

Homeless Veterans remain grave concern of Elks

by Paul D. Helsel, PGER, Vice Chairman

I thank all of our Lodges, Members and volunteers for their continued support of Veterans and active-duty military personnel. Your service to our nation's heroes deserves every accolade we can bestow. While we do an outstanding job in service to our Veterans and the military, there is still grave concern for a group of Veterans that can most definitely use our help – Homeless Veterans. Helping these needy Veterans takes on a new level of commitment. They need everything we all expect for ourselves and our families – sustenance, shelter, security and a life filled with purpose.

Although the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and Veterans Service Organizations are taking steps to solve the problem, the situation is far from acceptable. Specific counts are difficult to establish, but the VA estimates that on any given night 107,000 Veterans are homeless, and probably over the course of a year at least twice that many experience homelessness. In addition, almost 1.5 million other Veterans are considered at risk of homelessness due to poverty, lack of support networks and dismal living conditions in overcrowded or substandard housing. As you might gather, there is certainly much to be done for these Veterans!

It is a given that your Lodge is providing service to Veterans and possibly the Military. What are you doing for Homeless Veterans in your community? If your Lodge is not supporting a Homeless Veterans Program, here is what you can do! Determine the need in your community. Contact your mayor's office or other elected officials for a list of providers. Contact the Elk Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service Representative in the VA Hospital nearest to you and ask to discuss this with the homeless coordinator of that hospital. Search state and community Web sites for homeless veterans programs and initiatives. Work with local shelters and invite homeless Veterans to a dinner. Participate in local homeless coalitions. Chances are one is in your community. The coalition may need volunteers, food, clothing or other essentials. The Salvation Army is very active in helping the homeless all over the country.

Stand Downs. Many hospitals and community-based outpatient centers host "Stand Downs" for the homeless. Stand Downs give homeless Veterans 1-3 days of safety and security where they can obtain food, shelter, clothing and other types of assistance. Find out what the Elks can do to help by contacting your local Veterans Administration facility. If a cash contribution is beyond Lodge means, perhaps your Members can volunteer time or collect needed items specified by the facility hosting the Stand Down.

Send a financial donation to your nearest homeless Veteran provider if you are unable to participate in a program directly.

Fundraisers to help Homeless Veterans. Dinners, dances, walks and motorcycle rides are but a few ways to raise funds.

Thank you for your continuing support to our Veterans and Military Personnel and most especially for your support for Homeless Veterans! tools will be of little or no value unless they are used. For Local Lodges, the major benefit of monitoring your progress is that all Members can see where the Lodge stands. On the State and District levels, the major benefit of monitoring progress is that their leaders can see where the Lodges are and assist them in obtaining gains. Work you plan, monitor your plan and make any necessary adjustments, and you will have a gain in membership for your Lodge!



Need a Break this Holiday Season?

With shopping, holiday parties and family meals, this holiday season is guaranteed to be busy, and expensive. Looking for a break? Why not donate to the Elks National Foundation by **December 31, 2011**, and get a tax break just for giving back. To make sure you get the necessary paperwork, send in your check early to ensure your donation reaches the ENF office by mail no later than December 31. You can also donate online by visiting enf.elks.org/donate.

Remember, the Elks National Foundation is a 501c3 nonprofit corporation, so all donations are tax deductible. Your donation to the ENF will help veterans, youth and Elks communities, and you'll get a much-needed break. What gift could be better?

The Gift of Education

Elks Lodges are known for helping local families in need. But what happens when an Elks family faces financial hardship due to the loss of a family member? With Elks National Foundation Emergency Educational Grants, children of deceased or totally disabled Elks can receive much-needed college financial assistance. These grants, which range up to \$4,000 each year, provide hope to the children of Elks who face a difficult road ahead.

Daniel P. Whitaker III is one of these children. Daniel's father, a member of Lewisburg, Tenn., Lodge No. 1990, passed away shortly before Daniel embarked on his college career. Thanks to the Elks National Foundation, Daniel's college education was never in jeopardy.

"When my father passed away, very many things were uncertain," says Daniel. "The Elks have continuously helped me handle the financial burden of college, and I am proud and thankful for my father's membership."

Each year, the Elks National Foundation helps the children of Elks through our Emergency Educational Grants. Applications for the 2011-12 school year are due by **December 31, 2011**, so if you know a family that could benefit from this scholarship, encourage them to email scholarship@elks.org. For details, visit www.elks.org/enf/scholars.

Elks National Foundation Doubles its Investment in Local Communities

CHICAGO—At its February 2011 budget meeting, the Elks National Foundation Board of Trustees doubled the funding for the Community Investments Program to \$4.6 million from \$2.3 million. The increase will benefit more than 2,000 Lodge communities across the United States. The Community Investments Program offers grants to Elks Lodges, allowing the Lodges to support charitable causes that are important to their communities.

"This increase in funding is wonderful news," says Bill George, ENF Chair of the Fairfield, Conn., Lodge. "It will give us the opportunity to expand our Lodge's charitable and youth programs, making them so much more meaningful to our community."

Starting April 1, both Gratitude Grants and Promise Grants will double in amount, totaling \$2,000 each. The Board also increased the number of available Promise Grants to 500 from 300, helping more Lodges

host events that build character and competence in local youth. Impact Grants will continue to range up to \$10,000, giving Lodges the means to significantly strengthen their communities.

"The Elks National Foundation Community Investments Program Impact Grant has made our Lodge come alive again," explains Sharon Kolkhorst, who manages Coos Bay, Ore., Lodge's Impact Grant project. "Thank you for enabling our grant project, which provides food packs to students in need."

The Community Investments Program not only helps the Lodge community, but also directly benefits the Elks community as a whole. Lodges that have taken advantage of CIP grants have consistently posted better membership numbers than the Lodges that haven't used these grants.

"At the Elks National Foundation, we believe that the key to improving retention and attracting more new members is raising the Lodge's profile in the community," says ENF Director Jim O'Kelley. "Doubling funding for the CIP will allow Lodges to do so much more to strengthen and support their communities."

To learn more about the Community Investments Program, visit www.elks.org/enf/community.

Veterans Message: Remember vets in Lodge budget

by Roger R. True, PGER Past Chairman

Now is time for the incoming Exalted Ruler and Lodge Veterans Chairperson to plan together to fund activities for the Lodge's veterans programs for the upcoming year.

I could take this opportunity to expound for pages on all the wonderful programs that our Order has developed to honor our veterans and our active military personnel but I know that I would be preaching to the choir. Therefore, it is very important that we take this time to plan and budget appropriate funding that will allow us to outwardly show our veterans and military personnel that we honor and respect them and their families for the sacrifices they made.

Programs such as the "Army of Hope", "Comfort Care Kits", "Adopt-A-Vet", and our partnership with the USO, have been developed as tools to allow our Members to pay tribute to those veterans and military personnel who have given so much to allow us to live free. Dinners, dances and parties can be combined with fundraisers to support veterans' programs.

For many years the Elks National Foundation has been providing funding in support of our efforts with the Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service (VAVS) at local veterans facilities. You, too, can help at these facilities by budgeting money in support of our VAVS volunteers. In addition, the Elks National Foundation can be a source of income through its Gratitude and Impact Grants – yet another reason to reach your Lodge per capita of \$4.50 per member early in the year.

Another opportunity is the Lodge Assistance Grant (LAG) which helps Lodges by allowing businesses that only support charitable 501(c)(3) organizations to support a specific Lodge charitable program or project through a restricted monetary gift to the ENF. By taking advantage of this opportunity, everyone benefits: The business is able to support a local charitable cause; the Lodge is able to expand on its good deeds; and a community need is addressed. No matter how you slice it, it's a win-win situation!