

Good Works: Community Welfare

Hawaii Elks have been having a good time while doing good works for 100 years. Minstrel shows, baseball games, carnivals, circuses, dances, rodeos, boxing matches, and “smokers” were all part of the mix. Some years raising money was a necessity to fund construction or pay off a mortgage. Most events raised funds to support charitable or social-community efforts. Personal commitment was always required. No matter the reason or style of event, Elks made sure the workers and participants had fun. If people didn’t have fun, the event was a flop!

Baseball was a steady favorite. The Elks first baseball team joined the Hawaii League, December 1902. Teams played against the Masons, Shriners (1922), and the Press-Radio Bums (1950). The games remained popular throughout the 1950s. The Kaneohe Lions and Elks played something called “Muumuu” baseball in 1957! By the 1970s, golf and now canoe paddling replaced baseball as Elks’ sports.

Theatricals raised funds steadily:

Minstrel shows (1903, 1919), plays (*Finnegan, the Millionaire* 1907), concerts (Madame Harrison 1911, Miss Wall, 1932), homegrown shows (*Lava Trail* 1914, *Elks Revue* 1924, *Winter Frolics* 1948), and a night at the movies (*Orphans of the Storm*, 1922).

Carnivals and circuses raised money and entertained the community. After a first 1910 carnival was a big success, similar events followed sporadically throughout the 1910s and 1920s. These were elaborate events complete with Ferris wheels, sideshows, and acrobats. The 1926 show (and others) traveled to Maui. The 1922 carnival raised an astounding \$19,442. Other years were almost as successful with one spectacular exception. The 1928 carnival lost a devastating \$32,500! The lodge was forced to take out a mortgage to pay off its debts. Smaller profits were realized on future carnivals and circuses (working with “Eddie” Fernandez on some). These community-pleasing events continued through the 1940s and 50s.

Ladies of the Elks and the Emblem Club raised funds with fashion shows, bingo, rummage sales, and dances. Two successful events in 1964 were the Roaring Twenties Dance and a Hawaiian Hootenanny.

When Elks saw a need they might act unilaterally: donating bags of marbles to each boy in the “reformatory” (1912). Members were personally involved: annually handing out Thanksgiving food baskets (1925 feeding over 2000 people). It felt good to help others, especially children: Kalihi Orphanage entertainment and picnic at Hanauma Bay (1931), Children’s Hospital Christmas party (1949), parties for students and teachers of both Waimano and Diamond Head schools (1965). In 1949, 616 held a toys and books drive to supply needed gifts to children in hospitals and orphanages. Offered an opportunity to help, Hawaii’s people filled the collection barrels making a merry Christmas for children.

Scholarships and awards for college bound youth are recorded as far back as 1945 - when \$120 covered a year's University of Hawaii tuition and registration. Scholarships and awards continue today, although the funds don't make as big a contribution to a student's costs.

Patriotic 616 bought war bonds during World War II: \$120,000 worth between 1942-1945. At War's end, Elks participated in 'relief work' (Guam 1944, Philippines 1945). Starting in the War years and continuing through the 1970s, blood donations were a special focus. Elks and supporters donated gallons of blood - a pint at a time.

616 supported a wide variety of charitable activities. Elks were often the first, or nearly so, group to support a community need. One estimate noted the Lodge gave nearly \$365,000 to charity in its first 50 years. Some of the groups supported in 100 years:

- Big Brothers
- Blood Bank
- Boy Scouts of America
- Cerebral Palsy
- Eye of the Pacific Guide Dogs
- Girl Scouts of America
- Hemophilia Foundation of Hawaii
- Hilo Flood Relief (1960)
- Hoopono Center for the Blind
- Junior Police Officers
- Kalaupapa residents
- Little League
- Lunalilo Home (1946)
- March of Dimes
- Muscular Dystrophy Association
- National Newspaper Carrier Day
- Police Athletic League
- Palama Settlement (1911)
- Salvation Army
- Waimano Training School
- United Service Organizations (USO)

Lodge 616 gave special attention to several projects over 100 years. Beginning with the depression in 1930, Elks community welfare funded healthy milk snacks for Hawaii's needy school children. The "Milk Fund" placed hundreds of bottles of milk in classrooms daily until World War II called a halt.

The March of Dimes against Polio focused fundraising during 1940 - 1950. Collected donations grew from \$5,440 (1940), doubling to \$10,430 (1943), and reaching a high of \$179,000 in 1947.

Although Elks were helping the March of Dimes as late as 1959, after 1950 the focus returned to school milk programs. For several years, the Elks funded the project by managing the Hula Bowl. The football games were 'hyped' with great ballyhoo - bottle return promotions, milking contests, and Milk Queen selections. In 1951, the Hula Bowl and the Elks briefly united management and labor. Honolulu Rapid Transit and the Art Rutledge led striking Transit Workers agreed to run buses to the game - giving all fares and wages to the Milk Fund. Games were played in the Honolulu Stadium or 'Termite Palace' [now the site of the Stadium Park on King Street]. Hula Bowl 1952 netted nearly \$17,900 or 190,700 bottles of milk for public and parochial schools!

In 1965, 616 began sponsoring speech therapists. That program continues today, making a difference in the lives of children and their families.

The tradition of giving continues at 616. Now that you know just a few of the Good Works Elks have done over 100 years in Hawaii, how are you going to carry on the tradition?

Anita Manning, Lodge Historian

References:

- Honolulu Advertiser*. The Elks' Benefit 13 Aug 30; Elks Start Yule Project 26 Oct 49; Elks Tubs will Gather Material for Yule Cheer 13 Nov 49; Hula Bowl Nets Elks Milk Fund 16 Feb 51.
- Honolulu Lodge 616. 1951. *Book of Memories, Fiftieth Anniversary*.
- Medley, Ray G. Interviews during 2000 and 2001.
- Muche, Gene 1976. *75th Anniversary Diamond Jubilee*. BPOE, Honolulu Lodge 616.
- Paradise of the Pacific*. "The Elks Carnival 1921", March 1921: 19-23.
- Star Bulletin*. Elks Ask Clothing Donations for Needy People of Guam 7 Oct 44; Elks Doing Great Relief Work in P.I. on \$100,000 Fund 24 Apr 45; Two Scholarships Offered by Elks 7 Dec 45.