



THE
1654



HICKORY HEARD

MARCH 2026

FROM THE ER

A FINAL WORD FOR THE HERD FROM YOUR EXALTED RULER

As we enter the month of March, I find myself reflecting on what has truly been an outstanding year for the Hickory Elks Lodge #1654. This will be my final newsletter message as your Exalted Ruler, and I want to express how deeply grateful I am for the opportunity to serve this incredible Lodge.

February was a powerful month that truly captured the heart of who we are. We were honored to present a check in the amount of \$4,259.14 to the Saluda Pantry for Western North Carolina relief efforts. That contribution was more than a number — it represented the generosity, unity, and compassion of our members. When our neighbors needed help, this Lodge answered the call.

Our Valentine’s Masquerade Party was another highlight of the month — a night filled with laughter, fellowship, and the kind of camaraderie that makes our Lodge special. Events like that remind us that while we work hard in service to others, we also cherish the friendships and memories created within these walls.

We also hosted a wonderful New Member Social, welcoming the newest members of our Lodge family. Watching seasoned Elks take time to connect, encourage, and share the spirit of Elkdom gave me tremendous pride and confidence in our future.

This has been a year of growth, generosity, and forward momentum. We have supported our community, strengthened our membership, and continued to prove why we are known as the Shining Star of the West. None of this would have been possible without the dedication of our officers, volunteers, committee members, and every member who stepped up and stood behind the mission.

Serving as your Exalted Ruler has been one of the greatest honors of my life. I am sincerely thankful for the trust you placed in me and the unwavering support you have shown throughout my term. Leadership is never a solo effort — it takes a Lodge united in purpose, and I have been blessed to lead one of the very best.

As I conclude my term, I am proud to welcome our incoming Exalted Ruler, Richie Patrick. I know he will continue to lead with strength, vision, and heart. Please give him the same support and encouragement you have so graciously given me.

Thank you for allowing me to serve. Thank you for believing in the vision. And most of all, thank you for being the kind of Lodge that truly lives Charity, Justice, Brotherly Love, and Fidelity.

Fraternally yours,

Frank O’Keefe

Exalted Ruler * (828) 310-1017

Lodge Officers

Exalted Ruler	Frank O’Keefe
Leading Knight	Richard Patrick
Loyal Knight	Jeff Beane
Lecturing Knight	Samantha Bowman
Secretary	Joe Elko
Treasurer	Debbie Whitworth
Esquire	Richard Waterbury
Chaplain	Lesli Garvett
5 Year Trustee	Cary Bowman
4 Year Trustee	Tim Herndon
3 Year Trustee	Robert Brisben
2 Year Trustee	Andrew Geis
1 Year Trustee	Gary Gantt
Inner Guard	Elizabeth Brisben
Tiler	Eric Huffman

Subcommittees

House	Ty Vassil
1st Floor Rentals	Tom McNair
Indoctrination	Richard Waterbury
Gov’t. Relations	Jill Patton
Membership & Retention	Tracy Coffey
Drug Awareness	Brenda Wronnek
Lodge Activities	Everyone!
PER Association	Carole Anderson
Auditing	Jim Benton, Deke Shepler
Presiding Justice	Gary Young
Accident Prevention	Andrew Geis
Public Relations	Brenda Wronnek
Veterans	Samantha Bowman
Americanism	Beth Bolick
E.L.K.S.	Lauren Brisben
Youth Activities	Beth Fox
Hoop Shoot	Robert Brisben
Helping Hands	Art Drumheller
Elk Merchandise	Brenda Wronnek
ENF	Judy Benton
Grants	Carole Anderson
Charity Book	Tracy Gantt

Personnel

Office Admin.	Debbie Whitworth
Bar Manager	TBD
Newsletter	Andrew Geis

FROM THE SECRETARY

Message from the secretary. It's already March and our yearly membership needs to be renewed before April 1st. You should have received an invoice by now. If you didn't, please see me and update your contact information. If you have a change of address, you should report that to the secretary within 30 days. Same goes for email addresses and phone numbers.

Please pay your dues promptly. On March 31st I will be dropping all delinquent Elks from our membership. If you wish to no longer be a member don't be dropped from our Lodge for nonpayment of dues. If you are an Elk in good standing, you can basically freeze your membership by requesting an absolute demit. If you are experiencing unexpected difficulties reach out to me. We can most likely help your situation discreetly.

Joe Elko

joeelko1869@gmail.com



Welcome our new members: Daniel Young, Norris Yoder, Chris Auer, Dana Pope.



WORDS FOR THE HERD

I'm will be so excited to see the yellow pollen again! It's a sure sign that Spring is here. Even though our Lodge slows down a bit during the warmer months, it's still a fantastic time to visit where everyone knows your name. Petition to stay open on Sundays? Imagine walking into the club level and hearing someone yell, "Hey Bob!" The Deck Heads will be filling the deck with laughter! The left side of the bar is always buzzing with tall tales, while the right side is famous for its jokes. So, grab your flip flops, come on downtown, and join us often—crash helmets and shame bags are available!

Carole Anderson

PER, PDDGER, caroleanderson1654@gmail.com * 828-312-7476

Grand Lodge Officers & Committees

- Special Deputy GER, Michael Bryant PER, PSP, PDDGER
- Esquire West, Robert Brisben PER

NCSEA Officers

- President, Mark Couch PER, PDDGER
- PSP Advisory Com Vice-Chair, Michael Bryant PER, PSP, PDDGER

NCSEA PER Association Officers

- President, Gary Gantt PER, PDDGER

NCSEA Committee Advisors

- Gov. Relations & Risk Mgmt, Michael Bryant PER, PSP, PDDGER

NCSEA Committee Chairs

- Disaster Relief, Michael Bryant PER, PSP, PDDGER
- Govnmnt Relations, Michael Bryant PER, PSP, PDDGER
- Leadership Training CoChair, Michael Bryant PER, PSP, PDDGER
- Long-Range Planning CoChair, Michael Bryant PER, PSP, PDDGER
- Risk Mgmt & Lodge Activities, Mark Couch PER, PDDGER,

NCSEA West District Committee Reps

- Americanism, Jay Tate PER
- Auditing, Debbie Whitworth
- Better Practices, Tim Long PER, PDDGER
- Camp Carefree, Frankie Houston
- Conference, Michael Bryant, PER, PSP, PDDGER
- Disaster Relief, Gary Gantt, PER, PDDGER
- Drug Awareness, Brenda Wronek
- ENF, Tim Long PER, PDDGER
- NC State Veterans Home, Joe Elko, PER
- Veterans Activities, Samantha Bowman
- Government Relations, Michael Bryant PER, PSP, PDDGER
- Grants, Carole Anderson PER
- Hoop Shoot, Robert Brisben PER
- Lodge Activities, Debbie Whitworth
- Public Relations, Mickey Lail PER, PDDGER
- Risk Mgmt, Michael Bryant PER, PSP, PDDGER
- Scholarship, Michael Bryant PER, PSP, PDDGER
- Scholarship, Vicky M. Bryant

ELKS NATIONAL FOUNDATION (ENF)

The Elk's year is coming to an end. It certainly has seemed to pass quickly.

A thank you to all of you for your support of the Elks National Foundation this year.....those who continued with their gifts and those who gave for the first time. We had 37 members give for the first time this year! Our total Donor Count is 143 members (out of 584), which puts us at a donor percentage of 24.49%. I had challenged you to get to 25%, so I am pretty pleased! This is the latest posting as of 1/31/26, so we may make it....

I usually report to you on what is happening here in our Lodge, but I thought I would give you a glimpse of where the ENF funds will be used next year.

The budget is set for \$48.2 million
 Community Investments \$18 million
 State Grants 6.4 million
 College Scholarships \$5 million
 Fundraising and Administrative Expenses \$3.8 million Elks
 Hoop Shoot Free Throw Program \$1.5 million Memorial Building
 Maintenance \$ Reserve Fund \$1.1 million Drug Awareness
 Commission \$1 million

I was really surprised and very proud to be a part of an organization that puts so much back into large cities and small communities across our great country. And you are a part of this by donating to ENF.

Continue to support this mission. Every gift, no matter how small (remember just \$10.00 makes you a donor), is needed and used.

Judy Benton

judyjim@charter.net

PAST EXALTED RULERS

We extend our sincere gratitude to everyone who has contributed to our scholarship program through donations and the sharing of our promotional materials on social media platforms. Despite these efforts, we still require substantial financial support to sustain our program.

If a member of your family has previously received one of our \$1000 scholarships, we encourage you to consider helping another deserving student. Our Bike Walk event is scheduled for the morning of March 21st, coinciding with the final ham breakfast of the season. We will be present in the parking lot, ready to roll!

We are actively seeking sponsors for the event and donations. The Past Presidents of your Lodge (PERs) are esteemed individuals who have dedicated their time and resources to your Lodge supporting children and community members. We invite you to join us in this noble cause and make a difference in the lives of our students. It's a love story for us!

Carole Anderson. PER, PDDGER

VETERANS COMMITTEE

We are still a month away from the new Elk year and already the veterans committee is gearing up for success. We are continuing our ongoing projects with the Welcome Home Kits. For the new folks in the lodge, these are funded by the Elks national veterans commission through the Grand Lodge's ENF (Elks National Foundation) donations.

We provided one Welcome Home Kit in the month of February through a referral from Veterans Services of the Carolinas. It was provided to a formerly homeless army veteran who had just received housing. We provided him all the small household goods and small kitchen appliances for him to set up housekeeping. Big shout out to Chris Osborne at Mattress by Appointment Lake Hickory. He has always given us a good deal within our budget for a mattress and basic frame. This month he donated the mattress and frame to the Veteran free of charge and free delivery.

We also are blessed to have a fully funded program to provide snacks for veterans who visit the VA clinic here in Hickory. Big shout out to our representative Lisa Watts, who heads that program!

We also have received an invitation to share in the birthdays of two of Black Mountains veterans at the state veterans home there. On April 2, Charlie Harris turns 104 years old and on July 6 Joe Cooper will be 104. We are so thankful to Joe Elko for keeping in touch with and providing items for Black Mountain!

We also will be planning our annual Fourth of July program and our other annual programs for the Elks year 20, 26-2027.

At last, but not least don't forget that we have the areas Veterans Stand Down coming up April 10th at the Tarleton center on the campus of Catawba Valley, community college. If you are a veteran, come out and enjoy if you would like to volunteer or learn more about it please come to our next committee meeting on Monday, March 9, 2026 at 5:30 PM.

Lisa Watts is on the on the right is Stephanie Z. AMSA. A representative from the VA. Snacks delivered February 12th.

Bitters committee chair person, Samantha Bowman pictured with army Veteran Nathaniel Kirby, we provided Nathaniel with household goods through the Elks Welcome Home Kit program for his new place after a period of homelessness.

All the best,

Samantha Bowman

Veterans Committee Chair * samanthakbowman@gmail.com * 828-234-0320

E.L.K.S. COMMITTEE

The Adults with Special Needs fiscal year is coming to an end. They celebrated their last event of the year, a Valentine's Day dance on February 10th.

Additionally, the E.L.K.S. committee will be shipping a second set of supplies to the five group homes that attend our events which include necessities such as plates, bowls, cups, paper towels, toilet paper, deodorant, soaps, detergents, and cleaners.

The committee is currently working on their final report and will resume with new grant year in May 2026.

Thank you to all our volunteers that make this 2025-26 year amazing!

Lauren Brisben

Laurenbrisben@gmail.com * 828-228-6928



HOOP SHOOT COMMITTEE

The District Hoop Shoot was a success with three Hickory area participants advancing to the State Hoop Shoot. Two of those three advanced to the Regional Hoop Shoot to be held on March 7, 2026 in Charlottesville VA. Congratulations to Jack Montgomery (12/13) from Northview Middle School and Hadley Shreve (8/9) from Snow Creek Elementary.

The West District represented very well taking four of the six spots that represent North Carolina at the Regional Hoop Shoot. I will keep you updated with the results of the regionals and hopefully we can celebrate our kids making the National Hoop Shoot in Chicago IL.

Fraternally,

Robert Brisben

Hickory & Western District Hoop Shoot Chair * Rbrisben@amerisafe.com * 828.310.6692

LADY ELKS NEWS

Happy Spring Everyone! Lady Elks are excited about our upcoming "Meet and Greet" to be held on Tuesday March 10th at 6:30. We will have a brief presentation about our Lodge and the Lady Elks involvement in the community followed by refreshments. If you or anyone you know is interested in becoming part of our group, please join us that evening. We are also busy contacting our high schools to support graduating high school seniors and their needs for the upcoming ceremonies. Our next meeting will be March 3rd 6:00 pm at the Lodge.

Marisa Wallace

President *pleasecallmeseymour@gmail.com*

Vice-President * marisacwallace@outlook.com*

AMERICANISM COMMITTEE

The Americanism Committee would like to give a hearty "thank you" and shout out to all committee members and volunteers who helped score the submissions to the Elks Americanism Essay Contest. This year's theme is "What Does Service To Your Country Mean To You." The top three essays for the Fifth, Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Grade contests have been submitted to the Western District for judging.

Coming up in March are two major events. On March 14th at 10:00 A.M. is the Annual Americanism Awards Ceremony. This is where the Lodge has the privilege to honor outstanding Civil Servants, Veterans and Students for their contributions during the year. On March 29th, at 5:00 P.M. is the Annual Sunset Remembrance Ceremony, where the Lodge honors all members who have passed away during this Elks calendar year. Please consider attending. "To Our Absent Members!"

This month's Americanism Committee meeting will be held Wednesday, March 4th at 4:30 P.M. All are invited.

Gary Young

Americanism Committee Chair * hkyamercom1654@gmail.com

March is known for the start of spring (vernal equinox), unpredictable weather (lion/lamb), NCAA Basketball's March Madness, St. Patrick's Day, Women's History Month, and numerous awareness campaigns (Irish-American Heritage, Kidney, Colorectal Cancer). It also features Daylight Saving Time, Pi Day (March 14th), and the founding of significant organizations like the Peace Corps.

Lodge Meetings are held on the first and third Thursdays of each month @ 7 pm.

HOUSE COMMITTEE



Friday, March 13th St. Patty's inspired supper- Black and Tan steak shepherd's pie and Reuben corned beef casserole. Come out and be Irish at the Lodge, wear green or face the "Pinch Ninny's"☺

We are better with YOU! Get involved and help steer our lodge towards true virtue and excellence.

Hickory Elks Lodge Gift Cards Now Available!

Looking for the perfect way to say thank you or show someone you appreciate them?

The Hickory Elks Lodge now offers gift cards for purchase!

* Use them for beverages, food, events, or merchandise.

* Choose any denomination that fits your budget. 10, 15, 20, 25.....

* Cards can be delivered secretly by our bar staff (like a Secret Santa), posted on our bulletin board or presented in a handsome envelope.

*Even if the card is lost, the member's credit remains safely in our system.

Whether it's for a special occasion—or just because—our gift cards are a simple and meaningful way to share gratitude within the Lodge. Elks Care. Elks Share.



Ty Vassill

House Committee Chair * bc98mgt@gmail.com*954-650-4990

WORDS FOR THE HERD

I'm will be so excited to see the yellow pollen again! It's a sure sign that Spring is here. Even though our Lodge slows down a bit during the warmer months, it's still a fantastic time to visit where everyone knows your name. Petition to stay open on Sundays? Imagine walking into the club level and hearing someone yell, "Hey Bob!" The Deck Heads will be filling the deck with laughter! The left side of the bar is always buzzing with tall tales, while the right side is famous for its jokes. So, grab your flip flops, come on downtown, and join us often—crash helmets and shame bags are available!

Carole Anderson

PER, PDDGER, caroleanderson1654@gmail.com * 828-312-7476

DRUG AWARENESS NEWS

Did you know the Elks National Drug Awareness Program is the largest volunteer drug program in the United States.

Would you like to be part of DAP?
There is many opportunities!

Let's talk about it!

One opportunity is the City of Hickory's Easter Egg Hunt on March 28. Elroy & the DAP trailer will be there for the children. We have Easter toys to pass out. This event is heart warming.

Our Youth Committee will be also.
Look for sign up sheet soon!

Thank you,

Brenda Wronek *

Chair, West District DAP



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The online store is:

Okielks.myshopify.com

Still working to find another bling vendor.

Steve Shueford at Premier Screen Printing can do embroidery and screen printing just take him your shirt or bag or scarf or hat and he can fix you right up.

Thank you,

Brenda Wronek * Chair, Merchandising * 704-651-5174

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Public Relations isn't just a monthly news letter or the Elks National magazine, it's YOU! How do you represent your lodge when you're out with your friends or out in public. Be a good Elk and always have a positive attitude. Talk about all the great things we do for the Youth for the Veterans for the Adults With Special Needs, always be positive.

We want to grow our lodge, but we need to bring in people that want to help with the committees with the things we do, to help cook on Fridays,etc.

To be a good Elk.

Thank you,

Brenda Wronek

Chair, Public Relations * browneyesbw@hotmail.com

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Mark Couch
 NC Elks President
 2025 – 2026



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March 2026							
◀ Feb 2026	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	
							Apr 2026 ▶
1	Winter Hours 1pm-6:30pm	2 Ping Pong & Potluck 5:30 House Meeting	3 6:00 Lady Elks 6:30 ASL Class	4 Tacos Bar \$11 & Bingo 4:30pm Americanism Mtg	5 7pm Lodge Mtg Meal: Krystal Grindel Baked Pork Chops, Mac 'n Cheese, green beans & corn bread	6 Dinner w/ Dave Partak-Husbuppies w/ Remoulade sauce Creamy Andouille Pasta, Creole Shrimp & Grits, Southern Chocolate Pecan Cake \$14	7 Ham Breakfast \$11 Charity-Backpack Regional Hoop Shoot 6:30pm Camp Carefree Gala-Greensboro LHSC (private 1 st Flr)
8	DD Clinic Morganton Winter Hours 1pm-6:30pm	9 Ping Pong & Potluck 5:30 Veterans Mtg	10 6:30 ASL Class	11 Shrimp Night \$5 for 1/2 pound, \$10/lb + High Hand w/ Dave P	12 6pm Youth Meeting 6:30 Wrangler Mtg	13 Dinner: St Patty's Theme Meal! Music by Mike & Gil \$12	14 10am Americanism Awards LHSC (private 1 st Flr)
15	Hours 1pm-6:30pm	16 Ping Pong & Potluck	17 Calcutta ?? Stay tuned for details	18 Burger Bar \$12 + SMT\$ w/ JB	19 7pm Lodge Mtg & Initiation Meal: Lasagna	20 Dinner-Lodge Award Night Dinner w/Vicky and crew	21 Ham Breakfast \$11- Charity-PER Scholarship 10am-Bike/Walk
22	11:15am Helping Hands Hours 1pm-6:30pm	23 Ping Pong & Potluck	24	25	26	27 Steak Night \$22	28 Jeep Wrangler Raffle! Watch for Details 6-9pm Easter Egg Hunt-Jacob Fork
29	5pm Sunset Remembrance Ceremony Hours 3pm-7:30pm	30 Ping Pong & Potluck	31 6:15pm Bunco Meal \$10- Game (\$5) & Cards to follow	Please watch for changes in the weekly email you receive and on our Facebook Page. If you are not on our private Facebook page, please contact Elizabeth Brisben to be added at (828) 310-6662			

Published Monthly By:

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356 Main Avenue NW
Hickory, NC 28601
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Monthly Newsletter

Edition #242

Return service requested.



Elks Lodge #1654 March 2026 Member Birthdays

Be sure to wish these special Hickory Elks a Happy Birthday!

Day Name	Day Name	Day Name	Day Name
01 Cary Bowman	09 Timothy Danahey	19 Deborah Few	28 Tony Burns
01 Kenneth Workman	10 Larry Farr	19 Mitch Gibson	28 Conley Sanders
02 Walter Thornburg	10 Krystal Grindel	21 Jeremy Fisher	29 Dennis Derichs
03 Judith Benton	10 Tim Long	21 Tony Hanson	30 John Blake
03 Tammy Hall	10 Lohr Loveland	22 Chad Pittman	30 Greg Conrad
04 Robert Miller	13 Jerry Caldwell	22 Barbara Van Horn	30 Brian Cropper
05 William Huffman	14 Brent Teague	23 Kimberly Buckner	31 Samantha Ballard
06 Ronald Duncan	14 Jerry Teague	23 Penelope Dillon	31 Kenny Hollar
06 James Neill	15 Donna Lane	23 Joe Smith	31 Tate Phillips
06 Rich Peters	16 Joseph Elko	24 Debra Hasselwander	
07 Kelly Bowman	16 Thomas Hogan	24 Lisa Wimbish	
07 Edward Esslinger	16 Bill Schrum	26 Michael Tucker	
07 Bart Starr	16 Becky Yount		

SPOTLIGHT ON THE HOUSE:

HEART OF SERVICE, SOUL OF ADVENTURE: ELIZABETH BRISBEN

The Hickory Elks Lodge is blessed with members like Elizabeth Brisben, who makes a powerful impact on our community.

Elizabeth is grounded in strong faith and guided by a deep love for her family, her fur babies, and her fraternal Elks family. She brings heart and steady purpose to everything she does. Elizabeth is always willing to roll up her sleeves, roll up the silverware, roll out the grits, and roll with whatever the day brings. Generous and warm hearted; Elizabeth carries that adventurous and optimistic spirit to everything and wherever she goes.

Elizabeth leads and serves with authenticity, integrity, and unwavering loyalty. She is genuine, steady and grounded in her values. Elizabeth stands by her word, supports the team, and approaches every situation with empathy and understanding. That combination of strength and kindness makes her not just an effective contributor, but a trusted friend and teammate. Behind the scenes, Elizabeths administrative strengths and organizational skills help to keep our House Committee running smoothly. She brings steadiness and structure to the table. Elizabeth loves to have fun and be creative but, when things get a little hectic; she can help steer and encourage the team back to the goal and move forward with efficiency.

Elizabeth is a scientist at heart, with a degree in biology and a career in pharmaceutical sales. She works with precision, has incredible people skills which formulate a formidable leader. Whether she's organizing a committee meeting, heading out for a day on the lake or deep-sea fishing; she approaches life with energy, curiosity, positivity, and a contagious laugh.

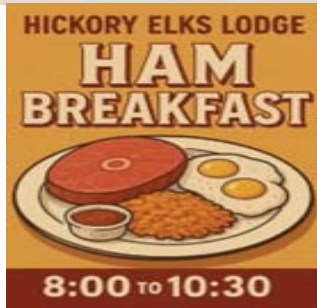
Elizabeth embraces fellowship and meaningful connections to so many within the Elks Lodge. Outside the Lodge, you'll likely find her in the sun, at the beach, or on the water spending cherished time with her loving family. Elizabeth married Robert 35 years ago and her family grew with two beautiful daughters: Lauren and Ashlynn. She speaks of them with pride and gratitude. Within the Elks family, we are so fortunate to have such a positive contributor, who is always willing to serve her fellow Elks and lodge. Elizabeth doesn't just show up — she serves with joy, faith, and a bold spirit that reminds all of us to work hard, laugh often, aim high. and that our people, our community, and anyone in need are our priority.

Thank you, Elizabeth, for your big heart, dedication, and sense of adventure you bring not only to the House Committee but everything you do. We love and appreciate you.



Celebrate at Your Lodge!

Members, don't forget — your Hickory Elks Lodge is the perfect place to celebrate life's special moments! Whether it's a birthday, retirement, anniversary, or just a good reason to gather, you're welcome to host your celebration at the Lodge.



Elk's family – a reminder about *lifelines*.

Take a moment and think about two or three people in your life that you can truly trust, the ones you can call about anything at any time.

Now remember you might be that person for someone else.

Life throws hard things at all of us, whether it's substance struggles, depression, anger, grief or just the weight of it all.

Sometimes just by letting the air out of the balloon by talking to a friend can change everything. You might be someone's lifeline when they need it most.

Don't wait, reach out, be present and listen without judgement. A conversation can make all of the difference.

Elk's helping Elks, that's who we are

An important message from your Brother and Sister Elks, "You are a shining star, that's what you are"

May your Lodge be Plentiful
your Charity be Endless
your Friendships be everlasting

Elks USA
St. Patrick's Day

WE NEED YOU!

WANT TO GET MORE INVOLVED AT OUR LODGE?

WE ARE IN NEED OF LODGE OFFICERS & COMMITTEE VOLUNTEERS FOR THE 2026 - 2027 YEAR

COME TO A MEETING OR REACH OUT TO A BOARD MEMBER TODAY!



Donation to the Salunda Pantry



Lisa Watts is on the on the right is Stephanie Z. AMSA. A representative from the VA. Snacks delivered February 12th.



FYI