his music and having a great time, but not everyone can get out and enjoy themselves, so he went to C. W. Bill Young VAMC and spoke to an administrator and asked if he could play his guitar and sing to the veterans. The administrator thought it was a great idea, so on July 10, he brightened the evening of veterans at Bay Pines Community Living Center. He connected with his audience through his music. He was happy to have been able to “do my small part to uplift their spirit.” He was invited to return in August.

In 2017-2018, the Elks National Veterans Service Commission awarded Freedom Grants of $2,000 to 200 lodges to hold projects that serve veterans and active-duty military members. Freedom Grants are competitive and are awarded to lodges whose projects are judged to best serve the needs of veterans and/or active-duty military members. Seminole Lodge #2519 promised to deliver household supplies and bedding to veterans living in transitional housing, and for this, the lodge was one of the grant recipients. Lodge Veterans Services Chairmen, Linda and Roy Broff, have been assisting the Heaven on Earth for Veterans project in St. Petersburg Beach with the funds received. The project’s mission is to alleviate Pinellas County veteran homelessness by providing quality, low-cost, safe living spaces for veterans in need. Every few months, along with Donald Broff, they deliver much-needed bedding and cleaning supplies to the affordable housing provided by this worthy non-profit charity.

On Aug. 20, Seminole Lodge #2519 sponsored bingo games and a pizza party for 20 veterans from the Homeless Empowerment Project (HEP) Veterans Community Center. Winners were awarded gift cards to local retail outlets. HEP is a social-services agency offering shelter care and supportive services for veterans, single individuals and families, including those with mental illness, physical disability and nonviolent criminal history. More information on HEP can be found on their website at hepempowers.org/our-impact/who-we-help/. The Veterans Committee with the help of ER Terry Anderson was also able to donate a bingo machine to the VA.

The National Veterans Service Committee of Seminole Lodge held a raffle to raise money to purchase public bus passes for Bay Pines veterans. Seventy-eight passes were purchased in July for distribution.
Tampa #708

Tampa Elks Lodge #708 holds two regularly scheduled activities each month for the veterans from James A. Haley VA Medical Center. On the second Thursday of the month, the lodge goes to the hospital and hosts bingo for the veterans. They are awarded prizes and are served juice and cake. On the fourth Friday of the month, inpatient veterans are transported to the lodge for a free dinner. They get to listen to music and enjoy the interaction with members. On Aug. 25, the lodge hosted 18 veterans bussed in from the VAMC for dinner and live music. The veterans had a choice of three entrées and then enjoyed freshly baked strawberry cupcakes and an ice cream sundae bar for dessert. The lodge books the band to come in early to play for the veterans.

Manasota #2734

Manasota Elks along with USF and Goodwill sponsored a program where six nearly homeless veterans graduated Aug. 21 at the new culinary school created by another veteran. After a 12-week course, they became certified chefs. All six now have jobs.

Sarasota South #2495

Sarasota South Elks Lodge #2495 has a monthly veterans luncheon in which they invite veterans from local nursing and assisted-living homes. In August, 90 veterans and spouses listened to guest speaker, Colonel Ben Knisely, a MEDEVAC helicopter pilot and former MIA in Vietnam.

South Hillsborough #2672

South Hillsborough Elks Lodge #2672, thanks to a Beacon Grant, hosted 20 veterans to a Tampa Bay Rays game as part of the annual Elks Day at the Rays. The veterans enjoyed great seats down the third base line and received vouchers to cover the cost of food and drinks. Bob Preston, Chairman, along with seven members of the lodge also enjoyed the event which was won by the Rays 3-1 over the Boston Red Sox.

South Hillsborough Lodge also serves meals to veterans from James A. Haley Veterans Hospital every second and fourth Friday of the month. They are allowed to order anything off the menu. Personal items provided by lodge members are also presented to the veterans.

Venice-Nokomis #1854

Venice-Nokomis Elks Lodge #1854 proudly hosts luncheons for veterans with funds provided by a Gratitude Grant. The July lunch was served to 40 veterans which included Brigadier General James E. Shelton. Pictured with Shelton is Southwest District Vice President, Sven Nelson, left.

Boca Raton #2166

Boca Raton Elks Lodge members crocheted and knitted lap blankets and shawls for veterans. These handmade items were delivered to the veterans at a local VA hospital. Members also shopped for personal care and home items for veterans. The items were delivered to Faith Hope Love Charity, an organization that helps veterans mainstream themselves back into society.

Venice-Nokomis #1854

The Bradenton Elks Riders hosted an evening of meat bingo to raise money to benefit the lodge’s veterans fishing trip. The game is played like Feather your Nest with the winners receiving prizes such as turkeys and ribs. The evening netted over $400 for veterans.

Southwest District

Boca Raton Elks Lodge members crocheted and knitted lap blankets and shawls for veterans. These handmade items were delivered to the veterans at a local VA hospital. Members also shopped for personal care and home items for veterans. The items were delivered to Faith Hope Love Charity, an organization that helps veterans mainstream themselves back into society.

Hollywood West #2365

Hollywood West Lodge #2365 donated $600 for the Honor Flight South Florida Inc. Veterans’ Candidate Program Committee.

Florida State Elks Association Magazine 40
Hollywood West Elks Lodge #2365 escorted a few veterans from the Sandy Nininger Nursing Home to the Davie Rodeo. Complimentary tickets, food and beverages were provided graciously by Troy Hughes, Exalted Ruler of Arcadia Elks Lodge #1524. The veterans were also transported to the lodge for a Fourth of July barbecue.

Pompano Beach #1898

Florida Keys Lodge was honored to have six World War II veterans and family members plus other veterans visit the lodge for the second annual VJ Day celebration Sept. 2. The Coast Guard presented the colors before the spaghetti luncheon. Also in attendance were a few active duty personnel with members and other guests. Eva Joyce entertained everyone with an old-fashioned USA show. Songs and dances from the era were enjoyed by all.

Florida Keys #1872

Florida Keys Elks Lodge #1872 held a luncheon for veterans from the Miami Veterans Hospital July 19. Member Lee Kibbey provided music and trivia.

For more news in between magazine editions, visit the Florida Elks online.

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SOUTH DISTRICT

VVA5 Deputy Representative and Veterans Chairman, Frank Sellers Jr., PER, helped celebrate the US Coast Guard’s 226th birthday. Sellers served in the Coast Guard from 1970-1974.

Ernie Kent, Korean veteran, joined Eva Joyce on the dance floor.

Member Bonnie Larson is pictured with Louis Woodward, left, a veteran of World War II, and George Albert of the American Legion.
Florida State Elks Youth Camp
December 27 - 29
at the
Florida Elks Youth Camp
Sponsored by

For more info, contact:
Dan Tabor
tabe725@cs.com
Welcome 2018 at the FSEA Youth Camp’s New Year’s Eve Party

All payments must be received by December 27th

RV Site or Cabin Lodging included
(5 members per cabin - must bring linens, pillows, and toiletries)

Heavy appetizers 7-11pm
Champagne Toast at midnight
BYOB, with basic mixers supplied
New Year’s Day brunch at 10:00am

Tickets $60 p/person

For Reservations please contact Jen Miller, jen@feyc.org, 352-431-8701