

GER Ron and First Lady Nancy Hicks' Visit to Alabama

We flew out of Richmond, Virginia, on Thursday January 14, for Perdido Key, Alabama, and the Alabama Elks Mid-Winter Convention, by way of Charlotte, North Carolina, and Pensacola, Florida. Richmond is a more "user friendly" Airport than Dulles or Washington Reagan, without the traffic issues and uncertain travel times, but, unfortunately, it does not offer as many flight options as the larger DC Airports.



Alabama State Sponsor Val Bates and his wife Claudia with Ron and Nancy

We were greeted at the Pensacola Airport by PGER and State Sponsor Val Bates and his wife Claudia, Alabama State President Danny McCallister and his wife Cheryl Ann, Grand Lodge Committeeman Andy Milwid and his wife Ruth, Florida State President Carl Ledig and his wife Dolly, SDGER Ron Creamer and his wife Gale, Alabama President-Elect Mike Thatcher, and Past Grand Lodge Officer Charles Snider and his wife Berta.



Welcome to Alabama! State President Danny McCallister and his wife Cheryl Ann



Ron and Nancy with Alabama SDGER Ron Creamer and his wife Gale. Fantastic "Southern Hosts!"

Perdido Key is a short drive from the Airport, just across the Florida-Alabama State Line, and we arrived at the Perdido Beach Resort, site of the Convention, about 5:30 pm. We



Alabama State Secretary Rick Thompson, Ron, and PSP and PGL Treasurer Charles Snider

shared a suite with Val and Claudia overlooking the Gulf, and after dropping our bags at the hotel, went to dinner with our greeters at a nearby restaurant. When we returned to the hotel, we had time to socialize with the group in our suite before retiring for the evening.



The guys visited the National Naval Aviation Museum

Friday morning the "guys" went to the National Naval Aviation Museum at the Pensacola Naval Base. They toured the Museum with retired Naval Aviator, Roger Hilson, who was filled with many interesting stories and information about the history of Naval Aviation and the many aircraft on

display. The Museum is a "hands on" facility, with the actual planes used in combat or on historic missions that you can walk up to and touch, or even board. There are also many videos, an I-Max Theater, simulators, and a number of replicas/reconstructions of actual places and things from throughout the war years.



Re-creation of a World War II PX

The Navy acquired their first airplane in 1910, and the birth of Naval Aviation began in 1911, with the first shipboard landing on the USS Triad. The first aircraft carrier was the USS Langley, in 1922, which was also the first ship sunk in WWII. Dwight Eisenhower was the first President to use a Navy helicopter for transportation, "Marine One," which has since become the preferred mode of transportation for short trips from the White House. President Nixon left the White House for the last time on "Marine One."



Ron striking the Nixon pose as he boards "Marine One"



Ron and tour guide retired Aviator Roger Hilsip

While the men were touring the Aviation Museum, the ladies had a light breakfast in the hospitality room. They were then off for a little retail therapy before heading to Foley, Alabama. In Foley we checked out a couple of antique shops before having lunch at the Gift Horse Experience where we "experienced" a delectable Southern Buffet of fried chicken, okra, sweet potatoes, corn pudding and other wonderful southern dishes.

The men had lunch at Sonny's BBQ before returning to the hotel, where Ron attended the meeting of the Alabama Trust Committee and learned about the State Major Project, ASCCA (Alabama State Camp for Children and Adults). The Elks partner with the year-round Camp to provide therapeutic and recreational education for children and adults with physical and mental disabilities to help them achieve dignity and maximum independence. The Trust also offers State Grants to all Alabama Lodges for use in their community service, and last year the Grants were \$2,700 each. Friday night we attended a social hour with Past State Presidents and spouses, before heading to the nearby Original Oyster House for dinner.



Ron and Past State President, Gwen Parker, Chairman of the Alabama State Trust

The Association Business Session started at 8:30 am on Saturday morning in the hotel ballroom. The meeting was filled with Committee reports of outstanding service and commitment. Ron spoke briefly about how Elks can use his GER Pin as a guide for their "Elevator Speech" when asked, "Who are the Elks and what do they do?" He

discussed the importance of the Indoctrination/Orientation Program and how it should be considered "The First Step in Member Retention." He also talked about how every New Member should be brought back into the Lodge quickly to engage in their very first Lodge Activity or Program, thereby making them feel a part of the Team and creating a sense of belonging.



Ron's Alabama "Share the Pride" Committee

The Association Luncheon was held in the Hotel Ballroom. Ron spoke about Membership and congratulated the Alabama Elks for their progress in gaining new Members and their support for ENF. He also referenced the tremendous Membership Gain nationwide, and the possibility of having a gain nationally, but cautioned that, over the next three months, we must concentrate on our delinquencies and the retention of our current Members.



Ron and Tammy Freeman, winner of the GER Wine Raffle which raised \$1,115 for ENF

Saturday afternoon Ron sat in on meetings with the DDs and a Lodge Steering Committee. Dinner was at a nearby restaurant before we returned to the hotel for the State Association Dance. After the Eleven O'clock toast, delivered by State President Danny McAllister, there were drawings for Ron's Special Label GER Wine and for the Alabama State Trust's Fundraiser, with a \$10,000 winner. Tammy Freeman of Childersburg Lodge 2295 won the Wine Raffle. She received the 3-bottle pack of wine, especially autographed for her by Ron. The Raffle raised \$1,115 for ENF, which will be donated in Tammy's name with credit going to the Lodge and the Alabama State Elks.



Upon our return to Richmond, snow ball left from the little snow storm we missed while in Alabama

Ron and Gale Creamer drove us to the Pensacola Airport on a sunny Sunday morning, but when we arrived back home in Virginia, it had been snowing. Our daughter, Katie, who lives just NW of Richmond, invited us by for dinner. After enjoying a couple of hours with Katie, Dennis and the three grandkids, and a great meal, we headed to Fredericksburg.

Submitted by Ron and Nancy Hicks

Send comments to webmaster@virginiaelks.org