



# HEARTBEAT

ELKS NATIONAL FOUNDATION NEWS

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Elks, like these members from Lakewood Ranch-Sarasota, Fla., Lodge No. 2855, serve veterans with support from CIP grants and the ENVSC.



## SO LONG AS THERE ARE VETERANS

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In 1946, the Elks pledged, “So long as there are veterans, the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks will never forget them.” Through Community Investments Program grants, the Elks National Foundation empowers Elks to fulfill this promise every day.

CIP grants can be used to ensure that veterans experiencing hardship are welcomed home when they return from service; that they have access to essentials like food, clothing, and shelter; and that they have improved access to the resources available to them through the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Brigantine, N.J., Lodge No. 2428 uses its Beacon, Gratitude, and Spotlight Grants to host veteran residents from nearby supportive housing for a day of food, games and companionship.

Just down the road from the Lodge, Veterans Haven-South and the New Jersey Veterans Memorial Home at Vineland house veterans who have experienced homelessness, many of whom struggle with substance abuse and poor mental health. An essential part of their recovery is establishing connections with those who share their experience to help them feel like part of the community. For its Fellowship Day, the Brigantine Elks arrange transportation for the veterans to the Lodge, prepare meals, and ready games for their visitors. High school students join in the effort as volunteers, and even the town mayor attends.

*see Vets, continued on page 2*



ELKS NATIONAL FOUNDATION, INC.  
HELPING ELKS BUILD STRONGER COMMUNITIES

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Through CIP grants and the ENVSC's Welcome Home program, Elks help veterans exiting homelessness turn their houses into homes.

*Vets, continued from page 1*

## IMPORTANT DATES

**JANUARY 2-6:**  
Winter Elks Scholar Service Trip  
in Phoenix

**JANUARY 15:**  
Hoop Shoot early bird registration  
opens

**JANUARY 17:**  
Beacon, Gratitude and Spotlight  
Grant application deadline

**FEBRUARY 5:**  
Legacy Awards application  
deadline

**MARCH 29:**  
Office closed for Good Friday

**MARCH 31:**  
Fiscal Year end

**APRIL 11-14:**  
MVS Leadership Weekend

**APRIL 18-21:**  
Hoop Shoot National Finals

"In the evening, the veterans are sad to leave, but they will have plenty of food, memories, and gifts to take with them," says Grants Coordinator Karen Geller. "Hopefully, they feel refreshed and loved at the end of the day and ready to start the next day with renewed energy, motivation and hope."

Weymouth-Braintree, Mass., Lodge No. 2232 used its Gratitude Grant to help renovate a shuttered school building into a new Veterans Center. The new facility, run by Disabled American Veterans and the Veterans of Foreign Wars, helps veterans access their medical benefits, find housing, and socialize with peers.

The Weymouth-Braintree Elks used their grant funds to help put together the Center's kitchen and sitting area. The Lodge purchased kitchen appliances, dishware, cabinets and other materials. Members offered their painting skills and helped set up the social area and reading room.

The Veterans Center is the only one in the community. Area veterans will now have a space to relax with their peers and learn about the health resources available to them. It also provides a place for the DAV and VFW to meet and continue supporting local veterans.

Any CIP grant can be used to serve the Lodge's local veteran population in need. The first step is connecting; reach out to the local V.A. office or veterans service group to start planning a project of your own. It is up to us to ensure the continued truth of the motto: "So long as there are veterans, the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks will never forget them."





## SMALL CIP FOR MANKIND

When the CIP was founded in 2005, giving over \$10,000 in grants seemed as distant a dream as putting someone on the moon was in the 1960s.

But, the new \$500 Gratitude Grant bonus for 2024-25, which will be awarded to Lodges that increase their fundraising by 10 percent over the previous year, isn't just another small step for the CIP.

"With the new bonus, Lodges will be able to earn \$10,000 in small CIP grants alone," says ENF Assistant Director Debbie Doles. "It's been a dream of ours to get the CIP to this point. Since inception, the program has grown by a factor of 45."

Lodges use CIP grants to combat food insecurity, support people experiencing homelessness, serve veterans and military members in need, promote youth community service, and meet other unique needs in their communities.

"The most successful CIP Lodges combine their small grants to address one need in their community," says Doles. "\$10,000 goes a long way toward meeting a need. Becoming an expert in a certain area of aid is a great step toward finding your Lodge's niche and receiving an Impact Grant."

This new milestone might be a small step in the continued growth of the CIP, but it's a giant leap for the service of mankind.

*For 2023-24, the Elks National Foundation allocated nearly \$16 million to fund the Community Investments Program. Lodges meet local needs through CIP grants that offer Elks opportunities to serve their community in ways that will raise the Lodge's profile, energize the membership, encourage former members to return to the fold, and gain the notice of people who want to be part of an organization that's doing great things. To learn more about the Community Investments Program, please visit [elks.org/CIP](https://elks.org/CIP).*

## MAKING AN IMPACT

Every year, dozens of Elks Lodges apply for the ENF's most competitive grant: the Impact Grant. This year, 220 Lodges submitted a project idea, 40 Lodges were invited to apply, and nine received a 2024 Impact Grant.

Worth up to \$10,000, the Impact Grant is awarded to Lodges that intimately understand a problem in their community, have a unique idea about how to solve it, and are armed with the volunteer power to make a difference.

"We're so happy to welcome nine Lodges to the Impact Grant family," says Meaghan Morris, Senior Programs Associate at the ENF. "The difference Elks make with CIP grants is inspiring, and we're so excited to see how these Lodges build stronger communities."

Scan the QR code to see Meaghan join ENF Director Jim O'Kelley and Assistant Director Debbie Doles on a special crossover episode of *Take a CIP* and the *Midday Minute*, where they announce the 2024 Impact Grant recipients.



SCAN ME



## ELKS SCHOLAR ADVISORY BOARD

The Elks Scholar Advisory Board is composed of Elks scholars, current and alumni, who advise the ENF on its scholar relation efforts. The Board is composed of 12 members, gaining a new Legacy Awards recipient and Most Valuable Student scholar every year and three new at-large representatives every two years. Meet the new members below and head to [enf.elks.org/SAB](https://enf.elks.org/SAB) to learn more!



### BRENNAN MUHICH

2023 Legacy Awards Scholarship Representative from Minnesota

"My older brother and I often joke that we were born into Elkdom, wearing 'Future Elk' shirts before we could walk," says Muhich. "In my daily life, I try to follow the cardinal principles of the Order."



### GLORIA GUERRIER

2023 Most Valuable Student Scholarship Representative from New York

"Serving on the SAB will help my aspirations," says Guerrier. "I am preparing for one of the major tasks of an engineer, which is working on a team and sharing ideas that function to foster positive change in the world we live in."



### SHANAY DESAI

At-Large Representative, 2021 MVS Scholar from Mississippi

"Our daily community service activities [on Elks Scholar Service Trips] were followed by sessions of self-reflection, where I realized service is not merely a task, but a transformational journey for the giver and the recipient," says Desai.



### MARISOL CRUZ VELASCO

At-Large Representative, 2022 MVS Scholar from California

"I will commit myself to lifelong learning, foster connections so I can increase my skill set, share my knowledge with others, and build meaningful relationships with individuals who share a passion for service," says Cruz Velasco.



### TANNER CHRISTENSEN

At-Large Representative, 2020 MVS Scholar from Utah

"For me, being an Elks scholar means being part of a community motivated to give back and help others in need," says Christensen. "I feel an unparalleled sense of belonging and community every time I engage with Elks scholars."





## A LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

For the Western sisters, Lowville, N.Y., Lodge 1605 was more than a place to go: It was the place to be.

“My family has been involved with the Elks for as long as I can remember,” says Elizabeth Western. “My mother was pregnant with me the year my father was Exalted Ruler of our Lodge.”

Both Elizabeth and Anna have fond memories of attending events like the annual Father-Daughter Banquet and participating in the Hoop Shoot and Soccer Shoot. They also made friends with the kids of other members—friends they keep in touch with today—and frequented dinners and trivia nights with their parents.

“I loved getting dolled up for the special evenings,” says Anna, “and we’d even go to the salon to get our hair done. The Elks was always one of my favorite places to be, growing up.”

After they graduated high school, the sisters set their sights on college: Elizabeth to Le Moyne College to study psychology, and Anna to State University of New York at Cobleskill to study plant science. Anna received a 2021 Most Valuable Student scholarship from the Elks National Foundation to aid her academic pursuits, and Elizabeth took lessons from the Soccer Shoot with her as the goalie of the Le Moyne women’s soccer team.

However, just months after Anna started college, their father, Brian, passed away unexpectedly.

“When my father died in 2021, the Elks did so much to help our family,” says Elizabeth. “So many Elks attended [the wake] and gave us support during that time.”

Because of their father’s passing, Anna and Elizabeth became eligible for the Emergency Educational Grant.

“The grant allowed me to continue my education without having to worry about the financial impact having a single-parent household income might have on my ability to continue school,” says Elizabeth. “My time growing up as the daughter of an Elks member has provided me with so many benefits in my life.”

Both recent college graduates, the Western sisters are looking to the future. Anna wants to be a floral designer or horticulturalist and hopes to travel to 100 countries in her lifetime. Elizabeth seeks to help those struggling with



Elizabeth (left) and Anna (right) Western received support from their #ElksFamily after their father passed away in 2021.

addiction by pursuing a master’s degree in social work and working in substance abuse counseling.

“This experience has shown me how much I want to continue building these connections and invest back into organizations like the Elks because of how much they have helped me,” says Elizabeth.

### EMERGENCY EDUCATIONAL GRANTS

Emergency Educational Grants provide undergraduate college financial assistance to children of deceased or totally disabled Elks in the form of renewable, one-year grants of up to \$5,000. EEGs aren’t meant to cover a student’s complete education, but they can help cover:



**ROOM &  
BOARD**




**TEXTBOOKS**



**TUITION &  
FEES**

For 2023-24, the Elks National Foundation allocated \$131,090 to fund the EEG program. If you know any Elks children who may be eligible to receive an EEG, encourage them to visit [enf.elks.org/EEG](https://enf.elks.org/EEG).

A photograph of a man, a woman, and a young girl hugging in a basketball arena. The man is on the left, the woman is in the middle, and the girl is on the right. They are all smiling and looking down at each other. The background shows a crowd of people in blue seats.

When a Hoop Shoot Finalist steps up to the free throw line, they stand alone. But afterward, their family is there with open arms and encouragement, no matter the outcome.



## BUZZER FOR THE BESONENS

### NEWS FROM THE COURT

**T**ension, excitement, silence—at the Hoop Shoot National Finals, anyone can leave the court a champion.

On Saturday, April 20, the top 72 scorers from across the country will try to etch their names in history as they step up to the free throw line at Wintrust Arena, home of the WNBA Chicago Sky.

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**E**very year, the Hoop Shoot National Finals guarantees a few things: 72 fierce competitors, an arena filled with silent fans, and an inspiring keynote speaker.

Over the past eight seasons, the National Finals have brought another guarantee: Michigan's Besonen family.

"It's been a staple in seven years of our lives," says Elise Besonen, the first Besonen sister to reach the National Finals in 2015. "That's over half of our life. We've been going on these trips annually and it's just been so much fun."

In every season but one from 2015 to 2023, the National Finals had at least one Besonen sister on the court. Given the unpredictable nature of sports, this stretch of dominance is nearly unheard of. But for sisters Elise, Emma and Bree, their finals appearances were just the latest chapters in the family's Hoop Shoot story.

Both Besonen parents, Brad and Jackie, competed in the Hoop Shoot when they were kids. Brad won a state championship, and Jackie made it to the district level. In case their trophy shelf wasn't already full, the other Besonen sibling, Christian, also took home a state championship.



“The Hoop Shoot has been very important for our family,” says Elise. “We go to our grandparents’ [house], and we can see our dad’s and uncle’s old Hoop Shoot trophies, and that’s pretty cool.”

More important than the trophies, however, is the grit the Besonens unleashed along the way.

“Grit is the word used in the Hoop Shoot,” says Brad. “I think it’s a fantastic word for it, and I think our kids have really learned how to gain grit. Everybody’s got a certain level of it instilled in them, but they’ve done a good job of practicing and committing to making sure they get their 100 [free throws per day].”

Because Bree, a two-time Frank Hise National Champion and 2022 Getty Powell Award winner, took her final shot as a Hoop Shoot competitor in 2023, this generation of Besonens dominance has come to a close, but it went out with a bang as she sought to become only the second person, and first girl, to win a third title.

In the first round of 10 shots, Bree sank eight. That’s not a dealbreaker, but she was going to need some help, and the 12-13 girls were not feeling charitable. Four of them posted perfect 10s in the first round.

The second shooter in the division, Bree’s shot at Hoop Shoot immortality was scuttled before she returned to the line. First shooter Morgan Michle of West Virginia, working off a perfect 10, drained all 15 of her second round shots to topple the reigning champ.

First was off the table when Bree stepped back up to the line, so she did what veteran Hoop Shooters do: She pivoted to a new goal, second or third, and another trophy for the family case.

Bree shook off the failure of her title defense, and with grace, poise and grit, sank all 15 shots to finish with a 23. When the dust settled, that was good enough for third. Veteran Hoop Shooters pivot when they must, but they keep moving forward.

That is something that will stick with the family for a long time.

“I would say for me, grit is important, but the way the Elks take care of families and kids is amazing,” says Jackie. “Like that first year, even getting to [the regional contest], they treated the kids like superstars. It’s just an awesome program.”

Maybe someday, the next generation of Besonens will step up to the Hoop Shoot line and continue the family legacy.

*The Elks have been unleashing gritty kids through the Hoop Shoot program for more than 50 years. For 2023-24, the Elks National Foundation allocated more than \$1.4 million to fund the program. For videos, news from the court, and more information about the Hoop Shoot, visit [elks.org/hoopshoot](https://elks.org/hoopshoot).*



If you blink, you’ll miss it. At the National Finals, official scorers keep track of the shots to ensure that scores are accurate. During the rest of the year, the ENF keeps you up-to-date on Hoop Shoot news through YouTube!

Though April may seem far away, our YouTube channel ([enf.elks.org/YouTube](https://enf.elks.org/YouTube)) has plenty of Hoop Shoot content to last through the winter. Stay current on the latest news about the contest by watching *Hoop Shooting the Breeze*, our YouTube show all about the Hoop Shoot! For inspiring, gritty stories about specific National Finalists and their families, check out our playlist of Griteos!

Do you want to be a part of Hoop Shoot history? Early bird registration opens January 15! Find everything you need to know at [enf.elks.org/hoopshoot](https://enf.elks.org/hoopshoot).



Designating your donation to your favorite ENF program puts your gift to work making an immediate difference in Elks communities.



## ALL PROGRAMS FUND GOES RIGHT TO WORK

### FEEL GOOD GIVING

Are you looking for a way to feel good about your giving? Look no further! The ENF's Feel Good Giving Gift Shop of symbolic gifts is a great way to support the mission of the ENF while seeing the kind of difference your gift makes in the lives of youth, veterans and Elks communities.

Pick the program you are passionate about, then decide on the kind of difference you want your gift to represent. Each gift counts toward your Lodge's per-member-giving credit and comes

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In *Star Wars*, a sarlacc is a massive, 100-meter-long creature that feeds on anyone unfortunate enough to fall into its mouth. A sarlacc's appetite is voracious, and its stomach is big enough to accommodate.

What does a sarlacc have to do with the Elks National Foundation?

On April 1, the ENF is making a change to its gift acceptance policy. All gifts with silent designations will go toward the All Programs Fund, allowing the donations to make an immediate impact on Elks and their communities.

Currently, when an undesignated gift is given to the ENF, policy dictates that it must go to the Endowment Fund. Thanks to years of generous, loyal support from our donors and prudent stewardship, the Endowment Fund has grown to be the powerful engine that propels our philanthropy. For the current fiscal year, the Endowment Fund generated more than \$37 million for spending.

However, because the endowment is self-sustaining, current donations to it have virtually no bearing on the performance of the fund.

"If you're donating to us to make an impact, clearly the best way to do it is by designating to one of our programs," said Director Jim O'Kelley on a recent episode of the *Midday Minute* YouTube show. "In terms of impact, a gift to the Endowment Fund is like giving a raisin to a sarlacc."

Last year, the Endowment Fund received \$4.5 million in donations, but only about 10 percent of that money was specifically designated to the



Endowment Fund. The rest was earmarked for the endowment by policy because the gift designations were silent.

With the policy change effective April 1, undesignated donations will have an immediate, tangible impact. Instead of being swallowed by the Endowment Fund where their impact would be negligible, if not nonexistent, undesignated gifts will be earmarked for the All Programs Fund, where they'll go to work immediately for our program recipients.

"With this change," O'Kelley said, "we can conservatively budget an additional \$2 million that will be available for spending on our programs."

That's money that will put food in the hands of veterans and other people in Elks communities who need it, instead of tossing another raisin to the sarlacc.

*To learn more about these exciting updates and the reasoning behind them, tune into episode 81 of the Midday Minute!*



**This change will tentatively put \$2 million more toward ENF programs.**

with an e-card to let someone know you donated in their honor.

A \$25 gift to the Hoop Shoot, for example, represents the cost of a set of trading cards for a National Finalist. Be a force for positive change, and feel good giving today!

Visit [enf.elks.org/](https://enf.elks.org/)  
**FeelGoodGiving** to peruse the shop.



**SUPPORT THE GREAT HEART OF ELKDOM!**

Visit [enf.elks.org/HBFall](https://enf.elks.org/HBFall), and your online donation will be put to work immediately in Elks communities!

## ASK THE ENF...

**Q** I heard that there is a new Gratitude Grant bonus. How can I help my Lodge earn it?  
—Giving Gratitude in Greensboro

**A** Hello Giving,  
The new \$500 Gratitude Grant bonus will be available starting April 2024, but Lodges can start working toward the bonus now. To qualify, Lodges must increase their fundraising by 10 percent over the previous year. Like the other Gratitude Grant bonuses, you can help your Lodge become eligible by making a gift to the Foundation and encouraging your fellow Elks to give, too! Whether you donate online, at the Lodge, by making a purchase through the ENF's Feel Good Giving shop, or with a monthly donation through the Fidelity Club, all gifts help increase your Lodge's per-member giving and your Lodge's chance of being eligible for the Gratitude Grant and its bonuses. Read more about the Gratitude Grant at [enf.elks.org/GratitudeGrants](https://enf.elks.org/GratitudeGrants). Check your Lodge's progress toward the four bonuses at [enf.elks.org/ggBonus](https://enf.elks.org/ggBonus).

Have a question for the ENF? Email us at [enf@elks.org](mailto:enf@elks.org).

# HONOR ROLL

We salute the following members of the 2023-24 Foundation Fellowship who contributed \$1,000 or more to the Foundation from April 1, 2023, through December 1, 2023. To learn more about the Foundation Fellowship and to view the benefits for each level, visit [enf.elks.org/fellowship](http://enf.elks.org/fellowship).

(+ Denotes deceased member; ^ Denotes ENF Trustee; > Denotes John F. Malley Society;  
\* Denotes Fidelity Club; # Denotes Loyalty Club; < Denotes Named Scholarship donor)

## CHARITY (\$10,000)

Karen Buchanan \*#  
Robert C. Coleman  
James P. Delaney  
Cheryl L. Garner-Vaira \*  
Brian Gillin  
Sharon E. Glasrud  
Tony Hafford #  
Gunther K. Schroth #  
Sharon L. Seibert  
Jimmy Tilley

## HOPE (\$5,00)

Bettyann Archambault \*#  
Mathew D. Brownfield \*#  
Kimberley J. Coronado >  
John M. Dolebo #  
Timothy M. Eaton \*#  
Aaron Frank >#  
Duane E. Hamacher  
Mark J. Henderson #  
Sharon S. Kelsay #  
Patricia Olson  
Chris M. Ord #  
Jerry V. Papenfuss  
Leonard W. Ritterpusch Jr. #  
Raymond F. Ross Sr. #<  
Daniel R. Sherry  
James D. Standen #<  
Margaret V. Walker #

## FAITH (\$1,000)

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Jeffery D. Allen  
Beverley Anderson  
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Danielle L. Arens

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Alan A. Baranyai #  
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Terry L. Barnaby  
Cherie Barnett  
Michael Barnum  
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Gregory Baxley  
Brian L. Baye \*  
Donald Baynes  
Thomas Beavers  
Brian Beissert  
James P. Benton Jr. \*  
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William J. Berger #  
Frank Bertagnolli Retired  
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Norman J. Biegaj #  
Christopher T. Black  
Terry L. Blackwell  
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Jim Blanchard \*#  
Michael S. Bohan  
Richard E. Borton  
Nancy Brennan >#<  
Derek Brewer  
Thomas W. Bright \*<  
Robert L. Brossia #  
Eleanor J. Brown  
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Clyde L. Clubine #  
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 Julie Molis  
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 Julie A. Nealon \*#  
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 Randa G. Newsome  
 Vaughn T. Nichols #  
 Marshall Nimmer  
 Brad B. Nolan \*  
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 Micheal E. Norway  
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