

The History of Brandon Lodge #2383

Chartered: February 16, 1968

The Centennial Lodge was the first lodge to enter the second century of Elkdom.

And it all began in September 1967 with two state Elks officials and three Brandon, Florida residents attending. Just four months later January 28, 1968 16 state Elks Association officials, including a Past Grand Lodge Exalted Ruler, instituted and presented the only Charter of BPOE bearing the anniversary date of February 16, 1968 to our own Brandon Lodge. The host lodge for this important event, Plant City, initiated 178 Charter members.

Meeting in a local Ladies Club room soon proved to be too crowded, and opportunity came knocking for renting of a building at 122 Linsley Avenue for \$250.00 a month. The liquor license (finally) obtained in 1968, and no more BYOB parties! But, more importantly, we could purchase the building. In January, 1969 approval received from Grand Trustees for purchase of building.

The Centennial Lodge had another first! The earliest any BPOE Lodge had requested the organization of a Brandon Ladies Of Elks, which was accomplished June, 1968. And what support they have proven to be! Their contributions over the years have proven to be invaluable from their first gift of lodge officers' stations and officers' jewels, to their continued loyal support today.

Bingo started in May, 1968 as a fund raiser to support our own mayor candidate for the Brandon 4th of July activities. Bingo still continues, and as voted by the members, the proceeds are designated to our own Harry-Anna Crippled Children's Home and other charitable activities.

Santa made his first appearance in our own building the Christmas of 1969 at our Christmas party for the kids; and on a more serious note during the year a Blood Bank for members and families began.

As our lodge grew, our needs grew, and the purchase of the lot north of building was completed in July 1971. Approval for our first addition to the building was issued August 1972. 1973-74 proved to be building years as many energetic and dedicated Elks members worked to complete the new bar and lounge for the lodge. Work completed, the new facilities were dedicated July 4, 1974.

In 1970-71 we graduated from a one page mimeographed newsletter to an eight page Bulletin - receiving our first award from the Florida State Elks Association (Honorable Mention) for Bulletins in 1971-72. This was the forerunner to our present many-paged BUGLE.

We were not only active and loyal local Elks, during this growing period, we also had the privilege of having one of our own representing us as Vice President of the West Central District during the year 1973-74 — another lodge first.

Our lodge was part of a realignment of State Districts in 1975-76. We left many old lodge friends of the West Central District, but looked forward to new friends in the South Central District. Always one to appreciate the BLOE support, Ladies Appreciation Night (L.A.N.) became an annual affair.

Teenager of the Month began and helped us achieve First Place in the Florida State Youth Activities Award. Again, a first, as DDGER for the SCD chosen from the Brandon lodge

Our state involvement continued with the State Chairman of Lodge Activities appointed from the Brandon lodge. And for the Country's Bi-Centennial what better way to participate than by adding a flag pole and light in front of the Centennial Lodge? Was it a coincidence the lodge won Third Place at National Convention for Flag Day Observance. Truly a red/white/blue Centennial year at all functions.

To help support our Harry-Anna Trust Fund supporting the BPOE State Major Projects, first of many candy boxes were placed in various locations and over several years, approximately \$10,000 donated to this worthy cause Another award! This time an outstanding Youth Activities Award received at National Convention in 1977-78.

How we have grown in just ten years!!

The pool room addition was completed in 1978-79. Our float won the Best of Theme Award in the 4th of July Parade. Mount Adams, Washington Lodge #1868 presented us with the Elks Antlers we still use today on our Altar.

Our Boy Scout Troop #60 honored an Eagle Scout at a special Court of Honor. Our First Annual Lodge Picnic was held at Edward Medard Park with many Elks and family members in attendance. Our float won the Best of Theme Award for the second year in a row in the 4th of July Parade.

We were awarded First Place at Grand Lodge Community Services Brochure Contest.

In 1981-82 we had a great year for awards; second Place for Grand Lodge Community Service Brochure, First Place for Inter-Lodge Visitation in the 300-600 member category, and Third Place in the Civic Division at the 4th of July Parade. One of our members was appointed District Deputy Grand Exalted Ruler for Central District. We held our First Annual Law Enforcement Recognition Dinner.

Harry-Anna Saturday raised \$1,700 on the streets in 1982-83 and four foot weary members and two equally foot weary ladies walked from Plant City Lodge to Brandon Lodge (20 miles) which resulted in an additional \$2,800 in pledges and certificates being raised for a total of \$4,500. The members voted to renovate and remodel the Lounge.

We completed the Lounge renovation and remodeling in 1983-84. We held our First Annual Student Scholarship Awards Banquet for deserving students. The Centennial Lodge was presented the Grand Exalted Ruler Award for Lodge Activities. Our float won First Place in the Civic Division in the 4th of July Parade.

Our Lodge purchased the Brandon Twin Theater and the adjacent parking lot area in 1985-86. One of our members was selected to be Vice-President, Central District. Our Veteran's Service Committee Chairman began monthly Wednesday Night Dinners for patients of the local VA Hospital. We won the Grand Marshal Award in the annual 4th of July Parade.

Our Lodge hosted the Florida Elks Bowling Tournament in 1986-87, one of the largest turnouts to date. Brandon Lodge members were appointed as District Deputy Grand Exalted Ruler, Grand Esquire, and Grand Auditor. Our Lodge won the Grand Marshal Award again in the 4th of July Parade. Harry-Anna Saturday raised \$2,834 on the streets. Our Centennial Lodge hosted the State Hoop-Shoot Finals at Armwood High School and dinners at our Lodge. Florida State President and Vice-President At Large were in attendance as well as many other dignitaries. State Director of the Hoop-Shoot was a member of Brandon Lodge.

What's new in 1987-88? Brandon Lodge is the proud recipient of the Grand Marshal Award again in the 4th of July Parade. We won First Place in the State Contest for Lodge Newsletters.

The Lodge Ritual Team has worked its way up to Eighth Place in the State Contest and has won the last two District Contests. Our contributions to the Children's Hospital and the National Foundation are very high in the State Ratings. We are striving to be recognized by the Grand Lodge for contributions to the Memorial Restoration Fund. The Lodge's Name will be inscribed on the Permanent Honor Roll with a little more help from the members.

In 1992 the Lodge building located on Linsley Avenue was sold and we moved into temporary quarters in the Valrico Square Mall while the new Lodge was being constructed.

The new building is situated on 8.5 acres of land at the end of North Oakwood Ave., just two blocks north of Highway 60. Official grand opening of our present Lodge at 800 Centennial Lodge Drive was held on February 12, 1994 with insertion of a time capsule and placement of the corner stone plaque.

The 1994 4th of July parade float won first place with the Presidential Award, the highest honor for the parade.

The Youth Activities Committee programs received awards for first place in the state and third place in the nation for Flag Day observance.

The ritual team (1994) won the Southwest Central District Ritual Championship.

In 1995 the Lodge started an annual walk to help find a cure for Cystic Fibrosis. Twenty three Elks and ladies participated and raised over \$3,000.00 for the cause.

Also, for the first time the Lodge sponsored a softball team and entered the third annual Elks Softball tournament at Deland, Florida.

In 1996 the Lodge sponsored Boy Scout Troop #627 - meeting on Tuesday nights in the Lodge room.

The 1997-98 ritual team won first place in the district ritual contest and received the traveling trophy to be held each year by the winning team.

The first annual Adopt-A-Family Christmas party was held December 19, 1998. Many members helped paint the exterior of the Lodge in September 1998.

The 1998 - 99 ritual team won the Florida state championship then went on to compete in the national contest in Kansas City, MO. In July. The Florida State winners were:

Terry Russell.....All State Exalted Ruler
Bernie Hiskey.....2nd Place Leading Knight
Francis McKinney ... 2nd Place Loyal Knight
Tony Scotch All State Esquire

1999 - 2000 saw numerous honors presented to our Lodge.

The ritualistic team won the state championship at the Florida State Convention and went on to compete in the 1999 national convention in Dallas, Texas in July. The Brandon team took third place in the Eastern Division with a score of 93.51

Major winners in the state competition were:
Bernie Hiskey..... All State Exalted Ruler
Francis McKinney . 2nd Place Leading Knight
Tony Scotch 2nd Place Loyal Knight
Jerry Yates 2nd Place Lecturing Knight
Bob Santoro All State Esquire
Art Yanni All State Chaplain
Jane Foust 2nd Place Inner Guard
Jim Vallad..... All State Coach
Bernie Hiskey..... All State 11 O'clock Toast

The Lodge was awarded first place in the nation for average per member donations to the Elks National Foundation, and also won first place in the nation for percentage of new pledge

points. Both awards were for Lodges with 501 - 700 members.

Lodge membership - April 2000 - 604

The greatest honor in 1999 - 2000 was winning the First Place award in the "All American" Lodge contest for division III Lodges - presented at the Dallas, Texas national convention. *The award is the most coveted honor in all of Elkdom.*

In January 2000 our charter members and those with 25 years or more service were honored and presented pins for years of service to Elkdom.

November 2001 - The first annual Veterans Day Hog Roast to benefit the veterans at James A. Haley Veterans Hospital was a great success.

In April the Lodge hosted a prom for the Dover Exceptional School students. The school is for the mentally and physically handicapped students in the eastern half of Hillsborough County.

2003- "No Smoking" in the Lodge took effect. A new screened lanai was constructed on the east side of the building to accommodate smokers.

The Marvin M. Lewis Award recognizes Elks who have significantly contributed to the youth of their communities by volunteering in programs of the Boy Scouts of America. The award is rarely given to the same Elks Lodge in succeeding years, however:

Winner for 2002 was Richard A. Rhodes

Winner for 2003 was Thomas M. Tennant

In the summer of 2002 the Lodge opened its' RV Park at the west end of the property. Start-up money was provided by 20 Elks who contributed to the cause which was headed-up by Jack Mineo.

In June of 2003 George Brown was elected into the Florida Elks Softball Hall of Fame.

2004 - The first annual "Hooked on Fishing - Not Drugs" tournament for kids arranged by Don Cornett was held on a nearby lake owned by Doug Holmberg.

The Lodge approved the sale of bonds to help retire the mortgage. The exterior of the Lodge was painted and the restrooms were painted. The Lodge hosted the visit of State President Frank Palladini for an entertaining weekend.

2006 - Lodge members planned and built a new horseshoe-shaped bar at the east end of the lounge, paid for by members - it has provided a new openness and provided a better view of the game room and lounge.

2007 - The Lodge received a special award from the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office for our "Hooked on Fishing - Not on Drugs" awareness program. Also in 2007, the Lodge Officers won Best Opening and Closing Ritual for Southwest Central District. At the State level, the lodge won Best Youth Activities Programs Division III; 1st Place Division III for Lodge Bulletin.

2008 - February saw us celebrating the Lodge's 40th Anniversary in Elkdom. The publication (newsletter) The Bugle - became available on the Internet.

Brandon Lodge won 1st place for Division III size lodges in State for Dollars Per Member to Elks National Foundation.

2009 – With much dedication from lodge members involved, the re-formation of Boy Scout Troop 627 happened!

2010 – Brandon’s sponsored softball team participated with over 50 other Elk teams in the State Softball tournament and won 2nd place!

2011 - The 1st Wednesday of the month lodge dinner became our salute to veterans, inviting veterans from James A. Haley Veterans Hospital to join us for dinner.

2012 – National Society of Sons of the American Revolution presented certificate to Lodge in recognition of Exemplary Patriotism. The Brandon Lodge Elks themed float won 1st place in 4th of July parade.

2014 – Non-Profit Organization of the Year for 2013-2014 award by Brandon Round Table. Lodge won 1st place from state for “Best Lodge Orientation Program”.

2015 – Elks escorted and sponsored veterans on a 5 hour cruise on WWII American Victory ship. Brandon Lodge raised funds and purchased a 15 passenger van (\$15,000) for use by Liberty Manor Veterans. Lodge won 2nd place in state for “Best Lodge Orientation Program”.

2016 – Brandon Lodge was presented The Outstanding Community Service/Volunteer Award from Tampa, Florida Mayor Bob Buckhorn for the Mayor’s Alliance for Persons with Disabilities. Presented on October 28, 2016.

2017 – Brandon Lodge started their participation in Hillsborough County Sheriffs Outreach Program for area homeless. Project is ongoing.

We know that Elkdom has a “Proud Past”. As members of Brandon Lodge No. 2383, we look forward with great enthusiasm to a “Challenging Future”.

Acknowledgement – Our thanks to the following for their efforts and contributions.

Capturing the first 40 years history – Len Brown, PER, Don Moon, PER, Bernie Hiskey, PER, Larry Harris, C.J. Hayes and the late Richard Rhodes, PDDGER.

The Recent 10 years – thanks to Bernie Hiskey, PER for combing 10 years of Bugles (thanks Frank Craft for having them). Administrative assistance provided by Jane Moon (BLOE).