

RT '17

Rollin' Times from the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America



Bob McDonald from Foundation for American Veterans presents the MPVA with a donation at MPVA Awareness Day to President David Peck alongside PVA Chapter Liaison Hack Albertson





**Paralyzed Veterans
of America**
Michigan Chapter



PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA
MICHIGAN CHAPTER

www.michiganpva.org



About this Issue:

MPVA Awareness Day took place on April 7, 2017. Be sure to read the Presidents Article for more details on this day.

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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

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. Awareness Month spotlights the work of PVA and its initiative to empower our wounded heroes and their families with the necessary supports to live a productive and fulfilling life.

PVA Awareness 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.

Thus, the month of April is our opportunity to let Americans know we are here and continuing to serve. At our Chapter, we do so by planning 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.

The MPVA celebrated PVA Awareness at various sites around Michigan. At the Detroit Medical Center, we had an opportunity to set up the display booth. This was a chance for us to introduce ourselves to veterans, caregivers, in-patients, and the medical staff to show our appreciation for the outstanding medical care they provide to veterans.

The MPVA also makes 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. We were honored to make these donations because their work is a priceless asset to our nation's veterans and to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

On April 7, 2017, 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.

Due to the generous support of the MPVA staff, volunteers and sponsors, this year's Awareness Day was a huge success. 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: **Bath for All, LLC., Delilah's Deli, Camp Liberty, Creative Mobility Group, Fusion Medical, Mobility Works, Peer Support Services, Wheelchair Getaways, Gresham Driving Aids, MV-1 and The Standing Wheelchair Company.**

Please see the inside back cover of this issue which features photos of the MPVA's 2017 Annual Awareness Day.



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Executive Director's Report

By Jaclyn Kochis, Executive Director, MPVA

St. John Lutheran School wins “Best City Disability Award” in Future City Competition



This past winter, students from 32 Michigan elementary and middle schools came together to compete in this year's Michigan Regional Future City Competition, put on by the Engineering Society of Detroit and sponsored by the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America.

This year's Michigan competition was held on January 23th at the Suburban Collection Showplace in Novi. The mission of the Future City Competition is to

provide a fun and exciting educational engineering program for seventh and eighth grade students that combine a stimulating engineering challenge with hands-on application to present their vision of a city of the future.

It's a team-based program consisting of students, a teacher and an engineer mentor. Each team creates detailed, often fantastic, cities of tomorrow that give intriguing insights to how young minds envision their future. At the same time, their bold designs and

innovative concepts provide a refreshing optimistic appreciation of how our nation can realistically deal with the many challenges facing its cities, including environmental disasters, crime, urban decay and urban sprawl. The students then have to present and defend their city to a panel of judges at the competition.

This year's theme: **The Power of Public Spaces**, which challenged students to design waste management systems of the future. Teams participating in this year's event were required to design their Future City that includes a distributed network of innovative, multiuse public spaces that serves their city's diverse population.

Once again, the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America presented a special award to the school that created a Future City that best addressed the challenges faced by people with disabilities. Both MPVA team members and advocates joined in to interview students on their cities. The "Best City Disability Award" recognizes the school that not only addresses the

everyday challenges facing the disability community — but more importantly, provides a blueprint for accessible solutions to these challenges. This special award prompts the students to include the disabled community in their thought processes when creating their future cities.

We want to congratulate **St. John Lutheran School, Rochester** for winning the 2016 "Best City Disability Award." St. Valentine Catholic School in Redford, won this year's Michigan Regional Future City Competition, earning them the right to represent Michigan in the national contest in Washington, D.C. in February.

Once again, I want to congratulate the talented team from **St. John Lutheran School in Rochester**, and all the students who participated in this year's event for a job well done!





By: Joe Shaeffer, Veterans Service Officer

Camp Lejeune Service Connection

The Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America would like to commend the VA for the long-awaited rule to establish presumptions for the service connection of eight diseases associated with exposure to contaminants in the water supply at Camp Lejeune, N.C.

According to the VA, the presumption of service connection applies to active duty, reserve and National Guard members who served at Camp Lejeune and MCAS New River for a minimum of 30 cumulative days between August 1, 1953 and December 31, 1987, and have been diagnosed with adult leukemia, aplastic anemia and other myelodysplastic syndromes, bladder cancer, kidney cancer liver cancer, multiple myeloma, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, or Parkinson's disease.

This has been long awaited news for all of the veterans that served at Camp Lejeune in that time frame and have been fighting to get this decision. If you or a fellow veteran have had, or currently has, one of the eight presumptive illnesses please contact me at the MPVA at (248)-974-5788 for assistance.

Pheasant Hunt

As the Chapter Service Officer, I am always looking for opportunities to attend events where I can interact with other veterans and help spread the word about the MPVA's Service Office and our free benefits service for veterans. On March 11, I was fortunate to be one of over 20 veterans who attended a pheasant hunt at Walkiewicz Pheasant Farm in Deford, MI. The hunt was sponsored by the Detroit Chapter of Safari Club International. I was invited by Ray Brown, MPVA Board Member and Wheelin' Team 457 member.

As an avid outdoorsman, I was pretty excited to be able to attend an event like this! I thoroughly enjoy hunting but this was my first time pheasant hunting. This was a great experience for me and much more of a challenge than I initially thought it would be.

In the morning we did a tower hunt in two man groups with rotating stations. After the morning hunt, we were treated to a delicious catered lunch. Following the lunch, we split up in four guided groups with bird dogs and did field hunts for the afternoon.

This was a great experience for all of us and it was also a wonderful opportunity for me to get to know some of our members in a more intimate setting, build some fellowship, and spread the word about our programs.

I would like to thank the team at Walkiewicz Pheasant Farm for providing golf carts to transport the veterans that needed them. Ray Brown also brought out his track chair to navigate to more difficult fields to assist our men and women on the terrain. I would also like to thank the Detroit Chapter of Safari Club International for sponsoring the veterans for this great day in the field. I look forward to other unique opportunities to be with my fellow veterans and share experiences like this!





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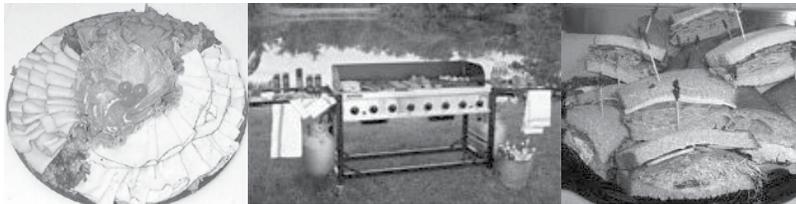
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Government Relations & Advocacy

By: Mike Harris

PVA Advocacy & Legislative Training Conference

In March, I attend the Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) Advocacy & Legislative Conference in Washington D.C. The primary focus of the seminar was to further educate attendees on current and future issues facing both the veteran and disability communities.

The conference provided opportunities to hear from PVA national staff, representatives from federal agencies, and other non-profit organizations. The first day focused on disability advocacy. The issues covered included Social Security, air travel, the Air Carrier Access Act, and continued challenges of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

On day two, we focused on veterans-specific concerns. The issues included protection of specialized services; expansion of the Comprehensive Family Caregiver program in the VA; reforming the benefits claim & appeal process and improve benefits for catastrophically disabled veterans.

The highlight of the week was the testimony of PVA National President, Al Kovach, before the Senate/House Veterans Affairs Committees, urging support for Paralyzed Veterans' top legislative priorities to ensure that VA specialized care services are protected and that veterans with catastrophic injuries receive the "gold standard of care" whenever they seek treatment.

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. I will give an overview of the two main issues I discussed with Michigan legislators:

Reforming the Benefits Claims/Appeal Process.

In March 2016, PVA joined the Board of Veterans Appeals, Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), and other veteran's service organizations (VSO) to form a working group with the goal of reforming the appeals process. With the number of pending appeals recently passing 470,000 in December 2016, VA projects that the inventory will climb to over two million over the course of the next decade if the system remains unchanged. Ten years from now, veterans will expect to wait six years for a decision. PVA believes reform is necessary, but procedural reform and greater efficiency must not dilute substantive rights and benefits that veterans have earned and deserve.

Layer upon layer of substantive and procedural rights have been added over time to this unique system of administrative law governing veterans disability claims. But these developments also produced unintended inefficiencies and an inability to identify faults in the process. A long-term fix requires a comprehensive overhaul of the entire claims process, not just appeals. The legislation developed by this working group takes this approach. It consolidates and streamlines redundant processes, provides veterans with more information to help make strategic decisions, and increases protection of the claim's effective date. Ultimately, the increased efficiency and information will produce faster decisions with a greater degree of accuracy, reducing mistakes that lead to avoidable delays.

The administration and Congress should support comprehensive reform of the benefit claims and appeals process to modernize and streamline the process in accordance with the draft legislation developed and agreed to by senior leaders of the VA, VBA, the Board of Veterans Appeals, VSOs and other stakeholders.

Protection of Specialized Services

Approximately 29,000 veterans with spinal cord injuries are currently served by the VA, and VA remains the best provider of health care for veterans. Specialized services are part of the core mission and responsibility of the Veteran Health Administration (VHA). VHA's specialized services, to include spinal cord injury/disease (SCI/D), blind rehabilitation, poly-trauma, and mental health, are of paramount importance due to the inability to replicate their comprehensive approach in the private sector. These specialized services must be strengthened and sustained within the VHA through allocation of appropriate resources, and not subject to defunding.

Some political leaders advocate providing health care to veterans by contracting for services in the community. This would move veterans out of the "veteran-centric" care environment which is only found within VHA, lead to a reduction of existing services, and increase health care costs in the federal budget. Furthermore, support services (cardiology, neurology, urology, etc.) are essential to the complex specialized care provided to SCI/D veterans. If support services are removed from within VHA to the community, then VA specialized care services is also diminished. Paralyzed Veterans strongly believes that VA remains the best option available for veterans seeking health care services.

Meanwhile, as VA services are designed specifically to meet the needs of veterans, VHA has received excellent ratings from patient satisfaction surveys, and garnered much recognition for its national safety program. The VA's system of patient-centered and coordinated care helps to ensure safe and consistent delivery of services. Additionally, independent research organizations have also found VA to be the lowest cost provider when compared to private health care systems. Paralyzed Veterans will continue to oppose any efforts that place the VA health care system at risk of being unable to properly meet the health care demands of veterans, particularly veterans with spinal cord injury or dysfunction.

"60 Minutes" Does a Disservice to the ADA"

Recently, *60 Minutes* aired a segment about the America with Disabilities Act (ADA) Title III "drive-by" lawsuits that focused on some of the ways in which the law has been misused by some attorney's to make money. The story "mischaracterized the ADA as an instrument of opportunism" instead of focusing that it has opened doors for millions of Americans.

The story that aired focused on an owner of a small hotel who was sued for not having a pool lift by a plaintiff who had never been to his hotel; a California attorney who made millions filing over 2000 lawsuits under the ADA/state law; and two disabled plaintiffs who claim they were recruited by and then deceived by their attorneys who filed and settled lawsuits on their behalf without their knowledge. The segment also highlighted the fact that the ADA regulations contain "thousands" of detailed requirements for public accommodations facilities that small businesses are not likely to know.

It is obvious that *60 minutes* went into the production of the story with a set agenda. Their story failed to include any commentary from many disability rights experts and business owners that have experienced the positive benefits of the ADA first hand. I can relate as I have had reporters contact me over the years asking if I would like to contribute a quote to a story only to find that it was never used as it did not support their narrative.

In 2017, U.S. representative Ted Poe (R-TX) introduced the American with Disabilities Act Education and Reform Act of 2017 (H.R. 620), which would limit the ability of people with disabilities to enforce their rights under the ADA of being able to access places of public accommodations in the same manner as all other citizens. The legislation would require a person with a disability to send a letter of notification to the business that it was out of compliance with the law giving them a grace period before one could file a suit. The bill would remove all incentives for businesses and other places of accommodations to comply with the ADA's accessibility requirements. Businesses could employ a "wait and see" approach, continuing to violate the law with impunity.

The ADA, which was signed into law on July 26, 1990, is the most comprehensive disability rights legislation ever passed by any country and it provides a model of compromise between business and people with disabilities. It prevents discrimination in employment, public services, public accommodations, telecommunications and other services based on disability. In 2008, Congress amended the ADA to recalibrate it to address discrimination in broad array of circumstances after interpretation of the law was narrowed by the federal courts.

Title III of the ADA was intended to balance the interests of small businesses along with the accessibility concerns of people with disabilities. It is a myth that the ADA's requirements are too hard on small businesses. The legislative history of the ADA is filled with claims about the burden it would place on small businesses and as a result, Title III does not require any action with respect to existing buildings that would cause an undue burden or that is not readily achievable. The approach of the ADA was not to exempt small businesses from the requirements of the ADA, but rather to structure the requirements to take into account the needs and resources of small businesses and to require what is reasonable and not impose obligations that are unrealistic or debilitating to businesses.

The ADA has profoundly changed how society views and accommodates people with disabilities. Twenty-six years after its passage the importance of the ADA cannot be denied. It has propelled accessibility, universal design, and the idea of equal opportunity for those of us who live with disabilities into the spotlight. In the process, we have discovered that an accessible society benefits everyone.

Throughout the years, Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America has worked closely with public and private entities statewide to make positive changes resulting in equal access and participation by people with disabilities. The law cannot act on its own. Partnerships we form with area businesses and organizations can bring the ADA to life, enabling people with disabilities to independently access facilities in and around their communities without encountering architectural and attitudinal barriers.

Such cooperative efforts have created the accurate perception that ADA implementation need not be an adversarial activity, but can be accomplished through partnerships and direct communication among those having a stake in compliance.

Before Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America files a complaint with the Department of Justice and/or file a lawsuit in federal court we will always send a letter to the business owner identifying the violations in question and explaining that when the ADA was signed into law it established provisions for businesses to receive tax credits and deductions for removing barriers. We always include information on the tax incentives that are available for businesses. We conclude the letter requesting that they call us within a certain time period to indicate the course of action they plan on taking to resolve the issue.

H.R. 620 is an attempt to fix a law that isn't broken and in doing so, this proposed legislation rolls back what is widely recognized as one of the most important civil rights achievements of the past 30 years -- making America accessible to people with disabilities.

The *60 Minutes* episode on the ADA took the rare abuse of the ADA and made it as if it is an everyday occurrence. The story was a disservice to people with disabilities who fought for decades to finally have a civil rights law that allows them to be treated on equal footing as all Americans!

I call on CBS and *60 Minutes* to right this wrong. Air a follow-up segments that shows an accurate depiction of the ADA and its many benefits that businesses gain by complying with the ADA.



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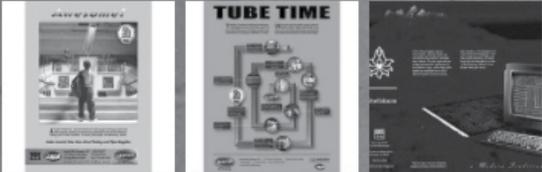
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Sports & Recreation

By: Ray Brown

Wheelin Team 457 Up/Down 9 Ball Tournament

What the heck is an Up/Down 9 Ball Tournament?

Well, you take two-player billiard teams that consist of one player that stands to play, and the other player that competes from a wheelchair. Many of our sporting events are set up this way in order for our games to be as inclusive as possible and for people to get a small sample

On Saturday, March 18, at the Cascadden Lounge in Metamora, Michigan, we held our 11th tournament. The team's Director of Billiards, Dale "Moper" Woidan, showed up early and began registration. Mike Sexton and Chris Tamba of Thumb Area American Pool Players Association run the busy venue in the Thumb Area and beyond. Both are very accomplished players in their own right and always sign up to join in. They host this tournament for two



of wheelchair sports. Able-body players have balance, strength, coordination, and definitely a better view of the table. Wheelchair athletes must overcome many obstacles to compete. Core muscles, reach, endurance, and hand grip could very well bring challenges to the game. The love of sports and friendly competition keep pushing us to excel and attend these events.

reasons: one, they have a huge passion for the disabled and our team, and two, they are always looking for wheelchair talent to send to Las Vegas for the grandest competition in the nation. They keep a watchful eye on this annual tournament and ensure it is a great fundraiser for us. Mike and Chris have attended many of our events and are excellent advisors to the team.



In all, we set a record of 16 teams for this year and have high hopes in growing numbers for the years to come. Plaques and cash awards were awarded to the top 3 teams. The winners donated the monies awarded back to the team. We have come to know and befriend many of the players in this league. This is truly a gentlemen and ladies' sport. The kindness and sportsmanship shown is very welcome, and we respond with eager emotions and willingness to

compete. Rack 'em! 'Cause this is how we roll.

If interested, look for your local APA Billiards group, and we would love to see you next March at our 12th Annual. Special Thanks to the MPVA—we are proud to hang your banner at our events!





MPVA AWARENESS DAY





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Membership Meeting

Thursday, May 18, 2017

Nominations for Board Members continue
Luncheon begins at 12:00 Noon and
meeting begins at 1:00 PM



MPVA Picnic

Saturday, August 12, 2017

Miracle League of Plymouth
357 Theodore St
Plymouth, MI 48170
10 AM – 1:30 PM



Membership Meeting

Thursday, July 20, 2017

Counting of Director Nomination Ballots
Luncheon begins at 12:00 Noon and
meeting begins at 1:00 PM