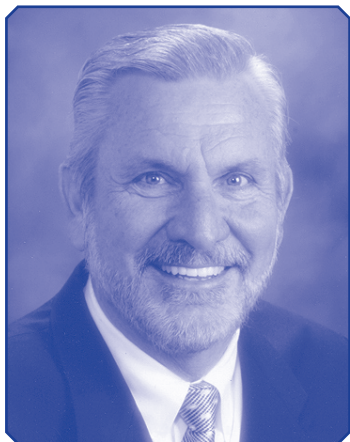


**GRAND EXALTED RULER  
ACCEPTANCE SPEECH  
July 5, 2010**



**Michael F. Smith**  
**PLANT CITY, FLORIDA LODGE NO. 1727**

**BENEVOLENT AND PROTECTIVE ORDER OF ELKS  
OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**




**GRAND LODGE CONVENTION**

**Orlando, Florida**

**July 4-8, 2010**






**Grand Exalted Ruler Nichelson**, Thank you so very much. And thanks to ALL of you for an outstanding celebration this most memorable morning!

National President Nichelson, Grand Chaplain Reverend Monsignor Jeffrey L. Wald, Past Grand Exalted Rulers, Grand Lodge Officers, Grand Lodge Committee Persons, Members and friends, overwhelmed, excited, humbled and extremely honored, I accept the nomination for the Office of the Grand Exalted Ruler/National President of the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the USA for our Fraternal year 2010-2011. Sandra and I pray and ask for your prayers to direct us as we **"PROMOTE ELKS PASSION"** throughout this exceptional membership of our Order.

There are so many people to thank and time would not permit, but please allow me to recognize some of those special people. Behind me are the Past Grand Exalted Rulers of the Order. They unyieldingly donate their leadership and experience to progress our Fraternal Order. For many years they have helped me through many opportunities without hesitation. My thanks to all of these leaders for all of their guidance and support. A "special thanks" to my Sponsor of many missions, mentor and friend, the Honorable Robert Grafton, and my State Co-Sponsor and friend, the Honorable C. Valentine Bates, who served as Chairman of the Advisory Council this year. We enjoy University of Florida Gator football games together. My thanks to the Chairman of the Programs Subcommittee and friend, the Honorable James C. Varenhorst, for patiently navigating me to this point today.

My Sponsors in Area 3 are the Honorable Robert Grafton, Lester C. Hess Jr., C. Valentine Bates and Arthur H. Frost III. Both Ted and Jack have been supporters and friends for many years and I have been active with them at the Elks National Retirement Home.




I am extremely appreciative to have had a longtime close friend, Tom Elmore, a Past Grand Esteemed Leading Knight, to nominate me for the position of National President of our “Great Order of Elks.” We have served on numerous committees together in the Florida State Elks Association over the past decades. Tom is a dedicated Elk, a good human being, and a very good golf partner. Tom, thank you for the kind words and all of the support you have extended to me over the many years.

I would like to ask my favorite wife of almost forty years to join me in introducing our family to you. Sandra, please come over.

Our favorite son, Todd (*yes, our only son*), has once again made me very proud with his seconding of my nomination. Todd has been an Elk in the Plant City Lodge No. 1727 for seventeen years. He has been active in our Lodge since he was around six years old. We are very fortunate to have both of our children and their families living in Plant City which has allowed us to grow with them. Todd, thank you for that excellent seconding of my nomination.

Todd is a Pharmaceutical Representative and is married to Stacey. Stacey is a Speech Therapist and their four children are: Jake, Christopher, Sienna, and Lexie. Our daughter, Jennifer, who is an instructor currently finishing up her Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration, also works as an assistant in that field for the University of South Florida. She is married to Steve Schneider, who is a Past Exalted Ruler in Plant City Lodge No. 1727 and a Deputy with the Sheriff’s Office in Hillsborough County. They have three children: Cameron, Chase, and Caris. As you can imagine, we have a very loud house on “Family Night.”




In the audience is Sandra's mother, Jenny Leitner, her brother Chipper, his wife Fern. Also joining us is Sandra's sister Karen, her husband Pete, their two daughters, Brittany and Amanda. Their son Jake is serving our country in the United States Navy.

I want to introduce all of you to two VERY SPECIAL friends of ours for many years, Jim and Sonja Coggins from Pensacola, Florida. Jim will serve as my Administrative Assistant and his wife Sonja will be assisting. They will have their hands full keeping me on track. Jim is a Member of the Warrington Lodge No. 2108. He is also a Past State President for Florida, a Past Grand Lodge Member of the Auditing and Accounting Committee, Chairman of the Grand Lodge Americanism Committee, and a Past Grand Lodge Esquire. I am sure a year from now being a Past Administrative Assistant will feel pretty good to both of them. My thanks for all the work you have done thus far and more importantly, for our friendship.

I would like for you to meet Sandi Willis and her husband Mike. Sandi has been working with me for fifteen years. Sandi will be my Executive Secretary and is very active in planning my travels, along with working with Jim and Sonja.

Our good friends, the Order's good friends, Grand Exalted Ruler Jim Nichelson and his wife Mary Carolyn, have shared their vision and made the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks a better place through their travels. We have had the pleasure of working with and to know the two of them through the Board of Grand Trustees, and they are always "Caring and Sharing" the *Passion of Elks*. They carried that through to their Administrative Assistant, Jeffry Durant, and their Executive Secretary, Rose. Our sincere gratitude goes to each of you.



Our Grand Secretary, Bryan Klatt, and his Chicago staff have been extremely responsive, as well as Elks National Foundation Director, Jim O’Kelley, and the Foundation staff. In addition to thanking them, I would also like to recognize and thank *The Elks Magazine* Editor, Cheryl Stachura, and the Magazine staff, and also the Elks National Convention Director, Tina Haran, and her assistant, Jessica Ruiz. With the help of all of these kind people, it has eased our tasks.

I extend my gratitude to my Endorsed Administrative Assistant and Past Grand Esquire, Jim Coggins, for chairing my fundraising committee. My thanks to Grand Lodge Special Representative, Jim Solana, for taking the Vice-Chairman’s responsibilities. Together, these two Jim’s, and their committee members, did a mammoth job. Their success and all the support of so many fine people, enabled me to prepare for the opportunity at hand.

What a fabulous celebration we witnessed this morning. Past District Deputy Grand Exalted Ruler Joe Rogers chaired the event. He and his committee, along with the “Great State of Florida’s” delegation and the members of Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi of Area 3, made this an experience Sandra and I will never forget. Thanks to all of you for your energy and support.

My Grand Lodge Committee work included Lodge Activities and State Associations, and had the honor to serve as Chairman my final year. That was followed by election to Grand Esteemed Lecturing Knight, and then the Board of Grand Trustees, where I served as Chairman this past year. The experiences and friendships that have come about through these positions will be cherished for a lifetime. The tireless dedication of these, and all, Grand Lodge Committees, should not be taken for granted.

Throughout the coming year, I plan to help instill a desire to **“PROMOTE ELKS PASSION”** in our membership. Our membership must find that spark to rekindle the fire that made you become a Member of our Order. If we can put some “pep in our step” it will become contagious and others will want to take part. We must address complacency with vigor and bring energy into our Order and our local Lodges. I challenge each of you to continue your good works with the children, with our Veterans, with our communities and with those in need. Let that commitment be seen and heard by everyone to prove that **“Elks Care – Elks Share.”**


***We do not need to keep our great works our secret!***

People enjoy being around good people and there is an opportunity that we must seize to promote our Order. I am very confident that if we continue our good works with a positive drive, we will gain Members. Rededicate yourself, inspire your Lodge Members with positive actions and put some energy forth to tell our story in your community.

***We are not a secret cult, be proud and loud!***

In our travels, I will be promoting each of our Grand Lodge Programs, as they are so vital to so many. The Elks National Foundation is the funding vehicle for the majority of our Grand Lodge Programs, therefore, a major focal point while on my mission. Our membership has shown great dedication to the Foundation during these challenging times by meeting and exceeding our per capita goal. ***This year I will continue the \$4.50 per capita goal and hope we far exceed the goal.***

Remember, you receive a reward by attaining your Lodge per capita, you receive a “Gratitude Grant.” Knowing our membership history in supporting the ENF, we can look forward to new and exciting opportunities to enhance our




current programs. Our scout troops, little league, Hoop Shoot<sup>®</sup>, scholarships and our States' Major Projects are all so important and impact so many people. It is my hope that we channel some energy and become visible in our local communities. The emphasis on a major local project would allow each of us to **“PROMOTE ELKS PASSION”** and encourage participation. With the continued support and wisdom of the National Foundation Trustees and its staff, we can look forward to many exciting programs to promote our Order in the future.

Robert Hennings is our capable Director of the Elks National Veterans Service Department and does an exemplary job in assisting our local Lodges and Veterans Programs. We have an obligation to the valuable people who protect our freedoms and in some cases, suffer the ultimate sacrifice. I would like to know that every Lodge has a very active Veterans Program. We need to Adopt-A-Veteran, assist at Veterans Hospitals, donate needed items and sponsor an “Army of Hope” project.

The key word being “H.O.P.E.,”  
— Have Only Positive Expectations!

Now I want to share with you some information. I have been involved with assembling a program regarding our Elks National Retirement Home. This past year my friend, our Elks National President, Jim Nicholson, has been promoting the value of the Home to our membership. It was this time last year when he covered his vision of having the home self-sustaining. As a member of the Board of Grand Trustees, I can assure you there has been a great deal of time spent putting a plan into place for consideration. If you have not had the opportunity to visit the Elks National Retirement Home, you are missing a part of your membership privileges. Under the leadership of the Executive Director, Dr. Ron Plamondon, we have provided a superb living



facility for our Members. Our membership has supported this facility and should be extremely proud. There was a misconception that the Home only housed residents from the south, which is simply not true.

The Board of Grand Trustees, with the approval of the Advisory Committee, will be presenting an opportunity to remodel Buildings H & I to accommodate additional residents and in so doing, bring in additional revenue. As we have discussed in the past, the apartments are in demand and have a waiting list. We simply do not have the apartments to accommodate more residents. We have unused space in Buildings H & I that can be remodeled into cash-producing properties. The proposed plan will phase out the assessments of the membership and make the Home fiscally sound for the future. The Home will be self-sustaining!

Perhaps the most constant issue we all face is the decline in membership. In a recent study conducted by an outside consulting firm, we find we are not branded, nor do we promote our charitable works. That probably is a well-known fact. What was a surprise to me was they did a survey and found the primary reason the majority joined our Fraternal Order was for the community service and charitable works. We need to amp up our efforts and channel them throughout our communities. I was interviewed by our Tampa paper and the reporter knew nothing of the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks. That is a very bad reflection on the approximately ten Lodges this paper serves, including my own. Is this unusual? Probably not.

Membership drives our Order from volunteers to capital and my thought is if a major reason people are interested in the Elks is to become involved in community service and charitable works, then we MUST speak louder, become VISIBLE. We must adjust our mind-set to a positive and progressive space. There are times

I hear negative comments on why we cannot change the way certain things are done. I am not one of those people! The Grand Lodge is investigating ways to help subsidize your Lodge in promoting a major project in your community. This is to promote your Lodge in your backyard. Start planning an annual or ongoing event that would bring positive visible results for your Lodge. Make the plan, then work it and afterwards, let everyone understand: "It's ALL GOOD!" It would make my day to have to request a second or third order of Grand Exalted Ruler Award Pins for those Members with three or more new Members this year. I would urge you to void out the negatives that poison our thoughts and substitute it with energy to **"PROMOTE ELKS PASSION"** with purpose. People enjoy being around positive people. Our Order brings rest to the weary. Let's make our Lodge a pleasant stay.

In closing, I want to let all of you know how elated Sandra and I am with the opportunity to visit so many wonderful places and we will do our utmost to **"PROMOTE ELKS PASSION."**

May God be with All.





PROMOTE

*Elks*

PASSION



“*Elks* Care

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*Elks* Share”