

# RT '16

Rollin' Times from the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America



Take a look inside this issue and learn about the MPVA's Annual Picnic at the Miracle League of Plymouth (photo above), what 20 years of dedicated service to the MPVA looks like, the opening of a new Veteran Service Office in west Michigan, and much more!





PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA  
**MICHIGAN CHAPTER**



## About this Issue:

Please enjoy all of the summer news from the MPVA.

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### 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 (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.

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# President's Report

By David Peck, President, MPVA

## Opportunities Exist with a Disability

I was just twenty years old and found myself living as a paraplegic with no trade or higher education. At home, I had a wonderful family who believed I would be able and willing to accept my new lifestyle if I had a new skill to focus on in order to obtain a balance of living and new sense of self-worth. I always felt that I could do anything I put my mind toward and with the help of my family (who supervised the building of a workshop as I returned home from Vietnam) I ended up doing just that.

Living all my life in a community of wonderful friends and family allowed me to accept offers to learn woodworking, caning of chairs, and refinishing of furniture. I set out to build a home to add on to the workshop I already had. With help from numerous individuals, the task was accomplished. From there, I realized I had lots of ideas, and with the use of my new knowledge I sought after a forty-one year journey of creating furniture.

With the passing of years, my hobbies have increased and new adventures have been experienced. I have traveled, seen my children become adults, and completed numerous projects in wood and refinishing. My favorite thing to do is mow the land around my home myself. I get such joy with the coming of spring and summer; the rebirth of nature and tasks that come with it. I also maintain our pool and keep up with the maintenance of all my "toys." In addition, my wife and I have also been able to do some traveling in each of the great states.

As for my furniture work, caning brings me the most joy. It is hard to find individuals who have this skill and I take pride in the fact that I can usually cane over



*My daughter and grandson taking time out to watch the train go by MPVA's Annual Picnic at the Miracle League of Plymouth*

twenty chairs a year, all sizes and styles. There are many of my finished products in my home and others as well. Over the years, I have refinished my own dining room furniture, living room tables and my bedroom furniture. Birdhouses happen to be my children's favorites.

I always look for new projects and hobbies to make my life enjoyable. I enjoy participating in MPVA sports events and I also had the luxury of participating in an African Safari Hunt which gave me the opportunity of bringing home unbelievable memories and a trophy.

Over the years, I have had the opportunity of talking with returning veterans and I have always tried to give them some sort of self awareness and knowing that someone else has gone through the same experiences. I have been blessed with the understanding and encouragement from my family and friends.

Although the opportunity to act as President for the Chapter came to me rather suddenly after Kevin Elya's passing last fall, I look forward to my duties and the opportunity to serve veterans and people with disabilities. I encourage you to get involved with the many programs we have to offer here in the state of Michigan. Please feel free to join us at our membership

meetings, annual events, and share your ideas and thoughts on how we can better our mission!



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# Executive Director's Report

By Jaclyn Kochis, Executive Director, MPVA

## 20 Years of Service

In 1996, the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America gained a new member. At that time, this new member would have never dreamed that their recent support of our organization would turn into 20 years of commitment, service, and inspiration.

Michael Harris—or “Pooh Bear,” a nickname coined during his military service because of his physical and wholesome likeness to the fictional teddy bear—is no shrinking violet. Since his spinal cord injury in 1986, Mike has gone on to serve as a Director of the MPVA



Board, MPVA Government Relations Director, and MPVA Executive Director.



In October 2015, Mike decided to “retire.” This is a word that traditionally means taking on activities of leisure and enjoyment after years of work. Yet, for Mike, it meant becoming a volunteer Government Relations Director and Director of the Board for the MPVA once more!

As a well-respected disability advocate, Mike has worked on civil rights cases that have impacted lives, both locally and federally. He has worked tirelessly to ensure that our communities are inclusive through his understanding and deep dedication to address the needs of those living with a disability. If I attempted to highlight all of his work, it would take up pages of this issue, and our team wanted to feature something a bit different in recognition of Mike’s 20th year of service.



For instance, Brenda Wheater, MPVA Administrative Assistant, wanted to share the following:

“When I think of Mike, the first thing that comes to mind is his positive attitude and sense of humor. After working with him for four-plus years, I cannot recall him coming into our Chapter with a negative demeanor.

My very first conversation after I had moved from North Carolina to begin work at the Chapter involved Michael asking me if I would need an advance on my salary to get me started, and that he would be happy to help if needed. That, to me, demonstrates his integrity and generosity of spirit. There are few people I have known that I respect as much.”

I, too, have come to know how generous Mike is—not only financially, but by providing others with his time. There have been so many organizations that have tapped on Mike to serve on committees or boards and he rarely

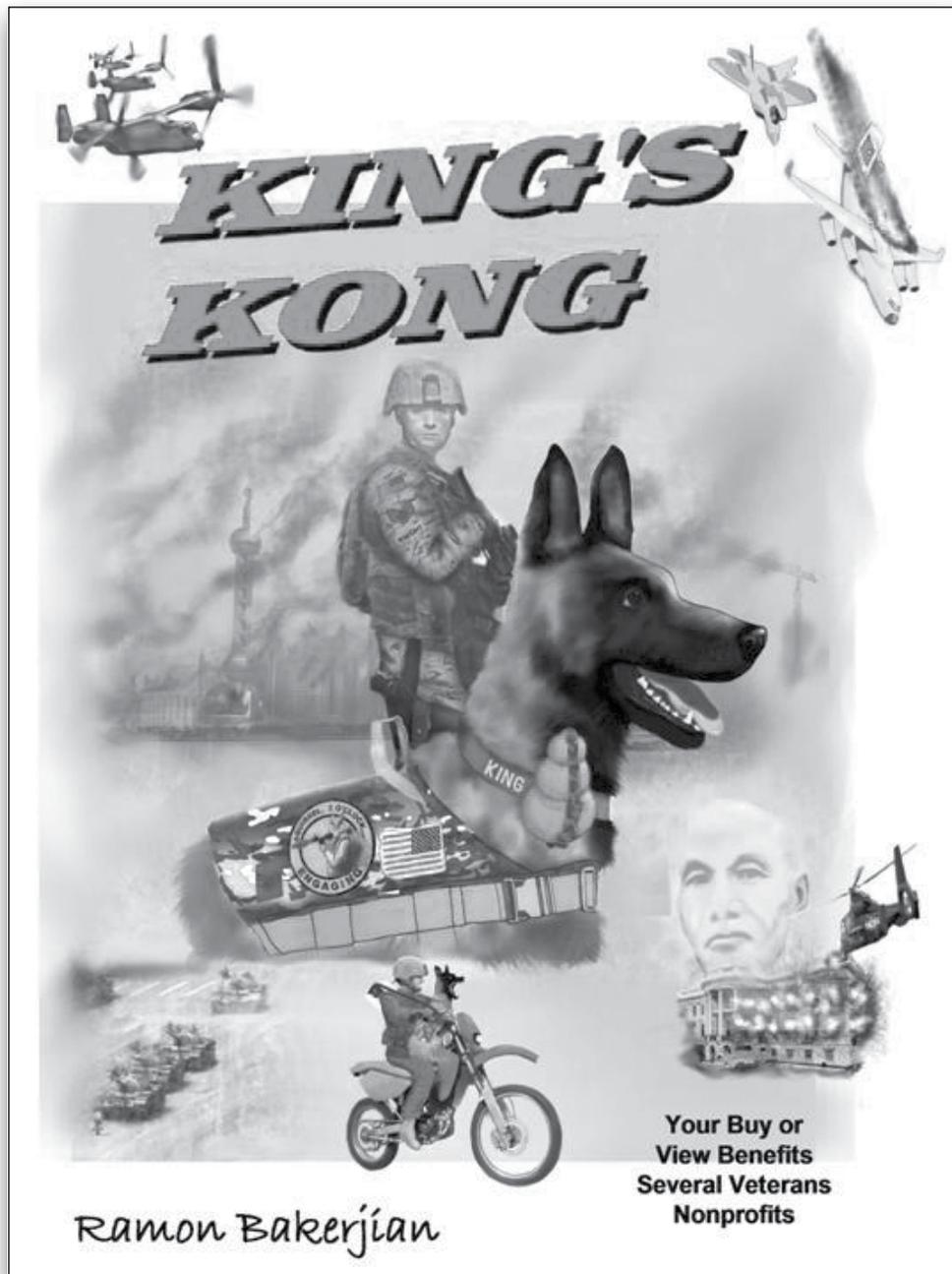
turns them down. To each, he brings enthusiasm and his unique expertise.

Mike is also a dedicated brother, uncle, and friend. I have been fortunate to speak with some of Mike’s buddies and family over the years and can tell you that he is absolutely cherished by all of them. Through all of these things, Mike has stayed committed to our Chapter, even in the face of difficult financial times, budget cuts, and numerous other organizational changes. And, I can tell you that he never complains (I even go into his office to prompt him to do so, and am only met with jokes).

“I was introduced to Mike in June of 2015 during my interview for the MPVA,” said Joe Shaeffer, MPVA Veteran Service Officer. “He instantly made me feel comfortable even though I was very nervous about my interview. As soon as I started, I felt like I was part of the MPVA “family.” Mikes’ kindness and willingness to listen has become a staple of the MPVA office environment. It is the best atmosphere I have ever been a part of and it’s all due to Mikes amazing attitude and work ethic. Thank you Mike for all you have done for us,” said Shaeffer.

The bottom line is this—when you work at a nonprofit you are often dependent on the volunteerism and the generosity of a few extraordinary people. In Mike, we have both and so much more. Not many people can say that they have given 20 years of dedicated service to one organization and we just wanted to take a moment to recognize that!

Abraham Lincoln once said “Whatever you are, be a good one.” I think it’s pretty clear, the MPVA has a “good one” in Mike!



King's Kong, is a short techno-thriller about how an incredibly tough, brave, and smart Malinois military working dog (a five-zero-kilo-niner) named King, his equally tough and brave handler, Air Force Sergeant Bill Knight, and a Green Beret / Delta Force team are inserted into war-torn Shanghai in the near future to capture or kill a renegade Chinese general bent on destroying Shanghai and taking over China.

Author Ray Bakerjian not only wrote the story, but he also created the art for the cover, did a YouTube video about that with action music, drew situation maps for the mission in Shanghai, and created several humor patches ("Squirrel 2 O'clock... Engaging"). He is also planning to record an audio book and is looking for just the right comic book

artist (artistic talent and a DD214 are helpful). Ray is the founder of "The Wounded Artist Project," a Michigan-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit which sends art supplies to war wounded.

He will be donating 20% of his net profits to various vet-related and animal rescue nonprofits including the MPVA, Stiggy's Dogs in Howell, and the Foundation of American Veterans.

To see the art video type this into your address line: [bit.ly/25WGDwd](http://bit.ly/25WGDwd)

To read a short excerpt: [bit.ly/1UpWB6p](http://bit.ly/1UpWB6p)

To read the first 40 or pages for free: [bit.ly/1UhNqpm](http://bit.ly/1UhNqpm)



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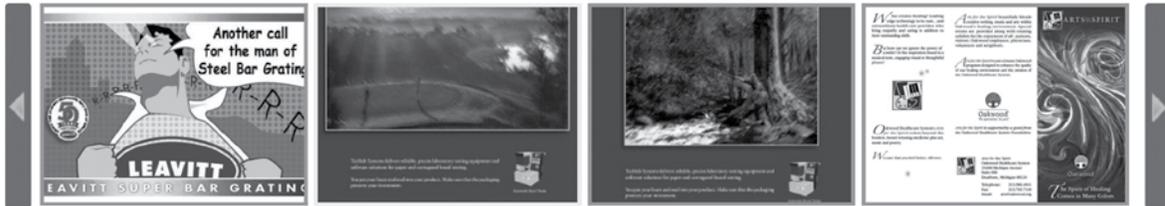
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By: Joe Shaeffer, Veterans Service Officer

## New Veteran Service Office



**O**n July 20, 2016, I was able to participate in a ribbon cutting ceremony for the opening of a new Veterans Service Office in Ionia, MI. Starting immediately, Robin Bailey (VFW Service Officer) and I will be sharing duties at this new location to ensure that veterans in, and around, west Michigan are able to obtain the VA benefits they are entitled to. The office will be taking calls for appointments Monday through Friday, 8 AM to 5 PM, at: (616) 775-1002, or you can contact me directly at: (248) 974-5788.

For more information about this location, please read the press release written by Robert Lathers, LMSW, and CEO of The Right Door for Hope, Recovery and Wellness, below:

The Right Door for Hope, Recovery and Wellness has partnered with the Ionia County Board of Commissioners and the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency to establish an office at The Right Door that is designated solely to serving veterans and their families. It's called the Ionia County Veterans Services Office and is located at The Right Door's main facility at 375 Apple Tree Drive in Ionia.

This initiative was begun by Ionia County Administrator Stephanie Fox and U.S. Army Colonel (Retired) Tim

Loney, who is the West Michigan Regional Coordinator in Region 4 for the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency. Loney has more than 28 years on active duty, served 11 years in Europe and Asia and was deployed overseas during Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The purpose of the Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency is to:

- Advocate for and on behalf of veterans and their families;
- Create a "no wrong door" customer service culture (thus the Right Door is a natural partner);
- Provide the advice and assistance veterans need

The Ionia County Veterans Services Office is going to be a site for multiple veteran services programs. The Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America and the Veterans of Foreign Wars have already assigned staff to the Ionia County office.

A ribbon cutting for the new office, held on July 20, was attended by Ionia County commissioners; 64A District Court Judge Ray Voet, who oversees Ionia County Veterans Treatment Court; and representatives from Veterans Affairs. Ionia County Dave Hodges of Belding, who also is a veteran, gave the keynote address.

Commissioner Hodges told attendees that there are 4,600 veterans living in Ionia County. The Ionia County Veterans Services Office will be able to better coordinate the services they are eligible for.

“It is important to serve veterans because they’ve stepped up to serve their country, in their daily life and potentially with their life,” Commissioner Hodges said.

The Right Door for Hope, Recovery and Wellness has been and continues to be committed to reaching out and serving all members of the community, and especially veterans.

*Robert Lathers, LMSW, is the CEO of The Right Door for Hope, Recovery and Wellness, formerly Ionia County Community Mental Health. His email address is [rlathers@rightdoor.org](mailto:rlathers@rightdoor.org). He welcomes your comments and questions. If you have a mental health emergency, call 911 or our 24-hour crisis line at 1-888- 527-1790. Visit The Right Door online at [www.rightdoor.org](http://www.rightdoor.org) and find us on Facebook. The Right Door in Ionia is now open every Saturday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.*



## MPVA's Salute to Veterans Online Auction

The MPVA is hosting an online auction during the following dates:

November 4, 2015—November 18, 2016

There will be tons of outstanding items at various values for you to bid on! Not only will you have a chance to win some fabulous prizes, but, you will be supporting a great cause!

**Make a gift donation today! Contact Jaclyn Kochis at (248) 476-9000, or at: [jkochis@michiganpva.org](mailto:jkochis@michiganpva.org)!**

### MPVA's Mission

*The mission of the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America (MPVA) is to enhance the lives of veterans with spinal cord injury or disease as well as all citizens with disabilities, by advocating for civil rights, assuring quality health care, supporting continued research and educations, and encouraging independence and healthy living through various health, sports and recreational programs. MPVA shall continue striving to remain at the forefront of both veterans' benefits services and disability rights, while working toward a better quality of life for all American citizens. Proceeds for the 2016 Salute to Veterans Gala benefit MPVA Programs.*

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Questions?  
Contact: Jaclyn Kochis, Executive Director  
PH: (248) 476-9000 ext. 06  
[jkochis@michiganpva.org](mailto:jkochis@michiganpva.org)



## *The Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America*

Present the:

# Salute to Veterans Gala

Keynote Speaker:

**Navy (Ret.) Captain James Redford,  
Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency (MVAA)  
Director**

&

Master of Ceremonies:

**Rich Luterman,  
WJBK FOX 2 News Chief Meteorologist,  
United States Air Force Veteran**

*Friday, November 11, 2016*

*6:00 PM to 9:00 PM*

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46100 Grand River Ave.  
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# Government Relations & Advocacy

By: Mike Harris

## Air Carrier Access Act 30th Anniversary

It is hard to believe, but we will be celebrating the 30th anniversary of the Air Carrier Access Act (ACAA) of 1986. In October of 1986, President Ronald Regan signed the ACAA into law. The civil rights law laid the foundation for making air travel more accessible for persons with disabilities, and to this day continues to protect the rights of passengers with disabilities.

The ACAA is not new. Most people with disabilities probably don't realize that this civil right law even exists. While the American with Disabilities Act has been well publicized, somehow the ACAA has not received the same attention by the media.

The ACAA protects your rights as an air carrier passenger with a disability while you are booking reservations, buying tickets, waiting for a plane, boarding, flying, leaving the plane, and picking up your bags. The Americans with Disabilities Act protects your rights and guarantees your access while you are in the airport.

The ACAA opened the door to aviation travel for millions of passengers with disabilities in the United States who were otherwise left grounded by inaccessible aircraft, airports and other facilities. It gives them the security of knowing that airlines would have to serve them equitably and accessibly when traveling domestically and aboard U.S. Carriers.

The act was passed by the Congress in direct response to a narrow interpretation of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 by the U.S. Supreme Court in *U.S. Department of Transportation v. Paralyzed Veterans of America*. The Supreme Court ruled that private commercial air carriers are not liable under Section 504 because they are not "direct recipients" of federal funding to airports. President Reagan signed the act into law on October 2, 1986.

Prior to the passage of the ACAA air carrier policies and practices concerning passenger with disabilities were considered a controversial and troublesome subject. Many passengers with disabilities objected to airline policies that they viewed as being inconvenient, unnecessary and discriminatory. Passengers expressed concern about the inconsistency of airline policies, asserting that it is often difficult for them to know, from one airline to the next or even from one terminal or flight crew to the next on the same airline, what conditions would be imposed on their ability to travel.

For example, the majority of airlines required an attendant to accompany all passengers who use wheelchairs, whether these passengers were capable of caring for themselves in flight or not. Most airline personnel did not even inquire about a wheelchair user potential or preference for self-direction because the possibility that paralyzed veterans or countless others with mobility impairments could travel alone was unimaginable.

All this changed with the passage of the Air Carrier Access Act of 1986.

The ACAA ranks among the most significant civil rights triumphs in our nation's history. Unlike 30 years ago, when passengers with disabilities frequently suffered degrading and discriminatory treatment from airlines, today air travelers can be assured of fair and equal treatment regardless of disability.

This means that airlines may not refuse transportation to anyone on the basis of disability for any reason not related to safety or, with a few limited exceptions, require advance notice that a person with a disabilities is traveling.

Most new aircraft are required to be built with the needs of disabled travelers in mind, and as a result more aircraft have accessible lavatories, priority space

for storing a passenger's collapsible wheelchair, and moveable armrests. Airlines must provide timely assistance with boarding, deplaning and making connections, and permit service animals to accompany passengers on flights.

One of the most important provisions of the ACCA is the requirement for each airline to have a Complaint Resolution Official (CRO) available at each airport, in person or by phone. This is the airline's expert on compliance, with the authority to intervene and correct a situation in order to ensure compliance with the act. When a violation has already occurred, the CRO must provide a written report to the passenger describing what happened and the steps taken to resolve the situation. In their statement they must advise you of your right to contact the Department of Transportation if you need further assistance or wish to file a formal complaint.

The U.S. Department of Transportation has established a toll-free hotline to assist travelers with disabilities that operates from 7am to 5pm EST Monday through Friday, except federal holidays. The hotline will provide general information to consumers about the rights of air travelers with disabilities, respond to request for printed consumer information, and assist air travelers with time-sensitive disability related issues that need to be addressed in "real time." Air travelers who experience disability related air travel service problems may call the hotline at 1-800-778-4838 (voice) or 1-800-455-9880 (TTY).

It is an unfortunate fact of modern life that air travel has lost virtually all of the glamour many of us once associated with flying. Airports are frantic places where getting through security can be a real nightmare, decent food and courtesy seem to be in ever diminishing supply, flights are cancelled without notice or adequate explanation, and departure gates are likely to change just about the time you arrive at the service desk.

That why it is important to know the rights that the Air Carrier Access Act guarantees to you as a person with a disability. Expect the airlines to accommodate you, and if they don't, or if they are reluctant to do so, insist they do. By knowing your rights and doing your part through simple communication you can ensure that you have an enjoyable flying experience

## Disabilities Forum for Air Travel Experiences

Individuals with disabilities now have a platform for sharing their stories, photos, videos and graphics about their air travel experiences.

[AirAccess30.org](http://AirAccess30.org), launched in January 2016 by Paralyzed Veterans of America, enables passengers with disabilities who utilize air travel to share positive and negative stories about their experiences.

The new website, launched in advance of the 30th anniversary of the ACCA, seeks the help of passengers with disabilities in showing the progress that has been made as well as the work that remains to accomplish the true spirit of the ACAA.

[AirAccess30.org](http://AirAccess30.org) offers a simple submission form in which passengers with disabilities can submit their story, an image as well as additional images or video relevant to describing their air travel experience. The site will also highlight some of the stories received by displaying them for others to review.

Air travel access for people with disabilities has undergone dramatic improvements in the nearly 30 years since passage of the ACAA. Airlines, for example, cannot refuse to transport anyone on the basis of disability for any reason except safety, nor can they require advance notice for travelers with disabilities.

Despite that progress, however, many travelers with disabilities continue to encounter barriers to air travel, including damaged assistive devices, inaccessible lavatories and in-flight entertainment and delayed assistance.

Sharing a story on the website does not equate with filing a formal complaint with the Department of Transportation, which offers a disability hotline as well as an online and paper complaint forms to passengers with disabilities who wish for the department to investigate a complaint. Airlines also provide complaint resolution officers in cases of dispute, and disabled airline passengers can request them upon incident. The [AirAccess30.org](http://AirAccess30.org) website is meant to complement those efforts by providing a public forum for passengers with disabilities to share their experiences and for the public to learn about gaps in air travel access.





# Sports & Recreation

By: Coach Phil Chester

## The 36th National Veterans Wheelchair Games

This year marked the 36th National Veterans Wheelchair Games which took place in Salt Lake City, Utah on June 27–July 2, 2016. It was a beautiful setting—there was mountain scenery all around us.



You could feel the excitement from the first day, and that tone carried right on through to the closing banquet on the last day. The team was led by team captain and athlete, Ray Brown, and I. The rest of the team was made up by: Kevin Bradley, George Coward, Dave Cutsinger, and Judy



Ross. Frankie Cutsinger and Marnie Dunn also attended and assisted.

The Michigan PVA Wheelchair Team spent their days competing in: Air Pistol, Air Rifle, Archery, Bowling, Field Events, Hand Cycling, Motorized Rally, Motorized Slalom, Power Soccer, Softball, Table Tennis and Trap. Though we were small in numbers, the team was big in determination and it all showed when the week was over. The medal count is 16 gold, 1 silver and 2 bronze—not bad at all!

One of our athletes got to ride a 70 MPH bobsled! You might be able to figure out who it is as he still has a huge smile on his face—Ray Brown, you experienced the thrill of a life time!

Our team would like to congratulate Sports Director, Scot Severn making The Paralympic Team going to Rio. Although we missed him at the games, we knew he was training hard to represent and compete for the US!

I would be remiss if I did not mention the loss of a good friend and supporter of The MPVA Wheelchair Team, Earl Sweet. Our prayers and sympathy go out to his wife Sandy Sweet and the Sweet Family.

A couple of our teammates were not able to make the trip



this year, because of illnesses. But there is always room for them when they are ready to come back! We also appreciate the team back home in Michigan. Thanks to Brenda Wheater and Jaclyn Kochis who were always just a phone call away!

Next year, the 37th National Veterans Wheelchair Games are in Cincinnati Ohio, from July 17th through July 22nd. We finally get a short drive! If you think you would like to compete, this could be a good start. It may not even be a bad day trip to check out the games and support your MPVA Wheelchair Team!



## The University of Michigan Health System Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation Department Study

Researchers from The University of Michigan Health System Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation Department are currently exploring issues that women with disabilities face when receiving care for gynecological or reproductive health needs.

We want to hear from YOU about YOUR experiences. For example, we are interested in things like barriers to getting the health care you need, accommodations you need at appointments, how your gynecological and reproductive needs affect personal relationships, and any other subjects you think we should add to the questionnaire.

Women or girls eligible for this study will be 16-50 years old, able to communicate comfortably in English and have some limitation in mobility, for at least 6 months, where they need some help with either personal care and/or routine needs, like everyday chores or going to the store. The cause of disability does not matter, it can be illness, injury or a condition from birth. Focus groups will be about 1 to 1.5 hours long. Participants will receive \$25.

For more information:

Call: 734-763-0430 | Email: [whdresearch@umich.edu](mailto:whdresearch@umich.edu)

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**2016 MPVA PICNIC  
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## Valuable Dates for 2016

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 **Membership Meeting**  
Thursday, August 25th  
Counting of Ballots  
Luncheon begins at 12:00 Noon and  
meeting begins at 1:00 PM

 **Salute to Veterans Gala**  
November 11, 2016  
6:00 PM to 9:00 PM  
The Suburban Collection Showplace  
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 **Columbus Day**  
Office closed October 10, 2016 in  
observation of holiday

Register Today! Dinner tickets are only  
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 **Veterans Day**  
November 11, 2016  
Thank those who have served, are serving,  
and remember those who have paid the  
ultimate sacrifice