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Piney River Moose Lodge has track record of service

By Katrina Koerting



Trophies, plaques and pictures of youth teams sponsored by Piney River Moose Lodge sponsor line part of the wood-paneled left wall of the lodge. The opposite wall is covered in plaques the lodge has received in recognition of the service it has performed over its 30 years of existence for the community

and Moose International.

Donnie Maddox, the administrator of the lodge, stood admiring the photos of the children he and his “family fraternity” have helped. Maddox is also the only member of the 170-member Piney River Moose Lodge to receive his Pilgrim Degree, the highest degree attainable within Moose International. About one out of 6,000 members receive their Pilgrim each year.

The Moose Lodge is an international volunteer organization of men and women that focus on programs for children and elderly and bringing communities together.

“It felt great,” he said about receiving the honor. “It takes a lot of effort and a lot of work.”

In order to become a Pilgrim, Maddox had to obtain two other degrees — the degree of service to become part of the Moose legion and the fellowship degree. Among the requirements are holding a leadership position within the lodge at a higher level, and serving in the organization for a certain amount of time depending on the degree.

Despite the amount of time and work, Maddox said he has enjoyed the experience since becoming a member of the Loyal Order of Moose. Although he does not have a specific favorite project, he said he loves doing things for the kids and seeing their joy at Mooseheart, a trip he’s made three times.

Mooseheart Child City and School is a year-round residential facility for about 300 children of needy families supported by the Moose fraternal organization. It is located on a 1,000-acre campus, 38 miles west of Chicago. Mooseheart has houses that are maintained by the individual lodges, certified schools, athletic programs and religious services for the children.

Children from infancy through high school across the country that qualify and are sponsored by a lodge can attend if space allows. The child does not have to be related to a Moose member.

“That’s probably the biggest thing in the world, seeing their appreciation,” Maddox said. “They are. They really are. That’s not just blowing smoke, they really are appreciative.”

Maddox said he decided to join in 1990 because a lot of his friends were playing ball for the Moose Lodge near where he lived in Alexandria and he was going to play too. Although he didn’t end up playing for the Lodge, he decided to sign up the first day he visited because he learned about Mooseheart and the programs the Lodge offers for kids.

“It seemed like the right thing to do,” Maddox said.

When Maddox moved to Amherst in 1995, he transferred his membership to the Piney River lodge and in 2001 he became the administrator, a job he devotes about four hours a day to, not including the time spent on weekends with other moose members doing activities. He also has served as a district president for two years, a Moose Legion president for one year and has been one of the marketing representatives for Virginia since 2007.

As administrator Maddox is responsible for keeping up the financial and community service records and the membership. He also sends reports and puts together a newsletter that he sends to the eight other lodges in their district. The district stretches from Bedford to Farmville and includes lodges in Appomattox and Lynchburg. There are 94 lodges throughout Virginia.

“Donnie’s done a wonderful job down here,” said Charles McMurray, the governor, or president, of the Piney River lodge. “He knows the ins and outs of everything. If it wasn’t for Donnie, the place would probably shut down. He keeps this place rolling. He’s taught me a lot.”

As governor and administrator, McMurray and Maddox work hand and hand on a lot of the club business, including working with other members to decide how they will give back to the community.

Each lodge is responsible for doing community service as a group. The lodge averages between 250 hours and 300 hours every three months, but a lot of members will do community service outside of the lodge projects, even though Moose International will not count individual projects towards the hours.

Since the Piney River Lodge is made up of people from both Amherst and Nelson counties, they focus on projects for both counties. They sponsor youth athletic teams, offer a \$1,000 college scholarship, promote a program that teaches kids about safe ways to surf the Internet, provide money to local organizations including churches and the Piney River Fire Department and host events for the children in Amherst and Nelson counties.

Some of these events include the Halloween party, movie nights once a month at the lodge and most recently, Snacks With Santa, which was held on Dec. 18. They also donate the lodge hall to the community for local fundraisers and functions, like Relay for Life fundraisers and churches' activities.

Another project the lodge just finished up is a food box drive where members collected nonperishable food items for the needy.

"With the way the economy is, there's a lot of hungry kids," said McMurray, who became a member in 2004.

In order to become a member, the applicant must be sponsored by a current member and not have a criminal record. The members of the lodge will then vote on the applicant at one of their meetings and if approved, the applicant will be a member within two weeks.

The Piney River Lodge meets on the first and third Tuesday of each month. There is also a \$20 initiation fee and every member must pay dues. Each lodge has a different cost. The Piney River dues are \$45 a year. If someone gets their Moose Legion degree, there is a \$10 initiation fee and \$17 annual dues.

Another key part of the organization is fellowship. The bar, pool table, numerous round tables and the TV in the social quarters are evidence of the time the members spend together.

The Piney River Moose Lodge is open Friday through Sunday. On Friday there is often karaoke and sometimes an open mic night. Once a month the members will have a steak dinner. On Sundays the members will watch a game or race on the TV.

Maddox noted the family atmosphere as a way the Moose Lodge stands apart from other organizations and the lodge's small size.

"The friendly atmosphere is different than a large lodge because everybody knows each other," Maddox said. "It brings more fellowship together and there's more of a family atmosphere than it is in a large lodge."

Some lodges can have more than 5,000 members.

McMurray agreed. "It's a home away from home."