

GER Ron and First Lady Nancy Hicks' Visit to Illinois



PGER and State Sponsor Lou Sulsberger and his wife Beth with Nancy and Ron



State President Dennis Gerleman and his wife Jeanette with Nancy and Ron



Ron with Grand Lodge Secretary Bryan Klatt and his wife Sue



Ron and Tina Haran, Illinois Convention Director and Grand Lodge Convention Coordinator

While we had worried about the possibility of bad weather during our visit to Illinois, as we left DC Reagan National Airport on a sunny Thursday, January 21, the Fredericksburg area was bracing for blizzard conditions, ice, and two feet of snow while we were gone. Our trip through Chicago to Springfield, Illinois, was uneventful, and we were met at the Springfield Airport by PGER and State Sponsor Lou Sulsberger and his wife Beth, State President Dennis Gerleman and his wife Jeanette, First VP Ray Summers, GL Forum Member Jerry Shapiro and his wife Jan, PSP Charlie Campbell and his wife Jan, and a number of other Illinois Elks. Charlie and Jan would be our escorts for the Convention.

When we arrived at the Wyndham, the Convention Hotel, we were greeted by even more PSPs, State Officers. and spouses. The Wyndham is a round building and the tallest south of Chicago, and from our "Presidential Suite" on the twenty-eighth floor, we could see the entire City and miles beyond. After a brief time to unpack, we proceeded to the top floor, the Thirtieth, for a Reception in the Hospitality Room, which was the hotel restaurant that had been closed for the Convention. With its beautiful views, it was a great setting for a reception. Illinois,



Arriving in a COLD and snowy Springfield for our Illinois visit



Ron and Nancy with their escorts for the weekend, Jan and Charlie Campbell



View from our room

with its seventy Lodges and over 27,000 Members, has worked out a very favorable multi-year contract with the Wyndham, which is centrally located in the State, so this is where the IEA holds all of its conventions.



Ron and the Illinois guys making an early morning visit to Lincoln's tomb

Friday morning we were up early for breakfast. The guys visited the Abraham Lincoln Tomb at the Oak Ridge Cemetery and the ladies met them later at the Lincoln Museum.



Ron rubbing Lincoln's nose for good luck



Ron and Nancy visiting the Lincolns in Springfield, Illinois

After Lincoln's death, his body was placed on a special train for the 1,700 mile, twelve day, journey from Washington DC to Springfield. The final resting place for our sixteenth President, an impressive 117 foot-tall granite Tomb, also holds the remains of his wife Mary Todd Lincoln, and



The touring group posing with the Lincolns



Ron and Lou Sulsberger impersonating Lincoln

three of their four children, and features many statues depicting Lincoln during various times in his life. Construction of the Tomb began in 1869 and it was dedicated on October 15, 1874, three years after Lincoln's body was moved to the Tomb from a temporary site at the Cemetery.



John Wilkes Booth should have paid Jerry Shapiro the retainer!



Lincoln's death mask shows the years of stress

At the Museum, located in downtown Springfield, we were treated to two excellent introductory videos about Lincoln's life and his Presidency before we started our self-guided tour of the amazing facility. The Museum uses life-like figures and scenes, special effects and riveting presentations to bring Lincoln's legacy to life. It was pointed out that there are more books written about Lincoln



Nancy beside Mary Todd Lincoln in one of her beautiful gowns

than any other figure in human history, with the exception of Jesus Christ. Also, that while he ended up a leader in the fight to abolish slavery, before he was President he didn't even support abolition or basic equality for blacks. After his death, Lincoln was universally loved and deeply respected, but, because of the troubled times and difficult decisions he had to make, this was not true during his lifetime.



Ron with the proud Exalted Ruler of the Springfield Lodge

We walked the three cold blocks back to the hotel, where Ron met with many Elks, some just arriving for the Convention, including ER Bobby Edwards and Marilyn Miller from the nearby Springfield Lodge. At Ron's request, Bobby drove Ron and Charlie to the Lodge, where they received a tour of the facility and learned more about the Lodge. Returning to the hotel, Ron stopped by the

Hospitality Rooms before we dressed to attend the Friday night Reception and PSP Dinner.

Saturday morning, the Committee meetings and Ritual Contest started early, and Ron spoke at as many of the sessions as he could attend. Sixty-four Illinois Lodges made the ENF Goal last year and fifty-seven received ENF Grants, with five Lodges receiving three Grants each. For lunch, we were happy to attend the "Lady of the Year Luncheon" hosted by Beth Sulsberger on Saturday afternoon. For this Award, each District nominates a most valuable non-member volunteer, and the Winner is selected from this outstanding group of ladies. This year, a surprised Barb Rich from Benton Lodge



Beth Sulsberger, Barb Rich, and Nancy

1234 was named "The Illinois Lady of the Year."



Ron and Nancy with the Illinois Elks Pipe and Drums of the Springfield Lodge

Saturday night the State Association Dinner got off to a loud and rousing start with a performance by the Illinois Elks Pipes and Drum Band from the Springfield Lodge. Outstanding!! Each State and GL Officer, and spouse, was then introduced along with the playing of a different song. Ron and I were introduced to the theme from the TV Show, "The Virginian." After dinner, Ron encouraged the Lodges to "let their lights shine" and to finish the Lodge Year strong with Membership and Retention.



Mount Vernon Lodge winning Ritual Team

Winners of the Ritual and Eleven O'clock Toast Contests were announced at the Banquet. Mount Vernon Lodge 819, led by ER Kent Fair, won the Ritual



Ron receiving a Certificate of Recognition for his military service in the Army from Jo Anne Mearns and Miriam Crusing from Oak Lawn Lodge 2254

and PER Greg Fuller of Robinson Lodge 1188 won the Toast. Lieutenant William Rivord, a K-9 Officer with the Du Quoin Police Department, nominated by the Du Quoin Lodge, received the Enrique Camarena Award. This was followed by the annual "Procession of Giving," where many Lodges make their major contributions to ENF and to the Children's Care Corporation, the State Major Project. In just a few minutes, \$35,800 was raised for ENF and \$66,480 was raised for the Children's Care Corporation. The GER Wine Raffle raised \$1,075 for ENF and was won by Don Mowers of the Danville Lodge.

The Business Session was held at 8:00 am Sunday morning, where the Lodges presented another \$20,000 to the Children's Care Corporation. Ron spoke about the Business Side of each Lodge, the use of technology and not being afraid of change that will benefit the Lodge. We had to leave before the finish of business, and Charlie and Jan drove us to the Airport for our 10:00 flight to Chicago. Little did we know what awaited us in Chicago.



The Enrique Camarena award winner Lieutenant William Rivord, a K-9 Officer from Du Quoin, Illinois, and Ron and Lou Sulsberger



Mayor of Springfield James O. Langfelder presenting Ron a book written by his grandfather, a former Mayor of Springfield



Ron and winner of the GER Wine Raffle for ENF Don Mowers from the Danville Lodge