**Spreading Holiday Cheer with CIP Grants**

Around the holidays, it’s easy to imagine being in a town like Whoville: a place where every lamppost is dressed and the Whoville band marches in their Christmasy best, where holiday cheer and whimsy are a way of life. While this town from *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* may be fictional, one Elks Lodge is turning its own version of Whoville into a reality.

Using a Beacon Grant from the Community Investments Program worth $4,000, Westminster, Md., Lodge No. 2277 partners with a local nonprofit organization to host a Christmas giving event. The organization, Live Hope Laugh, is dedicated to making an impact on the lives of children and teenagers who live with chronic illnesses. Together, the two have hosted the event at the Westminster Lodge for 10 years.

“These families, in dealing with their children's illnesses, struggle to make ends meet on a daily basis,” says Grants Coordinator Christina Landsman. “During the holidays, it is more difficult to show and give their children a festive holiday that all children deserve.”

When community members enter the Lodge’s backyard at the start of the event, they immediately step into another world: a Christmas town with lights, wrapping paper, inflatables, s’mores, Santa Claus—and even the Grinch! They are also treated to a magic show, a DJ set, and plenty of delicious holiday food.

But, the magic of the Christmas town isn’t the only way the Lodge helps spread holiday cheer. While the children keep the Grinch at bay, Lodge members sneak away to the parking lot and load every car with gift baskets. Including food and presents from each family’s individualized wish list, like sheets, bedding, socks, clothes, and school supplies, these gift baskets are the perfect way to send families home with hearts that have grown three sizes.

“Many Elk members have gotten to know these families over the years and continue to support them and foster their friendships,” says Landsman. “This event has proven its success by increasing the number of families participating and the number of sponsors and volunteers helping year over year.”

Last year, more than 300 people from 100 families were served at the event. This year, the Lodge expects to help even more people with the help of approximately 50 Lodge members.

“This event shows the community that there are organizations and people who they can turn to in times of need,” says Landsman.

It may not be Whoville, but with its Beacon Grant, the Westminster Lodge is spreading holiday cheer and making meaningful differences in the lives of its neighbors. Not every Lodge can create their own Christmas town, but no matter the project or the time of year, Elks are always there for their community.

If your Lodge wants to make a meaningful difference in the lives of your neighbors, apply for CIP grants. Applications close January 21; don’t delay!

*For 2025-26, the Elks National Foundation allocated nearly $18 million to fund the Community Investments Program. For 20 years, Lodges have met 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, visit* ***elks.org/CIP***.