**A CIPtastic Summer**

**By Sam Kayuha, ENF Programs Associate**

There are plenty of ways to enjoy summer—long days can be spent in the sunshine at parks, beaches or the ballpark. But this season can also bring a lack of structure for young people and other challenges to populations who lack access to summer’s pleasures.

Some Elks Lodges use CIP grants to ensure that students do not spend summer idly; others do projects that take advantage of warm weather to help isolated populations make connections. As the season turns, let’s recognize how Lodges can make this season safe, fun, and healthy for all members of their communities.

Athletics are a common activity for young people in summer—from t-ballers to high schoolers, parks are packed with big league dreamers. But, for those who gravitate more toward the arts, there can be fewer opportunities. Maryville, Mo., Lodge No. 760 used its Gratitude Grant to support an organization that operates a musical theater program for young people during summer break.

Maryville Young Players hosts a summer camp where students learn, rehearse, and perform a musical over three weeks. The 2023 program culminated in performances of “Frozen, Jr.” to more than 3,000 total audience members.

“The camp provided a creative outlet for students, away from video games and mobile devices, that helped grow friendships, teach valuable skills, and provided a unique time for fun and fellowship while growing an appreciate for the arts,” says Grants Coordinator Tammy Thompson.

Around 25 Lodge members helped the camp purchase materials for the production and advertising efforts and staffed the performances. Lodge members remarked afterward that the program made a great impact on those who do not have such opportunities in their rural community.

“The reality is that not every student has the physical ability or desire to compete in competitive sports,” says Thompson. “For those students especially, Maryville Young Players exists to provide a creative outlet to anyone seeking to experience and learn about the arts during the summer months.”

Troy, Ohio, Lodge No. 833 used its Beacon Grant to protect students against the “summer slide.” If students don’t keep themselves engaged with learning material from the previous year, they’re at risk of losing some of the knowledge they gained. By directly supporting the local parks and recreation department’s summer reading program, the Troy Elks made sure students keep climbing the ladder instead of going down the slide.

The program, Summer Lunch Buddies, focuses on children in kindergarten through 5th grade who have been referred by their school for extra reading help. The students and volunteers gather in the rec center to eat lunch together, participate in a group activity, then break into pairs for a reading session.

Throughout last summer, Lodge volunteers worked with more than 100 students. The program has been ongoing for more than 20 years and has successfully kept many students engaged with their education. Lodge participation is an opportunity for the membership to ensure the program continues to succeed for another 20 years, and to show the community that Elks always care.

It’s clear that Elks do not just see the summer months as a time for vacations and relaxation. Lodges are always on the lookout for the different challenges faced by members of their community, and they use CIP grants to address them, now and throughout the year.

*For 2024-25, the Elks National Foundation allocated $16 million to fund the Community Investments Program. Lodges meet local needs through CIP grants that offer Elks opportunities to serve their community in ways that will raise the Lodge’s profile, energize the membership, encourage former members to return to the fold, and gain the notice of people who want to be part of an organization that’s doing great things. To learn more about the Community Investments Program, please visit* ***elks.org/CIP***.