

GER Ron and First Lady Nancy Hicks' Visit to New Jersey

We left Bangor, Maine, at 6:45 am, on a chilly November 12, headed for the "Garden State" and Long Branch, New Jersey, for the New Jersey Elks State Convention. We flew to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, then on to Newark, New Jersey,



Ron and Nancy with State President Richard Tabachuk and his wife Linda

where we were met by State Sponsor PGER Paul Helsel and his wife Jane, State President Richard Tabachuk and his wife Linda, Past Grand Forum Chief Justice and SDGER PSP Malcolm McPherson and his wife Pat, Grand Lodge Committeeman Rusty Gerstenmier, and Frank Olexson and Maxine. Frank would be our van driver for the next two days.



Ron and Nancy with State Sponsor PGER Paul Helsel and his wife Jane



Ron, Dr. William Weiss, and Nancy



Ron and Nancy with Past Chief Justice of the Grand Forum and SDGER PSP Malcolm McPherson

On the way from Newark to Long Branch, we made our first stop at the North Jersey Elks Developmental Disabilities Agency, an elementary school for special needs children from pre-school through age thirteen, supported by New Jersey Lodges as part of the State Major Project. We were greeted by Executive Director Dr. William Weiss who explained that the school used simple technology to reach the children and have them express their wants and needs. We watched a brief film, then met Valentina and Joseph, who welcomed us and presented us with gifts made by the students. We then enjoyed a ballet performed by young-lady students with disabilities, some in wheelchairs or others using walkers. The school Principal led us on



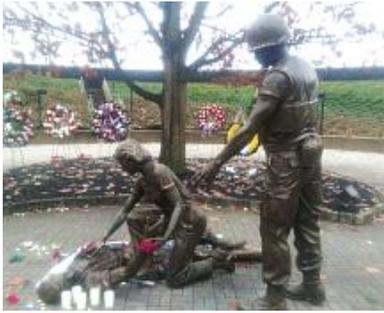
Ron and Nancy with Valentina and Joseph



Ron and Nancy with the beautiful ballerinas at the North Jersey Elks Developmental Disabilities Agency

a tour of the facility, where we were introduced to more students and staff. After lunch at the school, Dr. Weiss offered that it was their job to inspire the students and give them courage. Then Malcolm, on behalf of the Elks

of New Jersey, presented a check to Dr. Weiss for \$40,000, bringing the total donation to the school this year to \$75,000. The Agency has one other elementary school, a high school, and an adult facility, with a second high school under construction. Great work is being performed at this school by a very dedicated and focused staff.



Three figure service member sculpture at the center of the New Jersey Veterans' Memorial

Our next stop was at the New Jersey Vietnam Veterans' Memorial and Museum. Dedicated in 1989, the Memorial is a tribute to the men and women of New Jersey who served our Country during the Vietnam War. The Museum and Educational Center, dedicated in 1998, is the first of its kind and is devoted to understanding the conflict in Southeast Asia and the surrounding political strife taking place in America. The New Jersey Elks were early supporters of the Memorial with a donation of \$100,000 to help the movement get started, then donated \$187,000 to purchase an impressive three-figure service member sculpture which stands as the centerpiece of the Memorial. The Memorial is a circular structure of 365 black marble panels, one for each day of the year, and on each panel is the name of the service members killed on that date. The latest addition to the site is the Gold Star Family Monument which was funded partially by a \$25,000 donation from the Elks. There were 1,553 casualties from New Jersey, including one woman, and the Elks of New Jersey are doing their part to make sure "they will never be forgotten."

We reached the hotel about 5:00 pm, and after getting settled, attended a reception with heavy hors d'oeuvres, followed by cake and ice cream. After a long day, we retired early.



New Jersey Gold Star Family Monument



Ron, Exalted Ruler of the Somerville Lodge 1068 Bill Rose, and Nancy

Friday morning we were off to Somerville Lodge 1068 for breakfast and a visit to the Somerset Children's Center. At the Somerville Lodge we were greeted by ER Bill Rose and a host of about sixty New Jersey Elks. A number of years ago, the Lodge added space onto its original building for a Cerebral Palsy Therapy Center. That building was acquired by a developer, who provided the Lodge with a new location, a new Lodge building and a new building to house the CP Center, now the Somerset Children's

Center for special needs children. After breakfast, Malcolm presented the Center's Director, Dr. Amy Phillips, with a check for \$40,000 from the New Jersey State Association.

After a tour of the Lodge by ER Rose, our group walked over to the adjacent Children's Center which provides speech, physical and occupational therapy to children ages three to twenty-one during afternoon and evening classes. Dr. Phillips gave a brief description of the work with the children, their siblings and the parents, and we were given a tour of the impressive facility, and the handicap accessible playground donated by the New Jersey Elks. The Center typically has about sixty children enrolled in weekly one-half hour classes, plus another thirty children that are provided therapy off site.



Ron, Staff Member, Dr. Amy Phillips, Nancy and ER Bill Rose



Ron and Nancy, Chairman of State Major Project Anthony Alfonso, Malcolm McPherson, and State President Richard Tabachuk

lunch for the fifty-five PSPs, DDs, ERs and other Elks in attendance. Chairman of the State Major Project Anthony Alfonso gave the group a tour of the property and its eighteen buildings. While at the Camp Ron had the honor of laying a brick in the "Pathway of Opportunity" leading to the playground.

Our van then headed up the road about an hour to Camp Moore, "The Miracle on the Mountain," a camp for children with special needs owned by the New Jersey Elks since 1971. The Camp serves 700 children per year, offering fun and recreation in a friendly, one on one, hillside setting. The Lodges pay for each camper they send and provide other support and volunteer services to the Camp. Volunteers from the Northwest District prepared



Ron laying his brick on the walkway to the playground at Camp Moore



Winners of the Association Theme Party, East Central District

Friday night we attended a PSP reception, then a moving State Memorial Service with beautiful music and song. Following the Service, we got casual and went to the Annual Association Theme Party, this year celebrating the sixties. Each of the twelve New Jersey

Districts presented their version of entertainment from that era, with lots of hippies, Elvis, several Sonny and Chers, the Beverly Hillbillies and Adams Family, Willie Nelson, the Beatles and much, much more. The East Central District with their bus full of hippies, entertainers, a streaker, and a rag doll was judged the winner. A fun event for sure!

The Business Session started at 8:30 am Saturday morning. New Jersey does a great job with all Grand Lodge, State and individual Lodge programs, and there were many impressive reports. The Winner of the Drug Awareness Poster Contest, nine year old Bianca Lomaine, representing the Bayonne Lodge, attended the Session and was presented with a plaque and a \$300 gift certificate. New Jersey is the Home State of Rick Gathen, our Grand Lodge Membership Director, and he is quite pleased to see that New Jersey is well on their way to another State Membership gain this year. All 113 Lodges have met the GER Goal for ENF over the last three years, and this year New Jersey has already exceeded the State-wide ENF Goal, with over half the Lodges already meeting Ron's Goal of \$4.65 per capita. A donation line of Lodges raised \$36,425 for ENF during the Session, bringing the total New Jersey contribution to ENF for the year to \$225,850. Another Lodge donation line raised \$142,975 for Camp Moore!

The Antler Program is strong and growing across New Jersey. The Lodges are also strong supporters of the Army of Hope and this summer the State Army of Hope Picnic raised over \$150,000 to assist in their efforts. When it comes to Veterans, the New Jersey Elks are active in all areas, including a Program in support of Homeless Vets. New Jersey offers a State Vocational Scholarship Program in addition to other Grand Lodge and State Scholarships. And, as mentioned earlier, New Jersey Elks have tremendous

programs in support of children and adults with special needs. This year the seventeenth annual "Miracle Run" had 1,723 attendees and raised \$100,000 for Camp Moore, and a check in that amount was presented to the Camp during the Session by Daryl Dreher, State Chairman. It was very obvious that the Elks of New Jersey are unbelievably generous with their time, talents, energy, and dollars in the support of the many projects and programs they support.



Rusty Gerstenmier, Ron, and State Chairman of "Miracle Run" Daryl Dreier

Saturday afternoon Ron sat in on meetings with the twelve District Deputies of New Jersey to review Lodge operations and discuss their Lodge visits. Most visits have been completed and the DDs were very complimentary and proud of the performance of their Lodges.

Saturday night was the Association Banquet. A band played during dinner and afterwards for dancing. Ron asked the “Jersey” Elks to let their bright lights shine and be a salesman for the success of their Lodges. The winners of the Toast and Flag Contests were announced and the Toast winner, Brian Connors of Middletown Lodge 2179, delivered the Toast for the evening. State ENF Chairman, Lori Pagano, led the effort to raffle the GER special label wine which we brought to the Convention and sold \$2,310 in raffle tickets. The State Association added another \$190, to make the total ENF donation from the Wine Raffle \$2,500, another example of the great attitude and generosity of the New Jersey Elks.

Next up the Silver State and Reno, Nevada, for the Nevada Elks State Convention. “Nevada” is from the Spanish word meaning “snowcapped,” let’s hope that is not the case on this trip!

Submitted by Ron and Nancy Hicks

Send comments to webmaster@virginiaelks.org



Ron and winner of the Toast Contest
Brian Connors of Middletown Lodge
2179

