



Clifton Park Elks Lodge

Elks Care, Elks Share

By Jenna Caputo | Photos by Angela Mia Photography and the Clifton Park Elks

In November 1867, Charles Algernon Sidney Vivian arrived in New York City to find his fortune. A son of a clergyman, Charles was a successful comic singer and dancer in the London music halls, but he wanted to try something new. Other entertainers gravitated toward his magnetic personality. A group of these people soon started meeting privately since the New York City Blue Laws mandated everything to be closed on Sundays. This loose organization began calling themselves the Jolly Corks. However, when one of their members died shortly before Christmas of that year, leaving behind a wife and children, the Jolly Corks decided they needed to create a more enduring organization to help those in need instead of just being of good fellowship.

The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks initiated on February 16, 1868 with Charles as its leader. Word of its social activities and benefit performances spread quickly and membership grew. The news spread and other cities soon requested their own Elks Lodges. As the requests continued to grow, the organization asked the New York State Legislature for

a Charter to establish a Grand Lodge with the power to establish local lodges anywhere in the US. In addition to each lodge's local charitable works, the group also banded together for national projects as well.

In 1907, each Elks Lodge adopted the practice of celebrating Flag Day. It was through his Elks Lodge in Independence, Missouri that President Truman got the idea for the national observance. Congress formally recognized June 14th as Flag Day in 1949. In 1918, the Elks built a 700-bed hospital in Boston, donating it to the federal government and becoming a precursor to today's VA Medical Centers. In 1928, they created the Elks National Foundation, looking "to unite the forces of the Order into a mighty army for the service of mankind." They started with a \$100,000 grant and used it toward their mission of building stronger communities through various programs. Since their inception, they have contributed more than \$500 million toward national charitable projects, and the programs continue to grow every year.



The Clifton Park Elks Lodge #2466 initiated on July 11, 1971 at the Northway Heights Golf Club on Route 146A (now Eagle Crest Golf Club). Sixty-seven charter members established the club. After the first several months, George Wheeler, a Lodge Trustee and a local building contractor, offered a piece of his property on the old Teresko Farm, where Leon Teresko, a Clifton Park Lodge member, grew up. Leon is still a member to this day. On November 12, 1972, the Clifton Park Elks Ladies Auxiliary began their journey and the two groups have been working together to support our community ever since. They go wherever help is needed, but some projects are annual events.

A sponsor of Boy Scout Troop 246, the Lodge lends out the facility and grounds to the troop for their meetings and camp outs. Many of the Eagle Scout candidates from this troop have implemented their own projects throughout the town to enhance the community, like the project completed by Eagles Scout, Leo Coons, in July 2020. The 24-foot-long wooden bridge built by the Scouts spans the original Erie Canal at a spot just west of Clute's Dry Dock and is utilized extensively by hikers in that area.

Pre-COVID, the Elks hosted monthly breakfasts to raise funds for local veterans. Other veteran support projects include a steak

luncheon at Stratton VA Hospital, holidays meals for the men's and women's homes in Ballston Spa, veteran gift cards, and a picnic at the lodge for vets from the VA.

They also have multiple programs for local students, including scholarship awards for high school students who have excelled academically as well as drug-awareness awards to students from Shenendehowa, Burnt Hills-Ballston Lake, and Niskayuna schools. In addition, the Clifton Park Lodge participates in the national Dictionary Project initiative, distributing over 400 dictionaries to third grade students in five Niskayuna schools each year. They have now provided over 5,000 dictionaries over the years.

The national Americanism Essay contest is another annual event. This contest is for students in 5th-8th grade to promote patriotism in our young people. The Clifton Park Lodge contest is run by Tom Venezia, a former teacher in the Burnt Hills-Ballston Lake district. Each year's theme relates to a different patriotic topic. This year, students are writing about how patriotism can be demonstrated. Participants are recognized with certificates, and pre-COVID, with a breakfast. The best local essays move on to the district then state levels. The best overall state winner usually



appears at the state convention before moving on to the national level.



The Elks also host many other youth programs, including their Soccer Shoot and Hoop Shoot contests. The Hoop Shoot is a contest open for boys and girls 8-13 years old. Winners advance through the district and state divisions before moving on to the National Finals. Winners receive a trophy and their names inscribed at the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in Springfield, MA. Started in 1946, this event is the largest and most visible of the many Elks' youth events. More than 3 million children now participate nationally each year. Past champions include

NBA star Chris Mullin, former North Carolina State star Jennifer Howard, and Major League infielder Chris Snopce. Our Capital District youth have historically done well in this contest as well with three championship winners in the last 10 years, including current Syracuse University star guard, Joseph Girard III, from Glens Falls. In addition to these contests, the Elks also reach local youth through drug awareness programs with the Red Ribbon week initiative, scholarships, assistance to kids in need, and much more.

Reaching out to the community is an important part of their mission. They have donated thousands of dollars to local organizations like the Shenendehowa Helping Hands Food

Pantry, Karyl's Kupboard, the Emergency Food and Hygiene Pantry, and Shen's Bountiful Backpack Program. These donations were all made possible by grants from the Elks National Foundation.

"We have a unique relationship with the community because many of our members are business or community leaders in their professional careers," says Dan Mathias, Past Exalted Ruler. "We have members who work for CAPTAIN (the social services organization), judges, lawyers, members of the state and town government, and other people active in our community who keep us in touch with the needs and challenges. In the past 50 years, some of the most prominent community leaders have belonged to the Clifton Park Elks and that helps us to be a part of the community." The Clifton Park Elks are also a part of many local events like the Halfmoon Halloween and Easter drive-throughs this past year, as well as the Clifton Park Winterfest, 4th of July Parade, and multiple Veterans Day events.

As if all this isn't enough, each state has a "Major Project" that the lodges come together in fundraising for support. The New York State Elks Association and the United Cerebral Palsy (CP) Association formed the Home Service Program in 1964 as New



York State's Major Project. This program has steadily grown each year since and now services over 17 districts in their Association. The Elks from around the state have contributed hundreds of thousands of dollars over the years to help families of children with CP.

Like with everywhere else, COVID changed their procedures. Initially forced to close for a while, they were eventually able to open with restrictions. They purchased special equipment to sanitize the lodge and learned how to do their meetings via Zoom. The scouts only meet outside, and one scout even came up with a new pandemic-friendly fundraiser, having members bring their cans and bottles to the lodge as a donation and to avoid grocery store lines during the height of the pandemic. They also hosted Parking Lot Bingo. Players came to the parking area to purchase their cards. The numbers were broadcast over the car radios and when a player won, they honked their horn and flashed their lights to let everyone know.

They are looking forward to getting back to full activities, which on top of their fundraisers, also include fun events like holiday parties, horseshoe leagues, weekly Bingo, car show, and even a bocce group.

"In today's busy world with so many pressures and challenges for people and families, membership in the Elks offers an opportunity to make an impact on our community and the lives of our youth and veterans and those in need," says Michael Bloss, a former Elks State President. "It is a great way to become involved in something bigger than yourself and to have some fun along the way!"

This year marks the Clifton Park Lodge's 50th anniversary. To celebrate, they will host a special dinner for members and their families on July 10th. They want to reflect on how far they have come over the years and are also including a new history article each month in their Lodge newsletter to document key events from their history.

A tight-knit group that truly cares about the community, the Elks have three sayings that sum up their mission:

- "So long as there are veterans, the Benevolent Protective Order of Elks will never forget them."
- "Elks are never forgotten, never forsaken."
- "Elks Care, Elks Share"

For more information about the Clifton Park Elks, visit their website at <https://www.elks.org/lodges/home.cfm?LodgeNumber=2466>.

