

GER Ron and First Lady Nancy Hicks' Visit to Florida

We left DC Reagan on a cool, cloudy Thursday February 4 headed for Orlando, Florida, and on to the Florida Elks Youth Camp in Umatilla. We were



PGER and State Co-Sponsor Mike Smith and his wife Sandra, Ron and Nancy, and PGER and State Co-Sponsor Val Bates and his wife Claudia

met at the airport by PGERs and Co-State Sponsors Val Bates and Mike Smith, and their wives Claudia and Sandra; State President Carl Ledig and his wife Dolly, PSP Sean McGuire and his wife Barbara, Vice President at Large-Elect Carl Gerace and his wife Cathy, Grand Lodge Committee



Ron and Nancy with Florida State President Carl Ledig and wife Dolly

on Judiciary Member Geoffrey Dobson and his wife Becky, PSP David Lake and his wife Kathy. We rode to the Camp on a thirty-six-passenger bus with a box lunch of Lobster Rolls, Roast Beef, and other goodies. At the Camp we were greeted by a host of Florida Elks, including several Past State Presidents, Alabama State President Danny McAllister and his wife Cheryl Ann, and Georgia State President Larry Emmett and his wife Mickie.



Group waiting at the Florida Youth Camp for our arrival

center, brick buildings and meeting halls, and many amenities. Florida Lodges send more than 2,400 kids to their Summer Camp each year, and a total of nearly 25,000 children visited the Camp last year.

The State Youth Camp, located an hour Northwest of Orlando, is an impressive facility located on 402 acres with a beautiful aquatic



Ron and Nancy as we got off the bus after a large group of Florida Elks met us at the Orlando Airport

Thursday night we attended a Reception and Dinner with PSPs, State and



Nancy and Ron with ENF and Harry-Anna Donors Ed and Pat Jackson

Grand Lodge Officers, and after dinner Ron accepted a check for \$5,000 for ENF from Ed and Pat Jackson, who are faithful, long-time ENF supporters. Friday morning Ron met with the PSPs Advisory Council and the Youth Camp Board of Directors before going to lunch at Eaton Beach on Lake Weir, a favorite summer resort for Florida residents. In the afternoon,

Ron met with the Harry-Anna Investment Fund Board, the Elks Children's Therapy Services Board, and the Elks Charities Board. At each of these meetings Ron congratulated the Florida Elks for their outstanding efforts and expressed how lucky the State of Florida is to have the Florida Elks.

The Harry-Anna Trust Fund was started in 1951 and, through tremendous Lodge support, it raises an amazing amount of money each year and funds all of the State's charitable activities. In addition, last year, the Fund provided matching funds for various Lodge programs totaling over \$350,000. The Elks Therapy Program treats over 400 children per week with its twenty-five in-home physical and occupational therapists.

Florida Lodges received twenty Freedom Grants this year and offer great support for our military and veterans with the Army of Hope, Veterans Historic Commemorative Program, Presidential Memorial Certificates, and their work in the VA Hospitals and Clinics. The Florida State Elks Association is committed to ENF, and with State matching Grants to all Lodges that met the GER Goal by December 31, Florida is now ranked number two in the Nation in both total contributions and per-capita giving. Florida takes a backseat to no one when it comes to Membership gain and will be among the top in the Nation at years end. Florida also offers many State Scholarships through several different Scholarship Programs. Last year eighty-two Lodges received ENF Community



Frank Paladino, Nancy, Ron, and Carl Ledig presenting a check from Florida State Elks Harry-Anna Fund to ENF. This check is for matching the Florida Lodge donations to ENF

Investment Grants and the number of Grants is increasing this year, including five Impact Grants.

During the meetings Darwin and Marilyn Leatherman and Ed and Pat Jackson were recognized for their significant support for ENF. Ed and Pat were also recognized as being instrumental in the institution of a new Daytona Beach Lodge and Pat was presented with a Plaque in recognition of her lifetime cumulative contributions to ENF of \$100,000.

A “Meet and Greet” was held Friday morning with Nancy; Dolly Ledig, Florida’s First Lady; Claudia Bates, Past First Lady and wife of State Co-Sponsor PGER Val Bates; and Sandra Smith, Past First Lady and wife of State Co-Sponsor PGER Mike Smith greeting all of the ladies as they entered the beautifully decorated Reception area. Dolly and her daughter with the help of some of the Florida ladies did a great job of transforming Building Nine into a lovely area to socialize during the weekend. Afterwards a delicious lunch was held in Nancy’s honor where she spoke to the ladies about her pin and highlights of some of the trips she and Ron have made so far this year.



Re-Creation USA during their performance

Friday night we attended a BBQ at the Camp, highlighted by a performance by Re-Creation USA, the patriotic group sponsored by the Elks, which has provided entertainment and support to hospitalized Veterans for almost thirty years.

In addition to its Grand Lodge support, the Florida Elks are tremendous supporters of Re-Creation USA, having purchased vans and equipment for them over the years, and during this visit presented them with a new equipment trailer.



Re-Creation USA in front of the new trailer donated by the Florida Elks

In addition to the entertainment, the members of Re-Creation USA volunteer to meet, connect and interact with the Veterans on their every visit. The lighting, glitz and music are the group's tools, but it is their personal contact with our Veterans that fulfills their Mission.

The group travels over 30,000 miles each year and is quick to give the Elks credit for our steadfast support.

Ron's father, sister, and friend Sandra, who were vacationing in Orlando, drove up to Umatilla and really enjoyed the evening. After dinner we visited the Hospitality Room before calling it a night. Saturday morning Ron attended the meeting of the Florida State Elks Association Board of Directors, then the Major Projects Meeting where he was the keynote speaker. Ron again congratulated the Elks for their outstanding performance in every area of Elkdom and told them that the youth and Veterans of Florida, and all the charities supported by the Florida Elks are reaping the benefits of the vision of the Elks



Exalted Ruler Aurora Griesler-Jones, Secretary Alice Wallace, and Treasurer Edyie Day from Largo Lodge 2159 presented Ron a check for \$5,000 for ENF

who had gone before, and that the efforts and vision of today's Elks were paving the way for those who will follow. There was a "giving line" for ENF and the Harry-Anna Fund, which is the custom at every Florida Convention, and in just a few minutes, Lodges donated another \$56,000 to Harry-Anna and another \$9,600 to ENF, including \$5,000 from Largo Lodge 2159 and \$2,225 from Ocala Lodge 286. The GER Wine Raffle raised \$1,210 for ENF and was won



ENF Vice Chairman Joe Cooper with Ron and the GER Wine Raffle winner Lenny Dilorinea

by Lenny Di Lorenzo, VP of SE District from Jupiter Lodge 2469.

After the Meeting, Ron had an opportunity to visit with the District Deputies, urging them to have their Lodges "Finish Strong," especially with their efforts to reduce delinquencies and retain our Members. Ron, Val, Mike, and Carl then went to nearby Eustis Lodge 1578 for their annual Florida State Elks BBQ Ribs Cook-Off. Six Lodges were vying for top prizes in Chili, Ribs, and Brisket Competition. A light rain was falling and the grills were smoking under tents, as many Elks waited inside for the BBQ delights. ER Bill Hall greeted Ron at the Lodge and escorted him outside for a sampling and private judging (unofficial). He agreed



Florida District Deputies and Ron

all were great!! The group left the Lodge before the winners were announced, but not before they had eaten their fill.

Dolly Ledig drove Nancy, Claudia Bates, and Sandra Smith into Mount Dora for a delicious lunch at the Pisces Rising, a great seafood restaurant. We had hoped to visit some of the booths at the annual Mount Dora Art Festival but, because of rain, decided to return to the Camp.

Back at the Camp we finished packing for our late afternoon drive to the Orlando Airport. President-Elect John Harris, a Member of the Vero Lodge in Melbourne, drove us to the Airport Holiday Inn Express on his way home. Ron's family came over to the hotel and took us to dinner. The next morning, we were up early for our trip to New Orleans and Mardi Gras!



Ron and President-Elect John Harris

Submitted by Ron and Nancy Hicks

Send comments to webmaster@virginiaelks.org

