

Community Outreach and Charitable Work of Allegheny Lodge 339 of the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the USA

Local Projects in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County

Allegheny Elks Lodge maintains various committees committed to fulfilling the cardinal principals of the order, which are Charity, Justice, Brotherly Love, and Fidelity. The standing committees, many of which provide far-reaching community benefits to local, state, and national audiences include: Community Activities, Youth Activities, Hoop Shoot, Drug Awareness Program, Americanism, Elks National Foundation, Yellow Glove Project, Flag Day, Veterans Services, Government Relations, the Pennsylvania State Home Service Program, Lodge Scholarships, and our Winter Holiday Food Charities. The Lodge also maintains recognition programs for the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts of America, and the U.S. Military Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps.

Yellow Glove Project

The Allegheny Elks' Yellow Glove Project provides free household cleaning supplies and personal hygiene products to clients of the Northside Common Ministries' Community Food Pantry. The program is entirely run by volunteers from the Lodge, and is primarily funded by a competitive grant from the Elks National Foundation. Fewer than 50 such grants are awarded every year among the 1,800+ Elks Lodges, and individual Lodge programs are typically greatly reduced in prioritization after three years of funding. Allegheny Lodge's Yellow Glove Project is currently in its fifth year of funding via this competitive grant, an almost unprecedented achievement. Allegheny Elks Lodge's Yellow Glove Project and the Northside Common Ministries Community Food Pantry were joint recipients of a 2016 Jefferson Award for Community Service.

SNAP (the federal Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program, a.k.a. "food stamps") only covers food. Recipients are not permitted to use their benefits to purchase dish soap, toothpaste, paper towels, laundry detergent, shampoo, toilet paper, personal hygiene products, etc. Institutions like the Pantry exist to cover the shortfalls of the SNAP program.

The Pantry provides both supplemental food and non-food products to its clients free of charge, allocated to its clients based on total weight of product, per household member. Due to the often-insufficient ceiling on SNAP food benefits, clients of the Pantry must sometimes still make the difficult choice between enough additional food for their household, or the non-food products which help to ensure Dignity of Self and Dignity of Place. The Yellow Glove Project aims to eliminate the need for that choice by providing Pantry clients with supplemental non-food products above and beyond the Pantry's allocation weigh-ins.

Started in 2016, the Yellow Glove Project works to allow Pantry clients to always be able to opt for additional food for their families. The Lodge procures grant funding and community donations, which are used to purchase non-food products to stock the pantry. Approximately every other month, volunteers from Allegheny Elks Lodge meet at the Pantry to pack the non-food products for distribution in hundreds of overstock re-usable tote bags donated by numerous local companies and organizations. These sturdy bags of non-food product are then given to Pantry clients after checkout, free of charge and exempt from the product weight limit.

100% of every dollar raised by the Yellow Glove Project is used for purchase of the products provided to Pantry clients. All administrative work and labor are provided by unpaid volunteers from Allegheny Elks Lodge, friends, and family members.

Hoop Shoot Program

The Elks Hoop Shoot is a basketball free throw competition for youth ages 8-13, and has been in operation for over 50 years. The program aims to imbue in competitors a sense of determination and perseverance, and to teach them the value of good sportsmanship.

Each participating Lodge holds a city/neighborhood competition, with the winners advancing to a district competition, then state, regional, and national. The national winners from each of six categories are enshrined in the Basketball Hall of Fame. The Elks Hoops Shoot Program is also a sponsor of the Basketball Hall of Fame's Wooten Lifetime Achievement Award, which annually recognizes two outstanding high school basketball coaches for their dedication to the betterment of student athletes.

Allegheny Lodge's Hoop Shoot program is currently chaired by a Lodge Member who is himself a former Elks Hoop Shoot champion, as well as a current youth community basketball coach and youth basketball outreach coordinator.

Drug Awareness Program

The Allegheny Elks Lodge participates in the Elks National Drug Awareness Program — the largest volunteer drug awareness program in the United States — by attending various community events and festivals to distribute literature, and by sponsoring lectures in schools throughout the City of Pittsburgh. The Lodge works closely with Pittsburgh's Urban Impact Foundation, as well as national youth drug prevention speaker Ray Lozano. The Elks are committed to eliminating the use and abuse of illegal drugs by all members of society and believe that in order to ensure a bright future for our country, it is essential that our children be raised in a drug-free environment. The program also works to prevent underage drinking and the use of tobacco and nicotine vape products.

Veterans Programs

Allegheny Lodge participates and runs numerous programs throughout Allegheny County for the benefit of veterans in our communities.

Volunteers from Allegheny Lodge conduct regular visits to the VA's Southwestern Veterans' Center and the Butler County VA Hospital to provide companionship, entertainment, supplies, snacks, holiday parties, and canteen books to residents of these VA facilities. The Lodge's knitting circle also produces dozens of hand-made lap robes every year for wheelchair-bound residents, given to them during the winter holidays.

Allegheny Lodge produces "welcome home" packages for formerly-homeless veterans moving into new housing. These packages include household goods, cleaning supplies, linens, furniture, and other items necessary to make these veterans' new homes a welcome and inviting one.

The Lodge partners with the Veterans Leadership Council of Western PA in conducting an annual "Stand Down" event, where homeless and indigent veterans receive free medical assessments, dental care, interview training, interview and other clothing, haircuts, counseling, etc.

Allegheny Lodge also partners with Carnegie Elks Lodge #831 for an annual holiday dinner for homeless veterans.

Winter Holiday Food Charity

The Lodge conducts an annual holiday fundraising campaign to raise money to provide food (in the form of grocery store gift cards) for needy families within our community. The primary disbursement occurs around the winter holidays. Smaller disbursements are made throughout the year, including to accompany the “welcome home” packages described in the veterans’ programs section above.

Carnegie Library After-School Program

Allegheny Lodge conducts after-school snack and craft days at the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh branch mere blocks away from our Lodge. The program encourages healthy snack choices in children, and provides craft supplies and instructions for creative activity.

Bradley Center Holiday Market

Allegheny Lodge funds a Winter Holiday Market with the Bradley Center, a local counseling and residential treatment facility for youth impacted by trauma, mental illness, or other behavioral health challenges. The Lodge procures gifts to stock an on-site market, which the Center’s youth clients “shop” at so that they may give holiday gifts to their families and loved ones – something that many of them have never been able to do before. Lodge volunteers provide on-site gift wrapping services for the items, as well.

Shaler School District Life Skills Program

The Lodge funds and provides volunteers and chaperones for outings by the Shaler Area School District’s Special Education Program’s Life Skills Class. The program provides field trips for special needs schoolchildren where they may develop and practice life skills.

Lodge Scholarships

Allegheny Lodge awards a new \$4,000 scholarship every year to a child or grandchild of an Elks Member who has exhibited outstanding service to their community. Lodge scholars are held to a rigorous academic performance standard and are expected to continue their community volunteerism while conducting their studies.

Youth Recognition Programs

Allegheny Lodge participates in Eagle Scout Courts of Honor and Girl Scout Gold and Silver Award banquets, providing recognition and awards to local Scouts for their community and charitable works. The Lodge also provides Outstanding Cadet awards to every JROTC unit within Allegheny County. The Lodge’s JROTC coordinator also serves as Commander for Pittsburgh Public Schools’ JROTC unit.

Low-Cost Event Space

The Lodge provides deliberately low-cost event space to members of our community to hold family gatherings, reunions, dinners, wedding receptions, fundraising events, etc. Many of the other event spaces in our neighborhood run in the thousands of dollars per event, and the Lodge prides itself on being able to provide a much more affordable option to our neighbors for family celebrations.

Allegheny Commons Park Beautification Project

Members of the Allegheny Elks Lodge volunteer to maintain the annual planting beds around the Hampton Battery Monument in Allegheny Commons Park. The Civil War monument honors the Pennsylvania Independent Light Artillery, Battery F, that served at Chancellorsville, Antietam, Gettysburg and other Civil War battles. Of the eighty men who were mustered into service on October 8, 1861, only 28 survived.

State Project

Home Service Program

Since 1963, the Pennsylvania Elks Home Service program has been helping improve the quality of life for thousands of children and adults throughout Pennsylvania. The program provides free in-home support and advocacy services by nurses and medical case coordinators to Pennsylvania residents with congenital neurological and developmental disabilities. It is funded primarily via Lodge fundraising and contributions from individual Elks members, with supplemental funding from the Pennsylvania State Elks Association Legacy Trust (a trust fund also funded by Pennsylvania Elks Lodges and individual Elks Members), and grants from the State of Pennsylvania.

The program employs 25 full-time Registered Nurses who in 2019 traveled 332,117 miles to make 14,513 home visits across every county in Pennsylvania. The program has received excellence awards from United Cerebral Palsy of Pennsylvania, the Governor's Private Sector Initiative Task Force, and the Pennsylvania Department of Health, among many others.

Under the stewardship of a PA West District Home Service Program coordinator (and, later, Home Service Program State Chairman) from Allegheny Lodge, the PA West District (of which Allegheny Lodge is a member) has been the only district ever in which not only did every Lodge hit its per-capita fundraising totals for a year, but did so six years in a row.

National Projects

The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks spends more than \$80,000,000 every year for benevolent, educational, and patriotic community-minded programs in such fields as benefitting physically handicapped children, sponsoring Elks National Foundation scholarships, Scouting, athletic teams, veterans' works, a national "Hoop Shoot" free-throw contest involving more than 3 million children, physical and occupational therapy programs, and patriotic programs. The organization boasts over 1,800 lodges throughout the nation and its territories with nearly one million members.

Elks National Foundation

Started in 1928, the Elks National Foundation (ENF) is a trust dedicated to bettering our nation by helping youth develop lifelong skills, sending students to college, meeting the needs of today's veterans, supporting the charitable work of the state Elks associations, and funding local Lodge projects that improve the quality of life in local Elks communities. The ENF spends less than 7% of its total outlay on fundraising and administrative expenses, which far exceeds all standards for charitable organizations. (The generally-accepted standard is 30-35%.)

Allegheny Lodge continually exceeds the per-capita fundraising and giving goals set by the national organization, many times over, and year after year. ENF grants fully or partially fund several of the local Lodge charities and programs listed above, and the Lodge's exemplary ENF fundraising efforts unlock additional grant monies to expand the funded projects.

ENF Scholarships

The Elks National Foundation awards \$2.5 million dollars nationwide in Most Valuable Student scholarships every year to outstanding high school seniors heading off to a full-time four-year program at any accredited US college or university. Recipients need not have any connection to the Elks, and more often than not have no such ties.

For children and grandchildren of Elks members, ENF also provides annually three hundred \$4,000 scholarships, as well as Emergency Education Grants to children of Elks whose household has lost significant income due to the unexpected death or incapacitation of a parent.