**The Impact of a Donation**

Leading up to the 2023 Elks National Convention in Minneapolis, the Elks National Foundation put out a call to action: Bring socks and children’s books.

Beginning in 2019, the Spotlight on Service supply drive has become a staple of the Convention, with 388 Lodges participating last year. When Lodges donate new socks and children’s books, which are given to veterans experiencing homelessness and programs that promote youth literacy, the opportunity to do good is only just beginning; participating Lodges are also entered into a raffle to win a bonus grant worth $2,000 through the Community Investments Program.

Ohio River Valley, Ohio, Lodge No. 231 was one of the winners of that raffle and took home a bonus grant. The Lodge used $8,000 in CIP grants to address food insecurity in local elementary and middle schools. The first step in their two-pronged plan was Blessings in a Backpack, a weekend food program that provided students with enough food to feed their families over the weekend. The Lodge prepared the backpacks with meals and other items, which are discreetly placed in students’ lockers to take home on Fridays.

“Since over 65 percent of the students are eligible for [the program], there is little or no stigma attached to the recipients,” says Grants Coordinator Mary Carolyn Nichelson.

The second phase of the plan was an after-school cooking program. Specifically designed to serve students from families living below the poverty line, the program taught more than 60 participants per week how to prepare simple meals that promote a well-balanced diet.

“After meeting with members of the faculty, our Lodge members were stunned by the students' obvious need for healthy food and improved eating habits,” says Nichelson. “Children need a nutritious diet to succeed in school.”

At the 2023 Elks National Convention, the Elks National Foundation put out a call to action, and the Elks responded. For the bonus grant winners, the call to action did not end at the Convention—it had only just begun.

If you are attending the 2024 Elks National Convention in Austin, don’t forget to bring new socks and new or gently used children’s books for the Spotlight on Service supply drive! The donation is small, but the potential impact is mighty—and your Lodge may be the lucky winner of a bonus CIP grant to further strengthen your community.

*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***.