

# RT '14

*Rollin' Times from the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America*



MPVA Vice President, David Peck, takes a moment to test drive an Action Track wheelchair at MPVA's Annual Awareness Day this past spring.





PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA  
**MICHIGAN CHAPTER**



## About this Issue:

Please be sure to read the President's Report to find out more about MPVA's Annual Awareness Day that took place on April 10, 2014!

### MPVA Officers and Directors

|                                  |                |                  |
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| Treasurer..... Timothy Agajecian | Director ..... | Maurice Jordan   |
| Director .....                   | John Dusa      |                  |

### MPVA Staff

Executive Director  
Michael Harris  
mharris@michiganpva.org

Administrative Assistant  
Brenda Wheeler  
chapterhq@michiganpva.org

Deputy Executive  
Director/Development  
Jaclyn K. Kochis  
jkochis@michiganpva.org

Financial Officer  
Linda Highland

Office Maintenance  
Willie DeBerry

Legal Advisor  
Steve Cohen

Director of Government Relations  
& Advocacy  
Vacant

Certified Public Accountants  
and Consultants  
Croskey, Lanni & Company, PC

Sports & Recreation Director  
Scot Severn  
ssevern@michiganpva.org

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of America

### VETERANS BENEFITS DEPARTMENT

McNamara Federal Building, 477 Michigan Avenue, Room 1233, Detroit, MI 48226

Phone: (313) 471-3996 or (800) 795-3608

Service Officer Stephanie Strickland • Service Officer Bonnie Williams

Service Office Secretary Marilyn Kittrell  
National Field Director Rickey Grant  
(202) 374-2032 Washington, D.C

### Disclaimer:

The Rollin' Times is a publication of the Michigan Chapter of Paralyzed Veterans of America. It is designed to inform the members of the PVA and other interested parties on veterans' issues, legislation, legal decisions, medical technology and other matters deemed to be relevant to the disability community.

The contents of this publication do not always reflect the views or policies of Michigan PVA, and no endorsement or approval is made or should be inferred with respect to products or services advertised herein. Consult an appropriate professional before making use of any product or service mentioned.

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*Michigan Paralyzed  
Veterans of America*

40550 Grand River Avenue

Novi MI 48375

(248) 476-9000 Fax (248) 476-9545

Toll free: (800) 638-MPVA (6782)

Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America (MPVA) is one of 34 member chapters of Washington, D.C.-based Paralyzed Veterans of America. A Congressionally chartered veterans service organization, MPVA has been assisting veterans with spinal cord injuries or diseases, including Multiple Sclerosis and ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, better known as Lou Gehrig's Disease), in Michigan since 1961.

MPVA programs include:

- Veterans' Benefits
- Wheelchair Sports and Recreation
- Spinal Cord Injury Research
- Equipment Donation
- Advocacy to eliminate architectural barriers and protect civil rights for persons with disabilities
- Referral Services for assistive devices, housing, employment and transportation
- Literature on a variety of topics including self-care, independent living, and disability rights.
- The Pump Guide: an online directory of gas stations throughout Michigan that will pump gas at the self-serve price for persons with disabilities.
- MPVA is a nonprofit organization and receives no federal funding. MPVA relies on grants, sponsorships, and private and corporate donations to support its programs.

The MPVA headquarters is in Novi, Michigan. Our service officers are based out of the McNamara Federal Building in Downtown Detroit.

*The Ad Agency*

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# President's Report

By Kevin G. Elya, President, MPVA

## MPVA Awareness Day a Huge Success!

In April, the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America (MPVA) celebrated Paralyzed Veterans Awareness Week with our national office and the other 34 PVA Chapters across the country. This year's theme, *Ensuring Care, Benefits and Jobs*, spotlights the work of Paralyzed Veterans to empower seriously wounded heroes and their families with the necessary supports needed to live a productive and fulfilling life.

PVA Awareness Week was created with the hope of sharing the PVA mission of service and its countless accomplishments with our nation's citizens. Many Americans are unaware of the PVA's existence or the organization's important contributions to the disability community. While we have chapters and service offices across the nation, PVA is much smaller than most veterans' organizations because of its stringent membership criteria.

PVA Awareness Week is our opportunity to let Americans know we are here and continuing to serve. This is achieved by planning a week of activities to educate the public about MPVA and to demonstrate how we make a difference in the lives of paralyzed veterans and others with disabilities.

PVA plays a role in meeting the full range of our members needs. Our members, staff, partners and volunteers work throughout the year to make a positive difference in the lives of our paralyzed veterans and all people living with disabilities.

MPVA celebrated PVA Awareness Week at various sites around Michigan. At the Detroit & Ann Arbor VA Medical Centers, we had an opportunity to set up the MPVA display booth. This was a chance for us to introduce MPVA to veterans and their caregivers as well as meet with in-patients and with the medical staff to show our appreciation for the outstanding medical care they provide to veterans.

MPVA made financial donations to the Detroit, Ann Arbor, Battle Creek, Saginaw and Iron Mountain VA Medical Centers in support of their VA Volunteer Services program. The Grand Rapids and D.J. Jacobetti State Home for Veterans received a financial contribution for their member

services program.

On April 10, 2014, the MPVA and our participating vendors sponsored an Awareness Day held at our Chapter office in Novi. The turnout for this year's event was outstanding as MPVA members, community leaders and the attending public had an opportunity to compare and review independent and assisted living products and services.

This was an opportunity for MPVA to honor all those who have contributed to MPVA's successes. These individuals have committed their time, talents, and money to allow us to accomplish our mission.

Due to the generous support of the MPVA staff, volunteers and sponsors, this year's Awareness Day was a huge success. We were extraordinarily lucky to have such beautiful weather for this event after the rough winter we had experienced. That made the day even better as people were able to enjoy our wonderful and fully accessible deck as well as the rest of our office! Additionally, we would be amiss if we did not recognize our friend, Ed Ptasznik, who acted as our Pierogi Chef for the third year in a row (and, as always, they were delicious).

Everyone's contribution truly made a difference and I cannot thank those who came out to support the day enough. At this time, however, I would like to especially thank the list of volunteers who came out that day and supported the MPVA's mission: **Bad River Outdoors, Bath for All, LLC., Creative Mobility Group, Level 11 Physical Therapy, Mobility Works, New Horizons, Peer Support Services, Public Service Credit Union, TSS Equipment, Wheelchair Getaways, Wright and Filippis, DTE Energy, Gresham Driving Aids, The Standing Wheelchair Company, Transition Remodeling, New Century Home Health Care, Inc., Pete M. Monismith, PC.**

*Please see the inside back cover of this issue which features photos of the MPVA's 2014 Annual Awareness Day.*





# MPVA ANNUAL PICNIC

**Saturday, July 26, 2014**

**10:00 AM-2:00PM**

**Plymouth Miracle League Field**

**357 Theodore**

**Plymouth, MI 48170**



**Accessible ball field—bring your baseball glove to play from 10 AM-12 PM! Lunch from Delilah's Deli and refreshments will be served from 12-1:00 PM.**

**Please R.S.V.P. by July 11, 2014**

**MPVA: #(800) 638-6782 OR**

**(248)476-9000**



# Executive Director's Report

By Mike Harris, Executive Director, MPVA

## Disabled Veterans Enjoy a Day of Fishing on Lake Michigan



Once again, Michigan veterans converged on the town of Manistee for an all expenses paid fishing event on Lake Michigan.

For most Americans, Memorial Day is celebrated on the fourth Monday in May. But for me, the official start of Memorial Day kicks off one week prior, during the "Tight Lines for Troops" Veterans Fishing Tournament.

It is amazing how far this event has come in just five years. It has become the premier fishing event for veterans in Michigan. The brainchild behind the fishing tournament was Army veteran and Manistee County Charter Boat Captain, Bob Guenthardt. His

motivation for hosting the event was to express his gratitude to disabled veterans for their distinguished military service and the sacrifice they made on behalf of our Nation.

Sponsored by the Little River Casino Resort and Manistee County Charter Boats, proceeds from the event benefit the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America, Brain Injury Association of America, and the Manistee County Veterans Endowment Fund.

On May 17th, 2014, Manistee County Charter Captains join other fishing boat Captains from around Northern Michigan to host close to 300 Michigan

military service personnel and Veterans on 64 - four-person "Teams."

Lake Michigan Charter Boat Captains gave up a day's pay to honor veterans from World War II to Afghanistan. Some of the Boat Captains came as far as 100 miles away to donate their time. Veterans that had difficulty paying for the trip were given financial support to help offset the cost in their travel, meals & lodging and the purchase of a fishing license.

Five boats carried veterans from the Army, Marines, Air Force, Navy and Coast Guard where a friendly rivalry was created amongst the branches of the arm forces. Congratulations to the Army for winning the Governors Cup.

This year, there were more disabled veterans participating that were injured either in Iraq or Afghanistan. Seeing them is a reminder that these young men and women have served our country with honor and distinction.

For some recently injured veterans, this is an opportunity for them to reclaim themselves. Some have difficulty accepting their disability. Doing something they did prior to their injury shows them that their disability does not have to define them.

Around dawn on Saturday morning, the boats gathered on Lake Michigan at the mouth of the Manistee River Channel. With all the boat engines turned off, the bag pipers performed Amazing Grace followed by a trumpet play Taps.

At the conclusion of the tournament boats again gathered together in the harbor and were escorted down the River Channel by the United States Coast Guard all the way to Seng's Marina on Manistee Lake. At the entrance to the channel on both piers, and all along the river walk, hundreds of people gathered standing shoulder to shoulder saluting, cheering and welcoming the veterans back from their excursion – with over five hundred American Flags, provided by Rolling Thunder Chapter 1 and Patriot Guard, blowing in the breeze. It was an incredibly moving and very emotional moment for many. I can assure you that the veterans who participated in the event were treated like VIP's, and journeyed home with the greatest of memories of this event.

The event was capped off with an awards ceremony along with a dinner provided by donations of food from many donors, including Ebels General Store and Kaleva Meats. The Little River Casino Resort filled in with all the salads and extra food, and provided staff to execute the dinner.

Without the support of many this event would have never been possible. All the heavy lifting for the event was provided by Bob Guenthardt and Judy Ball.

I want to personally thank the Boat Captains for donating their time and resources. Saturday is a prime day in the charter boat industry. For them to have given up an opportunity for a big payday to honor disabled veterans is a statement within itself!

The collective efforts of over 200 volunteers including representatives of Rolling Thunder MI Chapter #1, Little River Casino Resort, LRBOI Warrior Society, Seng's Marina, US Coast Guard, Manistee National Guard Armory, American Legion Men's Auxiliary who hosted the Captains dinner, VFW, American Legion, Local Boy Scouts, Manistee Chamber of Commerce, BIAMI and MPVA, and countless others worthy of recognition made this year's event the most successful Tight Lines for Troops tournament to date.

Special thanks go out to everyone who sponsored the event. Without their support this day would not have been possible. Their donation is a tribute to those who honorably served, and are serving, our country. Many of these veterans would have been unable to travel to Manistee for the event; most would never have been able to afford a charter fishing trip, a hotel, or even fuel for the trip. Cash donations allowed us to provide financial assistance to veterans most in need, and also to help offset the expenses of the actual tournament – trophies, t-shirts, etc.

Please visit our website [www.tightlinesfortroops.com](http://www.tightlinesfortroops.com) and visit the Tight Lines for Troops Facebook Page to see photos, news reels, and comments – all real accounts of the experience of May 17, 2014.

We very much look forward to next year!





# From The Development Office

By Jaclyn Kochis, Deputy Executive Director/Development, MPVA

## Public Service Credit Union Supports the MPVA

This past spring, the MPVA was invited to participate in a unique “Community Challenge” with Public Service Credit Union (PSCU) located in Romulus, Michigan. The idea behind this initiative was to aid people applying for loans and, at the same time, support local charities; the MPVA being one of them!

To help launch the challenge, Public Service Credit Union hosted an outstanding “Meet Our Charities” event on May 2nd! The MPVA, along with the three other participating charities, spent the afternoon at Public Service’s facility which was adorned with a large outdoor tent, balloons, games, exceptional food, refreshments, and much more!

The “Meet Our Charities” festivity was a great opportunity for the MPVA as we were able to meet lots of other wonderful local charities and spread the word about this program and our services! Another highlight came when we were awarded with a key to the City of Romulus by Romulus Mayor LeRoy Burcroff!

The MPVA is extremely grateful to be tapped on by Public Service Credit Union! We would especially like to thank Nadine Hohnke and Robert Mercier and the whole team at PSCU for planning and hosting the



Community Challenge.

Additionally, the MPVA would like to make it known that the Community Challenge is still happening and here are the ways in which it works:

- Save people in our communities half a million dollars in loan interest in 2014
- Total interest saved by refinancing any loan product offered at Public Service Credit Union, other than student loans, will contribute toward the goal





- When the \$500,000 goal is met, Public Service Credit Union will donate up to \$2,500 to four local charities

You can get involved in this Community Challenge in the following ways:

- Taking out a qualifying loan through Public Service Credit Union
- Telling everyone you know about this opportunity.

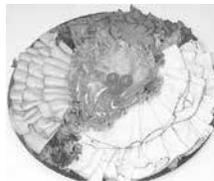
For more details on the Challenge go to [www.PSCUSaves.com](http://www.PSCUSaves.com).



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Mike Bannoura  
2755 Farmington Rd.  
Farmington Hills, MI  
48331

PH: (734) 812-1074  
Fax: (248) 454-9214



Ray Bannoura  
26711 Northwestern  
Hwy.  
Suite #100  
Southfield, MI 48304

PH: (248) 354-3061

[www.delilahsdeli.com](http://www.delilahsdeli.com)



# Government Relations & Advocacy

By: Mike Harris, Executive Director, MPVA

## 2014 PVA Advocacy & Legislative Conference

In March, I attended Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) Legislative/Advocacy Conference in Washington, D.C. The main focus of the conference was providing us with the tools to effectively carry out PVA's legislative & advocacy priorities for the upcoming year.

During the week, I had the opportunity to visit 12 members of the Michigan Congressional Delegation. The legislators that I met with gave me the opportunity to educate them on issues important to our membership. The issue that dominated my conversation with legislators this year was the timely delivery of prosthetics devices.

### The Issue: Timely Delivery of Prosthetic Services

When the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Service decided to overhaul the prosthetics process, leaders at Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) knew this could spell trouble for its members.

Veterans who were already used to enduring long waits for customized wheelchairs, patient lifts and other high-dollar prosthetics equipment now had to deal with even more red tape and time in an already painstaking process.

### The New Way

Under this new process, a request for prosthetics equipment costing over "micro-purchase authority" (\$3,000 or more) has to leave the local VA prosthetics for approval from centralized offices run by the VA Office of Acquisition and Logistics.

The \$3,000 limit was established by laws governing contracting authority on the government's behalf. That means those purchasing agents who did not hold a

"warrant" cannot transact above the set limit.

Why is this important to PVA members? Because most durable medical items used by veterans with severe disabilities cost well over \$3,000. The items must be approved by contract representatives who never have to interact with veterans. The representatives have no clinical expertise yet may question, modify, or delay requests for prescribed equipment.

If the process works as intended, a consult or prescription submitted by a clinician goes to the local prosthetics purchase agent. If the cost exceeds \$3,000, the request goes to the network contracting representative for review.

The contracting representative solicits bids from vendors, and the chosen vendor produces and delivers the product. The clinically relevant aspects of the order do not get questioned or modified by administrators. The chosen vendor is capable of meeting the time and specification requirements of the bid.

The veteran receives the equipment and can get on with life. That is what is supposed to happen. But here is what actually happened in the following cases:

### Generating Paperwork

A PVA member with terminal, service-connected, ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease) and his elderly wife were prescribed a whole house generator in order to keep his ventilator working in the event of a power outage. VA prosthetics delayed the request by referring it to a major medical equipment committee, which required the veteran to produce four years of records from the electric company and his spouse's health records to substantiate the claim.

The local PVA service officer sought the intervention of the Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) director, after which the request was immediately

approved. The same veteran was later prescribed an artificial ventilator but died ten days after the equipment order was submitted.

Records show the prosthetics chief sat on the request for a week, deciding whether she should rent or buy the equipment. When questioned, she answered there are no established time frames for procurement and delivery of such devices in instances of terminal illness.

## Put on Hold

Another PVA member with terminal ALS was prescribed a percussion vest and ventilator machine, both needed to sustain artificially the veteran's respiratory system.

The local prosthetics office received the consult for the vest on December 3, 2012, but did not forward it to the network contracting office for nearly two months.

After the local PVA Service Officer got involved and pointed out the egregious delay to VISN leadership, the network contracting office placed the order the next day, and the vendor shipped the vest to the veteran by overnight delivery.

Similarly, the request for the ventilator took two weeks to reach contracting, which did not occur until the PVA Service Officer again raised the issue and notified the contracting office. The contracting office notified prosthetics that the ventilator cost less than \$3,000 and, therefore, could have been purchased locally.

## Power Problem

A PVA member with quadriplegia had a consult submitted for a power chair on August 15, 2012, by his physical therapist. VA medical notes show the order sat idle for about four weeks before being sent to the VISN contracting office. The responsible contract representative sought three vendor bids, and then inexplicably closed the order after receiving none.

The PVA Service Officer contacted the VISN Prosthetics Representative (VPR) to find out why the order had not been fulfilled, only to find it had been dropped. The VPR attributed the process breakdown to miscommunication between local VA prosthetics and network contracting, after which she directed her staff to bypass the system to procure the wheelchair

locally.

Two more orders were discovered to have sat for three to four weeks before submission to contracting.

## The Reality

These three stories increasingly typify reports PVA has received from the field that illustrate the reality of a VA prosthetics process in disrepair. Orders found inexplicably languishing on an administrator's desk; unnecessary referrals to approval committees for items that are routinely issued in other VISNs; prosthetics staff applying outdated or unenforceable standards to delay or deny requests. These are the symptoms of a system that needs greater quality assurance and more attentive leadership.

Although larger procurements like powered wheelchairs and porch lifts are a small percentage of the total workload for VA, they represent the most critical equipment needed by the majority of PVA's members — veterans with paralysis, neurodegenerative diseases, and other severe afflictions who literally need prosthetics to live.

Delays in these procurements prove costly to the government, in terms of unnecessarily extended hospital stays while awaiting equipment, and to veterans, in terms of lost independence and quality of life.

It is tremendously disheartening that PVA leaders predicted this would happen and voiced these concerns to VA leadership well before the changes to the prosthetics process were implemented in 2011.

Paralyzed Veterans' national office staff is closely following the changes within VA prosthetics and working with VA leadership to ensure that the current changes do not negatively impact veterans. Prosthetics is one of the most important elements of providing disabled veterans quality of life. The Paralyzed Veterans of America and their Chapters will work to make certain that veterans are provided with quality prosthetic devices that meet their needs in a timely manner.





By: Bonnie J. Williams, Chapter Service Officer, MPVA

## Social Security Disability Changes for Veterans Applauded by PVA

**T**he Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America applauds a new initiative by the Social Security Administration that will fast track disability benefits for veterans. On February 19, 2014, the Administration unveiled a new process for expediting disability claims by veterans with a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) disability compensation rating of 100 percent Permanent and Total (P&T) applications from qualifying veterans will be flagged as high priority, which in most cases should result in expedited decisions!

The new process, which will launch in mid-March 2014, is the result of a collaboration between Social Security and the VA to identify veterans with disabilities who have high probability of meeting the Social Security definition of disability.

The changes are based on legislation authored and introduced by Representative John Sarbanes, D-MD. Sarbanes proposed the legislation after a veteran constituent contracted him for help with his application for Social Security benefits. While the veteran has received a 100 percent rating from the VA, he had been waiting for years to be approved for Social Security disability benefits.

"No one wants to put America's veterans through a bureaucratic run around," Sarbanes said in a statement, "As baby boomer generation ages and more veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan need care, this common sense change will help reduce backlogs and cut through unnecessary red tape so that our most disabled veterans receive the benefits they've earned."

"I am pleased with the decision to expedite veteran's disability claims in the Social Security system," said Sherman Gillums, Jr., Associate Executive Director of Veteran Benefits at Paralyzed Veterans of America. "These men and women have already endured that wait for their VA benefits and should not have to navigate through another lengthy bureaucratic process to get their earned entitlement."

In order to receive the expedited service, veterans must tell Social Security they have a VA disability compensation rating of 100 percent, P&T, and show proof of their disability rating with their VA Notification Letter.

Still, Gillums expressed concern about the different standards used by the VA and Social Security to determine a veteran's level of disability. "A veteran rated 100 percent disabled by VA may still have to fight for the same rating at Social Security Administration to get benefits...but at least now they won't have to wait months for the initial decisions."



# RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS NEEDED!

The University of Michigan is conducting a new study to learn more about how neurogenic bladder and bowel in people with spinal cord injury affect quality of life. We're also very interested in speaking with caregivers/ personal attendants.

The study is designed for people with neurogenic bladder and bowel due to an SCI which occurred less than a year ago OR whose injury happened more than 10 years ago OR a caregiver for someone with neurogenic bladder and bowel due to SCI. The study involves a one-on-one, face-to-face interview lasting 60 – 90 minutes. For those with SCI, there is also a series of surveys to complete by telephone taking another 60 – 80 minutes. You will be compensated for your time.

If you are interested, please call or email us at (734) 763-6189 or [DOD-SCIStudy@umich.edu](mailto:DOD-SCIStudy@umich.edu) and mentioned “DOD SCI Study” to learn more.



# Sports & Recreation

By Scot Severn, Sports & Recreation Director, MPVA

## Thunder in the Valley Games



**A**thletes from several different states descended on Saginaw, Michigan, for the 7th Annual Thunder in The Valley Games that were held at Saginaw Valley State University. There were even a few past and present Paralympics Athletes competing. Events included: swimming, air rifle, table tennis, power lifting, archery, hand cycling, and track and field. The University once again offered a reduced rate on dorm rooms to allow athletes to stay right on campus. The weather was great all weekend for the record largest group of 90 participants.

At the end of the weekend, awards were handed out to the Most Valuable Athletes. In the masters division, James Cowie III and Angela Miller took home the

honors. The adult division was won by Lorenzo Gaines and Evan Petros, and the Junior Most Valuable Athletes were Eric Rine and Abigal Gase. Eric Rine also claimed the Jeff Coupie and Lloyd J. Yeo Rising Star Award. The team trophies went to Wheelin Team 457 for large team and ASPO (Team consists of Sammy Rhodes and Eric Rine) for the small team. Volunteer of the Year Award went to Elizabeth Thimm.

With more events being added each year, there is something for everyone. Please log onto [www.thunderinthevalleygames.com](http://www.thunderinthevalleygames.com) to check out this year's results and photos and information on next year's games.



## 2014 Veteran of the Year for the Governor's Council on Physical Fitness

The Governor's Fitness Award Veteran of the Year award honors a Michigan veteran who has served their country and has either overcome obstacles to lead a healthier life or now serves their community by acting as a catalyst for healthy-living and inspires behavior change. I was honored to receive such an accolade and I would to congratulations to all the nominees and the winners from this year's ceremony!

A complete list of this year's nominees and the winners can be found at: <http://www.michiganfitness.org/governors-fitness-awards>.





~ 2014 AWARENESS DAY ~



Photo Credit: Kelly Whalen



MICHIGAN PARALYZED  
VETERANS OF AMERICA  
A Member Chapter of Paralyzed Veterans of America  
40550 Grand River Avenue  
Novi, MI 48375

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Summer Edition 2014

## Valuable Dates for 2014:

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### **Independence Day**

Office Closed July 3rd and 4th  
in observation of holiday



### **Membership Meeting**

Thursday, August 21st  
Counting of Ballots  
Luncheon begins at 12:00 Noon and  
meeting begins at 1:00 PM



### **MPVA Membership Picnic**

Saturday, July 26th 10:00 AM-1:30 PM  
Plymouth Miracle League Field  
357 Theodore  
Plymouth, MI 48170  
Bring your baseball glove  
to play from 10 AM-12 PM!  
Lunch from Delilah's Deli served at Noon!