**Serving Those who Served**

In 1946, the Elks made the solemn pledge: “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 are welcomed home when they return from service; that they have access to essentials like food, clothing and shelter when experiencing hardship; and that they have information on accessing 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 which struggle with substance abuse and poor mental health. An essential part of their recovery is establishing connections with those who share their experience and 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.

“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 ensure they are using 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. The first step is making the connection; 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.”

*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***.