

# Celebrating 75 years of serving veterans



**2020-21**  
Annual Report





April 1, 2020, was a time of uncertainty, to say the least. Veterans’ facilities were closed to visitors. Our usual veterans’ support events were not possible. But as quickly as things changed, our programs changed too, thanks to the dedication and ingenuity of our volunteers.

At a time when veterans were more isolated than ever, Elks were there.

Volunteers repurposed funds usually reserved for birthday parties and barbecues to buy iPads for State Veterans Home residents. They took funds from hastily cancelled events and quickly shifted to buying masks, hand sanitizer and protective equipment for veterans and caregivers at risk of Covid.

Our Voluntary Service Representatives served from a distance by delivering art supplies, playing Bingo over the hospital intercom, and even hosting concerts where musicians played outside facilities so veterans could listen from their windows.

When VA food pantries shut down and veterans’ dinners were cancelled, Elks packed and delivered food baskets directly to local veterans, some of whom had suddenly found themselves without jobs.

We soon learned that though our service looked different, in some ways it was more essential than ever.

This proved true for Dunedin-Clearwater, Fla., Lodge No. 1525, which used a Freedom Grant to provide household supplies for veterans transitioning into housing, a bigger need than ever when staying in a crowded shelter posed serious health risks.



The Lodge reports that “This was one of the most important grants we have had. This enabled us to show these vets that they had the support of our Elks community even in the toughest of times. Our project partners were extremely grateful for the continued support to help these vets embark on their next phase away from homelessness and sustain them in a time of crisis.”

That sentiment prevailed and our volunteers persevered. In a year when home was the safest place to be, our Welcome Home program allowed thousands of veterans to stay or become housed, giving them not only shelter but supplies, furniture and food.

And when facilities began to reopen, our volunteers were eager to return to work. In fact, Voluntary Service Representative Brian Kinney was the first volunteer to return to normal hours at the Lexington, Kentucky VA Medical Center. Even in a pandemic, Elks will never forget our veterans.

Sincerely,

John D. Amen, Chair

Ronald L. Hicks, Vice-Chair

Robert L. Duitsman, Secretary/Treasurer

David Carr, Past Chair

James L. Nicholson, Past Chair



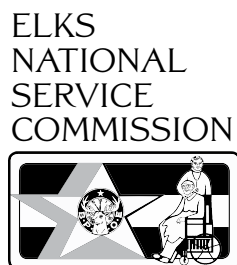


Though the Elks have always supported veterans, it wasn't until 1946 that the Elks National Veterans Service Commission officially came into existence, on the heels of the War Commission ending and inspired by a passion for continuing to serve those who risked their lives for this country.

We are thrilled to be celebrating 75 years of service! For the last 75 years, thousands of Elks volunteers have generously given of their time, energy and resources to serve veterans and military members every day.

From supporting WWI veterans with a 700-bed Reconstruction hospital to mailing care packages to American troops in Vietnam to fighting veteran homelessness today, America's veterans can always count on the Elks.

#### Our logos through the years:



★ *Elks Lodges across the country did all they could to support the military during WWII. In this September 1943 photo, hundreds of soldiers from various camps are being entertained at a Lodge in Oregon.*



★ *In this March 1946 photo, President Harry S. Truman presents the Congressional Medal of Honor to fellow Elk member Lt. Frank X. Burke. Lt. Burke was nicknamed "The One-Man Army" because of his endeavors during the war.*



★ *Children of Elks members gather at the Elks National Veterans Service Commission booth to learn about the Elks support of veterans at an Elks Convention during the Korean-War era.*



★ *During WWII, Elks opened 155 fraternal centers near training camps and stations for recreation and entertainment of military personnel. These GIs are perfecting their square dancing skills at the Columbia, S.C., Elks Lodge in 1954.*





- ★ In 1960 and 1963, the Elks National Veterans Service Commission launched nationwide campaigns to collect playing cards for hospitalized veterans and veterans with disabilities, a precursor to today's Playing Cards for Veterans program.



- ★ Massachusetts Elks made sure that veterans at the Fort Deven Army Hospital who weren't able to visit with their families had a good holiday. Elks donated gifts and celebrated with patients in this Christmas 1965 photo.



- ★ Since 2000, Elks have collected 317,044 hides, distributed 59,019 pairs of wheelchair gloves to veterans and donated a total of 923,280 square feet of leather to Help Heal Veterans.



- ★ We've awarded 2,277 Freedom Grants to Lodges across the country to serve veterans and military members in need, totaling \$4,892,500. Point Pleasant, N.J., Lodge No. 1698 used its 2014 Freedom Grant to host a holiday breakfast for the men and women stationed at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst.



- ★ The Elks Voluntary Service Program began in 1955 and has grown every year since. In this March 1971 photo, Illinois Elks visit wounded Vietnam veterans at a local VA hospital.



- ★ In 1986, the Commission began working with Re-Creation USA to engage with, support and entertain veterans in facilities across the country. Thirty-five years later, the Elks remain a strong supporter of Re-Creation USA's mission.



- ★ Since 2015, Elks have provided 5,871 Welcome Home Kits to veterans exiting homelessness. And, we've awarded more than \$1.3 million in Focus Grant funding to Lodges in high-need communities.



- ★ The Elks Emergency Assistance Fund has helped 2,539 veterans exit or prevent homelessness. Afghanistan veteran Nicole received assistance to help her and her children stay housed after her struggles with PTSD caused her to fall behind on bills.



★ ★ Welcome Home ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

The Welcome Home Program addresses the critical need of housing for veterans, because we believe every veteran deserves a place to call home. 2020-21 marked the sixth year of our focus on homelessness prevention and housing access.

2020-21 was an especially challenging year for veterans, with many facing financial struggles that threatened their housing. In the midst of the pandemic, the Elks Emergency Assistance Fund helped 409 veterans stay or become housed. We paid for expenses like rent, security deposits and utilities for veterans in the 8 cities with the highest numbers of homeless veterans. Each veteran received an average of \$1,580, showing that even a seemingly small amount can make a world of difference for veterans in need.

We awarded 35 Focus Grants to fund large-scale, direct-service projects that address veteran homelessness. Volunteers collectively dedicated over 5,000 hours and served 4,417 veterans. Elks used the funds to run a variety of creative projects, including stocking food pantries and delivering food baskets, organizing resource fairs, and providing technology to help veterans communicate with doctors and loved ones while social distancing.

Many veterans living in shelters or on the streets move into their new homes with no belongings. The Welcome Home Kit program helps veterans feel at home by providing essential supplies. Elks provided household items for 1,411 veterans exiting homelessness. In both urban and rural areas, volunteers from 92 Lodges in 32 states participated in the program.



Elks from Oakland Park, Fla., Lodge No 2407 wrangle pillows into a van. The Lodge used a Focus Grant to provide food and household supplies for newly housed veterans.

At the height of the pandemic, volunteers from Culver City, Calif., Lodge No. 1917 provided meals for veterans living at a temporary outdoor shelter.



★ ★ Voluntary Service ★ ★ ★ ★

Across the country, Elks serve veterans directly as Voluntary Service Representatives and Deputy Representatives in 359 facilities.

This year has been tough for everyone, with pandemic distancing and many people experiencing losses. But our volunteers are resourceful and have adapted to serving veterans remotely or continuing familiar projects in new ways.

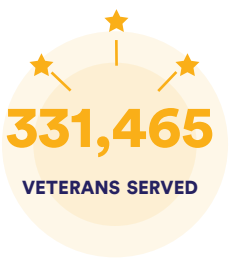
After a hailstorm destroyed bird feeders at the Fort Meade VA Medical Center, Voluntary Service Representative Neil Harris replaced them so that veterans could continue their daily birdwatching. Sometimes little things can make a big difference.

Nancy Wolke, Representative at the Seattle VA Medical Center in Washington, couldn't visit the hospital as usual but came through with an emergency supply of clothing. Even during a pandemic, struggling veterans needed clean clothes to wear home from the hospital.

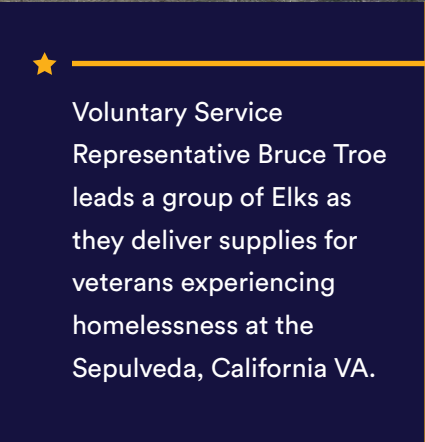
Our Representatives have been patient when unable to volunteer and are ready to hit the ground running when they get the green light to return to visiting veterans in person. Elks will never forget the veterans they serve, no matter how far the distance.

*"The VA staff is extremely appreciative of this donation. We have been in contact and will continue to be involved even during these trying times."*

*-Jack Stein, Voluntary Service Representative in Northport, NY  
(December 2020 report)*



Voluntary Service Representative Cheryl Blake and veterans build a garden at the Pennyroyal Veterans Center in Hopkinsville, Kentucky.



Voluntary Service Representative Bruce Troe leads a group of Elks as they deliver supplies for veterans experiencing homelessness at the Sepulveda, California VA.



Voluntary Service Representative RoseMarie Davidson partners with VA Recreation Therapists to plan kayaking and boating trips for residents of the State Veterans Home in Marion, Illinois, at the Lodge's lakefront property.



★ ★ Freedom Grants ★ ★ ★ ★

In 2020-21, we increased the amount of each Freedom Grant to \$2,500 and awarded these grants to 327 Lodges to hold Elks-led projects that serve veterans and/or military members in need and their families.

While pandemic restrictions limited the hands-on involvement that’s usually part of Freedom Grant projects, Lodges continued to use the grant to make connections locally through supply delivery, activity sponsorships, and projects adapted with social distancing.

Elks embraced the grant’s flexibility to meet the needs of veterans in their communities during a year when many experienced increased hardship and uncertainty. As conditions change, Elks are already excited about planning projects that engage veterans face to face as soon as possible.

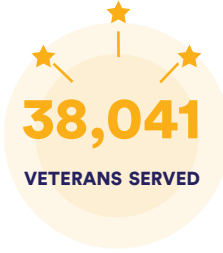
*“This year somehow made it special for our Elks, family, friends, and other outside groups that came and wanted to give of their time and help with this wonderful project. We had an incredible response... we were all surprised with so many Elks wanting to help.”*

- Joe Woodruff, Project Manager for Santa Barbara, Calif., Lodge No. 613’s Freedom Grant



★  
Santa Barbara, Calif., Lodge No. 613 used a Freedom Grant to host a drive through Stand Down, distributing supplies to veterans in need.

★  
Elks from Fort Worth, Texas, Lodge No. 124 assemble supply bags for veterans at the Patriot House shelter.



## ★ ★ Leather Program & HHV Award ★ ★ ★ ★

Every year, hard-working Elks collect and donate thousands of hides to the Elks Veterans Leather Program. Leather is used to make wheelchair gloves and craft kits, and some leather is sent directly to VA Recreation Therapists for local use..

With many adaptive sports events cancelled, the demand for wheelchair gloves was down. At the same time, there was a huge increase in demand for craft kits! With many veterans confined to their homes, craft kits made from Elks leather were more popular than ever.

Thanks to all our volunteers and especially these top 3 states, we had plenty of leather to donate to our partner Help Heal Veterans to make those kits.



5,117

MISSOURI



4,218

ARKANSAS



3,966

IOWA

## The Elks are proud to be named Help Heal Veterans' Partner of the Year.

For the past 20 years, Elks have been working closely with Help Heal Veterans, which helps veterans recover and thrive by providing free therapeutic arts and crafts kits to hospitalized and homebound veterans.

In that time, Elks have donated a total of 923,280 square ft of leather to the organization, which was used to create 622,216 craft kits for recovering veterans. This support is worth more than \$15 million.

Help Heal Veterans CEO Joe McClain presented the Elks with this award at the 2021 National Convention. Leather Program Chair Dennis McAleese and Vice-Chair Chuck Mudge accepted the award on the Elks' behalf.

16,277

HIDES DONATED

649

GLOVES DISTRIBUTED

8,810

CRAFT KITS DISTRIBUTED



★ ★ Partners in Service ★ ★ ★ ★

We partnered with the following organizations to be there for veterans in an unexpected time.

The National Creative Arts Festival went virtual this year, allowing veterans from across the country to participate and share their talents.

As members of the VA Voluntary Service National Advisory Committee, we support the James H. Parke Memorial Scholarship Fund, which provides scholarships to outstanding high school students who volunteer at VA facilities.



Bugles Across America rallies thousands of volunteers in all 50 states to play live Taps at veterans' funerals and memorial services each year.

We funded the Playing Cards for Veterans program, which provided thousands of free playing cards to veterans in facilities across the country.

We partnered with Help Heal Veterans to host virtual crafting events. Veteran participants received craft kits in the mail and attended online instructional events.



In Memory of the Volunteers We Lost

2020-2021

FRANCISO ALECIA

Watervliet, N.Y., Lodge No. 1500  
Deputy Representative, Albany VA Medical Center

GARY B. DRUMHELLER

Sun City, Ariz., Lodge No. 2559  
State Veterans Chair  
Representative, Arizona Veterans Home

DONALD R. ALLEN

Pueblo, Colo., Lodge No. 90  
Representative, Walsenburg Veterans Home

RICHARD E. LONG

Topeka, Kan., Lodge No. 204  
Deputy Representative, Topeka VA Medical Center

JAMES P. ALLEN

Ft. Collins, Colo., Lodge No. 804  
Representative, Ft. Collins CBOC

WILLIAM PIERCE

Deer Trail, Colo., Lodge No. 2307  
Deputy Representative, Aurora CBOC & State Home

THOMAS BAMBINO

Sunnyvale, Calif., Lodge No. 2128  
Deputy Representative, Palo Alto VA Medical Center

ROBERT C. SAMANIEGO

Sacramento, Calif., Lodge No. 2577  
Deputy Representative, Mather VA Medical Center

ROBERT O. BARTLETT

Ely, Nev., Elks Lodge No. 1469  
Deputy Representative, Reno VA Medical Center

WILLIAM SMOULDER

Allegheny, Pa., Lodge No. 339  
Representative, SW Veterans Center

WAYNE CHRISTOPHER

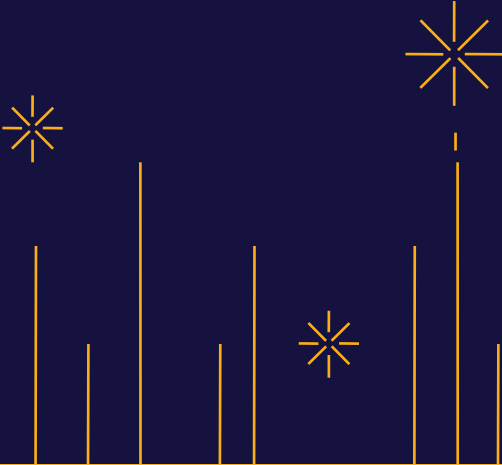
Clear Lake (Kemah), Texas, Lodge No. 2322  
State Veterans Chair

EDMUND R. TYLEND

Plaquemine, La., Lodge No. 1398  
Representative, Louisiana Veterans Home

# Volunteers of the Year

★ <b>ALASKA</b> John Todd Schlegel Stephani Hillen	★ <b>KENTUCKY</b> Martin Harbolt Brain Kinney	★ <b>NEW YORK</b> Richard Donn Johnna Joly	★ <b>TEXAS</b> Wayne Christopher (Posthumously)
★ <b>ARKANSAS</b> Jeremy Frakes Emily Swink	★ <b>LOUISIANA</b> William D. Boudreaux Debbie Boudreaux	★ <b>NORTH CAROLINA</b> Harry L. Agner Robin L. Miller	★ <b>VERMONT</b> Roland Bigelow Susan Tallman
★ <b>CALIFORNIA-HAWAII</b> Jere Lee Romano Maria Veronica Aslan	★ <b>MAINE</b> Bruce Sargent E. Jean Oliver	★ <b>OHIO</b> Edward J. Eberly	★ <b>VIRGINIA</b> Kathryne Cassedy Bonnie Shomaker
★ <b>COLORADO</b> Daniel Moss Judy Atencio	★ <b>MINNESOTA</b> Wayne W. Bailey, Jr. Edythe L. Larimer (Posthumously)	★ <b>OKLAHOMA</b> Bobbie D. Hamrick Vicki Inman	★ <b>WASHINGTON</b> Otis Warren
★ <b>CONNECTICUT</b> John Grinvalsky Kathleen Kelsey	★ <b>NEVADA</b> Gregory A. Weeks	★ <b>OREGON</b> Leonard Degroot Emma Pletz	★ <b>WEST VIRGINIA</b> Flavious O. Haynes Donna Haynes
★ <b>FLORIDA</b> John Nugent Robin Rutzke	★ <b>NEW HAMPSHIRE</b> Barney C. Barbera Brenna Cavanaugh	★ <b>SOUTH CAROLINA</b> Deanna Donaldson	
★ <b>IDAHO</b> Michael Mead Deborah Nadrchal	★ <b>NEW JERSEY</b> Josephine Gagliano Gina Mellon	★ <b>TENNESSEE</b> David Joseph Girten	





## On the ENVSC's history of service:

The Elks National Veterans Service Commission was born 75 years ago. It's been a proud era of service. It started with the WWI field hospital in France, and the first real veterans' hospital in the New England area. During WWII, we had the Elks War Commission, which turned the Lodges into victory centers where any veteran, any soldier in uniform, was welcomed in the Lodge. In both of those campaigns, we opened our Lodges after wars were over to help retrain veterans, bring them in and teach them new skills.

## On his inspiration for serving veterans:

Service to veterans is, I believe, our most valuable program, both for our country and for veterans who deserve the best. My father served in the European theater in four different campaigns during WWII as a combat medic and came back a very different person.

## On his role in starting the Welcome Home, the newest ENVSC program:

When I was a Grand Exalted Ruler on the national tour in 2015 I had the privilege and pleasure of meeting with the Secretary of the Veterans Administration, Robert MacDonald. He said he wanted us to join with the VA on eradicating homelessness in America. And that was the trigger in 2015 to the agreement between the Elks and the Veterans Administration that continues to this day where we work to keep veterans out of homelessness.

It's such a worthy, worthy program. We will continue to work on homeless veterans' projects until every single veteran in America is housed.

## On the next 75 years and more:

The ENVSC helps facilitate the Elks motto that as long as there are veterans, the Elks will be of service to them. And we will continue that as long as there is Elkdom, which in my mind is going to be forever!

## ELKs Total Impact

Elks Lodges used an estimated **\$1,717,750** in Community Investments Program Grants to serve veterans and military members in need. The Elks National Foundation awarded a total of **\$425,012.30** to Elks State Associations to fund veterans programs.

States, Lodges and Elks from all over the country contributed to local projects. Altogether, **139,713** Elks and friends volunteered **489,805** hours to serve veterans and/or military members and their families. The value of this service, including time, in-kind and fiscal donations equals **\$35,656,077**.

The Colorado Elks Association partners with the Colorado National Guard to provide ongoing support for National Guard members and their families. That support was especially appreciated this year, as Guard members were deployed to help with the state's Covid response. Elks provide anything from food baskets and school supplies to family events and end-of-mission barbecues for the more than 3,400 Guard members.



Boca Raton, Fla., Lodge No. 2166 takes full advantage of its coastal amenities and uses its Beacon Grant to assist veterans with PTSD. In addition to hosting meals and events for veterans, the bulk of the grant supports dolphin therapy. Grant Coordinator Donna Powers says, "Many of these veterans are suffering from PTSD; some have physical disabilities from action; and others have mental wounds making it difficult for them to cope at times. This program is designed to help them alleviate stress and anxiety through dolphin therapy."



# National Veterans Service Volunteer of the Year



One woman who handled the roller coaster of last year with grace and determination is Emma Pletz of Milwaukie-Portland, Ore., Lodge No. 142. From serving National Guard families to helping new veterans' shelters open, Emma Pletz found a way to keep serving in a pandemic.

That's why she is the 2021 National Veterans Service Volunteer of the Year!

Pletz wears many hats. As the Secretary for the Oregon State Elks Association, she makes sure the Voluntary Service Representatives receive the ENVSC funds they need every month to serve veterans in facilities across the state.

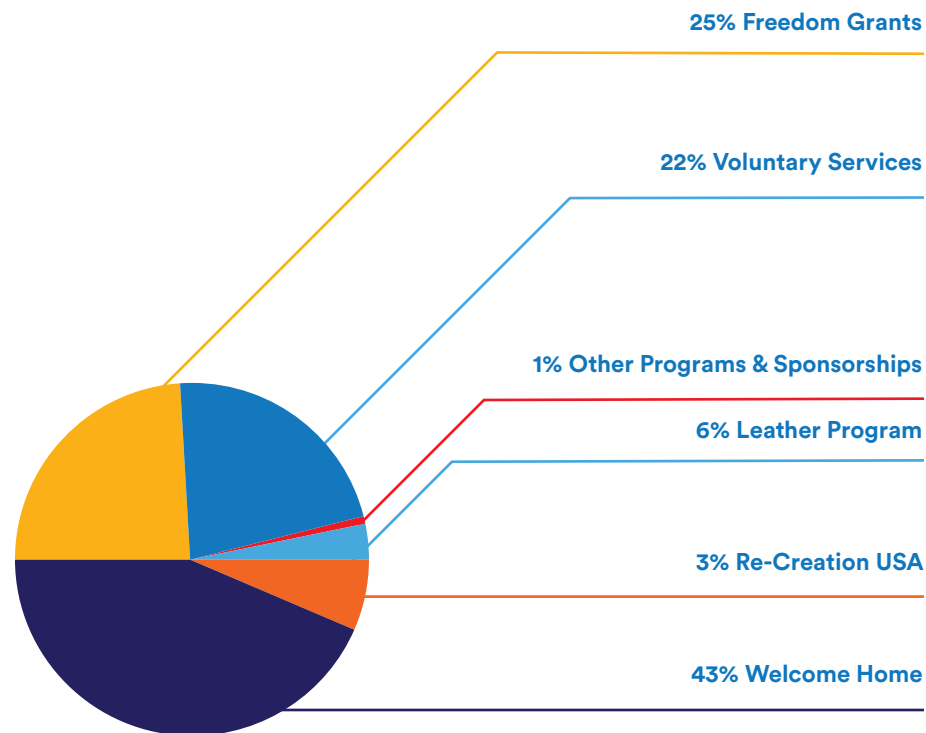
As Grants Coordinator for her Lodge, she secures the Freedom Grant to serve local National Guard families. The Lodge goes above and beyond with this project, working closely with battalion leadership to identify families in need and tailor the food boxes to meet the needs of those families. This year, the food baskets were as essential as ever, with many National Guard members coming back from deployment, unsure if their usual jobs were still there.

She and her Lodge have also provided 57 Welcome Home Kits for newly housed veterans since February of 2020. It was through this program that the Lodge learned about a new veterans housing unit opening in Portland that needed community support. Using Spotlight Grant funds, state funds, the Welcome Home Kit program, and a truckload of donated supplies, the Lodge was able to completely furnish all 28 units at the newly opened housing facility. Each veteran received a full kit of home supplies and a new bed.

"The veterans were SO EXCITED. We could hardly get the items stacked in the commons room before they wanted to start snooping. A few helped us sort and deliver to each room of the facility. We brought flags, balloons, and cupcakes to make it a celebration. The veterans enjoyed not only the new additions to their apartments but visiting with the Elk members."

When we asked her how she pulled it off, Pletz said, "Honestly, I'm exhausted."

## Financial Information



### Revenue and Support

**\$3,971,940**

appropriation from The Elks National Foundation, Inc.

**\$166,022**

other contributions

**\$4,137,962**

total revenue and support

Financial highlights for 2020-21 were summarized from the Financial Statements of the Elks National Veterans Service Commission, with the Independent Auditor's Report prepared by FK Advisors. The audit covered the period beginning April 1, 2020 and ending March 31, 2021. Complete financial statements, including all notes, may be obtained by contacting the Elks National Veterans Service Commission.



**Join us in service to  
our nation's veterans!  
Visit [elks.org](http://elks.org) to find an  
Elks Lodge near you.**

**[www.elks.org/vets](http://www.elks.org/vets)**

**Visit our Social Media  
to stay up to date on all  
our work.**



**@ELKSVETS**



**ELKS NATIONAL VETERANS  
SERVICE COMMISSION**



**@ELKSVETSSERVICE**

**Contact us anytime!**

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