

GL Newsletter, December 2012 Veterans Message: **Much left to do to reduce number of homeless Veterans** by Louis J. Grillo, PGER, Commission Chairman.

Over the last few years, efforts by community organizations, such as the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks and government agencies, have reduced the number of homeless Veterans, but there is much more to do.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) estimates more than 130,000 veterans who are homeless on any given night, and 280,000 in an average year.

Who are these homeless Veterans? They are male and female, young and old, and served their country in war and at peace. Almost half served in the Vietnam era. The majority of homeless Veterans reside in major population centers, but they are found in suburban areas and rural communities as well.

Why are they homeless? Homelessness has a wide array of causes. Lost income due to job loss, reduced salaries or benefits, home foreclosures, and a shortage of affordable housing all contribute to the problem. Perhaps the chief cause of homelessness, however, is the mental condition of its victims.

Military service may have severe psychological effects, which may take years to surface. This adverse reaction to combat or stressful military duty is now referred to as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD. During the Vietnam era, very little, if anything, was known about Post Traumatic Stress Disorders. It is not surprising, therefore, that so many of our nation's homeless are Veterans of that period.

A veteran suffering from PTSD may have trouble coping with family, community and career upon returning to civilian life. Untreated, PTSD can lead to depression, inability to focus, and alcohol and drug abuse. These symptoms may lead to job loss, domestic violence, homelessness and even suicide.

Over the past few years, the VA has sought to screen Veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, but hundreds of thousands of Veterans of previous wars have never been tested for PTSD. It is essential to get these Veterans whatever help they need, to get them back to being complete, productive citizens. They were there when their country called upon them, and now we must be there for them.

What can you do?

- Determine the need in your community. Contact your mayor's office or other elected officials for a list of providers. If your Lodge has a Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service Representative, ask them to discuss this with the homeless coordinator of the hospital in which they work. You can also search state and community Web sites for homeless veterans programs and initiatives. Some Lodges work with local shelters and invite homeless Veterans to a dinner.
- Participate in local homeless coalitions. Chances are there is one 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 VA hospitals and community-based outpatient centers host Stand Downs for the homeless. Stand Downs give homeless Veterans one-three days of safety and security where they can obtain food, shelter, clothing and a range of other types of assistance. Find out what the Elks can do to help by contacting your local VA 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.

Stewart Israel (Plymouth, MI Lodge No. 1780), the National Chairman of the Elks Adopt-a-Veteran Program, is very active personally in working with the homeless in his community. Brother Israel would be happy to share his experience with Lodges wishing to be more actively engaged in helping homeless Veterans.

You can e-mail Brother Israel at stewizzy@yahoo.com, or write to him at:

Stewart Israel, Chairman Adopt-a-Veteran Program
40225 Newport Drive
Plymouth MI 48170-4739



Beacon Lodge #1493 conducted a clothing drive for Castle Point Veterans clothing pantry and collected over 700 pounds of clothes for our local veterans and their families who are in need.

Syracuse Lodge #31 Host Veterans

On Wednesday, November 7, 2012; Syracuse Lodge #31 hosted the Veterans from the Syracuse Veterans Outreach Center for dinner at the Lodge. Syracuse #31 has been hosting this event for the last 16 years and this year's event was well attended and enjoyed by all. This year's event drew 28 Vets, both men and women, who utilize the Outreach Center in various capacities, along with some of the Directors. Over the years, many friendships and bonds have been made and renewed. This event always enjoys a great deal of camaraderie as well as a plethora of old "war stories". Most of the Vets who join us in this dinner will tell you that they look forward to it every year and wouldn't miss it for the world. In some instances in the past, the Vets have been treated to entertainment during the event, usually a local school group with some patriotic based theme. Based on our relationship with the Outreach Center, the Syracuse Elks has held numerous events including our annual Flag Day Ceremony, at the Center for the enjoyment of their participants. Syracuse Lodge #31 is proud to host these events for those who have given so much for the benefit of all of us, and look forward to this annual event for many years to come.



On November 12, 2012 60 members of the 7 lodges comprising the State Capital District marched in Albany, New York for the annual Veterans Day Parade. Marchers included members of the Elk Riders, a motorcycle group and Hugs the Bunny. Many thanks given to **Albany Lodge #49** for arranging transportation to and from the parade and for lunch at the lodge after the parade. Pictured in photo is Left to Right: State Capital District Deputy Grand Exalted Ruler Ernest "Jay" Heassler, Cobleskill #2040; Exalted Ruler Charles Pemburn,

Rotterdam #2157 and State Capital District Vice President John Kochan, Colonie #2192.

Webster-Fairport Lodge # 2396

treated the Veterans at the Canandaigua, N.Y. V. A. Hospital to an afternoon outdoor picnic.

Picnic lunches were served to 98 Veterans and Hospital Staff. The lunches consisted of hot dogs, hamburgers, sausage, salads, baked beans, apple cider, lemonade, pop, and many assorted desserts.

Sixteen Lodge members, 2 members of the Lady Elks Auxiliary, and 4 Volunteers participated in making this worthy event a huge success.

Also assisting the Lodge with this worthy event were 12 Cadets of the U. S. Air Force Auxiliary Civil Air Patrol and their Squadron Commander, Dr. Laurie Rocco.

After lunch 8 Veterans, who were physically able, participated in a fun game of softball with the Civil Air Patrol Cadets. The Vets won.

The weather was perfect for the occasion and a great time was had by all. Lodge Veterans Committee Chairman, Robert Knapp organized this event.



Olean Lodge #491

A dozen members and friends joined together to make cookies for a military unit at Forward Operating Base Fenty in Jalalabad, Afghanistan. Lodge member Carmy LeRoy has regularly baked and sent her son-in-law homemade cookies. He recently told her how much his soldiers enjoyed the cookies and told her that they don't often receive things from home so he makes sure they enjoy what she sends to him. Carmy, along with two members discussed how much fun it would be to get a group of members together to bake cookies for the 80+ soldiers in his unit. Olean Wholesale Co-op, Inc. donated flour, sugar, and peanut butter to bake the cookies. Other members donated butter and eggs. By word-of-mouth, other Lodge members who also belong to other service organizations went back to their VFW/American Legion posts and returned with donations to help the Elks' members cover the shipping costs; however, a lodge member learned that the Southern Tier Military Support Group would ship the boxes. With this generous assistance, the Olean Lodge members were able to use the donations from the VFW and Legion and numerous Olean Lodge members to purchase iTunes cards for the soldiers. The group baked and sent 74 dozen cookies to the soldiers!

The Past District Deputy's Association of the West Central District

of New York has dispersed a total of \$3,100.00 from the District Deer Hide Fund. The money raised for the fund comes from collection of Deer Hides by all seven Lodges in the West Central District. The following is a breakdown of the local Veterans needs and programs helped:

1. \$500.00 to the Gregory J. Harris Military courtesy Room at the Syracuse, New York Airport to make travel easier for our Military Personal.
2. \$1,000.00 for the Veterans Golden Age Games thru the Canandaigua Veterans Hostital.
3. \$1,000.00 to Honor Flight Rochester, New York for Veterans to visit the World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C.
4. \$600.00 to a benefit for local Veteran Richard Stern who has many physical problems.