

## **NVSC MANUAL INFORMATION ON ARMY OF HOPE**

(How easy it can be to start your program)

In February, 2003, the Elks National Veterans Service Commission announced a program of mobilizing an “Army of Hope” to assist the families of Military Reservists and the National Guard who have been called to active duty during this time of crisis. The news media has called some of our Lodge and national leaders to obtain a local perspective on our program. The response from our members and non-Elks has been overwhelming. Our elected government officials at the local, state and national levels are greatly impressed, and have responded favorable to our initiative.

The “Army of Hope” has many facets and literally any activity that supports our troops and their family falls under this vital program. Lodges are partnering with local and state organizations to adopt units and families to help them through these trying times.

Here is just how easy it can be to contribute to this vital program: The first step in setting up your local program is to identify a lodge chairperson. This position may be especially attractive to a veteran; however any volunteer can chair your program. The first priority of that chairperson is to establish a list of volunteer members who are willing to provide their individual expertise. In addition, a subsequent list identifying the specific skills of each volunteer will also be helpful in matching the needs of families with the skills of the volunteers. (for example: Volunteer John Doe-minor automobile repairs, Volunteer Jane Doe-painting and “back up” child support).

After you have established your “Army of Hope” volunteers, you will need to make contact with your local Reserve and/or National Guard units. When contacting them explain what the program is and how your Lodge can help the families. (It is understood that not every Lodge will be able to handle every request). You can provide the list of volunteers along with their expertise directly to the local Reserve or Guard units. The military units may then contact the Lodge or the volunteers directly, depending on how you set up your local program. You still might be thinking what can my small Lodge or State Association specifically do to help? The following are examples of how easy it can be for your Lodge or State Association to make a difference in the lives of our service men and women and their families.

- Have a “family oriented” dinner at the Lodge in honor of our troops and host the families and Guard or Reserve representatives to the Elk volunteers they will be working with.
- Supply the families with phone cards.
- Provide lawn mowing, landscaping or sprinkler service.
- Perform automobile repairs, or transportation when needed.
- Complete minor home repairs, such as plumbing, painting, etc.
- Provide either full time or “back up” babysitting service.
- Send comfort care packages to our troops – (various sized packages are available from the Grand Lodge for a nominal fee).

- Send copies of the service person's daily home town newspaper.
- Have a photography buff in your volunteer listing? Take some pictures of the soldier's family and possibly some local sights to send to the troop member.
- Host a welcome home party at your Lodge or for the troops that return home and thank them and their families for their service.
- Hold some fund raising activities at the Lodge to provide monetary support to specific families, if identified.

Now that you have seen what some of the other Lodges are doing in their programs, I know with the initiative and creativity of our members and support organizations you will be able to think of hundreds of more ways to help. STILL don't think your Lodge is large enough to establish it's own "Army of Hope" program, then team up or volunteer with another local organization (V.F. W., etc.) to help them with a program. Even if your Lodge just does one of the tasks listed above, *you can make a difference!* The final responsibility of the "Army of Hope" chairperson is to take a few minutes to write up a short report and mail it to the office of the Grand Secretary describing the activities on behalf of these families. This will be of immeasurable help as we continue to tell our story of service to these American patriots.

Please send your letters (pictures) and reports to:

"Army of Hope"

Michael F. Manning, Director

National Veterans Service Commission

Benevolent and Protective Order of the Elks

2750 North Lakeview Avenue

Chicago, IL 60614-1889