

# RT '20

Rollin' Times from the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America



The MPVA was pleased to present Michigan Islamic Academy the “Best City for people with Disabilities Award” at this year’s Future City Competition





**Paralyzed Veterans  
of America**  
Michigan Chapter

PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA  
**MICHIGAN CHAPTER**

www.michiganpva.org



## About this Issue:

The MPVA participated in the Future Cities Competition this past winter!  
Check out the President's Article for more details!

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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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The Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America (MPVA) is a chapter of the 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.
- 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 Plymouth, Michigan. Our service officers are based out of the McNamara Federal Building in Downtown Detroit.

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# President's Report

By: Michael Harris, President, MPVA

## Tyrone Chatman: A Life of Service



*Tyrone Chatman, founder of the Detroit Veterans Center. 1952–2020.*

The Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America (MPVA) is deeply saddened by the recent loss of our longtime friend, Tyrone Chatman, who died on February 26, 2020 from organ failure. Tyrone, founder and CEO of the Michigan Veterans Foundation, died at age 67 after a lifetime of service to his country.

Born Sept. 26, 1952, Chatman lived in Southfield before joining the U.S. Army at 17 years old. Like most Americans at the time, when Tyrone Chatman enlisted in the United States Army in 1970 he had never heard of Vietnam.

Tyrone returned to Detroit in 1972, where American soldiers returning home from Vietnam often faced public scorn as the war they had fought in became increasingly unpopular. As such, he went through a long period of insecurity and nearly re-enlisted for another tour. During that period, he became acutely aware that the help that many veterans needed (that was in an era before “Post Traumatic Stress Disorder” was a widely understood affliction) was simply not available.

Tyrone understood that the completion of the war does not mean that the fight would end for the people who served. With this in mind, he founded the Michigan

Veterans Foundation in 1989 and out of this the Detroit Veterans Center was created. This non-profit agency offers counseling, substance abuse treatment and housing along with other service to Michigan veterans, regardless of the conflict in which they served.

The Detroit Veterans Center is a transitional housing facility and resource center. They provide the skills and confidence needed for homeless veterans to break the cycle of homelessness and return to independent living. This includes the specific goals of residential stability, increased skill level, increased income and greater self-determination to obtain and maintain self-sufficiency.

Jack Welch, the former Chairman and CEO of General Electric, once stated “good leaders create a vision, articulate the vision, passionately own the vision, and relentlessly drive it to completion. They are members of the community that they serve. They inspire just by their presence. They are individuals who are able to etch positivity and inspiration into others minds. They do these things without promoting themselves and draw satisfaction from helping others.”

Tyrone was that type of person.

He touched thousands of lives. Politicians, civic leaders and everyday people consider him as a friend. Many words have been spoken and written about him. Of all of them, the ones that stand out are that Tyrone was a man of sincere warmth, infectious humor, brutal honesty, humility, and extreme generosity.

I first met Tyrone about twenty years ago and had the honor of serving with him through my work with MPVA. Our relationship grew throughout the years, both personally as well as professionally.

There are some people in life that you know are special the minute you meet them, and Tyrone was one of them. Tyrone’s life work was not to champion the causes of those with wealth or power or special connections. It was to give a voice to those who otherwise would not be heard.

It’s not often a person can be defined by one word. But this is the case for Tyrone Chapman. The descriptive

word in this case is “service”. His remarkable record of service reminds us all that one person’s efforts can have a positive impact on the quality of life of many.

Some folks may never know that their lives are better because of Tyrone Chapman. But that’s okay. Certainly for Tyrone, acclaim was never his motivation for helping others.

Rather than react with anger or despair to his time spent in Vietnam, Tyrone treated it as a call to action. His work has given opportunity to the homeless veterans and he has left a legacy of service that will continue to touch lives for years to come.

It is impossible to sum up a man’s accomplishments in a few short words in a newsletter, and there could never be a way to truly convey the impact that Tyrone’s advocacy had in helping the lives of homeless veterans living in the streets throughout southeastern Michigan.

I, along with others, will miss my dear friend. But, I know that his spirit and legacy will live on forever in the multitudes of lives that were touched by his compassion and commitment. The best compliment I can give Tyrone is that he left this world a better place to live than when he entered it.

Tyrone leaves behind his wife, two children and two grandchildren. We join in extending to the members of his bereaved family our heartfelt sympathy.

Rest in peace, my friend!!



# Michigan Islamic Academy wins “Best City Disability Award” in Future City Competition

It was an intense competition, with students from 35 Michigan elementary and middle schools coming together to compete in this year’s Michigan Regional Future City Competition, sponsored by the Engineering Society of Detroit. This year’s Michigan competition was held on January 28th 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 refreshingly 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 was *“Clean Water: Tap Into Tomorrow.”* Most of us take for granted that when we turn on the faucet that clean water will always flow. But for civil engineers, urban planners, developers, and other professionals, maintaining a reliable water supply takes expertise, planning and constant vigilance. A water-resilient city must be prepared to address a wide range of risks, including drought, flooding, population change and natural and manmade disasters.

Participating teams were required to choose a threat to their city’s water supply and design a resilient system to maintain a reliable supply of clean water.



Since 2007, the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America has presented a special award to the school that created a Future City that best addressed the challenges faced by people with disabilities. We want to congratulate the **Michigan Islamic Academy, Ann Arbor** for winning the 2020 “Best City Disability Award.”

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.

St. John Lutheran School, Rochester, once again 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 the **Michigan Islamic Academy** and all the students who participated in this year’s event for a job well done!



## Be Sure We Can Connect With You!



We hope to take this newsletter to an E-News format in 2021 so that we can ensure our news reaches you in the timeliest manner! If you have not updated us with your email in some time, please take a moment to email us at: [chapterhq@michiganpva.org](mailto:chapterhq@michiganpva.org)!



Throwing in the towel on an old motorcycle that won't run or looking to get rid of an ATV? In all situations, Paralyzed Veterans of America's Wheels Helping Warriors Vehicle Donation program is a perfect outlet for your generosity. It's easy to donate. Be sure your title is on hand, fill out the online form at [PVA.careasy.org](http://PVA.careasy.org) or call (877) 900-8387 (877-900-VETS). We will schedule the pickup free of charge and donors receive a tax deduction for the donation.



# Executive Director's Report

By Jaclyn Kochis, Executive Director, MPVA

## What COVID-19 Has Taught Us

By the time this issue hits your mailbox, we will have been in a state of what we call “quarantine” for six weeks. It has been scary, frustrating and enlightening. This pandemic has changed the way the Chapter has run and the way we look at our business going forward. I could write about the scary and depressing side of it, but I think we have all had enough of that. It may be slightly rose colored and naïve to report on the positive side of this situation, but there has been a great deal positivity.

Back in March, the Chapter accessed our work-from-home scenarios. We immediately had to tackle the cancelation of our face-to-face programs for the foreseeable future. This meant no sporting events (including the 39th Annual Veterans Wheelchair Games), spring fundraisers, membership outings and much more. It brought a great deal of anxiety.

Yet, as we reset our sails and changed course we noted that we had more time to focus on areas of our Chapter that could use improvement. For starters, we had not gone through our member database and called our members in a few years. That certainly seemed like something we could improve upon.

We began breaking our member database into sections and have been reaching out to members on a daily basis. What we have discovered through these calls is that YOU are among the most resilient people on the planet! You all have had such an uplifting attitude and have brought more cheer to us than I think we have brought to you. It has been a joy to reach out to you all, and if you have not received a call from the Chapter yet, please stay tuned because we are still working our way through the list!

Besides catching up with you, we are interested in

knowing:

- how your VA telehealth appointments are being handled;
- how you are obtaining prescriptions;
- if you have had any VA related issues we can be of assistance with;
- do we have a good email address for you on file?

The Chapter is here to help and support you with any hurdles you may be experiencing regarding transitioning to remote or contactless support, especially with the VA, during this time.

In addition to member calls, the Chapter has been able to really dig into our programming and consider how remote services may be best used even after the pandemic. Some areas where this may work would be: remote peer-to-peer support, remote sports and recreation training, and interactive games and workshops for our members.

Not only would offerings like this assist us in reaching out to all of you, but some of it may save the Chapter more money that could be used for larger events in the future.

Please stay tuned for updates on these programs! The best way to stay up-to-date on MPVA news and events is to follow us on social media. Our Facebook page can be followed at: [facebook.com/michiganpva](https://facebook.com/michiganpva).

We even hope to take this newsletter to an E-News format in 2021 so that we can ensure that our news reaches you in the timeliest manor! If you have not updated us with your email in some time, please take a moment to email us at: [chapterhq@michiganpva.org](mailto:chapterhq@michiganpva.org)!

Lastly, I want to task you all to continue to stay safe during this time. Your health and safety are so important to us. We hope you can use this time to reconnect with loved ones remotely or take up a new hobby at home that we never seem to get around to, learning new recipes, reading that book that we started but never finished! I am proud to say I learned to cook bread from scratch and it was easier than I thought it would be!

I also want to share this piece written by our Development Coordinator, Robin Bennett. She joined our team this past summer and has been working on an hourly basis to create content for our website and blog (which can be followed at: [mpvablog.wordpress.com](http://mpvablog.wordpress.com)):

### Paralyzed Veterans Respond to COVID-19

This spring brings new challenges and unique circumstances, just as it brings warmer weather and new leaves.

The Board Members of Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America have experienced their own challenges and unique circumstances throughout their lives of service. During this unprecedented crisis in our world, let's turn to the heroes of this country to consider their perspective on health challenges, isolation, and insight into why we should never give up.

The MPVA Board was asked:

*1. How has the current COVID-19 crisis affected your life? (For example: has the stay at home order interfered with your ability to handle health issues related to your paraplegia, are you more isolated, etc. Any positive experiences?)*

Board member, Clark Shuler, wrote:

*"I don't think my situation is terribly different from someone who doesn't have a spinal cord injury, my family is concerned that my wheels might bring in microbes, whereas they can just remove their shoes before coming in the house. That seems to be the main difference! So, I am fortunate to have family that can go to the grocery store, drugstore, etc.*

My caregivers have stayed and I have what I need. My van could use a wash, but that can wait. I have shirts at the cleaners, but since I'm not going anywhere it doesn't really matter if my shirt is pressed!"

Board President, Michael Harris, wrote:

*"A couple weeks ago I received a call from the University of Michigan Hospital, Physical Medicine Rehabilitation (PMR) clinic about rescheduling my appointments because of being at higher risk of contracting Covid-19.*

*(...) it was suggested that I communicate with my physician using my phone/tablet instead of doing so in the outpatient clinic setting. This type of doctor/patient visit is known as Telemedicine.*

*Telemedicine allows health care professionals to evaluate, diagnose, and treat patients in remote locations."*

In a phone conversation with Mr. Harris about his switch to telemedicine, he said,

*"I didn't know what my options were."*

He had needed to visit his provider for what turned out to be an ear infection.

Michigan's governor had declared an Executive Order on March 23 requiring citizens to stay at home, whenever possible, and only allowed for certain "essential" businesses such as hospitals, grocery stores, and pharmacies to remain open. When he started experiencing symptoms on March 24, the majority of VA clinics were beginning to close to non-essential traffic.

That is when Mr. Harris discovered that telemedicine can help with a number of different appointments. Telemedicine is offered throughout VA hospitals/clinics and by a number of medical providers for a variety of health needs—from PMR appointments to routine appointments.

For more information on VA telemedicine opportunities please visit [VA.gov/coronavirus](http://VA.gov/coronavirus) to learn about using Secure Messaging through MyHealthVet to send a message to your provider or to request a telehealth appointment online. You may also call your local VA hospital or individual provider.

2. As 90% of the United States is now under a stay at home order, many citizens find themselves experiencing new limitations on their lives. As a veteran with a spinal cord injury, what would you say to encourage or to bring



awareness to able-bodied citizens experiencing these limitations for the first time?

Board member, Ray Brown wrote:

*Abiding by this Stay at Home Order is the least I can do to help others stay safe. It helps those that need to do their jobs do so without me being in the way. I don't look at it as 'limitations', but as chance to enjoy life. Slow your roll, so to speak!*

*We have been given a precious gift (time). Freedom to enjoy family, friends, pets...even our homes. The very things we've worked so hard for we now get to enjoy.*

*When I was in the Military, I longed to be home. It was a precious time at home on leave and it was over in a flash and we were separated again. Enjoy it while you can!"*

Board member, Scot Severn wrote:

*"Basically, we are choosing to look at it as an extended spring break with our kids around our house. I'm actually enjoying the time with my kids (ages 18, 19, & 21).*

*It's hard watching them grow up and go off to college and it's nice having them home for a while. It's a little weird not having anyone leave the house, but we always stay stocked up on essentials.*

*The main thing I'm missing is my weekly massage and chiropractic care but I do have a chair that helps. Missing out on the normal activity of going to the gym 5 times a week with my boys is hard to get used to, but we are working out at home.*

*Not going to lie, I hate travelling in the spring. I'm usually on the road going to track and field meets but, I'll keep my focus on the Paralympic games in 2021!"*

3. Please share any insights or teaching moments that you have learned through this experience that could inspire or educate others?

Board member, Ray Brown wrote:

*"Ya gotta have faith! My motto is, For God & Country. So I'll share Isaiah 40:31.*

*They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength,*

*they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."*

*We're going to get through this... cause that's how we roll!"*

Board member, Robert Vance wrote:

*"This is our chance to rediscover what is most valuable and really needed in our lives."*

Board President, Michael Harris wrote:

*"Over the years people have thanked me for my service to our country and regretted the fact they did not serve. I always remind them that you do not have to wear a uniform to serve your country.*

*As our country faces a pandemic, there are people I want to thank: the doctors, nurses, and other medical personnel who are on the front line of the war against COVID-19.*

*Doctors, nurses, paramedics, and first-responders around the country are facing an unprecedented workload in overstretched health facilities. They are working in stressful and frightening work environments, not just because the virus is little understood, but because in most settings they are underprotected, overworked, and themselves vulnerable to infection.*

*Our members know first-hand the critical role the medical community has in allowing people with a spinal cord injury/disease to live life to its fullest.*

*Their dedication, commitment, and courage deserve our deepest appreciation for the countless lives being saved under extreme conditions.*

*On behalf of MPVA, thank you for a job well done!!".*





By: Kimberly Springfield, National Service Officer

Submitted by: Stephanie Strickland, Senior National Service Officer

## How to Avoid VA Benefit Overpayments

**A** life happens, there can be a number of circumstances that may cause financial hardship within your life such as unexpected sickness and the need for hospitalization, loss or gain of household income, loss of a spouse or other dependent to name a few. Sometimes these life events may result in overpayment of VA benefits if the VA is not properly notified. Therefore, it is important to inform the VA of any situation changes that may impact your benefits. Because as stated above, failing to do so may result in an overpayment.

These are some of the most common situations that may cause an overpayment if the Veteran does not notify the VA:

- A change in marital status.
- Receipt of education benefits and withdrawal from school.
- Incarceration of the veteran or beneficiary.
- Failure to report the marriage of a school-age child.
- Death of a dependent.
- Receiving care at a VA medical facility and failure to pay the required co-pay.

It is also very important to remember that the VA and federal agencies like the Social Security Administration cross match and share information, so failure to notify VA when situations or income with any federal agency changes can also ultimately result in an overpayment. Anytime VA has discovered a change that can or may result in an overpayment, they are required to and will send out a notice to the beneficiary with an explanation of the potential debt and the action and information the beneficiary may submit to dispute a potential debt. When an indebtedness notice is received from the VA, the beneficiary has 60 days to submit a Notice of Disagreement along with evidence disputing the possible overpayment. If there is no response within 60 days, this debt will be forwarded to the VA Debt Management Center for recovery efforts. At this point, the beneficiary will get notice of the recovery plan, which could be a reduction in benefit payment or a payment plan. If this effort cannot resolve the debt it will then be turned over to the Treasury for forced collection.

A beneficiary does have the option to pursue a waiver

to further dispute an established overpayment. To be eligible for waiver considerations, you must be a Veteran, a payee or beneficiary including a fiduciary, a representative acting on behalf of a debtor such as a parent, sibling, or a representative of an estate in the case of a deceased payee. In lieu of requesting a complete waiver of the debt, a claimant may try to resolve the debt by making a compromise settlement, requesting a hearing to provide evidence to show why the debt is incorrect, or request a repayment plan to resolve the debt. When you request a waiver, you are requesting that VA terminate collection action on a debt. If a waiver is granted in full or part, you will not be required to pay the amount that was waived.

To apply for a waiver, you must submit the following items:

- A written letter that explains why you are requesting a waiver.
- The letter should explain why you feel you should not be held responsible for payment of
- the debt or why the collection of the debt would be unfair and create a
- financial hardship.
- Completed and signed Financial Status Report form (VAF 5655).
- Mail your waiver and completed and signed Financial Status Report form to:

US Department of Veterans Affairs

Debt Management Center

P.O. Box 11930

St. Paul, MN 55111

If you have are facing a situation that you think could result in a potential overpayment or you are in the midst of dealing with an overpayment issue, you should contact VA to get the appropriate assistance in dealing with the issue or work with your local Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) National Service Officer (NSO) to assist with this process. You can also contact the VA Debt Management Center for repayment options at 800-827-0648.





# Government Relations & Advocacy

By: Mike Harris, Executive Director, MPVA

## PVA Advocacy & Legislative Conference

From March 2 to March 5, 2020 Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) Chapter representatives from across the country descended on Washington, DC to attend the PVA Chapter Advocacy/Legislative Training Conference. The theme for this year's conference was *"Pushing Access Forward."*

This year's conference was structured to provide information regarding the issues of concern to PVA members, as well as tools to more effectively carry out PVA's legislative and advocacy efforts. The Advocacy Legislative Conference provides an opportunity to meet with elected leaders on Capitol Hill and push forward PVA's messages to Senators and Representatives which greatly supports the ongoing activities of the PVA National staff.

Following two days of education and training, PVA members and Chapter representatives spent two days on Capitol Hill meeting with their legislators about PVA's priorities. I met with 13 members of the Michigan Congressional Delegation. Presentations to legislators focused on PVA's top two policy priorities: Protect Access to VA's Specialized Services and Caring for Women Veterans

### Protect Access to VA Specialized Services:

#### The Issue:

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Spinal Cord Injury and Disorder (SCI/D) System of Care is comprised of 25 SCI Centers and six long term

care facilities, which provides a coordinated life-long continuum of services for SCI/D veterans.

Nearly 49,000 VA staffing positions went unfilled last year. In September 2019, VA's Office of the Inspector General (VAOIG) reported that 131 of 140 VA medical facilities had severe shortages for medical officers and 102 of 140 facilities had severe nurse shortages. Additional shortages in human Resources Management positions compounded this problem department-wide.

However, VA's ability to meet the highest standards of care to our veterans relies on more than just having the right number of physicians and nurses. They also need qualified and well-trained housekeepers. Last year, at some VA medical facilities, staffing levels for environmental (custodial) employees dipped below 50 percent, which heightens the health risks to veteran's patients, particularly those with serious illnesses or catastrophic injuries. Low pay, a cumbersome hiring process, and a lack of qualified applicants are often cited as major contributing factors to VA Staffing problem.

Staffing problems tend to have a direct impact on the SCI/D system:

- Lengthy, cumbersome hiring processes make it difficult to hire and retain staff which prohibits SCI/D Center from meeting adequate staffing levels necessary to care for this specialized veterans population;
- SCI/D Centers with nursing shortages limit bed

availability for admission to a SCI/D Center. This limits access to care for specialized care delivery; and

- As SCI/D long term-care facilities are exceptionally limited, veterans with SCI/D who have chronic medical issues are often placed in community institutions, with providers not trained in SCI/D. This results in compromised quality of care and poor outcomes.

### **PVA Position:**

- Congress and VA must reform the Department's hiring practices and pay structure to ensure the positions, pay and other incentives offered are competitive with the private sector.
- Congress must ensure that VA core services which include SCI/D System of Care remain fully funded

### **Caring for Women Veterans:**

#### **The Issue:**

For decades, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) focused primarily on serving male veterans. But, as more occupational specialties are opened to women wishing to serve in the military, there are dramatically increasing number of women joining the Armed Forces.

Currently, women make up 16.2 percent of today's active duty military forces and 19 percent of

National Guard and Reserves. More than half a million women veterans are currently using the VA health care services and as increasing numbers of women join the individual services, the number of women veterans using VA will continue to rise.

VA needs to be better prepared to meet the gender-specific health care needs to these women veterans. The Department has developed a robust spinal cord

injury system to serve the needs of veterans with spinal cord injuries and disorders (SCI/D). However, there needs to be a stronger focus on the needs of women veterans with SCI/D.

As Congress develops strategies and policies for VA to follow to improve care for the rising number of women veterans, there needs to be an equal effort to ensure the needs of women veterans with SCI/D are factored into these decisions.

### **PVA Position:**

- VA and Congress must ensure that women veterans have access to comprehensive care in environments sensitive to their needs.
- Women veteran's primary care services and gender-sensitive mental health care must be designated as essential, foundational services that VA maintain at every facility.
- The needs of catastrophically disabled women veterans should be factored into all planning discussions (present and future by Congress and VA)
- Congress must pass legislation and provide adequate funding to improve the recognition, accessibility, and treatment of women veterans.

## **The ADA: Thirty Years Later**

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the American with Disabilities Act (ADA). When signed into law, the ADA was hailed as the most sweeping civil rights legislation since the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Thirty years after its passage the importance of the ADA cannot be denied. It has propelled into the spotlight: accessibility, universal design, and the idea of equal opportunity for those of us who live with disabilities. In the process, we have discovered that an accessible society benefits everyone.

During the past thirty years, the accepted definition of disability has been changing for the positive. In the 1970's, the concept of a disability referred to an underlying physical or mental condition. For example, a person with paraplegia would have been considered disabled based solely on their physical condition. Today, disability is seen as a complex interaction between a person and their environment. The same person with paraplegia may be considered disabled due to their physical impairment as well as the barriers in the environment that prevent full social participation.

As public perception of disability has changed over time, so have the goals of programs supporting people with disabilities. In the past, the emphasis was to provide support to people with disabilities primarily through benefits. Today, the emphasis has shifted to supporting independence and promoting involvement in all aspects of society.

Disability is not an experience that will touch just a minority of Americans. Rather, it is an experience that will touch most Americans at some point during their lives. People with disabilities come from all walks of life, in all colors, sizes, genders and ages. Those of us living with disabilities bring something to the table whether it is fresh perspective, indomitable spirit or an energizing presence.

Since the signing of the ADA much has changed. America's built environment, transportation and telecommunications infrastructure that has been transformed by the ADA's gradual approach to accessibility improvements. This change comes at a critical moment as America is aging and the demand for accessibility is increasing.

Because of the ADA, millions of Americans have grown accustomed to accessibility features when they are pushing strollers or pulling roller bags through public spaces, when they are watching captions in an airport, or when they are riding their bikes up/down curb cuts.

Prior to the ADA, millions of Americans with disabilities lived as second-rate citizens in a society based on the promise that "All men are created equal."

There were no laws to ensure access to or a benefit from the most basic of freedoms that a majority of Americans take for granted.

People with disabilities who had traditionally been isolated, not only from the mainstream of society, but from one another, began coming together to speak out and demand an end to unequal treatment and seeking control over their own lives.

Upon passage of the ADA on July 26th, 1990, President George H.W. Bush described the ADA as "the world's first comprehensive declaration of the equality of people with disabilities," declaring that "every man woman and child with a disability can now pass through once closed doors, into a bright new era of equality, independence and freedom."

When analyzing the ADA I wouldn't characterize it as a complete success, but I wouldn't characterize it as a failure. I think it is an important piece of legislation whose promise has not been "fully realized." When the ADA became law most people with disabilities assumed that the front door would be open and everyone would welcome us with open arms! As we know, this has not always been the case.

With that being said, we still have our work cut out for us. There has always been a perception in the disability community that because the ADA is in place our elected officials are automatically enforcing its laws. Unfortunately, this is not the case. State and local officials throughout Michigan do not have the authority to enforce Title III of the ADA on behalf of the Federal government unless the Department of Justice certifies Michigan building codes. The likelihood of that happening anytime soon is very remote.

It is for that reason that we become advocates in the communities we live in so we can provide insight on the issues that prohibit us from being active participants. We need to work to create conditions, to establish policies and practices which facilitate the full integration and participation of persons with disabilities into all aspects of community life.

As we have benefited by the actions of the thousands of people who have come before us, it's up to us to pave the way for those who will come after. In advocating for our rights, disabled people must work to establish several important principles. One is to be considered on the basis of individual merit, not on stereotyped assumptions about disabilities. Another is that society must make certain changes to ensure that people with disabilities can freely access their community without having to encounter architectural barriers.

We do know that the world is an easier place to get around than it was prior to the ADA. Many places that were completely inaccessible to us have now opened their doors to people with disabilities. Stadiums, amusement parks, public parks, and theaters that would otherwise have been poorly designed are now accessible due to the fact that we advocated for accessible design.

It is obvious that the ADA has made a difference in the lives of so many. But there are many others who


still face barriers, barriers that man-made structures create and barriers stemming from people's attitudes. Those barriers took generations to create. It will take continued vigilance and dedication to remove them.


As we celebrate the 30th anniversary of the civil rights law, let's commit to redouble our efforts to identify and knock down the remaining barriers to full citizenship that continue to hamper the beautiful vision of the ADA. Working together, we can build on the progress of the last 30 years and create an America that celebrates and invests in the talents, dreams and aspirations of its more than 54 million people with disabilities.




## Date Cancellation and Virtual Sessions

### SPORTS EVENTS:


 **Canceled:** 39th Annual National Veterans Wheelchair Games. The 40th Annual Games are slated to take place in the summer of 2021 in New York!

 **Canceled:** Wheelin' Team 457 events have been canceled until further notice.

 **Virtual Sessions:** Virtual sessions and training are currently being offered through Facebook Page "Paralyzed Veterans of America Sports" (<https://www.facebook.com/pvasports/>). These sessions have included tips on wheelchair bowling, adaptive yoga, online spinning, air rifle and pistol, and much more.

### MEMBERSHIP EVENTS:

 **Canceled:** Chapter Membership meetings have been canceled until further notice

 **Virtual Sessions:** Please stay tuned for updates on virtual programs during this time. The best way to stay up-to-date on MPVA news and events is to follow us on social media. Our Facebook page can be followed at: [facebook.com/michiganpva](https://www.facebook.com/michiganpva).

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