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State President's Message

Past Grand Exalted Ruler Peter T. Affatato, distinguished members of the dais, brothers, sisters and friends, I stand before you today very proud of the honor you have bestowed upon me to serve as your State President for the year 2009 - 2010. I extend my sincere gratitude to outgoing State President Jay Amodeo and all of the state officers, state program chairs and district coordinators, and all of the district and lodge officers and members for helping to make our lodges a vital force in the civic and welfare advancement of our communities in which our lodges exist. I also want to express my heartiest congratulations to all of you who were installed tonight, and I wish you the very best throughout the coming year.

As strange as it may sound, I stand before you this evening because years ago, I became stuck in a snow bank. I had all but forgotten this story until SP Amodeo recently asked me what prompted me to join the Elks. I told him that during the 1974 Christmas season I

had dropped off gifts to a family that lived on the main road just south of Whitehall. When I attempted to back out of the driveway, I turned a little too soon and my left rear wheel became mired off the edge of the driveway. I got out of the car to look over the situation. Just then two of my friends who were fellow members of the Skenesborough Volunteer Fire Company stopped and asked me if I needed a hand. "Yes! My car is stuck, and I need a push." As they approached me, one of them held out a sheet of paper and said, "We'll push you out as soon as you fill out this paperwork." Believe it or not, it was an application to join the Elks. I thought they were kidding, but they weren't. I filled out the application, they pushed me out of the snow, I was initiated into the Whitehall Elks Lodge in February, 1975, and here I am today!

As with so many people even now, I knew very little about the Elks at that time, but I learned quickly because my lodge involved me immediately. One of our major challenges we face today is that very few people know anything about the Elks other than the fact that there is a local building where Elks socialize. They know nothing about our programs or what we do for their communities because there is seldom any news coverage. We need to focus on public education and we can't depend on news media doing this for us. Lodges can distribute flyers that explain our programs, or prepare lodge place mats for use during lodge breakfasts, luncheons or dinners that exemplify what we are doing for patriotism and our nation's veterans, ...for children and adults with disabilities, ...for victims of disaster, ...and how we serve the children of our communities with our many programs including Major Projects, Golf Tournaments, Soccer and Hoop Shoot, the Dictionary Project, Drug Awareness, Little League, Scouting, and many school sponsored programs.

A vast majority of citizens do not know that the Elks War Relief Commission, established July 11, 1917, provided many services to help our soldiers including construction of two base hospitals in France which cared for thousands of wounded and sick.

They also constructed the Elks Reconstruction Hospital in Boston, Massachusetts, a 700 bed facility which provided care to thousands of our veterans returning home from the war. *These were the first V.A. Hospitals!*

For thousands of America's returning soldiers, the Elks provided the helping hand toward vocational rehabilitation through a revolving fund which made loans ..without any security whatsoever ...to more than 40,000 veterans. These were the very first G.I. Loans.

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Michael A. Valentin was initiated into Catskill Lodge #1341 on February 3, 1969. He became very active and advanced through the chairs, serving as Exalted Ruler for the fraternal year 1973-1974. During his term of office a

substantial gain in membership was realized and with his active participation and capable leadership, Catskill's new home on North Jefferson Avenue was established.

Michael was very dedicated to our Order and served on numerous Lodge committees. He also served on the Board of Trustees for five years, and was Assistant Lodge Secretary for eight years. He was elected to Honorary Life Membership in the Catskill Lodge and was selected to serve on the District's Inter-Lodge Initiation team which resulted in his being named Number One Exalted Ruler for his Ritualistic abilities. Michael became a certified Ritual Judge in 1974 and District Ritual Chairman during 1980 -1981.

In 1974, Michael was appointed District Deputy Grand Exalted Ruler by GER Gerald Strohm. As District Deputy, he was credited for establishing a Transportation Fund for our disabled Veterans at the Albany Veterans Hospital.

Michael was an active participant in the North Hudson District Charity Fund Program. He also assisted in the Organization and institution of a New Lodge in his district.

In 1977, Michael was appointed District Lodge Development Chairman and in 1978 was appointed as NY State Chairman of the Lodge Development Committee, a position that he held for several years. His dedication and involvement on this Committee contributed to the growth of our Order by adding thirteen New Lodges and over 3,500 new members.

"An Honorary Founder of the Elks National Foundation, Michael's direction and service continued to foster the charitable works of our Order.

Michael was recognized as a successful and distinguished businessman, and an active community leader. He was elected Supervisor for the Town of Cairo and served in that position with dignity.

Michael served as President of the New York State Elks Association during the fiscal year 1985 - 1986. Following his term as State President, Michael continued to be a very active member of the State Association Advisory Board and his presence will be greatly missed.

We extend our regrets to his wife, Barbara, and their children.

