

IMPORTANT NEWS FROM PAST STATE PRESIDENT RICHARD WUNDER

ELKS YOUTH CAMP

Elks Youth Camp

Message delivered to General Session at Fall Elks Conference in
Albany, New York

Good morning, Grand Exalted Ruler Amen and New York State Elks,

I am here to speak to you for a moment regarding a project known as New York State Elks Association Camp for Kids. A number of months ago, Past Grand Exalted Rulers Bristol, Affatato and Carr presented to the New York State Advisory Board their desire to see the creation and development of a permanent location that could accomplish **several** goals. At first it was proposed that such an undertaking would be just a camp for kids. However, after a short discussion on the topic, **additional reasons and purposes** were discussed. During this initial discussion, it was decided that a committee should be appointed to begin this undertaking. The Advisory Board has appointed the following individuals to this committee:

Past State President Dan Capella

Past State President Charles Noonan

Past State President Michael Bloss

State Chairman Mel Oliveira

State Trustee Scott Hirst

State Treasurer Christopher Maddock

and myself, Past State President Rick Wunder

Since the appointment of this committee a number of months ago, the committee has met many times. I can assure you that even though we have met and had extensive discussions, so far, no definite decisions have been made. Of course, many decisions will have to be made as the discussions continue, choices are examined, and options explored.

One might ask "What are the potential uses and purposes of such a camp?" Of course, from the very beginning our primary thought and focus was to establish and develop a summer camp for kids. For decades our local lodges have undertaken countless youth programs and projects to benefit the youngsters of our many communities. For many years, our members have raised hundreds of thousands of dollars to support our Major Projects programs. Of course, some of those programs may provide for camping experiences for their clients. This undertaking is not to diminish or replace our commitment to Major Projects. Just the opposite – this project will expand and enhance our commitment to our youth, our communities, our lodges and our members. The last several years our lodges, districts and New York State have been actively involved in the development and management of a Soccer Shoot-Out Program. One of the **potential** uses of such a camp location would be for the State Final Soccer Shoot-Out Competition each fall.

Another **possible use** that was identified would be a meeting site for lodges, districts and even state gatherings and activities throughout the year. Such meetings could be for business or pleasure and recreation. Another **potential use** of the site could be for the storage of the historical records of the state and memorabilia.

Another very real possibility for use of the site could be a vacation or recreational area for Elks and their guests at different times of the year. One example of this might be a cross-country skiing or snowshoeing event. Another possibility might be a district-wide camping weekend.

Still **another possible** use of such a camp would be for an outing for veterans. Perhaps a lodge or district would want to use the camp for a day-program or overnight activity for the many veterans that our local lodges assist throughout the year. Such an experience might include a cook-out, fishing, or just a walk in the woods. Activities such as this could be enjoyed by the veterans and might certainly be an adventure which would be very different than their everyday activities.

These are only **some** of the possible uses which have been discussed by the committee members. The uses are really endless in nature. Further discussions and conversations, open minds and imagination can be very fruitful. A location such as this **could be a source of tremendous pride** for our members. It **could possibly spur a new increase in membership** by bringing friends and guests to various activities at the camp site. An undertaking such as this **could certainly help improve the public image of our great organization**.

Just for an idea of our information gathering to date, I would like to report that we have been in written, phone and electronic communication with other State Associations which already have established camps in the States of Florida, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Georgia, Minnesota, Nevada, Virginia, Arizona, New Jersey, and Alaska. We have had discussions with various scouting counsels in this state to discuss the opportunities that summer camps bring to our youth. We have also had communications and discussions with other private organizations that operate youth camps in New York State. One of our committee members

even spent an extensive period of time visiting an Elks youth camp in Florida during his winter vacation. Four members of the committee traveled to Vermont recently and met with Past Grand Exalted Ruler Carr for a personal tour of the Vermont State Elks Youth Camp. The permanent director of the camp and the Vermont State Special Representative gave the committee members a personal tour of the facility and spent hours discussing the camp with them.

One would naturally ask "Where could such a camp be located?" The committee has really explored this concern. As we all know our state is much longer than it is wide. Just ask the members from Niagara Falls or Long Island and the northern lodges such as Plattsburg and Massena about the number of hours they spend on the road for Elk functions at the other end of the state. Taking this into consideration and in an attempt to centralize such a camp to the greatest extent possible, our **present thoughts** are to be in the general vicinity of Utica-Syracuse area or perhaps 50-75 miles north or south of the New York State Thruway. This is **not cast in stone** but please understand that we are trying to meet the needs of our entire membership through the Empire State. With this thought in mind, the committee has already visited several potential properties in that geographical area. The committee members will certainly keep an ear open for other possible locations as we continue to explore and develop this project.

Another concern of the committee is do we try to purchase a camp that is already established? Such a camp could be from a scouting or private organization. There **are** camps for sale; **the question is**, would it be in the geographical area which is acceptable to our proposed use and would the facilities meet the projected needs. Of course, only time will tell. We continue to explore this possibility. Of course, the other option is to purchase land and then develop the buildings and facilities from scratch. There are pluses and minuses for each of these two options. The committee will explore each.

How can you, the leaders of our lodges, together with our members, help in the development of this project? As I am sure you can appreciate, this is a **tremendous** undertaking. The members of the committee and the advisory board would **eagerly** appreciate your thoughts and concerns. Perhaps you or a member of your lodge have some experience with a camp. It is even possible that you or a member of your lodge are a member of such an organization such as scouts or know of a camp already up and running that might possibly be for sale. Perhaps one of you or a member of your Elk family was a counselor at such a camp or went to such a camp in your youth. Perhaps from your personal experiences additional ideas for uses or programs for such a camp experience.

These are all ways in which **you**, the members, **can help the committee** and the Advisory Board explore the possibilities for the creation and development of this undertaking. If so, **please reach out to us** and let us know your thoughts and concerns. Please feel free to contact any member of the committee who I earlier introduced. **All ideas and input will be considered** as we go forward with this project.

This undertaking has tremendous potential for the youth and veterans of our great Empire State as well as the members of our local lodges. Establishment for such a camp would give a **huge** sense of pride and satisfaction to the members of our great Order.

I am pleased and honored to announce that this project has received the unanimous endorsement and the support of the Advisory Committee.

Since the Fall Conference members of the Camp Committee have continued to meet. We have personally visited a number of currently active youth camps that may be for sale. We have visited and viewed vacant lands available for sale as well as a private residence with several out buildings and considerable acreage that is available for sale. All of the sites and locations have been evaluated and reviewed by the Committee. We have also had the assistance of a professional realtor helping us to find and review available locations. We have traveled literally thousands of miles to continue the search for an appropriate location.

We continue to receive input, ideas and suggestions from **members**; and, we encourage anyone who has an idea to help advance this program to give any of the Camp Committee members a call.

On behalf of the camp committee and the Advisory Board members, we look forward to hearing from you with any concerns, thoughts or ideas that you may have as we go forward.

Thank You!

Richard C. Wunder

Past State President

Committee Chairman