

## GER Ron and First Lady Nancy Hicks' Visit to North Carolina

We left Fredericksburg on another beautiful day, Wednesday, October 19th, driving to the North Carolina State Convention in New Bern, North Carolina. We left a day early to visit Linwood and Trudy Parker in nearby Beaufort, North Carolina, who are long-time friends from Ron's days at Chowan Junior College. After a great overnight visit, on Thursday we drove the thirty miles to New Bern, arriving about 3:30 pm. We were met outside the hotel by PGER and State Sponsor Jack Frost and his wife Sharon, State President Ron Dickson and First Lady



Ron and Nancy with our friends Linwood and Trudy Parker from Beaufort, North Carolina



Our male Welcome Committee



Our female Welcome Committee to New Bern, North Carolina

Linda, Special Deputy John Boyd and his wife Ann, Grand Lodge Committeeman Ashley Buckwell and Linda Whislett, PSP and Past Grand Lodge Officer Steve Clark and his wife Joyce, Past Grand Lodge Committeeman Lee Littiken, and a number of other great North Carolina Elks.

Thursday evening we enjoyed a reception and dinner with State and Grand Lodge officials. Friday morning Ron attended meetings with the North Carolina Elks Charitable Trust Board, the PSPs, and the State Trustees. The North Carolina State Elks Charitable Trust, Inc.(1993) helps fund many state projects, including Camp Carefree, a camp for chronically ill and disabled children, and their tremendous support for the North Carolina Veterans. Ron traveled with State and Grand Lodge Officials by "party" bus to the New Bern Lodge for lunch, where they were greeted by Exalted Ruler Kathleen Meyer, Leading Knight Bob Miller, and Loyal Knight Jody Pascarella.

Kathleen led a tour of the building including their beautiful Lodge Room with its very old, traditional furnishings and pointed out a photo of PER Caleb Bradham, the inventor of Pepsi Cola. Bradham invented "Brad's Drink" in his drug store in 1893 and it became an instant sensation. He thought it a



Exalted Ruler of the New Bern Lodge Kathleen Meyer and Ron

healthy cola that aided digestion, so he changed the name to Pepsi, derived from the word “dyspepsia,” meaning indigestion. Who knew?!?

After lunch the bus traveled to the North Carolina State Veterans Home in Kingston, NC, where they were met by James Woodward, facilities manager for the four North Carolina VA Homes



Ron, Home Administrator Sara Dieter, Facilities Manager of the North Carolina VA Homes James Woodward, and PDD Jack Strickland

and the three VA cemeteries; Sara Dieter, Home Administrator; and PDD Jack Strickland, an Elk VA Representative and long-time volunteer at this facility with its 100 residents. This impressive, bright facility is only three years old, with state of the art equipment and furnishings. Through the years the Elks of North Carolina have contributed over \$500,000 in support of Veterans, including recent purchases of wheel chair accessible buses for each of the VA Homes and TVs for every resident room in the VA facilities. Ron had the opportunity to meet and thank many Veterans and hand each of them a Star reclaimed from a retired American Flag with a written reminder that they are not forgotten. (A meaningful gesture started by the Elks of Texas with their Texas Star Project.)

While the men were busy with their meetings the ladies were enjoying a trolley tour of historic New Bern, the second oldest town in the State of North Carolina and a major port and trading center in the 1800's. It was captured and occupied by the Union Army after a fierce battle in March of 1862. There are more than 150 sites included in the National Register of Historic Places. Among those historic sites are



Ann Boyd, Nancy, Linda Dickson, and Sharon Frost at lunch

some of the churches of New Bern. On our tour we passed Bradham's Pharmacy where Pepsi was created. As we were nearing the end of the tour and about ready to be dropped off at our lunch destination our trolley stopped and was unable to start. The ladies started walking to the restaurant, after walking a couple of blocks, the trolley had started up and picked us up and carried us to the restaurant for our lunch.

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The newest bus purchased for the VA Homes by the North Carolina Elks Association

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After a reception and dinner Friday evening, we spent time meeting and greeting many North Carolina Elks in the Hospitality Room. This was a large room with many tables and space to move around, where each of the four Districts had their own food and beverage areas; a great way to gather and celebrate the Lodges in each District and enjoy each other's company during the convention.

The Association's General Business Session was held Saturday morning, with many fine reports. The morning also included a presentation by Sandy Liel, a Member of Hickory Lodge 1654, who started the Elks Loving Kare Social Program (ELKS), providing opportunities for adults with mental and physical disabilities to interact in a safe and fun environment. She is working to take the program state-wide and perhaps even nationally.

North Carolina has already reached 76% of its Membership Goal for the year and is well on the way to a Plus-1 year. Leading the way is Hendersonville Lodge 1616 with 98 new/reinstated members, Winston-Salem 449 with 75, and Greensboro 602 with 70. William Handley (24) and Chris Deanes (16), both of Southern Pines Lodge 1692, are the top recruiters to date.

The North Carolina Elks are strong supporters of the Elks National Foundation with the State exceeding the GER's ENF Goal for eighteen straight years. Last year thirty-one Lodges exceeded the Goal and over half of the Lodges have already exceeded the Goal this year. Fayetteville 1081, with its \$87.20 per capita, led the State last year and finished #6 in the Nation, and Raleigh 735 always seems to be a State leader with a per capita contribution of around \$55-60.00 per year. During the Session, per tradition, the Lodges lined up and presented Ron with donations of over \$4,500 for ENF.

Last year thirty-one Lodges received ENF Community Investment Grants with Hickory Lodge 1654 receiving a Beacon, Freedom, Gratitude and Promise Grant, plus an Impact Grant. Salisbury Lodge 699 received four Grants and seven other Lodges in NC received three Grants each. The Lodges are applying for even more Grants this year!

After the Business Session, the New Bern Lodge conducted an impressive Memorial Service, followed by the Association Luncheon which was attended by over 300 Elks and guests. Ron spoke about his theme "Elks Pride - Community Focus" and how the positive, "can-do" spirit of one or two Lodge Leaders can become contagious and help lead to a successful Lodge.



Ron and Nancy with Sharon and Jack Frost, PGER and State Sponsor of North Carolina



Ron and Nancy with Linda and Ron Dickson, State President of North Carolina

Nancy joined the ladies in the Hospitality Room for a light breakfast and bloody Mary's. A representative for the Nicolas Sparks Foundation was the Guest Speaker. He spoke about the commitment to philanthropy that Nicholas Sparks and his wife have made to education in North Carolina. In 2006 they founded the successful K-12 Epiphany School of Global Studies in their hometown of New Bern. They have introduced a jewelry collection featuring keepsake bracelets themed with elements from several of his more popular books. Seventy-five percent of the gross profits go directly to the foundation's charitable student programs.



Wine Winner Jan Broulik with Ron and her husband

Saturday afternoon Ron sat in on meetings with the DDs. Saturday night we enjoyed dinner at a nearby restaurant with State and Grand Lodge officials, followed by a fun evening of song, dance and fellowship in the Hospitality Room. Ron had brought his special label wine to the convention to be raffled for ENF. PSP Bob Janivek led the effort to sell the raffle tickets, which raised another \$710 to go to ENF in the Winner's name, Jan Broulik. Jan also received the 3-bottle pack of wine which Ron personally signed as instructed.

The PER Association conducted a brief breakfast meeting open to all attendees on Sunday morning. The winners of a State-wide fundraising raffle for Camp Carefree were drawn and announced. Then, the winners of the Golf Tournament were announced with most of the prize money being donated back to Camp Carefree by

the winners.

The Tar Heel State has many dedicated Elks and we enjoyed our time together. This was our first "Southern Visit" and first opportunity to sample the grits, fried chicken, banana pudding and pecan pie that you'd expect down South! It was good being back with old friends and meeting many new friends, including thirty-year Lodge Secretary and sixteen-year State Secretary Blayne Turner, who always provides entertaining and fun comments, but whose remarks usually carry an important and meaningful message. As former North Carolina First Lady Evelyn Hood said upon leaving one of our Virginia Conventions several years ago, we had "a very LARGE time!!!"



Long time State Secretary Blayne Turner doing his "Carnac the Magnificent" impression

Submitted by Ron and Nancy Hicks

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