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**Phillip Holowacz
State President's Message**

Past Grand Exalted Rulers, the Honorable Peter Affatato and the Honorable Dr. Bristol, Past State President Bloss, Reverend Martine, members of the Advisory Committee, notably my District Sponsor Ernie Southworth, brothers and sisters in Elkdom, family and friends, it is my most sincere honor to be called upon to represent you as the New York State Elks Association State President. I would like to express my gratitude to outgoing President Michael Bloss and his wife Pat, and to all the officers and coordinators at the district and state level who have made this past year a success, and of course to congratulate those newly installed.

We have been entrusted with a monumental honor. I promise you we shall have a rewarding and prosperous year.

My motto for the upcoming year is "Elks keep the unity in community". Let's first apply this to the communities in which our lodges are, where we must remain, a dynamic presence. As Elks, we stand for something and we will make a difference. When we stand united in our many causes, like Major Projects or Elks National Foundation, we have a passion and compassion that is contagious. Does your community know who you are, what you do, and what you stand for?

Tell them! Shout it out loud! Work your programs and tell your story.

The coach who helps with Hoop Shoot, is he an Elk? Does he know about our various youth programs? Does he know about our scholarship program, dictionary program, and our commitment to drug awareness? The nurse at the Vet's home where we visit, does she know that the Elks are a distinctively American organization? Does she know the passion with which we support the men and women who have defended our country and preserved our freedom? Has she heard our promise that as long as there are Elks, no vet will be forgotten? Tell them. Tell them with the passion that lives in every one of our 127 lodges across New York State. Dave Carr recently reminded me of a story from my own District. The Johnson City Lodge prints placemats with upcoming Lodge events for the Friday night dinners. The printer has since joined the Johnson City Elks and was even the Lodge's Elk of the Year. He joined after reading the placemats and finding out all the activities and community service projects this Lodge does. It's a great story about getting our message out there. We're doing great things that people want to be part of. Everyone enjoys being around good people, and I know from experience we have the Best People on Earth right here in our Elks family. The strength of our message is in knowing the good we do in our communities and making sure our communities know it. We do not want to be our communities best kept secret. Our Lodges must maintain a strong community image, be a living, vital part of the community, and be a unifying force.

Elks Keep the Unity in Community.

Let's address the community within our lodge. Getting new members is one obstacle, but keeping members is another challenge. Does your lodge have a program in place to get new members involved? Do your officers approach your new members and make them feel welcomed? Why did they join your lodge? What are their interests? I challenge you to make your indoctrination process really count. In most cases this is the lodge's first opportunity to introduce a possible new member to our lodge community. I encourage you to make this session fun, welcoming, and informative. Make their initiation a memorable experience. This is a beautiful and moving ceremony when performed correctly. These are important parts of who we are, and should not be abbreviated or eliminated. Make sure the new members understand who we are first, a fraternal organization dedicated to charity, justice, brotherly love and fidelity. The bar is secondary even though it is a vital part of Lodge revenue. Does a neighboring lodge have an idea that's really working? Let's make sure that we get the word out to our fellow lodges about our successes. We are unified in our commitment to Elkdom. Furthermore, I ask that you examine your current membership. How many of them participate in Lodge activities? I'm not

speaking of card games, horseshoes or darts, but the activities we do as Elks. Elks National Foundation fundraisers, Memorial Sunday, the Flag Day Ceremony or Dictionary project, do your members participate and donate to the activities that make us Elks and not a sports bar? Well, we may have been described as a really cool frat party with your Grandmother, but that's not who we are. A presence in our community as a charitable and philanthropic organization will help us gain members, but maintaining member interest, conducting new and creative lodge functions, reinforcing the lodge as a fun and safe place to be, and providing a positive and harmonious environment will keep members. When we stand united in our various causes, like Major Projects or Elks National Foundation, we have a passion and compassion that are contagious. Involvement is key to retention. Remember that at some point our members CHOSE to become an Elk, don't let them forget why. Recognize hard work and accomplishments, be responsive to members needs, welcome new ideas, and keep the unity in your lodge community.

Elks Keep the Unity in Community

Finally is our community of Elkdom. We all know the numbers. Our membership is declining. We need to examine our way of doing business and be prepared for change. To paraphrase Benjamin Franklin, "you can't do the same thing over and over again and expect different results". There are proposed changes we may or may not agree with, but as loyal members of the Elks, we will stand unified. It wasn't that long ago we made the decision to allow women to become members. It was a decision met with resistance, and in some cases great resistance. Today these women are some of our most involved and passionate members and leaders. As we move through these tough times, remember we are a fraternal organization with one of our main focuses being Brotherly love. As we are faced with new ideas, remember we can agree to disagree, and then move forward unified. The many members who invest the time, money, and energy to belong to the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks care about image and perception of their organization. Everyone likes to brag about the organization they are a member of, and it is our job to continue to provide them with bragging rights. Over the last 40 years as an Elk, I am proud to have belonged to a community of the Best People on Earth.

Elks keep the Unity in Community

Together we can move forward, united as Elks, united with our communities, united with a passion and compassion that makes a difference. Do what we do best and then tell people about it.

Sue and I are looking forward to visiting each of your lodges throughout New York State and seeing the impact you make in your communities, the brotherhood felt in your Lodges, and the commitment to keeping Elkdom a unified community. Elks keep the Unity in Community. Thank you and **God Bless you, God Bless our men and women in uniform and God Bless America.**

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