**Service That Inspires**

The 2023 Winter Elks Scholar Service Trip took place in Tampa, Florida, from January 3 to January 6, and for the first time since 2020, there was a full cohort of 20 scholars. Spearheaded by Elks Scholar Fellow and 2017 Most Valuable Student scholar Raleigh Cury, the service trip focused on disaster relief efforts post-Hurricane Ian, which hit Florida in September.

In preparation for the scholars’ arrival, Tampa Lodge No. 708 leaned on its community for clothing donations to take to Pine Island, which was hit hard by the hurricane. Under Exalted Ruler Rita Smith’s leadership, the Tampa community outdid itself, amassing dozens of bags for the scholars to sort and deliver to Pine Island.

“I thought we’d never get done with that collection,” said Smith. “But [the scholars] were so incredibly good and efficient, and they had it all done in about three hours.”

The next day, amidst the visible decimation of nature, property, and the Pine Island way of life, the scholars cleared debris from a local tree farm, the yard of a community member, and Greater Pine Island Lodge No. 2781. Despite the destruction of the Lodge, the Greater Pine Island Elks prioritized aiding their community, showing the scholars what it means to have hearts for service.

“I learned so much about the strength of Elks communities as well as disaster relief,” said Nishitha Karumuri, a 2019 Most Valuable Student scholar and current Scholar Advisory Board member.

When the scholars returned to Tampa, they served at Feeding Tampa Bay, a food warehouse, and Metropolitan Ministries, a shelter for individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness. They had dinner with the Tampa Elks and learned more about disaster relief from a disaster relief management specialist. Both staff and scholars expressed enthusiastically how special the trip was.

“One week is not a long time,” said Cury, “but our Elks scholars participated in and created something bigger than themselves.”

*The Elks National Foundation offers three Elks Scholar Service Trips annually. These trips provide scholars the opportunity to learn about societal issues, serve those in need in the name of the Elks, and connect with their Elks family from across the country. For more information about the trips, visit* ***enf.elks.org/ScholarServiceTrips***.