

GER Ron Hicks' Visit to Utah Featured in Local TV Broadcast



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ST. GEORGE — Ron Hicks prefers to be called the national president of the Elks Lodge, but whether he is called president or grand exalted ruler — his formal title — his mission remains the same: to promote the good work and service for which the Elks Lodge is known. Hicks has been visiting the St. George area since Wednesday.

“I’m in the middle of traveling the country, visiting as many of the Elks Lodges in all the states,” Hicks said. “Having a great time, (it’s a) wonderful journey sharing all the stories of elkdom with our 800,000 members across the country.”

The Elks, also known as the “Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks,” was founded Feb. 16, 1868, initially as a fellowship club, but soon



Composite image: Ron Hicks, national president of the Elks Lodge and the official symbol of Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks. | Courtesy Virginia Elks Association and Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, St. George News

transitioning to an organization known for its philanthropy and charity work, according to the group's history webpage. These days, the Elks provide millions of dollars in funding for a wide array of charities, funding everything from veteran's projects to college scholarships to community grants.

The Elks Lodge, while known as being a group that offers many benefits to its members, is better known for its charity work.

Hicks said:

"I guess we're better known for the work we do in the communities, the work we do with our veterans, our youth, drug awareness programs. Just so many programs nationally and then each individual lodge tries to meet the needs of the community it serves."

As he has traveled the nation in his role as national president, Hicks said he initially expected to be the one to encourage and motivate those he met, but has found instead the roles reversed.

"I was looking forward to inspiring others," he said, "I find that I'm the one being inspired with all the great work we do."

The St. George Elks Lodge, known as the Dixie Elks Lodge, has been very impressive, Hicks said.

"Here in St. George, your Dixie Lodge, they're a tremendous asset to this community."

Dixie Elks Lodge Exalted Ruler Dan O'Mara said the visit by Hicks means a lot to the local chapter and its members.

"It's of great importance to show his support of our local lodge and to be a part of our small community," O'Mara said.

The members of the Dixie Elks Lodge have been very impressed with Hicks, O'Mara said.

"A nice, down-to-earth, regular guy," he said. "Even to hold a position of his magnitude, (he is) very well spoken and listens to everyone's concerns."

Much of his time is spent touring the country, Hicks said. In fact, he is home in Virginia on average for only Monday and Tuesday each week. The rest of his time is spent on the road, and since a national president visits all 50 states during his one-year term, that means he is in a different state nearly



Antler chandelier and Elk head at the Dixie Elks Lodge in St. George, Mar. 3, 2016 | Photo by Sheldon Demke, St. George News

every week. Despite the grueling nature of his job, the travel has been an opportunity for he and his wife to fulfill some life goals.

“We are knocking off things from our bucket list ... my wife Nancy travels with me, and we are just clicking things off our bucket list on every visit. It’s really a great tour of America,” Hicks said.

The St. George area has impressed him, he said.

How do you get used to the vistas? How do you get used to what’s all around you? It’s amazing.

“I loved the visit to Zion, we went up to Tuacahn ... we’ve been to some of the arts and crafts places around the area. How do you get used to the vistas? How do you get used to what’s all around you? It’s amazing.”

In his role as national president, Hicks said one of his favorite aspects is seeing the wide variety of charitable work the many Elks Lodges engage in throughout the United States.

“Every lodge does it differently,” he said. “They meet the needs of that community, they find out what is needed in their area ... I like to say we span America, we bridge the gaps in the community we serve.”

The Elks Lodge organization has a great story to tell, and has much to offer, he said. Often the organization is perhaps too quiet about its work, something he would like to see change.

“We need to get out and blow our horns a little more, I think, and let people know exactly who we are and what we do,” he said.

Email: dgilman@stgnews.com

Twitter: [@STGnews](https://twitter.com/STGnews)

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The Dixie Elks Lodge in St. George, Utah, Mar. 3, 2016. | Photo by Sheldon Demke, St. George News