

Hunterdon Cares

Flemington Elks Always Seeks to Serve Children, Families in Need



By Cynthia Orsi-Kuhl,
Flemington Elks

Editor's Note: Each month, this column will feature an inspiring non-profit that serves Hunterdon County. Contact us to recommend a non-profit to be highlighted in this section.

The Flemington Elks recently celebrated its second annual Community Improvement Grants Distribution.

The Elks National Foundation (ENF) allocated nearly \$16 million (nationwide) this year to fund Community Investments Programs that are lodged, through the volunteerism efforts and donations made by the local Elks that facilitates the financial resources earned.

Following the COVID pandemic, resulting in a lagging membership, suffocating fundraising events and lack of growth in membership, the Flemington Elks Lodge and Auxiliary, is finally on a strong comeback. The rising membership is passionately implementing fresh ideas to strengthen support throughout Hunterdon County. This renewed enthusiasm is helping welcome new members, create partnerships with community government and non-profit organizations and address needs in our county.

In April 2024, Flemington Elks Lodge ENF Committee launched its first grant ceremony since the COVID pandemic, disbursing \$6,000 towards food insecurity in the county.

This January's Freedom, Beacon, Spotlight and Gratitude Grants totaled \$10,000 to benefit returning veterans; the rising numbers in food insecurity; strengthening families and individuals through educating workshops; advocating for children in unhealthy environments; and funds that foster youth development, healthy living and social responsibilities. It is these types of programs that significantly impact our future leadership.

Elks Exalted Ruler Vern Ainslie informed the audience, "We are a volunteer-led, non-profit organization with the goal of helping those in need, including veterans acclimating to a normal lifestyle, awarding scholarships to worthy students, extending grants to other partnering charities and assisting others less for-

tunate. We educate our youth through state-led peer leadership conferences and drug awareness programs. All Elks lodges in New Jersey are committed to the Camp Moore Project, located in Passaic County. Every summer, special needs children can enjoy a week in the country under one-on-one supervision and care, so they can experience freedom and interaction with others."

The ENF also has volunteers at the lodge, district and state levels, who help coordinate our fundraising strategy and implement programs. Lodge committee chair Cynthia Orsi-Kuhl quoted author Amanda Gorman, saying, "There is strength in unity, strength in all of us, strength in allied-ship, companionship and community ... which makes that strength enduring, sustainable and meaningful," and this is what we do as Elks in Hunterdon County. We come together, for the good of all."

This year's CIP Grant recipients included NJ Returning Veterans, Harvest Family Success of Prevention Resources, Flemington Area Food Pantry, CASA SHaW, Cross River YMCA-Hunterdon and Flemington-Raritan School District. A representative from each organization shared gratefulness for having been chosen, and the grant's positive impacts.



This year, a new initiative was launched in the Flemington-Raritan School District. The Elks Literacy Reading Team strengthened the bond between the classroom and community, inspiring children by reading the first two chapters of Judy Blume's book, "Freckle Juice," and gifting a book to each child to complete the reading at home.

Bipartisan celebratory accolades were extended by Assemblywoman Mitchell Drulis and Hunterdon County commissioners John Lanza, Jeff Kuhl and Susan Soloway. All dignitaries unanimously expressed gratitude to the Elks and grant recipients, "recognizing the good work and countless hours that these cornerstone organizations contribute for the benefit of our community," they said.

The Flemington Elks has been a part of the community for over 70 years, supporting vulnerable populations with the intent that a strong community makes for a better one. Participation in being present in community benefits the mind, body and soul, increasing

longevity while making new friends along with meaningful community service. Elks lodges welcome new membership, especially to exemplify to their children how volunteering makes a difference.

Though parent membership isn't required, the Flemington Elks Lodge is interested in beginning a youth version of an Elks Lodge, called an Antlers Program, for children ages 12 to 20. This program operates with an advisory council, and develops leadership skills which are important for adolescents to understand for service to their community, country and the functioning facets of a volunteer organization. Other Elk youth activities offered are essay poster-Power Point and movie contests, peer leadership development, one-day sports programs and community service volunteer opportunities.

Many of you may be familiar with the Elks Auxiliary-coordinated Bingo on the first Thursday of each month. The Flemington Elks holds many activities that welcome community members. When you participate in these



events or rent their banquet hall that holds up to 325 people, it helps the Elks keep our community strong.

Call 908-788-8203, email ElksEvents.info@gmail.com or visit FlemingtonElks.com for more information.

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