

# Army of Hope



In February, 2003, the Elks National Veterans Service Commission announced a program of mobilizing an "Army of Hope" to assist the families of Military Reservists and the National Guard who have been called to active duty during this time of crisis.

The "Army of Hope" has many facets and literally any activity that supports our troops and their family falls under this vital program. Lodges are partnering with local and state organizations to adopt units and families to help them through these trying times.

The response from our members and non-Elks has been overwhelming. Our elected government officials at the local, state and national levels are greatly impressed, and have responded favorably to our initiative.

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The first step in setting up your local program is to identify a lodge chairperson. This position may be especially attractive to a veteran; however any volunteer can chair your program. The first priority of that chairperson is to establish a list of volunteer members who are willing to provide their individual expertise. In addition, a subsequent list identifying the specific skills of each volunteer will also be helpful in matching the needs of families with the skills of the volunteers. (for example: Volunteer John Doe-minor automobile repairs, Volunteer Jane Doe-painting and "back up" child support).

After you have established your "Army of Hope" volunteers, you will need to make contact with your local Reserve and/or National Guard units. When contacting them explains what the program is and how you're Lodge can help the families. (It is understood that not every Lodge will be able to handle every request). You can provide the list of volunteers along with their expertise directly to the local Reserve or Guard units. The military units may then contact the Lodge or the volunteers directly, depending on how you set up your local program.

You still might be thinking what can my small Lodge or State Association specifically do to help? The following are examples of how easy it can be for your Lodge or State Association to make a difference in the lives of our service men and women and their families.

- Have a "family oriented" dinner at the Lodge in honor of our troops and host the families and Guard or Reserve representatives to the Elk volunteers they will be working with.
- Supply the families with phone cards.
- Provide lawn mowing, landscaping or sprinkler service.
- Perform automobile repairs, or transportation when needed.
- Complete minor home repairs, such as plumbing, painting, etc.
- Provide either full time or "back up" babysitting service.
- Send comfort care packages to our troops - (various sized packages are available from the Grand Lodge for a nominal fee).

- Send copies of the service person's daily home town newspaper.
- Have a photography buff in your volunteer listing? Take some pictures of the soldier's family and possibly some local sights to send to the troop member.
- Host a welcome home party at your Lodge or for the troops that return home and thank them and their families for their service.
- Hold some fund raising activities at the Lodge to provide monetary support to specific families, if identified.

Now that you have seen what some of the other Lodges are doing in their programs, I know with the initiative and creativity of our members and support organizations you will be able to think of hundreds of more ways to help.

STILL don't think your Lodge is large enough to establish its own "Army of Hope" program, then team up or volunteer with another local organization (V.F. W., etc.) to help them with a program. Even if your Lodge just does one of the tasks listed above, you can make a difference!

The final responsibility of the "Army of Hope" chairperson is to take a few minutes to write up a short report and mail it to the office of the Grand Secretary describing the activities on behalf of these families. This will be of immeasurable help as we continue to tell our story of service to these American patriots.

Please send your letters (pictures) and reports to:

"Army of Hope"  
Robert M Hennings, Director  
National Veterans Service Commission  
Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks  
2750 North Lakeview Avenue  
Chicago, IL 60614-1889  
[vets@elks.org](mailto:vets@elks.org)  
773-755-4736



**Vestal Lodge #2508** Over 130 veterans and guest enjoyed a great dinner and music and entertainment. Veterans brought in over 200 pounds of food item for our packages. Outstanding and generous monetary donations were also received.

November marked the 30<sup>th</sup>. Anniversary of the "Wall", the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on the Mall in Washington, D.C.

**EVERYDAY, ORDINARY AMERICAN MEN**  
A Vietnam Veterans Tribute  
Soldier, Sailor, Airman, Coast Guard, Marine,  
From all across the land they came,  
Every race, every creed.  
As their fathers and forefathers before them

When their country called they stepped forward.  
Albeit at time when the nation was embroiled in bitter discord.

At the prime of their young lives,  
They did not shirk from the specter of war.  
Caught up in a political maelstrom  
Not of their making.  
They hurled onward to a rendezvous  
With hardship and strife.  
Everyday ordinary American men.

This monument now stands before us,  
It's bold and imposing beauty bespeaks a solemn and silent tribute.  
To the honored dead  
whose names are inscribed there.  
To the maimed, the disabled, the emotionally scared, the missing in action,  
The scar of the Vietnam war will never heal.  
To the young lives barely lived,  
to the young loves hardly loved,  
To the what might have been  
that we will never know.

Dear God, let their hallowed memory  
Forever burn bright.  
Let there be meaning and purpose to their death.  
For without it, this monument will never be anything more than cold stone and mortar,  
An empty symbol without sense or meaning.  
Let we Americans everywhere, dedicate us,  
to giving it meaning and purpose.  
Let it mean that never again,  
will this nation shed its young men and women's blood in a cause without resolve.  
Let it mean that we will devote special care and attention to disabled veterans from all wars.  
That, we will pay whatever the price, give whatever it takes, to help them ease their burden.

The "why" of Vietnam may never be answered,  
the sacrifice never vindicated;  
But let no one dare  
question the fiber of the men and women,  
who answered the call of the uncertain trumpet.  
They risked and lost, life and limb  
to serve their country.  
They are the mark and caliber by which great nations are measured.  
Let us never demean those who have carried this country's banner to battle.  
They gave to us their very lives and their futures.  
We could never hope to repay  
to them their just due.

Let us all now join hands as united Americans,  
and as one voice, reach out, and  
Loudly and Proudly Proclaim:  
"Welcome home-at last together  
we will heal the wound"  
And in the spirit of love and thanksgiving,  
Embrace these  
**Everyday, ordinary American men.**

Don Buzney USMC 1967-71

