

Elks and Community Service

The Order of Elks was originally founded in 1868 to provide community service and to help those less fortunate in time of need. Each year Elks members throughout America serve as faithful servants to the communities in which they reside. Our dedication to community service is the driving force behind the success of our many programs.

The Lodge Community Activities Committee is a key link between the Lodge and our communities. This committee has the responsibility for addressing those activities involving the community that are not handled by other standing committees within the Lodge. This broad charter allows a Lodge to develop programs that are tailored to the needs of their neighbors, effectively using the abilities of their members and frequently determining how the Lodge is viewed by others in the community.

Because program coordination is very important, Lodges are encouraged to conduct a monthly Activities meeting. Such a meeting, attended by the Lodge Officers, Committee Chairs, House Committee, Board of Trustees, PER Association, Lodge members and Auxiliary members is an excellent way to coordinate all Lodge activities. This is an informal meeting run by the Lodge Activities Chairperson to discuss and plan all upcoming activities being scheduled for the next eight to ten weeks.

The Lodge Secretary receives Lodge correspondence as soon as it arrives and presents a copy of all correspondence requesting aid to the Lodge Trustees. Those requests for aid that are not already covered in the Lodge budget are turned over to the Community Activities Committee for review. This committee contacts the organization making the request and invites them to send a representative or representatives to attend the next Activities meeting to further explain the request and answer questions. This kind of forum allows the members of the Lodge to interact directly with the requestors to determine the most effective way that the Lodge can help and whether the event or activity is consistent with Lodge ideals. The members attending are then able to present clearly to the members at a Lodge meeting what kind of support is needed, as well as what the benefits are to the community and the Lodge. Support requests vary from raising funds or providing assistance in staffing an event to providing a facility or endorsing a program that will benefit the local community. The membership present at the Lodge meeting will vote on approval or disapproval before any action is taken.

Discussions held during a monthly Activities meeting will help to determine how to best address an issue, gain commitment on the part of all parties, establish expectations consistent with what would be done, and set reasonable goals and timeframes. The results following these specific discussions include better communication between local organizations and a far greater understanding of how each organization might contribute for the benefit of the community.

The idea of working directly with the community has had significant, wide-ranging and very positive effects for those lodges conducting monthly Activities meetings that have resulted in:

- *Better Community Image.*
- *Significantly improved community relations.*
- *More effective use of resources.*
- *Increased involvement of existing members.*
- *New members.*

The primary focus for every Lodge and committee should be to “*enhance member and public confidence in our purposes and programs*”. Following any activity that benefits a charitable or patriotic purpose including our nation’s Veterans, youth, physically impaired, victims of disaster or special community need, it is very important to make sure there is news coverage, if at all possible. It is important to take photos and cover these activities in the Lodge bulletin as well as through the local news media. Many members are unable to attend meetings or Lodge activities because of health, family or work commitments and the Lodge bulletin and local newspaper is the only way these members know what is going on. “A photo speaks a thousand words,” and a photo of a child or veteran smiling, saying “Thank You”, is all it takes to make these members proud to be Elks.

In conclusion, the steps we take to increase the involvement of non-members or less active members in our many Lodge and Community Activities will result in many of these individuals joining with us in fulfilling the ideals of Elksdom. It is also important to offer family activities in order to give “together time” to better utilize the continually shrinking hours families have in a fast-moving society. Involving family and community leaders from other organizations will certainly help local citizens better understand our purposes and programs that fully demonstrate our motto, ...

“Elks Care - Elks Share”.