



Elk in the Headlights: Nelson Burke, P.E.R.

We all have our ways to celebrate the Holiday Season; there is one person at our lodge that takes it to another level. Nelson Burke PER was our Lodge Santa from 1989-2022. He was asked by Bob Holliday, Bingo Chair and Child Party Chair. While reflecting on the many requests of what children asked for, he recalls the "usual marketed" toys such as dolls, games and sports equipment. Although on occasion, he would have young children ask for cellphones! There was a touching story Nelson shared about a young child that asked Santa to make her grandma, who was in the hospital, well again. Not wanting to give the little girl false hope, he explained that Santa specialized in toys but would pray for her grandma.

Being Santa for 30+ years, Nelson had the opportunity to meet a lot of children. Parents would tell him that he was the only Santa their child ever knew. Children who visited with Santa in the 1990s have gone on to have kids of their own and have brought them back to see the same Santa! Asked if he has ever shaved his beard, Nelson answered that he started growing his beard shortly after his son was born in 1972 and has never shaved it off!

Nelson was born in Putnam, Connecticut to Harold and Rachel Burke. At the age of 13, Nelson and his parents left snowy Connecticut and moved to sunny Anaheim, California. He graduated from Anaheim High School in 1964 and shortly after enlisted in the US Army. Nelson spent time in Vietnam and Armor Desert Training at Fort Irwin. After his discharge, he went back to school to complete his AA Degree at Fullerton Jr. College.

Nelson and his lovely wife have been married for 57 years. They have one son, Christopher and two granddaughters, Erin and Emma. Nelson worked as a heavy-duty truck driver. He had 32 years in the Teamster Union when he retired at the age of 57. Since retiring as Santa (and Mrs. Claus), Nelson and his wife Ava are finding time to travel. They have found the joy of traveling on the sea!

Nelson is a 38-year member and was Exalted Ruler 1999-2000. As a newly initiated member, his proposer, Adam Barraza, educated him of many of the programs that the Grand Lodge and our Lodge were part of. He was eager to serve our community through the Elks. He mentioned that there isn't much difference now than it was when he was an officer. The main difference is the number of members. As now, growing membership was a priority. In the late 90's we had approx. twice as many members we do now and had the largest membership in the Orange Coast District.

When asked what advice he has for new members, Nelson had these words of wisdom. "I believe the proposer should mentor the new members and introduce them to the workings of the lodge." If they do not have an active proposer, it is up to the current members to make new members feel at ease. Nelson added, "A member who becomes involved and makes friends will have a reason to enjoy the lodge."

Nelson was also asked if he has any advice for someone considering becoming an officer. He answered with, "My opinion of a Lodge Officer is a "plain old member" with responsibilities. They have to do the extra things that make this Lodge successful. If they want to wear the RED COAT, they must be prepared to mentor new members."

Nelson and Ava are still regular attendees of our lodge, when they are not on a cruise. You can find them enjoying lunch at the lodge during the week. Our lodge would like to thank Nelson and Ava for all the time invested as Santa and as ER.

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How much does it cost to attend the City's "Winter in the Grove" celebration on December 6th?

GG Elks Trivia

What famous Angels baseball player and manager was a member of Garden Grove Elks Lodge?

GARDEN GROVE ELKS BRING HOLIDAY CHEER TO LOCAL FAMILIES

'Twas the night before Christmas, and all through the house, not a creature was stirring-- except for the Elks. While most homes are quiet in anticipation of the holiday, the Garden Grove Elks are hard at work, spreading joy throughout the community. For decades, Garden Grove Elks has delivered traditional Christmas dinners to hundreds of families in need, focusing on those attending Title I schools within the Garden Grove School District.

~Elks Make Good Elves~

This year, on December 14th, the Garden Grove Elks Lodge will host the annual Underprivileged Children's Christmas Lunch, for children and families selected by the schools. In addition, on the 20th, Elk's members and local youth volunteers will gather at the lodge to pack hams, fresh vegetables, stuffing, and lots of other essential food items into care packages. Working in large assembly lines, volunteers will fill waiting cars with food baskets and Christmas gifts destined for families across Garden Grove and surrounding cities—including those living in motels.

~Merry Christmas To All~

Garden Grove Elks commitment to service is fueled by a year-round effort of fundraising, wine tastings, and raffle baskets. Our unwavering dedication to our community ensures that the tradition continues, bringing hope and holiday spirit to the community's most vulnerable. Garden Grove Elks extend their gratitude to all who contributed to the Christmas food basket program and wish everyone a very Merry Christmas.



THE TRADITION OF GIFT-GIVING DURING THE HOLIDAYS

The tradition of gift-giving during the year-end holiday season goes back thousands of years and transcends multiple cultures and religions. Long before Christmas became the dominant winter celebration, ancient civilizations marked the darkest and shortest days of winter (the winter solstice) with festivals celebrating the ideas of renewal, generosity, and hope for the coming new year.

These celebrations often included the exchange of food, treats and small gifts.

One of the earliest examples comes from ancient Rome: Saturnalia, a week-long festival in that celebrated Saturn, the god of agriculture. Small figurines and candles were exchanged between family and friends symbolizing light's triumph over darkness. This is a common theme expressed in other religious celebrations such as Hanukkah, Diwali and Kwanza.

In Christianity, the practice of gift-giving is linked to the biblical story of the Three Wise Men, who brought gifts of frankincense, gold and myrrh to the baby Jesus. By the Middle Ages, the tradition of giving and receiving gifts during the Christmas season often centered on the early December festival of St. Nicholas, a 4th century bishop known for his acts of generosity, kindness and secret gift-giving to children and the poor.

By the 19th century, industrialization transformed holiday gift-giving. The rise of mass production made presents more affordable and accessible to the growing middle class. Literary works such as Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol, reinforced the moral value of generosity. Queen Victoria really popularized the modern Christmas celebrations across the British Empire, as well as the US, when she adopted the German traditions of the Christmas tree and gift-giving between family, friends and staff.

While the ancient Jewish holiday of Hannukah did not historically involve gift-giving, it did include the tradition of giving small amounts of money (gelt) to children as a reward for studying the Torah – as well as to teachers and the poor as an act of charity. By the late 19th century, giving gifts to children during Hannukah became more popular as a way for them to feel included during a season when their Christian peers were receiving Christmas gifts.

Today, the ritual of giving gifts, and other expressions of generosity and charity during the holiday season, is engrained in cultures and religions throughout the world.

RUDOLPH VS. ELROY

Elk and reindeer are two distinct species, each with unique characteristics that set them apart. Their differences can be seen in their size, preferred habitats, antler features, hooves, and social behaviors. Elk are considerably larger than reindeer. Elk live in forests, meadows, and grasslands, where they find food and shelter. Reindeer inhabit arctic and subarctic areas like tundra and boreal forests, adapting to harsh climates. A key difference between these animals is their antlers: only male elk grow large, multi-pointed, "tree-like" antlers. Both male and female reindeer grow antlers, which can be "C"-shaped and often have points close to the head.



Elk have narrow, split hooves suited for soft ground, while reindeer have broad, flat hooves adapted for moving on snow and ice.

In terms of social structure, elk typically live in herds. However, males may become solitary or form small groups outside of the mating season. Reindeer are known for living and travelling in large herds, and they often migrate for hundreds of miles in search of food and suitable conditions.

Rudolph the Reindeer is known for pulling Santa's sleigh; Elroy the Elk is the mascot for the Elks Drug Awareness Program (DAP). Despite the differences in their species, both are majestic and well-loved figures who take their jobs as role models for children seriously!

The History of Christmas Cards

A Victorian Beginning: The very first Christmas card appeared in 1843 in England, created by Sir Henry Cole — a busy civil servant who helped modernize the British postal system. Too occupied to write personal holiday letters, Cole asked his friend, artist John Calcott Horsley, to design a single card he could send to many people. Horsley's card showed a family celebrating around a dinner table with the message: "A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to You." About 1,000 copies were printed and sold for one shilling each, marking the start of a warm and enduring holiday tradition. The first Christmas card was so unique for its time that one copy sold at auction in 2001 for over £20,000! That is \$26,306.50 in US dollars!

Spreading Cheer Across the Globe: As printing became more affordable and postage faster, Christmas cards quickly caught on throughout Victorian England. By the 1860s, they were mass-produced with colorful illustrations of snowy scenes, flowers, and festive messages. In the 1870s, the idea spread to America, where Louis Prang, a Boston printer, began creating beautiful, high-quality cards using a new color printing process called chromolithography. His elegant designs earned him the title "Father of the American Christmas Card."

A 20th-Century Holiday Staple: By the early 1900s, Christmas cards had become a household tradition. Designs featured everything from Santa Claus and reindeer to peaceful winter landscapes. During World War I and II, cards carried messages of hope and love across great distances, helping soldiers and families stay connected.

In the mid-20th century, companies like Hallmark turned Christmas cards into a cultural phenomenon, producing millions each year. Families began including photos and personal letters, transforming cards into keepsakes of family memories.

From Paper to Pixels: Today, many people share greetings through email, social media, or digital e-cards, but traditional paper cards remain a cherished part of the season. There's something special about receiving a handwritten note—one that you can display on a mantel or pin to the fridge. Even in a digital age, Christmas cards continue to remind us of the simple joy of connecting with others.

A Tradition That Endures: From its beginnings in Victorian England to today's global celebrations, the Christmas card remains a heartfelt symbol of love, friendship, and goodwill. Whether printed or digital, each card carries the same timeless message:

✨ Peace, joy, and kindness to all this holiday season. ✨



A Tradition of Holiday Giving: The Elks BPOE and Their Christmas Meals Through the Years

For more than a century, Christmas meals have been one of the most cherished charitable traditions of the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks (BPOE). What began as small lodge gatherings in the late 1800s— simple holiday feasts for widows, veterans, and local families— has grown into a nationwide effort to ensure that no one faces the holiday season without warmth, food, and fellowship.

In the early decades, Christmas dinners were humble but heartfelt. Many lodges prepared classic, regional holiday staples: roast goose or turkey, root vegetables, potatoes, and homemade pies. Volunteers cooked in lodge kitchens, often using donated or homegrown ingredients. The focus was on offering comfort at a time of year when loneliness or hardship could feel especially heavy.

As the Elks expanded across the country, Christmas menus evolved with local tastes. In the Northeast, traditional turkey and stuffing dinners remained popular, often accompanied by cranberry sauces and pumpkin pies. Southern lodges embraced dishes such as baked hams, cornbread dressing, sweet potatoes, and pecan pies. Western lodges sometimes added a frontier flair with smoked meats, tamales, or hearty stews. In coastal regions, Christmas seafood—like clam chowder or baked fish—occasionally found its way onto lodge tables.

By the mid-20th century, Elks Christmas dinners became large-scale community events, with lodges serving hundreds or even thousands of meals. Today, many lodges continue the tradition by hosting free holiday banquets, delivering meals to homebound seniors, or assembling food baskets for families in need.

The Garden Grove Elks Lodge continues this legacy with exceptional dedication. Each year, its members serve hundreds of Christmas meals to local residents who might otherwise go without a holiday dinner. The lodge also hosts a special Christmas party for families and their children, providing warm meals, gifts, and a joyful celebration for those facing financial hardship during the holiday season.

The motivation behind these meals remains unchanged: to offer comfort, dignity, and joy during a season meant for generosity. Through shared food and fellowship, the Elks help strengthen community ties and ensure that the holiday spirit reaches those who need it most.



THE AMERICAN CHRISTMAS TREE



The tradition of decorating Christmas trees in the United States is deeply rooted in German customs. These practices were introduced by German immigrants and gradually gained widespread popularity through influential public figures and publications.

The origins of the modern Christmas tree can be traced back to Germany in the 16th century. German settlers brought this tradition to America, and the earliest documented use of a Christmas tree in an American home dates to the 1830s in Pennsylvania. These trees were set up by German families, reflecting their cultural heritage. Even earlier, outdoor community Christmas trees were recorded among the settlements of the German Moravian Church in Pennsylvania by the mid-18th century.

The Christmas tree became a mainstream American tradition in the mid-1800s, largely due to the influence of a widely circulated illustration. In 1848, the Illustrated London News published an image of Britain's Queen Victoria and her German-born husband, Prince Albert, celebrating Christmas with their children around a decorated tree. The image captured the attention of the public and was later reprinted in 1850 in Godey's Lady's Book, a popular American magazine. The magazine modified the illustration to make the royal family appear more American, which helped cement the concept of the family Christmas tree in American culture. Queen Victoria's status as a trendsetter contributed greatly to the tradition's spread.

Commercialization of the Christmas tree followed quickly. By the 1850s, Christmas trees were being sold commercially in the United States, beginning with the first retail lot in New York City in 1851. Decorations evolved as well; in 1882, Edward Hibbard Johnson, a business partner of Thomas Edison, introduced the first electrically lit Christmas tree, marking the transition from candles to electric lights.



By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Christmas tree had become a central symbol of the American holiday season. Large public displays of Christmas trees became popular, with New York City hosting the first community Christmas tree in 1912. In 1923, the tradition reached the nation's capital with the first National Christmas Tree lighting ceremony on the White House lawn, further solidifying the Christmas tree's place in American holiday celebrations.



GARDEN GROVE #1952: OLYMPIC CHAMPIONS!

October saw the end of the 13th Annual Rick Ross Elks Olympic Games. There were plenty of exciting moments throughout the games. The RREO games started off with the preliminary shuffleboard rounds and the shooting event. The following week was the Opening Ceremonies that gathered all 8 lodges from our district here at our lodge.

As always, the medal count and points earned were close from the start. Orange Lodge #1475 dominated in the shooting event and took an early lead. With the medals won during Opening Day, Garden Grove took a small lead and continued to earn points with every medal won. The overall lodge winner was not decided until the last day of competition. Huntington Beach Lodge #1959 hosted Axe Throwing and Beverage Pong. Huntington Beach was well in striking distance but needed to win most of the medals that day. At the end of the day, our lodge had clinched the overall lead, and the Rick Ross Trophy!



Closing Ceremony, October 26, 2025

Closing Ceremonies were held at the Huntington Beach Lodge with a surprise visit from Rick Ross PER. His son traveled with him so he could attend the closing ceremonies. It was a pleasant surprise for all. Each lodge was presented with their medals, and the trophy was awarded back to our lodge. The trophy is back in the trophy case for at least another year! The final scores were as follows:

Garden Grove: 38, Orange: 34, Huntington Beach: 31, Fullerton: 26, Mission Viejo: 23, Santa Ana: 19, Buena Park: 2, Newport Harbor: 0.

There were many volunteers that helped make this year a success. Committee members, event captains, and the many participants. There are many events to compete in. It is encouraged to sign up next year and help keep the Rick Ross Trophy at our lodge.

Our lodge competed hard and every participant should be proud of their contribution. Congratulations to Garden Grove Lodge #1952, 2025 Rick Ross Elks Olympic Champions!

MEET THE HISTORIAN COMMITTEE



Paul Escobar

Years as an Elk: 5 Years
Officer Title/Yrs: Head Tiler, 3 Years
Committees: Historian Chair, Investigation Chair, Rick Ross Elk Olympic Co-Chair, Americanism, Youth Activities
Memorable Gift: My most memorable gift was a 10-speed bike. I rode that bike to all ends of our neighborhood and beyond. It was my "Trigger". But what made this gift so memorable was the weather during that Christmas. We had constant rain for days, so my brand-new bike remained parked in the living room for what seemed like weeks!! There was finally a break in the rain, and I was allowed to take it out for a spin. I will always remember seeing my parents standing in the street, watching me ride away down the street.



Jim Spurlock

Years as an Elk: 2 Years
Officer Title/Yrs: Assistant Tiler, 2 Years
Committees: Historian, Scholarship, Americanism, Veterans, Olympics, Bingo, Football, Game Room, Business Practices
Memorable Gift: Blue bike – Amber & I got new bikes one year, and it was the best thing ever!



Sue Sawyer

Years as an Elk: 3 Years
Officer Title/Yrs: Esquire, 1 Year
Committees: Scholarship Chair, on History & American, Business Practices Chair, WebMaster, helping with technology e-sign and club room TVs procedures.
Memorable Gift: Peace Plant and a succulent plant from colleagues that I still have and they are thriving in remembrance of my mom and dad.



Terese Caiazza

Years as an Elk: 6 Years
Officer Title/Yrs: Candidate (2022 - 2023) / (1st place District & 1st Place State) / Team 2nd in Nation; Chaplain (2023 - 2024) / (1st place District & 1st place State), Lecturing Knight 2024 - 2025) / (1st place District & 1st place State) / Team 2nd in Nation, Loyal Knight (2025 - 2026) (1st place District & 1st place State)
Committees: Historian, Americanism, Bingo, DAP (Drug Awareness), Elk Enders Newsletter Editor
Memorable Gift: 16th Birthday - received my father's car for my birthday (he passed away when I was 13). I was so happy that my mom had kept his car and gave it to me in his honor.



Kieth Huff

Years as an Elk: 7 Years
Officer Title/Yrs: Currently Trustee #2; Co-Chair DAP (5yrs)
Committees: Historian, Americanism, Veterans, Olympics, Football (Chairman), Business Practices, Emblem Club (3yrs); Elk-Enders (4yrs); AV; DJ; cook on Football Sundays.
Memorable Gift: A space gun that strapped to my head with a view screen, which was a big deal in 1967!





Amber Spurlock

Years as an Elk: 2 Years
Officer Title/Yrs: Assistant Tiler, 2 Years; Photographer, 1 Year
Committees: Historian, Scholarship, Americanism, Veterans, Olympics, Bingo, Football, Game Room, Business Practices
Memorable Gift: Red bike! Jim and I rode those bikes for years (his was blue) – they gave us freedom and independence, they were brand new, and they were all ours! I can still feel our disbelief and excitement when we opened them! It was the 80s, and we were so rad - get on your bikes and RIDE!!!!



Matt Cox

Years as an Elk: 10 Years
Officer Title/Yrs: 2025/26 Lodge Chaplain
Committees: Historian Committee
Memorable Gift: My favorite Christmas gift from my childhood was a 2xl robot complete with several 8-tracks which it called memory programs. I got it in 1983 during my fifth grade year.



Jim Hernandez

Years as an Elk: 2 Years
Officer Title/Yrs: I've held the positions of Assistant Tiler and now I hold the position of Inner Guard. This past year I made All-State Inner Guard.
Committees: I belong to the committee of Americanism, the Veterans committee, and lastly, the Historian committee.
Memorable Gift: Favorite holiday gift is a hard one for me, let me go way back to when I was a kid. It was one. My dad brought bikes home. My dad had been working a second job November to Christmas so I guess that's where he got the money for bikes for my brothers and I. I have others, but this is probably the most memorable one.



Mark Schuster

Years as an Elk: Almost 1 Year
Officer Title/Yrs: N/A
Committees: Historian
Memorable Gift: I received the infamous "Pong" first generation video game when I was 12. It was revolutionary at the time, and I must have spent most of that new year playing against my brothers and organizing neighborhood "tournaments" with my friends. Ironically, my parents sold the game at a garage sale when I went to college for barely anything. I can't imagine what that would be worth today!



Stephanie Janji

Years as an Elk: 8 Years
Officer Title/Yrs: N/A
Committees: Americanism Chair, Veterans Committee, Scholarship Committee, Historian Committee, Youth Activities Committee, Elk Business Practices
Memorable Gift: Best holiday gift I received was a Meyer lemon tree from my mom. I've always wanted a lemon tree, but you can't buy lemon trees locally. My mom managed to get one from another state and surprised me with it, despite her bad hip and lifting it in and out of her car multiple times. I'm very blessed for my mom's thoughtfulness.



Maria Cox

Years as an Elk: 6 Years
Officer Title/Yrs: Assistant Chaplain's Lady (10/20 – 3/21 [Tony 1*], 2021-2022 [Tony 2], 2022-2023 [Eric*], 2024-2025 [Tony 3], 4/25 – 10/26 [Chris*]); Chaplain's Lady (10/25 – 3/26 [Chris*]); Photographer 1/21 – 3/21 [Tony 1*], 2021-2022 [Tony 2], 2022 [April – July; Eric*]) * Partial years
Committees: Historian, dabbled a bit in Americanism
Memorable Gift: When we were living in Boca Raton, Florida, in 1985-1987, I was in 1st and 2nd grade. My dad was working for IBM and each year they had an all-day Christmas party for the whole family. Every year there was plenty of activities for the kids. We would also sit on Santa's lap and told him what we wanted for Christmas. After, Santa's helpers would give us a wrapped gift, I remember getting a Barbie, but I can't remember which one it was specifically.



If you're interested in becoming part of the Historian Committee, please contact us at Historian.BPOE.1952@gmail.com

HOLIDAY PUZZLES

Word Search

Winter Holidays

P T O U P T E Z N M Q C A Y D U W
 U C A B U C W Q P V F S F C M Y K
 Z H H T O S A M T S I R H C Q S R
 S A L Y A K C S C K N T R W J I F
 F A M I L Y W T O O C J R Y B L Y
 K L H X K T E H P U S O D F Y Y T
 W K O I U M L G E W I N T E R A S
 A C K O F L E I S A N T A Y K D O
 N D H A S Y U L W X K X L N G I R
 Z I L A V C A N D L E S H A P L F
 A G C E K M L O N O B A D M S O W
 A D P B A K V E U R R R Y W B H V
 Z F F C J Y U T D O N H A O Y R E
 T T B J Y G M N N I S T G N V R M
 O R F Z Q S G E A N E M P S G S K
 Y E L S T N E S E R P Q D M D F B

Family Candles Frosty Snowman Santa
 Kwanzaa Lights Presents Tree Menorah
 Dreidel Elf Winter Hanukkah Christmas

KWANZAA

Holiday
 See Website for Answers

Rebus

1 Christmas
 Christmas
 Christmas
 → Christmas

2 DEER
 DEER
 DEER
 DEER
 DEER

3 Winter Wonderland

4 DONKEY
 → donkey

5 Tupac
 NEWSPAPER

6 XXXX

7 Wish

8 YYY Men

9 S

10 CCCCCCCCCCCCCCCC
 Festive

Visit the
 History Page
 at Elks1952.org
 for the answers!

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 Lodge Pins



B.P.O.E. Trivia Answer

Upon the tablets of love and memory.

Garden Grove Trivia Answer

*Nothing!
 It's a FREE event for all residents!*

GG Elks Trivia Answer

*Jim Fregosi
 Player 1961-71; Manager 1978-81*

PLEASE LOOK FOR OUR NEXT QUARTERLY EDITION - COMING IN JANUARY 2026
 GARDEN GROVE ELKS HISTORIAN COMMITTEE