

Walking in a Winter Wonderland

No one wants to be away from their family and loved ones during the holidays. Sadly, active duty soldiers often have only one thing on their wish list: a safe return to their expectant families. The families of soldiers who aren't currently deployed fear that their loved one won't be celebrating with them next Christmas. Since everyone deserves to enjoy the gifts of the season, Norristown, Penn., Lodge No. 714 recognized some of these courageous families during the holidays last year.

Using a Community Investments Program Gratitude Grant, which the Lodge received for meeting the GER's per-capita goal, Norristown Lodge held a holiday luncheon for soldiers and their families at the nearby 358th Army Reserve unit. Thirty-five Elks cooked and served lunch and decorated the armory, turning it into a Winter



Wonderland. The Lodge furnished a DJ for the event, and children were given gifts by Santa Claus himself!

Season of Giving

"The event was definitely a success," says Lodge Secretary S. David DeStefano. "It's nice for the soldiers and veterans to know that there's someone out there who cares, and who notices what they're doing for our country. We didn't put on the event out of obligation; we did it because we wanted to."

Most of the soldiers attended with their families, but DeStefano was particularly touched by a few of the wives who attended despite their husbands' deployment. "They were moved to even have been invited," says DeStefano, "but truly, they are serving our country too, in their own way."

It wasn't just the soldiers and their families who enjoyed the event; members of the Lodge felt more connected to the Elks pledge by participating.



"We always say, 'don't forget our veterans', but it's great to put that into practice. This really helped our Lodge feel like we made a difference and carried out the Elks' pledge."

The Elks invited others to spread the holiday cheer by enlisting the local Boy Scout troop to help. Scouts cleared tables, and helped decorate and clean up the armory for the event. The exciting day was publicized on a local TV news channel and in the local newspaper.

Norristown Lodge has already exceeded the GER's per-capita goal of \$4.50 for 2008-09 and will apply for another Gratitude Grant this year.

Unfortunately, they will not be able to put on the same holiday event because the 358th Army Reserve base has since relocated. But judging by their motivation to do good in their community and the success of their event, we can count on the Lodge to find another way to make a difference!



Elks National Foundation

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FREE MONEY!

Don't Let Your Lodge Pass Up This Opportunity

The ENF believes that Lodges know the needs of their communities best. That's why we created the **Community Investments Program**. This year, the Elks National Foundation will invest up to \$1.375 million in local communities through the Gratitude Grants, Promise Grants and Impact Grants.

Gratitude Grants are charitable reimbursement grants up to \$500 available to any Lodge that meets the GER's per-capita goal. In 2008, over 1,000 Lodges were approved for **Gratitude Grants!**

Lodges have used **Gratitude Grants** to:

- distribute holiday gift baskets to needy families.
- fund a "Teacher of the Year" award.
- give dictionaries to local school children.

Promise Grants offer Lodges up to \$500 in reimbursement to host an event that builds the character and competence of local youth. Last year, the Foundation awarded all 250 **Promise Grants**, and we've already received more than 200 applications this year!

This year's **Promise Grant** recipients will host some exciting youth events, including:

- Junior Citizen Police Academy.
- bowling event for disabled children.
- Most Improved Student competition.



Impact Grants, the newest initiative of the Community Investments Program launched in 2007, are competitive grants worth up to \$10,000 for Lodges to address an unmet need in an Elks community. This year, with a larger grant pool, we awarded \$400,000 to 45 Lodges with big plans to make a difference in their community!

This year, Lodges received **Impact Grants** for a variety of meaningful projects. Lodges will:

- collect the stories of veterans.
- provide job skills training for military spouses and wounded veterans.
- help create a Kids Fit Club to introduce children to a healthier lifestyle.



**Endless
Possibilities Await
Your LODGE at
www.elks.org/enf/community!**