

The Elks and Patriotism

Since the earliest days of the Order, patriotism has been among the many hallmarks that make the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks stand out from other fraternal organizations. With a membership comprised entirely of U.S. citizens, the BPO Elks is committed to promoting the principles of individual freedom, opportunity, and dignity.

The Stars and Stripes

Elks have always been moved by the flag of the United States of America, which is why, in 1907, Elks members adopted a resolution designating June 14 as Flag Day. In 1911 the Grand Lodge mandated that all local Lodges observe Flag Day with appropriate ceremonies, making the Elks the first national fraternal organization to require the observance of Flag Day. Finally, on August 3, 1949, President Harry S. Truman, himself a member of the Order, permanently designated June 14 as Flag Day by signing an act of Congress.

But observing Flag Day isn't the only way that the Order demonstrates its deep reverence for the banner that symbolically embodies the values of the nation. Many Lodges give or sell flags to worthy groups and provide training in proper flag etiquette. Some Lodges even provide flags for newly sworn citizens, while other Lodges give flags to their local schools for display in the classroom and provide educational materials to help grade school students learn the Pledge of Allegiance. Each year, Elks across the country sponsor essay contests that encourage elementary and high school students to explore why the flag is important in their lives.

Lady Liberty

At their 1983 national convention, the Order of Elks passed a resolution endorsing the Liberty Centennial Campaign's work to restore the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island and pledging its full support to the campaign. For its part, the Order vowed to raise one million dollars in three years. Elks from across the country enthusiastically responded to the Order's pledge, and by 1986, the Order had exceeded its original goal, contributing more than \$1.38 million to restore this treasured symbol of the nation's promise of freedom and opportunity.

Civic Pride

In nearly 2,200 communities, local Elks Lodges work valiantly to promote civic pride. Local Lodges regularly hold functions to recognize and celebrate the achievements of local emergency services personnel, teachers, leading citizens, educators, students, and government officials. Elks also demonstrate the pride that they feel toward their communities by assisting the efforts of local charitable organizations through volunteer work and financial contributions.

In Defense of the Nation

In times of war and international conflict, the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks has made considerable contributions to the nation's armed forces. The Order considers its work done to aid in defense of the nation as one of its proudest and most lasting achievements.

World War I

The Elks patriotism and generosity helped the nation to victory in World War I. In 1917, the Grand Lodge allocated \$2 million to finance efforts to assist U.S. soldiers. The Order organized and equipped the first two

base hospitals in France, and to accommodate the maimed and wounded, the Elks built a 700-bed Reconstruction Hospital and gave it to the War Department in 1918. This was the first of what was to become the VA medical centers. That same year, the Order built a 72-room Community House to take care of the families visiting the 40,000 soldiers stationed at Camp Sherman, Ohio.

During the war, the Salvation Army was severely handicapped in its great efforts for the servicemen by lack of funds. To make sure that this work continued, the Elks undertook campaigns to raise funds for the Salvation Army, and on many occasions assumed the entire cost of these undertakings. In addition, the Order at Christmastime in 1918 gave the Salvation Army \$60,000 to continue its programs.

Following the war's end, the Elks made 40,000 rehabilitation, vocational, and educational loans to disabled veterans who were ineligible for government help or awaiting approval of their applications. This service was so effective that the government followed the Order's example and established a revolving fund that was the precursor to the GI Bill.

More than 70,000 Elks served in the armed forces during World War I. More than 1,000 made the supreme sacrifice.

World War II

Throughout World War II, the Elks fully contributed to the war effort by providing for members of the armed forces both at home and abroad. By the time hostilities ceased, the Grand Lodge had spent more than \$1.5 million, while local Lodges spent hundreds of thousands of dollars more.

Elks Lodges spearheaded local recruitment efforts, directly helping to enlist more than 142,000 men into the armed forces as well as thousands of construction specialists who dramatically aided the war effort. Additionally, more than 400 Lodges conducted refresher courses that qualified thousands of young men for training as army flying cadets.

During World War II, the Order also realized the need to boost the morale of servicemen stationed far from home. Across the country, the Elks sponsored 155 Elks fraternal centers, where GIs were invited to relax, socialize, and enjoy the hospitality of the Elks. More than one million servicemen visited the center in New York City. For those serving overseas, the Elks prepared and sent care packages containing candy, personal grooming supplies, and other comforting items.

In 1999, the members of the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks gladly approved a resolution pledging an amount equal to one dollar per member to the National World War II Memorial, to be collected by voluntary donations from the Order's membership. The memorial, to be built on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., will preserve the memory of the more than 16 million people who served in WW II, the more than 400,000 who died, and the millions more who made lesser but nonetheless important sacrifices to support those in combat overseas.

Korea and Vietnam

When war broke out in Korea in 1950, the Elks responded by sending the gift packs as they had done in World War II. In 1951 during the Korean War, the Secretary of Defense appealed to the Order for help in procuring blood for the wounded. Within a few months, the Elks Lodges obtained more than half a million pints.

During the Vietnam War, the Elks again answered the call by beginning the Letters from Home campaign. Elks members from across the nation flooded these fine young men and women with letters expressing gratitude for the sacrifices they were making on behalf of the nation. In addition to the letters, the Order provided care packages to soldiers.

Operation Desert Storm

As in previous conflicts, the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks was ready to aid the men and women of the U.S. armed forces. Once again, the Elks mounted a letter-writing campaign to thank these patriots for their dedicated service, and gift packs for soldiers were provided as had been done in the past.

At the close of the Gulf War, many Elks Lodges made arrangements to host ceremonies honoring the brave soldiers returning from the conflict in the Middle East, making the Order one of the first organizations to formally welcome these veterans home.

Through these programs and many others, the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks has truly established itself as a leading force in promoting the values that help shape and strengthen the United States.

