

## GER Ron and First Lady Nancy Hicks' Visit to Michigan

We left Dulles Airport on Wednesday morning, October 14th, headed for Grand Rapids and the Michigan Elks Association Fall Convention. We changed planes in Chicago, and after boarding one plane, we were moved back into the terminal where we waited almost three hours until United delivered another airplane to our gate.



Finally, we were off to Michigan. At the Grand Rapids Airport we were met by PGER and State Sponsor Jim Varenhorst, State President Randy Jackson and First Lady Christy, First Vice President Pete Gadzinski and his wife Pam, and Second Vice President Joe Antonishek. Also meeting us at the airport and providing our airport transportation for the weekend were District Deputy Mike Lampani, and State Major Project Executive Director Brenda Cook.

We traveled to Michigan a day early in order to spend time with our very dear friends Ric and Barb Mulholland before the start of the convention. However, we learned a few days before the trip that they would not be attending because of Ric's illness. So, we arranged to borrow the car of Howard and Jeannie Diehl, and after dropping off most of our luggage, drove to Bay City on Wednesday night. We had a great visit that evening and the next morning with Ric and Barb before heading back to Grand Rapids Thursday afternoon.



Welcome at Grand Rapids Airport. Christy and Randy Jackson, Peter and Pam Gadzinski, PGER Jim Varenhorst, and Mike Lampani. Present but not pictured is Brenda Cook.



Past State President Howard Diehl and his wife Jeannie and Ron and Nancy.

Thursday night we joined PGER Varenhorst, the PSPs, State Officers, and Grand Lodge and State Committeemen for dinner at a nearby restaurant. It was a ten minute drive to the restaurant, but it took forty-five minutes to return to the hotel due to a number of unfortunate turns - thanks for the unscheduled tour Randy!



Ron and Nancy with PGER and Michigan State Sponsor Jim Varenhorst.

Friday morning Ron met with the Past State Presidents, then after lunch met with the District Deputies, the Charitable Grant Fund (Gold Key) Board, and the State Major Project Commission. The State Major Project, chaired by Diane Dusendang, with Brenda Cook as Executive Director, serves children with special needs and their families in various ways, from furnishing equipment to providing opportunities for needed therapies. The Charitable Grant Fund and its Gold Key Scholarships, chaired by Geno Grabinski, with PSP Kevin Quinn as Executive Director, provides scholarships for special needs students who would otherwise have little opportunity to receive such assistance to continue their education beyond high school. The Grant Fund Board believes that "Great Futures Begin With Gold Key." The Michigan Elks also support the Donate for Life, Gift of Life, Donor Program.

Nancy joined the Past State Presidents wives for Coffee hosted by First Lady Christy Jackson, Pam Gadzinski, and Debi Antonishek. It was a great chance to speak with many of the ladies who were introduced by Barb Mulholland last May and who have become good Elk friends.



PGER Jim Varenhorst, State President Randy Jackson, Ron, and Grand Lodge Membership and Public Relations Director Rick Gathen.

Friday night we attended the Past State Presidents Reception and Dinner, where we were joined by Grand Lodge Membership and Public Relations Director Rick Gathen, Grand Forum Senior Justice Jim Deamud and his wife Tina; Grand Lodge Ritual Committee Chairman Keith Waltke and his wife Judy; Grand Lodge Public Relations Committeeman Ed Geishert and



Ron and Nancy with Tina, Cassie, and Jim Deamud, Grand Forum Senior Justice.

his wife Penny; and from the Ohio Elks, Grand Lodge Fraternal Committeeman Doug Sheifer and his wife Julia. (Grand Lodge Audit and Accounting Committeeman Keith Alverson and his wife Greer were also at the convention.)

Saturday morning the Association held its Business Session filled with impressive Committee Reports and opportunity for contributions to State Programs and The Elks National Foundation. The Grand Rapids Visitors Bureau welcomed the Michigan Elks to the City and made a \$2,500 donation to the Michigan Elks Association, which will be divided between the Major Project and Gold Key.

The Session was highlighted by the special appearances of Jordan Rose and Levi Faber, two young people helped by Gold Key with inspirational stories.



Jeff Alisch, Jordan Rose, and Ron. Jordan is holding the charcoal drawing she donated to MEA for Gold Key Scholarship Fund. Jeff is the Exalted Ruler of the St. Joseph-Benton Harbor Lodge.

Jordan was the recipient of a Gold Key Scholarship last year and is pursuing a degree in art. She and her mother attended the convention to thank the Elks and to present Gold Key with one of Jordan's charcoal drawings to be auctioned in support of the Scholarship Program. The auction and other donations raised \$830 for Gold Key, which then surprised Jordan by announcing that the money would be donated back to her for the purchase of books and other school supplies this year.

Levi received a kidney transplant at age two, which has allowed him to lead a healthy and productive life. Now seventeen, he thanked the Elks for its support of the Gift of Life Program and explained how his experience and support from others has inspired him to help raise organ donor awareness. Both Jordan and Levi are great examples of how Elks are changing lives every day and a validation of our tremendous programs in support of



Ron with Levi Faber and Special Events/Organ Donor Chairman Kimberly Deckard.

our youth.

The Ladies Breakfast was held in the hotel Saturday morning. There was a great turnout of ladies and the room was decorated with lovely fall decorations. Christy Jackson introduced her husband Randy Jackson and Vice President Pete Gadzinski. They each brought in flowers for their wives for Sweetest Day, a holiday celebrated in Midwestern United States. Randy introduced PGER and State Sponsor Jim Varenhorst and Ron. They each spoke briefly to the ladies. Jordan Rose was brought into the breakfast and introduced, she spoke about the art classes she is presently taking and thanked the ladies for their help.

Saturday Night we attended the MEA Reception and Dinner. The crowd was somewhat late arriving due to a little football game between in-state rivals Michigan State and the University of Michigan! Kermit (Sesame Street) was correct on this day "It was good being Green," as Michigan State won.



Ron and Kathy Jo Stratton, ENF Chairman. She headed up the Wine Raffle.



Debi Antonishek, wife of Second Vice President Joe Antonishek; Nancy; and First Lady of Michigan Christy Jackson at the Frederik Meijer Gardens. Not pictured was Pam Gadzinski, wife of First Vice President Pete Gadzinski.

State President Randy Jackson, whose theme is "Remembering our Past to Build on our Future," has set out an ambitious program for the year, with emphasis on membership growth, and the Michigan Elks are making every effort to achieve his goals. The Elks of Michigan are strong supporters of ENF with twenty-nine of their Lodges achieving the GER Goal in each of the last three years, and forty-three Lodges receiving ENF Community Investment Grants worth \$178,000 in support of their community outreach. Michigan also has

the opportunity to become a Plus-1 State in membership this year, with Charles Pankey of Ferndale Lodge 1588 leading the way so far by sponsoring thirty-two new Members!

Michigan is where it all began for us last May, after Ric Mulholland's withdrawal as Endorsed GER Candidate due to illness. It was our first opportunity to thank PGER Varenhorst, Ric, Howard Diehl and many other Michigan Elks for their early support of Ron's campaign for GER. After that trip and the reception we received from the Michigan Elks, we felt that we were doing the right thing and that we were ready to take on the challenge of GER and First Lady. It was good to be back with our friends from Michigan!



Our driver to and from the airport, Tony Bradley, member of the GER Transportation Committee.

Our transportation to and from the Dulles airport for this trip was provided by Tony Bradley, a member of the Fredericksburg Lodge Transportation Committee. Next up, North Carolina, where Ron has many fond memories and many good friends from his days at Chowan Junior College (now Chowan University), and where he now serves on the University's Board of Trustees.

NOTE: Our friend Eric K. Mulholland died soon after this trip on October 24, as previously reported on this blog. He was a great Elk and will be missed, *there will be the Vacant Chair*.

Submitted by Ron and Nancy Hicks

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