



Elks National Veterans Service Commission

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The Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks is proud to announce that Stewart Israel of Plymouth-Ann Arbor, Mich., Elks Lodge No. 325 has been chosen as the VA Voluntary Service NAC Male Volunteer of the Year! Stew has been volunteering to serve veterans in his community for more than 45 years. In that time, he has excelled in roles both local and national. Today, he is the National Veterans Programs Chair for the Elks, a longtime NAC Deputy Representative, the Elks Representative at the Detroit VAMC, and a fill-in Representative at the Ann Arbor VAMC.

In addition to his official responsibilities, Stew pulls off several large events for local veterans annually. Every April and November, he plans a steak dinner for 140 veterans from local VA facilities and shelters. Veterans look forward to the event all year, which includes a live band and a party following the dinner.

He also coordinates a Christmas gift program every year, soliciting gifts and donations to fill 850 gift bags. Ninety community members help distribute these to veterans at multiple VA facilities and shelters. Planning for this event is year-round. In August when no one else is thinking of Christmas, Stew is calling local dentists to ensure they can donate toothbrushes and toothpaste for Christmas gift bags.

Many volunteers found it hard to pivot when Covid restrictions limited usual events, but Stew adjusted quickly. In fact, since April 1 (the beginning of the Elks fiscal year) Stew has led his Lodge's Veterans Committee to serve more than 4,800 veterans, purchased and donated over \$13,000 worth of goods, and driven 2,500 miles.

When the Ann Arbor VAMC Elks Representative and Deputy Representative passed away in 2020, Stew took it upon himself to take over their duties. He quickly raised funds from the community to cover the veterans' needs. He has since provided more than \$8,000 in monetary and in-kind donations to that facility.

Through it all he remains humble, focused only on serving veterans. "Stew is not a veteran but has taken it upon himself to put the care for these veterans and the quality of that care at the forefront of his volunteer experience," says Bill Browning, Chief of Volunteer and Community Relations at the John Dingell VAMC.

Personally, I can think of no one more deserving of this award than Stewart Israel.

Sincerely,

Mary Morgan

Director, Elks National Veterans Service Commission