

GER Ron and First Lady Nancy Hicks' Visit to Wisconsin

We gave the Lodge Transportation Committee the week off and drove to DC Reagan for our flight on Thursday, Sept 9, to Appleton, Wisconsin, and the Wisconsin State Elks Convention. On the flight from DC to our connection in Chicago, we had the honor of flying with Cpl. Larry Bailey, USMC, a triple amputee, who had lost both legs and his left arm in an IED explosion in Afghanistan. He was returning home and when we arrived in Chicago, he was escorted off the plane to a standing ovation, and inside the terminal, he was met by news cameras and a number of Veterans, Firemen, Police and USO representatives.

At the Appleton Airport, we were greeted by State President Tony Voulgaris and his wife Mary, PSP Todd Kostuck and his wife Leah, SDGER Dave Madson and his wife Carol, Grand Lodge Activities Committeeman Norm Behnke and his wife Judie, and other Wisconsin Elks. After being inducted as Wisconsin "Cheeseheads," Norm and Judie drove us to the hotel, where we were



Cheesehead welcome to Wisconsin...Ron and Nancy with State President Tony Voulgaris and his wife Mary at the Appleton, Wisconsin Airport.

greeted by PGER, Lou Sulsberger. Lou's wife, Beth, was unable to attend the Convention.

Thursday evening we enjoyed a reception and buffet at the Oshkosh Lodge and met many Lodge Members and Elks from across the State. Before we left, ER Jason Ellis and his wife Tammy presented us with a model airplane plaque as a memento of our visit, Oshkosh being home to the Experimental Aircraft Association Air Show, one of the largest fly-ins in the Country.

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Ron and Nancy with Oshkosh Lodge 292 ER Jason Ellis and his wife Tammy.



PGER and Wisconsin State Sponsor Lou Sulsberger and Wisconsin Association State President Tony Voulgaris with Ron.

State Meetings began early Friday morning with the Association Board of Directors and PSPs. The Association pooled their moneys in 1996 to create the Association's Benevolent Fund. The Wisconsin Elks are enthusiastic supporters of the Fund, and over its 20 years, the Fund has grown to nearly \$2M, while providing another \$2M in income to benefit the State Major Project and other Wisconsin charities. Wisconsin is also a big supporter of ENF, with all but two Lodges achieving the GER Goal last year and 26 of their 32 Lodges taking advantage of the ENF Community Investment Grants, plus 3 Community Impact Grants! Wisconsin also has one of the lowest rates of delinquencies in the Nation, telling us that the Elks of Wisconsin love being Elks!

Friday morning the ladies feasted on homemade doughnuts, muffins and fresh fruit made by Wisconsin First Lady Mary Voulgaris. Friday afternoon, Mary hosted an enjoyable lunch downtown with the Past State Presidents wives at the Good Company Restaurant. Afterwards, Nancy joined several of the ladies to help support the local economy with a little "retail therapy" at one of the local malls.

Friday evening we visited the Appleton Lodge for a Meet and Greet Reception hosted by ER Todd Kagleman, followed by dinner with the Past State Presidents hosted by PSP David Nitze and his wife, Pat, at a downtown eatery. While at the Lodge, Ron was introduced to cheese curds, a Wisconsin favorite, and toured the facility with PSP Don Slavic, a member of the Lodge's Hall of Fame. Most Convention attendees had arrived at the hotel by the time we returned, and we had an opportunity to meet many of them in the State Hospitality Room.



Ron and PSP Don Slavic member of the Appleton Lodge.

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Saturday morning was filled with the meetings of all State Committees and Ron made the effort to attend and speak at as many as possible, carrying the message of "Elks Pride and Community Focus," Membership, Ritual, and finding ways to "grow" Elkdom in all we do. At the Drug Awareness Meeting, members heard from special guest,



Dessert for Luncheon made by Lynn Weinsrott.

State Representative John Nygren, a member of the Marinette Lodge, who spoke of his personal experiences with his teenage daughter's heroin addiction, the signs of trouble, the toll it takes on a family, the private battles to confront addiction, encounters with law enforcement and the courts, and finally, his efforts as a State Legislator. Last year, Rep. Nygren sponsored seven bills related to drug awareness, treatment and recovery that were passed into State Law, and he plans to continue the fight this year.

A ladies luncheon was held in the hotel on Saturday with Nan Johnson, wife of State Secretary Ken Johnson, as the Mistress of Ceremonies. State President Tony Voulgaris came into the luncheon to introduce the State Officers, Grand Lodge Officers, State Sponsor, Lou Sulsberger, and Grand Exalted Ruler Ron Hicks to the ladies. There was a 50/50 raffle and a drawing for baskets filled with various items and donated by many of the ladies for the benefit of the Wisconsin Benevolent Fund. Ron won a basket donated by President-Elect Rob Radig's wife, Michelle. She had filled the basket with lots of homemade goodies like cookies, zucchini bread, and rice crispy treats. Ron was pleased to have the delicious snacks for our flight home!

The Association Banquet was held on Saturday evening. The National Hoop Shoot second place winner of the 13-14 Year Old Division, Sam Hinson, representing the Marshfield Lodge, was present with his family and recognized for that achievement. Wisconsin also had the winner of a \$30,000 Most Valuable Student Scholarship, however, she was unable to attend the Convention. The Wisconsin State Motto is "Forward," and during his after-dinner comments, Ron suggested it also a fitting motto for today's Elks, encouraging all Elks to not try to pay the Elks back, but instead, to pay it "Forward," i.e., pay it forward for our Youth, the Military, and our Veterans; pay it forward for our Members and our Communities; pay it forward to insure that Elkdom will continue to grow and strengthen, not just this year and next, but for many years and many generations to come.

Dinner was followed by more time in the hospitality room, where Tony had a case of private label root beer with the picture of Ron and Nancy on the label (Similar to our fundraising Wine bottles.). Ron signed all of the bottles with comments for the various sports teams in the area, "Go Brewers," "On Wisconsin," "Go



Ron and Tony Voulgaris with National Hoop Shoot second place winner, Sam Hinson, representing Marshfield Lodge.



Ron and Nancy with Mary and Tony Voulgaris holding a bottle of the "special root beer".

Private Label Root beer with photo of Ron and Nancy.



Badgers,” “Go Packers,” etc. The root beer bottles will be sold later as a fundraiser to benefit the Wisconsin Benevolent Fund.

Sunday morning, we attended the beginning of the final Business Session before departing for the airport. Ron thanked the members for their hospitality and congratulated the Lodges and the Association for their achievements, support of the Grand Lodge Programs, and service to their communities. He also spoke briefly about how he appreciated the recent State President themes: PSP Todd Kostuck had “Changing Lives Through Elkdom;” current State President, Tony Voulgaris, has “Renew, Grow, and Succeed;” and President-Elect, Rob Radig, will have “Be Loud and Be Proud,” explaining how each of these themes play into his message to all Elks. Another truly great visit!!

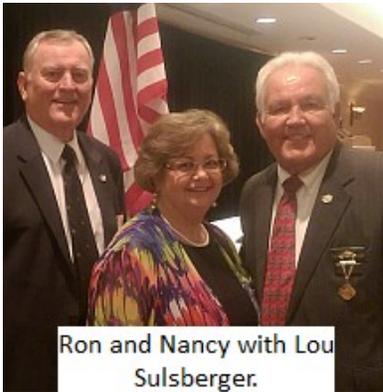


Ron and Nancy with Bob and Char Bohnsack of the Fond du Lac 57 Lodge.



PSP, Todd Kostuck and his wife, Leah presenting Ron and Nancy with Parker pins that he had hand turned on a lathe made of exotic woods.

We arrived back in Fredericksburg around 6 pm on Sunday, where we will have the luxury of three full days to relax, catch up on work and prepare for our two-week trip to New York, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Vermont, New Hampshire and Massachusetts.



Ron and Nancy with Lou Sulsberger.



Ron and Tony Voulgaris with engraved golf bookends from the State Association.