

# Keizer Elks turn fraternal order into charitable army

By ERIC A. HOWALD  
*Of the Keizertimes*

Over the years, fraternal organizations like the Benevolent Order of the Elks have been pinned with the reputation as places where people go to drink and party. The Keizer Elks' 2,250 members are determined to change that.

"I think \$59,000 given to local charities in the last 10 months says we are about a lot more than drinking," said Dave Salisbury, the current exalted ruler of the lodge.

At a time when many such organizations struggle with membership, the Keizer Elks are growing – and not in small ways. Lodge 2472, at the corner of Manbrin Drive Northeast and Cherry Avenue Northeast is the largest Elks lodge on the West Coast and the 11th largest in the nation.

Not only do the Keizer Elks provide local non-profits with financial donations, as was the case with two recent \$1,000 donations to the Keizer Community Food Bank and Liberty House, they put in time and miles that go largely unaccounted for.

"We donate to Meals on Wheels, but we are also the host facility and about 90 percent of the

drivers are Elks members," said Salisbury.

The Elks' charitable efforts aren't limited to seniors and the disabled either. Elk Diane Norton is one of many that visit local schools to administer eye exams.

"One of the technicians from the Elks Children's Eye Clinic in Portland (aka Casey Eye) comes down and trains us on conducting the tests and we actually do the testing," said Norton.

Those who don't perform testing provide comfort to students as they progress through the testing process.

"We went down to the Head Start Program at Washington Elementary and my job was just to escort the students down to testing area and stay with them. It was a lot more rewarding than I expected," said Elk Bruce Plummer.

Other programs include drug abuse awareness education, a hoop shoot competition that boasts alumni like Oregon State University's Katie McWilliams, college scholarships, a holiday food box program that provides for local families, a kids' Christmas party, funding underfunded sports and arts programs at McNary High School, a firefighter and police appreciation dinner and much more.



KEIZERTIMES/ERIC A. HOWALD

Don't let the gray-haired officers of the Keizer Elks fool you, Lodge 2472 is attracting younger members, and turning membership into charitable giving.

However, veterans have a special status when it comes to the Elks' giving efforts. Seventy-five of the 200 food boxes prepared for local families last December went to the families of veterans.

"One of the mottos of the Elks is that as long as there are Elks, veterans will never be forgotten," said Salisbury.

That saying is more than just words for Elk Lee Arehart, a veteran himself. He fought back emotion when asked what motivated him to transfer to the Keizer Elks Lodge from another lodge many moons ago.

"Mainly the veterans program and all the things this lodge does for vets. Once a month, we go up to the (Veteran's Administration) Hospital and bring the patients care packages with candy and toiletries and stamps. Everything they might need. For some of them, it's the only outside contact they have," Lee said.

Lee's wife Corrine is also an active member and an officer with the Elks.

"I think one of the great things about this Lodge is there are so many ways to be involved. If you want to be a member and stay in the background, that is fine. If you want to step up and be a leader in a project, you can do that, too," Corrine said.

Elk Al Ault was a member for eight years before taking on an officer role and it rapidly grew his enthusiasm for the lodge as a whole.

"This has been the most exciting year as a member that I could imagine. You make of it what you want it to be. I just finally wanted to be part of giving back," Ault said.

The openness with which one can treat an Elks membership is leading to something of a renaissance. While many of the officers are of the gray-haired persuasion, a new, younger group of

members is finding a home at the Keizer Elks Lodge.

"We have some young guys who come in and set-up their (tabletop) games at the card tables, and they feel comfortable doing that. They told us that if they went anywhere else they would be asked to leave after a while. They can come in here and play for hours without anyone hassling them," Salisbury said.

There is a \$25 application fee, but dues to the Elks are just \$100 annually. For that price, members get seven-day-a-week access to the lodge that comes with a restaurant and bar inside, a spacious outdoor area with everything from horseshoe to barbecue pits, and music every weekend.

"We've made it so that our members want to be here, and they bring in their friends and our membership grows," said Elk Rick Wagner.

They are trying to establish a new reputation for the organization as a whole, the full bar is not as problematic as one might think.

"We actually had someone report to the police that we were the last place they'd had a drink before getting picked up for a DUII," said Elk Jack Madison. "I wasn't okay with that and I went down to the (police) station to find out what else might have been happening. Our numbers are way below anywhere else in the area on those last drink reports. We've only had four in about five years," Madison said.

A number of the current officers don't even partake of the lodge's bar offerings.

"We take a lot of pride in what we do and we are changing what people expect of the Elks," said Salisbury. "But it's because our members care about this place, we don't have another local establishment like it."

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