

Santa's special visit: Middletown Elks lodge hosts holiday party for local youths

By [Kevin Penton](#) Staff Writer December 25, 2008

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Sure, members of the Middletown Elks enjoy a cold beer or two every now and then.

But anyone who thinks that Post 2179's primary activity is emptying mugs rather than serving Middletown is greatly mistaken, said Michael Dickie, who becomes the group's exalted ruler in 2009.

"Sometimes, I think we're the best kept secret in Middletown," said Dickie, fresh off volunteering during a youth basketball tournament.

Since 2005, the Belford post has helped raise \$249,107 toward various charities in the region, Dickey said.

According to the Web site of the New Jersey State Elks Association, the Middletown chapter ranks 22nd out of 118 chapters statewide in per-capita donations to the national organization in 2008. As of Nov. 1, the lodge had contributed \$3,120, the most within its state district.

Among their activities this year, the Elks helped install a swing disabled children, updated the playground equipment at a township park and awarded scholarships to area students.

Middletown is particularly grateful for the work the Elks performed in the township's parks, Deputy Mayor Pamela Brightbill said.

"They are just great guys," Brightbill said. "They don't hesitate to help whenever they are needed."

Getting things done takes organizational skills and members willing to chip in toward costs, said Dickie, who acknowledges the effort can be a lot of work.

"You never turn anybody away," said Dickie, who works for the Monmouth County Bayshore Outfall Authority. "When you see the smiles on the kids' faces, that's all I need."

But in tough economic times, losing members is a concern for the post, which has more than 600 members, said Mike Parulis Jr., its current exalted ruler.

"Every time guys walk through the door, they're getting hit up for 10 bucks here, buying raffle tickets for

that," said Parulis, who noted members are not obligated to contribute. "Not everyone can afford it."

The post covers operating costs such as utility bills and property maintenance by running the bar, said Francis Corridon, who helps balance the finances.

The lodge typically attracts new members through its community activities or by recruiting family members and friends, Dickie said. More information on the post is available at www.middletonelks2179.org on the Web.

"When people come to us for help, we don't know how to say no," Dickie said. "You can't say no."

Kevin Penton: (732) 888-2617 or kpenton@app.com