

Elks Club and golf course are doing just fine

By STEPHEN MILLSSTAFF WRITER

Nov 8, 2017



Women enjoy a painting class Sunday at the Montpelier Elks Club. Touching brush to canvas in the foreground is Shelly Noury, of East Barre. STEFAN HARD / STAFF PHOTO

MONTPELIER — Contrary to rumors that the Montpelier Elks Club was closing, the fraternal organization says it's flourishing after selling and leasing back its clubhouse and golf course, a process that helped fund a major renovation of consolidated club facilities.

Elks Lodge officials said the primary reason for the reorganization was "financial" after a precipitous drop in membership.

In May 2016, Montpelier property developer Steve Ribolini agreed to purchase the Elks Lodge and 10-hole golf course and lease it back to the club. Elks officials said the sale-and-lease agreement helped fund a renovation of the club's bar and restaurant, meeting room and games room, and allowed for the creation of modern, heated offices for staff.

Today, the Montpelier Elks Club is “better than ever,” said Tim Hutchins, exalted ruler of the Capital City club that has existed for 110 years at two different locations, first on Barre Street before moving to its current location on Route 2 in 1962. Post 924 of the national fraternity in Montpelier is part of the national order of Elks that began as a social club in New York City and celebrates its 150th anniversary next year.

Much like the mantle of the national organization, the Montpelier Elks Club takes its mission seriously to engage society on numerous levels, helping the sick, poor and elderly, offering youth and school programs, and helping war veterans and charitable organizations by doing everything it can to live up to its claim of being a “benevolent and protective order.”

Hutchins said the reorganization of the club will allow it to fulfill its mission into the future, despite fewer members.

“Our membership was 1,500 to 1,600 members, and now we have just below 400 members, and we couldn’t afford everything that was here, so we sold it,” Hutchins said. “We leased back 6,000 square feet of the building — it was 16,000 square feet to begin with — and we leased back the golf course.”

A Montessori day care center has taken over some of the room, and another child-care organization is expected to occupy the remaining vacant space.

“We downsized to what we are membership-wise, for what we can afford,” Hutchins added.

Hutchins said the club’s finances depend on \$92 annual membership dues, money earned from rentals of the meeting room, bar and restaurant sales, raffles and other in-house fundraisers.

Money raised from membership fundraising and activities supports a variety of local and statewide causes.

“We try to do as much charity work as we can,” Hutchins said.

Some of those efforts include providing Thanksgiving turkeys to the Washington County Youth Service Boys and Girls Club, Halloween candy delivered to Rowan Court nursing home in Barre, and an upcoming Veterans Day dinner on Saturday.

The Elks often work in association with Montpelier’s other two veterans groups, VFW Post 792 and American Legion Post 3.

Hutchins is particularly proud of the Elks’ Silver Towers program in Ripton, a residential summer camp for people with disabilities supported and staffed by members of all 12 Elks clubs in Vermont.

Open to people with disabilities, aged 6 to 75, the camp offers 26 acres surrounded by the Green Mountain National Forest with a wide range of activities that include swimming, arts and crafts, music, field sports, hiking and nature studies.

“ Our biggest thing is we are a charity organization for the community, and although we sold the building, we’re still here,” Hutchins said. “We still provide wonderful lunches and a great Friday night dinner that people are welcome to attend.”

Other local programs funded by the Montpelier Elks include basketball hoop and soccer shoot recreational programs. The Montpelier Elks also support Montpelier High School students with college scholarships.

The club’s activities bond and bind members from all walks of life. It’s not necessary to be a member to use the club’s restaurant and bar, although members do get a discount and also can use the club games room and participation in various tournaments. Members are also welcome at family meals at the lodge.

New members are proposed, vetted and reviewed by a committee before a ceremonious initiation into the fraternal organization.

“It is a good organization,” Hutchins said. “I’m a 30-year member. If you believe in God and you’re a good citizen, you’re welcome.”

The club will host a Widows Shopping Weekend on Sunday at 10 a.m., so named because it falls on the second day of hunting season, that will serve as an early start to the holiday shopping season.

To learn more about the Montpelier Elks, call 223-2600 or visit www.montpelierelks.com.

stephen.mills @timesargus.com