

Remembering Our Nation's Veterans

Since 1917, the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks has demonstrated its compassion for the veterans of our armed forces through a number of programs and activities. The Elks realize that in every state, city, town, and village in our nation there is a hospital, nursing home, or VA medical center that houses a living veteran deserving utmost respect. And that is why the Order made a pledge in 1946 that "So long as there are veterans in our hospitals, the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks will never forget them."

While visiting VA medical centers, many Elks choose to entertain veterans by hosting coffee and ward socials, magic shows, musical concerts, games, bingo, or an afternoon or evening of movies. Often, Elks members demonstrate their compassion and gratitude for veterans in the simplest of ways--reading to a blind veteran who sacrificed his sight in defense of the nation or by listening to the stories that a veteran has to tell. While visiting VA medical centers, the Order not only entertains veterans but frequently provides much-needed supplies and equipment to the hospitals and a wide range of smaller amenities to the veterans. Some items that are perennial favorites for the Elks to give these brave men and women are greeting cards for holidays, birthdays, and all other occasions; envelopes, stationery, and first-class postage; lap robes, slippers, and toiletry items; books, recent issues of pictorial magazines, and crossword puzzles; occupational and manual-art supplies, including hides from the Elks Veterans Leather Program; board games; jigsaw puzzles; fishing and golf supplies; small appliances like radios, hot-air popcorn poppers, and televisions; and homemade cookies and pastries.

Local Lodges that aren't close to a VA medical center make sure that they remember veterans residing in nursing homes throughout their community. These veterans, like the ones residing in VA facilities, are often "adopted" by the Elks and invited on fishing trips, sightseeing tours, golf outings, ball games, or to the Lodge for lunch or dinner. Veterans often are honored guests at a lodge's holiday and special events.

The Order's history of caring for veterans is something for which every Elk is proud, and that pride shows permanently in the Elks Veterans Memorial, an awe-inspiring monument on Chicago's lakefront. Dedicated in 1926 to the memory of those who had fought in World War I, the memorial was rededicated in honor of the men who served in World War II. Rededications followed in 1976 for the patriots of the Korean War and Vietnam, and in 1994 for the men and women who have served in all of our nation's conflicts since.