



1978-1998

Caring and Sharing during Changing Times

THE PERIOD from 1978 to 1998 was one of many social and technological changes. Guided by its principles of Charity, Justice, Brotherly Love, and Fidelity, the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks worked during this time frame to hold fast to its central commitments, embrace positive changes, and combat changes that they felt were detrimental to the American character.

Battling Drug Abuse

In the early 1980s, PGERs Francis Smith and Frank Garland traveled the country to find out from educators and school administrators what their schools' greatest challenges were and how the Elks could best serve young people in a changing world. These educators and school officials overwhelmingly responded by saying that the need to fight growing drug abuse among young people was of paramount importance. As a result, the Elks National Drug Awareness Program was created in 1982, with Richard Herndobler as its first administrator.

The drug awareness program's mission was to provide facts to children and parents about the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse in a format that children could appreciate. The much-loved Elks drug awareness mascot, Elroy the Elk, was introduced to the program in 1986, and the state association drug awareness trailers, which were



Elroy the Elk, shown visiting a child at the Corinth, Mississippi, Lodge's drug awareness booth in 1997, was introduced in 1986 and has come to symbolize the work of the Elks National Drug Awareness Program.

developed by Larry Collins, of the Charleston, South Carolina, Lodge, were first deployed in the southeastern region of the country in the late 1980s.

After the tragic death of US Drug Enforcement Administration Special Agent Enrique Camarena, who was abducted and murdered in 1985 while investigating drug cartel activities in Mexico, Elks in Camarena's home state of California were among the first to remember him through the distribution of red ribbons at schools on an annual basis. In 1988, Elks took part in the first national Red Ribbon Day commemoration of Special Agent Camarena's life and death, and in 1989–1990, then Assistant Drug Awareness Program Administrator Andrew Milwid became one of the members of the Red Ribbon Day national board.

In time, the Elks National Drug Awareness Program became one of the most prominent national programs that was fighting the use of illegal drugs, and the leaders of the program were heard at the highest levels. Both Milwid and Herndobler served on national anti-drug advisory councils that were convened by Presidents Reagan, Bush, and Clinton.

Veterans Service

One thing that did not change during the period from 1978 to 1998 was the Elks' steadfast observance of their pledge never to forget the nation's veterans. Throughout this period, the Elks National Veterans Service Commission continued to support work in VA hospitals nationwide and in 1982 introduced the Adopt-a-Veteran program, which encouraged local lodges to develop relationships with individual veterans.

In 1991, at the outset of Operation Desert Storm, GER James Damen wrote to President Bush to express the Order's wholehearted support for the US military in its efforts to liberate Kuwait from Iraqi occupation forces. Like so many times before, Elks nationwide pitched in to send care packages and notes of encouragement to deployed service members. Then, in 1994, following a four-year restoration effort, the Elks National Veterans Memorial was once again rededicated, this time to recognize "the fighting American men and women of all wars."

In 1997, when a memorial in Bedford, Virginia, to the servicemen who died in World War II during the D Day invasion was contemplated, the memorial's founders turned to the BPO Elks for help. The Order donated \$50,000 to help with the construction of this worthy monument to the memory of the Bedford Boys and the other troops who sacrificed to help liberate Europe and defeat the Axis powers.

Supporting American Icons

In 1982, the Statue of Liberty–Ellis Island Foundation was created to lead private sector efforts to renovate and preserve the Statue of Liberty for its 100th anniversary in 1986. In 1983, in response to the foundation's call for donations, the Elks pledged to provide \$1 million toward the effort. On December 14, 1985, the Order made good on

its promise—the first charitable organization to do so—and by 1986, it had donated a total of nearly \$1.4 million toward the restoration effort.

Another great American institution that the Elks took part in during this period was the annual Rose Parade, which takes place in Pasadena, California, each New Year's Day. In 1981, Elks from states that included California, Hawaii, Arizona, and Nevada individually contributed to create a float and enter it in the parade. They did so again in 1982, and starting in 1983, the Grand Lodge sponsored a parade float each year until 1994.

Serving in a Changing World

Beginning in the late 1970s and early 1980s, membership in almost all voluntary organizations in the United States, from churches to bowling leagues, declined for reasons that scholars continue to debate. The BPO Elks was not immune to this trend. Membership in the Order in 1978 was just over 1.6 million and peaked in 1979–1980 at nearly 1.65 million, but then it began to gradually but steadily decrease. There was no single year with a precipitous drop, but by 1998, membership in the Order had fallen by nearly half a million to slightly less than 1.2 million.

As society changed, some things about the Elks also changed. One major shift came in 1995, when Elks at the Grand Lodge Session voted to end the Order's status as an all-male fraternity and admit female members. The constitutional amendment was ratified by the individual lodges and came into effect on September 29 of that year.

Another adaptation came in late 1995, when a website for *The Elks Magazine* went online. The official Elks website, www.elks.org, went live in January 1996, and the Grand Lodge Advisory Committee created an Internet Department in February 1996. The committee hired a full-time Internet manager in 1997.

Even as membership numbers were falling and the world was changing, the Elks' generosity and charitable efforts were vastly multiplying. By 1997–1998, the estimated total charitable expenditures of the Order, including all lodge monetary donations, donations in kind, and value of time donated, had risen to more than \$146 million. This was nearly ten times as much as the roughly \$15 million recorded in 1977–1978. In recognition of the Order's amazing service, the assembled Elks at the 1997 Grand Lodge Session decided to adopt a motto for the Order: Elks Care—Elks Share. ■



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The BPO Elks contributed nearly \$1.4 million to assist with the restoration of the Statue of Liberty in time for its 100th anniversary.