

Oak Harbor Elks Lodge #2362 History

As Compiled by Marc A. deLeuze PDDGER
and many Lodge members and fellow PER's

As of August 2018

Well, depending on where you look, you may see different dates for our Lodge's beginning. This fact made compiling this history a bit of a challenge, but would not stop us from celebrating the fact that 50 years ago, several gentlemen of our community, some already members; instituted a lodge for the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks right here in Oak Harbor.

The year, 1961, (Yes I know the math doesn't work, wait for it) Elk members living in Oak Harbor asked Chicago for a Charter for a Lodge. Decision from Grand Lodge: "Population not large enough to support a Lodge". 1966 three members of the Anacortes Lodge (Clint Bassett Charter Secretary, Harry Bliven Charter Exalted Ruler and Leo Paquin Charter One Year Trustee) each throw \$20.00 in a pot in hopes again of instituting an Elks Lodge in Oak Harbor. On March 18, 1967 Oak Harbor Lodge was instituted with 485 charter members. Originally the Lodge name was "Oak Harbor 'NAV-AIR' Lodge #2362" in reference to our military community and naval air base connection.

In the very beginning the Lodge meet at the Knights of Columbus Hall. The then Brothers worked at raising money. Both for our Charities and as the old saying goes "Charity begins at home" but in this case it was "Charity begins with a home". Money was raised and property was purchased in December 1968 with a "Revival Center" structure on it and that became our first real home. For those that don't know, that property and building is now Flyers. A significant event for that structure was the mortgage burning on September 17, 1986.

Right from the beginning this Lodge was making a positive statement in our community. Serving lunches, as there were no national franchise fast food restaurants in town. Every Sunday morning breakfast was being served.

Wednesday nights was steak night; you got your choice of plain or marinated stake with a baked potato, salad (with no extra stuff) and French bread. They also held a lot of very successful Reno nights as there were no local casinos. Other activities were Emblem Club western nights, 50/50 raffles, sweetheart dances, Hoop Shoot contests, first responder dinners and of course the annual Purple Bubble Ball held on "the best dance floor in town". We even hosted two state golf tournaments and one state bowling tournament. Our Lodge picnics were held out at the Rod and Gun Club for many years and finally moved here in 1999. In my conversations with some of our more senior members, there seemed to be a few common themes: "there was lots of gambling, lots of drinking 'Kool-Aid', and lots of visits to other Lodges and their functions." One trip to the Bellingham Lodge when they were still downtown, included a chainsaw and a Lodge room door! Member Bill Bailey had a "mini-car" that made several trips off the island. On many of

these trips, the members were attired in orange flight suits; you can see the patch that was on the back of these suits in the display case in the foyer. Almost from the very beginning our lodge became known as “The Fun Lodge” a very well deserved and fitting reputation. If it is possible to have too much fun, I think some of our early members and their activities may have gotten close.

With all this fun being had there were some serious times in our Lodge. Additional property was purchased; that was the ground that we are now on, the property behind us and a 17 acre parcel on Old Oak Harbor Rd. At one point in the early years the Lodge was in financial trouble and bonds were sold to the members to help keep the doors open. It is estimated that in the late 70’s we sold the 17 acres and repaid the bonds. Then in the late 80’s the membership agreed to sell the property behind us and started to seriously consider growing structurally. Member number one, our charter Exalted Ruler Harry Blevin drew the plans for our current home. On April 26, 1990 we broke ground and built this building, three times the size of our old home, the majority of the interior was completed with the help and support of many members. One notable member that needs to be recognized is P. Richard “Dick” Cays. Without his efforts we would have had to go into debt to finish our new home. Yes you heard correct, we moved into this building and dedicated it on September 25, 1993 debt free, and soon after sold the old lot and building. In the almost 25 years we have been in this building we can proudly say that we are one of the few Lodges in the state (maybe even the county) that got larger in structure size and made it successful. This is a true testament to the hard work of a lot of members and employees over the years.

As you all know Charity is one of the cornerstones of our order and is very important to us. Oak Harbor Lodge has always been a leader in the state when it comes to our charitable endeavors. We have consistently been in the top 5 Lodges in the state for both contributions to the Elks National Foundation and our own Washington Elks Therapy Program for Children. In regards to the Elks National Foundation, we have been the number one lodge in the state nine times since 1995. When we weren’t number one we were usually second or maybe third. As for the Washington Elks Therapy Program, we have consistently been in the top three for the last 15 years. As I have heard both these Committee Chairs say several times. “The Lodges accomplishments are not them; it is the membership that makes it happen.” That being said, jobs well done Oak Harbor.

In about 2005 State Sponsor, Past Grand Exalted Ruler Roger True started the FOG Award in honor of Past Grand Exalted Ruler Frank O. Garland to recognize the best Lodge in the state. Oak Harbor has received that award seven times since then. Just this last summer we again received the FOG award but this time we were also recognized as the first Lodge to ever receive this award for four consecutive years! Great job Oak Harbor.