



# HEARTBEAT

ELKS NATIONAL FOUNDATION NEWS

ISSUE 78 | 2024



The Elks Scholar Service Trip in Phoenix gave scholars an opportunity to put on some work gloves and don their dancing shoes, participating in service and camaraderie, courtesy of the Mesa Buckhorn Elks.



## STARTING THE YEAR WITH SERVICE

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What happens when strangers come together for multiple days of service, sightseeing and socializing? For some, the answers may vary. On Elks Scholar Service Trips, the answer is always the same.

In January, ENF Program Relations Associate Libby Willkomm led the first Elks Scholar Service Trip of 2024 in Phoenix. Then in March, Willkomm led a second trip to Philadelphia.

“The Phoenix and Philadelphia service trips were absolute successes,” says Willkomm. “It was so amazing to see the scholars do impactful service, while also strengthening their connections to one another and the Elks family.”

The scholars on both trips had diverse backgrounds, with some coming from towns of less than a few thousand people and others coming from some of the biggest cities in the country. Though the scholars had very different upbringings, they were able to see the beauty in their differences—while finding plenty of similarities.

“I was so worried at first that I’d feel such imposter syndrome getting to know everyone, but I immediately knew that these were genuine people I had so much in common with,” says Elaine Gombos, a 2023 Most Valuable Student scholar sponsored by Allegheny, Pa., Lodge No. 339.

In Phoenix, the scholars’ service covered a variety of issues, from ensuring that

*see Service, continued on page 2*



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Service is at the heart of what it means to be part of the #ElksFamily, and Elks scholars know that service together is better.

*Service, continued from page 1*

## MARK YOUR CALENDAR

JUNE 29 – JULY 3:  
Elks National Convention in Austin

donations were high quality and would make recipients feel at home to providing essential supplies for veterans experiencing homelessness.

The service in Philadelphia focused on fighting food insecurity. Scholars started by working in a food distribution warehouse, then made food for a community fridge, and brought their service full circle by handing food directly to members of the community at Bridgeport, Pa., Lodge No. 714.

“It was great to see the ways the organizations we worked with address food insecurity,” says Taylor Thompson, a 2022 Legacy scholar and member of the Elks Scholar Advisory Board, sponsored by Nevada, Mo., Lodge No. 564. “I think it goes to show that this issue requires more than a one-size-fits-all solution, and it was so inspiring to meet and work with individuals who are stepping up in their communities.”

Elks in both Phoenix and Philadelphia did an excellent job of showing the scholars what it means to be part of the #ElksFamily. Along with the Bridgeport Lodge, Mesa-Buckhorn, Ariz., Lodge No. 2656 and Deptford, N.J., Lodge No. 2708 stepped up to host these incredible groups of scholars.

“The highlight of the service trip for me was certainly visiting the Elks Lodge,” says Anika Jannatul, a 2019 Most Valuable Student scholar sponsored by New London, Conn., Lodge No. 360. “It was evident how much time and effort they put into planning for our visit, and I had so much fun talking to Elks members and dancing.”

So what happens when strangers are brought together? On Elks Scholar Service Trips, the answer is clear: meaningful service, lasting friendships and unforgettable memories.

*The Elks National Foundation offers three Elks Scholar Service Trips annually. For more information about the trips, visit [enf.elks.org/ScholarServiceTrips](https://enf.elks.org/ScholarServiceTrips).*



ENF staff members Meaghan Morris and Sam Kayuha didn't go to Arizona just to learn about CIP grant projects—they also got involved!



## A MIGHTY IMPACT WITH CIP

ENF Assistant Director Debbie Doles, Senior Programs Associate Meaghan Morris and Programs Associate Sam Kayuha represented the Community Investments Program in Phoenix and saw how Elks in the Saguaro State serve their communities using CIP grants.

Gilbert, Ariz., Lodge No. 2848 uses CIP grants, including an Impact Grant, to create and maintain food pantries at local Title One schools, in which more than 40 percent of students are from families below the poverty line.

“The Lodge has strong relationships with the schools and the students,” says Kayuha. “It was great to see the system that the Gilbert Elks had developed to so effectively serve this important need.”

With only 60 members, it takes an all-hands-on-deck approach to make sure the Gilbert Lodge's grants help as many students as possible. “What's small in membership is mighty in impact,” says Doles. “The Oak Tree Elementary School Principal said it best when he called the Gilbert Elks their partners in student success.”

The Casa Grande Valley Lodge No. 1957 uses its Impact Grant to provide hydration supplies and heat relief kits. The average high temperature in the area between June and August is 104 degrees Fahrenheit, making these kits essential for people without reliable shelter.

“It's a privilege being able to see our CIP grants in action,” says Morris. “Witnessing the scope of the Gilbert and Casa Grande Valley Lodges' grant projects in person allows us to see the dedication, commitment, and impact in ways that can't always be translated on paper. We are honored to be a part of it!”

*For 2023–24, the Elks National Foundation allocated nearly \$16 million to fund the Community Investments Program. To learn more about the Community Investments Program, please visit [elks.org/cip](https://elks.org/cip).*

## THE GRANT YEAR'S GREAT START

Meaghan and Sam are back at the office, and they're busy approving grant applications for the 2024–25 grant year. Since the applications opened on April 1, more than 500 Lodges have submitted proposals to help build stronger communities—and the number continues to grow every day.

In 2024–25, the ENF allotted \$16.3 million to the Community Investments Program to help Elks meet the most pressing needs in their communities, and the goal is for every Lodge to use at least one CIP grant this year.

It is easy to get started! The CIP staff created handy toolkits that explain the purpose of every grant and how to make sure your Lodge's application is successful. The Spotlight Grant also offers seven project plans to make it even easier to make a difference.

Get connected with your Lodge's Grants Coordinator—or reach out to your Lodge leadership, if your Lodge doesn't have one—to see how you can get involved today.

Visit [elks.org/CIP](https://elks.org/CIP) to learn more.



## THE ROAD TO CHICAGO

### UNLEASHING GRIT

The 72 Hoop Shoot National Finalists share much in common. They've shot thousands of free throws, overcome numerous obstacles, and defeated all challengers in fierce competition. Win or lose, participating in the Hoop Shoot unleashes grit throughout the way.

Though they are similar in so many ways, every National Finalist has a unique story. Queue Griteos.

Griteos are videos about the passion, perseverance, and grit of Hoop Shoot competitors. Each Griteo focuses on a different National Finalist and their family, giving viewers an inside look at the Hoop Shoot and what it means to those involved.

To watch these short videos, go to [enf.elks.org/griteos](http://enf.elks.org/griteos).

The road to the Hoop Shoot National Finals is long. Before competitors can even think about Chicago, they must win their Lodge, District, State, and Regional contests, each with competition fiercer than the last.

But if Chicago felt especially close to some competitors this year, that is because it was: The Elks National Foundation sent three employees—Youth Programs Coordinator Nathan Springberg, Programs Associate Sam Kayuha, and Communications Coordinator Patrick Roelofs—into the field to catch the action live on the road to Chicago.

Springberg and Roelofs kicked off the ENF's travels by visiting the Florida State Finals at the Florida Elks Youth Camp in Umatilla. This was Roelofs' first time seeing the Hoop Shoot in person, and the bar was set high.

"I was amazed at how seamless the competition was run," says Roelofs. "From the scorers to the door guards, the Florida Elks sure know how to make the competitors and families feel like the champions they are."

After battling on the court, the competitors ate lunch, listened to speeches by Elks dignitaries, and received trophies that came up to their waists.

Only a few weeks later, Springberg and Kayuha traveled to Charlottesville, Virginia, for the Southeast Central Region 10 Contest. Featuring state champions from Maryland, DC and Delaware; North Carolina; Virginia; and West Virginia, this was only another stop on the road to Chicago for some—and the end of the Hoop Shoot journey for others.

From the start, the competition was fierce.

After a first round which personified the grit that the Hoop Shoot unleashes, the drama continued with the 10-11 boys, who needed a shootoff to determine a winner. Ty Willard, sponsored by Bedford, Va., Lodge No. 2844, sank 4/5 in the extra round to punch his ticket to Chicago.

The 12-13 boys saw a nearly perfect Reid Borders, sponsored by Morganton, N.C., Lodge No. 1852, sink 24. Reid seemed nonplussed by his impressive

effort, probably already looking ahead to how he would fare in the National Finals.

“The contestants make new friends and learn valuable lessons for life,” says Regional Director Lynn Rutherford-Snow. “Life is not always about winning, and you will experience a few defeats along the way. But these defeats will make you stronger, and you will learn from them.”

Though the road to Chicago is long, 72 gritty Hoop Shoot competitors outlasted their competitors and punched their tickets to the National Finals, learning important lessons along the way.

*The Elks have been unleashing gritty kids through the Hoop Shoot program for more than 50 years. For 2024–25, the Elks National Foundation allocated more than \$1.5 million to fund the program. For videos, news from the court, and more information about the Hoop Shoot, visit [elks.org/hoopshoot](https://elks.org/hoopshoot).*



Volunteers like former Florida State Hoop Shoot Director Jeff Rumler make the Hoop Shoot special at every level of the competition.

## SNEAK PEEK

Stay tuned for the next issue of *Heartbeat* for full coverage of the 2024 Hoop Shoot National Finals, including a heartwarming stories, breathtaking photos, and a full list of the National Champions.

If you can't wait for a review of the action, visit the ENF website for the most up-to-date Foundation news at [elks.org/ENF](https://elks.org/ENF).



SUPPORT THE GREAT HEART OF ELKDOM!

Visit [enf.elks.org/donate](https://enf.elks.org/donate), and your online donation will be put to work immediately in Elks communities!

## ASK THE ENF...

**Q** I heard there is a way for my Lodge to work with Elks scholars. Is this true? How can I get my Lodge involved?  
—Curious in Columbus

**A** Hello Curious,  
It is true! Called ScholarCIP, this initiative brings Elks scholars and Lodges together. Because scholars are typically only familiar with their sponsoring Lodges, they tend not to be involved with Elks while they are at school. The goal of ScholarCIP is to change this by connecting students with Elks near their college towns and introducing them to local Lodge projects. Elks scholars are eager to serve with their #ElksFamily, and we are here to help make it possible! If you would like to connect with Elks scholars in your area, email [scholarship@elks.org](mailto:scholarship@elks.org).

Have a question for the ENF? Email us at [enf@elks.org](mailto:enf@elks.org).

## WELCOMING THE #ELKSFAMILY

It's not often that 20 of the brightest young minds in the country come together for a weekend of service and fellowship. But for the Top 20 Most Valuable Student scholars, it's a yearly occurrence!

From April 11-14, the 2024 Most Valuable Student Leadership Weekend introduced the Top 20 scholars to their #ElksFamily in a big way. They volunteered at a local organization, participated in leadership programming, went sightseeing around the city, and visited the Elks Headquarters and National Veterans Memorial! Each will receive a \$30,000 scholarship to support their undergraduate education.

If you want to see photos from the weekend, follow us on Facebook and Instagram! For a more detailed look at the Leadership Weekend, stay tuned to our Youtube channel. Go to [enf.elks.org/social](https://enf.elks.org/social) to see all our social media in one place.



Past National Presidents and their spouses were recognized for their contributions to the Foundation at the Board of Trustees meeting in San Diego.



## GIVING ISN'T ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL

Donating to the Elks National Foundation is not a one-size-fits-all proposition. Some prefer the ease of monthly giving, while others prefer to see the kind of difference their gift may make by giving a symbolic gift.

For those who are 70.5 years old and above, like Jim Blanchard, the savvy way to give is through Qualified Charitable Distributions.

Before he was an Elk, Blanchard received a visit from his cousin, who wanted to visit the local Lodge. Blanchard followed, and after a hot dog and some encouragement, decided to join Hollywood West, Fla., Lodge No. 2365.

In the 22 years since, Blanchard has been named the Lodge's Elk of the Year and Officer of the Year. He currently serves as CIP Grants Coordinator. By donating to the ENF through QCDs, Blanchard not only supports several worthy programs—he also supports himself.

Also known as Charitable IRA Rollovers, QCDs are distributions from one's IRA made directly to a nonprofit organization so they don't count as taxable income. Because they go directly to charitable organizations, QCDs lower one's adjusted gross income, effectively reducing income taxes.

"It is a great way to give and save money on your taxes," says Blanchard. "I feel like I can give more this way."

In addition to giving through QCDs, Blanchard is also a member of the Fidelity Club, the ENF's monthly giving program.

Donating to the ENF is not a one-size-fits-all proposition, but for Jim Blanchard, the choice is clear. Discover all the ways to give, and see if QCD giving is right for you at [enf.elks.org/WaystoGive](https://enf.elks.org/WaystoGive).

# FIDELITY CLUB

We thank the members of the Fidelity Club, who give automatic, monthly donations to the ENF. As of March 2024, these sustaining donors have given 150 or 200 Fidelity Club gifts to the Foundation. To learn more about the Fidelity Club and see the complete honor roll, visit [enf.elks.org/FidelityClub](http://enf.elks.org/FidelityClub).

## 200

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David W. Demert  
David M. Edwards  
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Gregory Moscibrocki  
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## 150

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Andrew J. Constantine  
Nancy B. Coughlan  
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Jerry E. 'Gene' Day  
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## STAY CONNECTED!



Open this issue of *Heartbeat* to read about the latest Elks Scholar Service Trip ... and much more!

