

THE ORDER OF ELKS AND THE ELKS NATIONAL HOME A BRIEF HISTORY

What is now known as the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks began in 1867 when a group of friends in New York (mostly theatrical performers) began meeting together and referred to themselves as the “Jolly Corks”. In the beginning, they were a purely social group. The death of a friend inspired them to become a benevolent organization to assist friends and their families in need. Out of this grew the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks and the Elks National Home.

At the Grand Lodge convention of 1898 there was expressed “a desirability of a home for indigent and needy Elks”. In 1899 at the Grand Lodge convention \$20,000 was raised on the convention floor toward this project. (That’s \$515,780 in today’s dollars.) The old Hotel Bedford was purchased in 1901 and on May 21, 1903, the Order of Elks dedicated it as the Elks National Home. As you would expect, there have been many changes at the Home since that time.

In the beginning, it was for “indigent” Elks and they were supported by their subordinate lodges and the Grand Lodge. Of course, that has changed completely over the years. Those who reside at the Home now are financially self-sustaining and pay the charges established by the Board of Grand Trustees. We are able to keep those charges to the residents at a reasonable level because of the support of the Elks membership through the \$1.00 per member annual assessment.

In a few years, the original hotel building became inadequate for the increasing residency and in 1916 a new building was completed and dedicated. Between 1923 and 1938, three additional buildings for residents were constructed, as well as a laundry building and theater. Although the buildings were well maintained and upgraded, there were few major changes in the construction until 1985 when Building “A” was totally renovated to provide private bathrooms and central air conditioning. The renovation of Buildings “B” and “C” followed in 1987 and 1991.

We refer to 1999 as the “year of change” at the Home, since that was the year of a major renovation project and when the first female Elk members and married couples became residents. The project involved converting four buildings into apartments for independent living, a complete renovation of the lobby, a dramatic redecoration of the dining room and sun porch, and enclosing the verandahs that connect the buildings at the front of the Home. The apartments filled quickly and have remained filled ever since, with a waiting list of interested members. The funds for this renovation came from bequests and gifts from members and friends of the Home.

You can imagine that the addition of women as residents made many of the “old time” residents apprehensive, but it has proven to be one of the most beneficial changes of all. The ladies are a positive influence on all aspects of life at the Home and they take an active part in the Home and Home Lodge activities.

Now we are in need of additional renovations to provide a new care unit and additional apartments for the members who are on our waiting list.

The Order of Elks was originally formed to protect and assist their members. The Elks National Home Retirement Community is a direct result of that purpose. The Home has a fascinating and fulfilling past, and we are excited about what the future holds. This part of the Order has had a tremendous impact on the lives of several thousand Elk members over the years. It has meant comfort, security, companionship, and happiness. Because of the concern and generosity of Elk members throughout the country, we are certain that things will only continue to improve and grow, and that the Elks National Home will continue to demonstrate the tenets of our Order – Charity, Justice, Brotherly Love and Fidelity.

