

HISTORY OF KERN RIVER VALLEY LODGE #2358

In 1966, two groups, unknown to each other, one headed by Tom Johnson, a Past Exalted Ruler from Ridgecrest Lodge #1913, and the other by Wofford Heights realtor Al Fikel, met separately with the aim of establishing an Elks Lodge in the Kern River Valley.

After months of hard work and with the help of Karl Kafer, PER from the Ridgecrest Lodge, an application to form a Lodge in the Kern River Valley was submitted to the Grand Lodge. On September 16, 1966, Raymond C. Dobson, Grand Exalted Ruler, granted a dispensation to James E. Wilson, Albert Fikel and 96 dedicated men for a Lodge to be known as Kern River Valley California Lodge #2358. Recruiting for prospective members continued and a date for the institution of the Lodge was scheduled for January 21, 1967. The ceremonies would be held at Woodrow Wallace Elementary School. The program for that day was impressive and extensive.

With the institution of Kern River Valley Lodge #2358, only one obstacle remained – the Lodge had no permanent meeting place. Dinner functions were scheduled and held at various places in the valley including the “Sportsman Inn” in Kernville and across the lake at “Paradise Cove.” The first meetings were held at what was to become the present Elks Lodge – at that time known as Duffy’s Tavern. A game arcade was found and made available to the young Lodge. The members dutifully moved the pool tables at every meeting to have enough room to hold their sessions.

Finally, in 1970, Alfred Rodriguez, ER and Karl Kafer, DDGER appeared before the Grand Trustees at the National Convention, held that year, in San Francisco California. They were given Grand Lodge approval for the purchase of what is now known as the home of Kern River Valley Elks Lodge #2358. Even in those early years, The Ladies of the Elks (LOE) were very prominent in their money raising efforts, and their first gift to the Lodge was a chain link fence to protect the property.

As each year passed, continued growth of the Lodge was accomplished. Dick Brock and Billie Ludiker, together with Architect Bob Forester initiated plans for remodeling and expanding the Lodge building in 1982. In 1984, ER Mike McCloskey hand carried the plans to the Grand Lodge Session in Houston, Texas. Upon approval, the groundbreaking ceremonies were held; non-interest-bearing bonds for financing were sold to members and the construction of our dining room and expanded kitchen went forward using almost all volunteer help. The natural wood finish building was dedicated and occupied during the 1985-86 tenure of ER Bill Coleman, who named the new addition the “Sequoia Room.”

Soon after, the property directly behind the Lodge was developed into a park and picnic area. TN June of 1999, our Lodge celebrated the grand opening of our new RV Park, directly across the Boulevard from the Lodge.

ABOUT OUR LODGE BUILDING:

- Built in the late 1800’s as Peterson’s Hotel in Old Kernville
- Other uses included a Hotel, Dance Hall, Library, Post Office, Barber shop, Restaurant, Tavern
- Moved from the lake bottom to its present location in 1955
- Purchased by the Kern River Valley Elks lodge #2358 in 1971