

# RT '21

Rollin' Times from the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America



The MPVA received a check for \$2,750 from the Allen Park Elks Lodge #2194 in support of our ongoing PPE care package program. That program helps our members receive member check in calls and care packages full of sanitization items and masks to help keep them safe and healthy! We couldn't be more appreciative of the Allen Park Elks Lodge support!



## About this Issue:

There is so much happening this spring at the MPVA, including the Chapter's 60th Anniversary. Read through this edition to find out all of the latest!

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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

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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.

*The Ad Agency*

[www.theagency.us](http://www.theagency.us)

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# President's Report

By: Michael Harris, President, MPVA

## A Man for All Seasons!

**C** OVID-19 has brought truly unprecedented times that no one saw coming. Seemingly overnight, the world as we knew it, changed!

As is often the case in a crisis, the pandemic has revealed the true character of many people. Though there are plenty of negative stories, there are also countless number of inspiring stories that have occurred in the last year of people doing what they can to help others, including neighbors, friends and complete strangers.



*Smiling wide behind my mask on the deck Bill Helwig built.*

Fortunately, working for the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America (MPVA) I have come across an abundance of such amazing people doing good deeds for others. One of those people is Bill Helwig. If there were a “hall-of-fame” honoring people who give back to their community in a positive way he would have been inducted years ago.

He has done a lot of things for the disability community that have gone under the radar. Over the past twenty years, hundreds of people have gained or reclaimed their independence thanks to a wheelchair ramp constructed by Bill Helwig. Whenever there is a good deed to be done, he has always been willing to step up to the plate, roll up his sleeves and lend a helping hand.



*Bill Helwig posing on the newly installed deck he volunteered so generously to build.*

Some folks may never know that their lives are better off because of Bill Helwig. But that is okay. Certainly, for Bill, acclaim has never been his motivation for helping others. 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.

Such was the case in January of 2021. He was called upon to build a ramp, in very extreme winter conditions, for a Vietnam veteran who otherwise would not been able to enter/exit his home.

We are incredibly grateful to Bill Helwig, for affording us the opportunity to allow a paralyzed veteran some “peace of mind” in knowing that accessibility in/out of his home will be one less thing he needs to worry about, allowing him instead, to focus on healing and adapting to the new life he is facing.





## Edward Jones Salutes

the courage and loyalty of our troops, both now and in the past.  
Thank you.



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# Executive Director's Report

By Jaclyn Kochis, Executive Director, MPVA

## MPVA's 60th Anniversary

**D**id you know that 2021 marks a significant milestone for our parent chapter, Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA), as well as for us here in Michigan at the MPVA?

PVA is celebrating their 75th Anniversary—a momentous occasion that paved the way for the Michigan Chapter to commence 15 years later. That means that we will be celebrating our 60th year of service to veterans with spinal cord injury or disease. A tremendous feat for this organization as a whole!

Founded in 1946 in Washington D.C., the Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) has worked to build a reputation as a leader in disability issues and a strong tradition in assisting veterans. PVA remains the only veterans service organization dedicated solely to the benefit and representation of individuals with spinal cord injury or disease.

The roots of the national Paralyzed Veterans of America reach back to the second World War era; a time when an estimated 2,500 spinal cord injured veterans had survived the initial trauma of their injury and returned to the United States to face a life expectancy of one to five years. With limited research and medical understanding at that time, many individuals began to suggest, both privately and publicly, that a national organization dedicated to veterans with spinal cord injuries should be developed.

Although there is some uncertainty as to who is exactly responsible for the idea of establishing a truly national organization, Mr. Gil Moss, secretary of what was then called the Paralyzed Veterans Association Vaughan Chapter, is most attributed for the concept.

Moss had initiated an appeal in November of 1964 in order to institute individual chapters under the

leadership of a structured organization. He suggested that a national organization should be established as soon as possible because the end of the war would also end the American peoples' interest in the dilemmas of paralyzed Veterans. Moss later recalled his motivation for a national organization by stating, "Because we were so seriously disabled, we felt that the other Veterans' Organizations could not give us adequate attention. In short, we would be swallowed-up and forgotten," (An Oral History of the PVA, 1985).

The MPVA was established in 1961 under the Chapter's first President, Mr. William Russell and has remained an unduplicated service organization. For 60 years, the MPVA has worked to enhance the quality of life of our members by:

- advocating for civil rights
- assuring quality health care
- supporting continued
  - o recreation
  - o research
  - o education
  - o and healthy living.

Just looking back at the 12 years I have been a part of the MPVA's mission I can think of so many trailblazers and leaders, like that of Mr. William Russell, who have actively made a difference towards our mission. It overwhelms me to think about these men and women

who came before us and legitimately paved the way for so many. I will be sharing some of my favorite memories on our social media page throughout the months ahead.

We want you to share in our spirit of advocacy and fellowship, as well! Join our cause in doing so by being sure to follow us on our Facebook page to stay up-to-date on free 60th Anniversary advocacy, sports, and leisure events.

Please write to us with your favorite stories and memories about the MPVA during this time. We can share your

memories on our social media page. Please email me at: [jkochis@michiganpva.org](mailto:jkochis@michiganpva.org). We certainly would love to hear from you!

We also encourage you to join us in our #MPVAGIVESIXTY initiative! By giving \$60 (or more) this season, you can become an MPVA Ambassador and ensure that the MPVA's mission will carry on!



Paralyzed Veterans  
of America

Michigan Chapter

# GIVE TODAY SUPPORT 60 YEARS!

Give \$60 (or more) to the MPVA and make a difference towards their mission of enhancing the lives of veterans with spinal cord injury or disease! Give today by visiting:

[www.michiganpva.org](http://www.michiganpva.org)

## #MPVAGIVESIXTY

Donations are tax deductible. The MPVA is a nonprofit, 501 (c) 3 organization.



# Veterans' News

Photo: Stephanie Strickland, Senior National Service Officer

This spring, the VA would like to keep informed with you and your needs while we continue to navigate through the COVID-19 pandemic. Please read through the following VA flyer for more details:



## VA COVID-19 “keep me informed”

Digital resources to keep Veterans informed and help VA prepare



### THE PROBLEM

VA is working to get COVID-19 vaccines to Veterans as quickly and safely as possible based on CDC guidelines and vaccine availability. Due to limited supply, we can't afford to waste a single dose. But strict storage and handling requirements make distribution complex.

In this rapidly evolving situation, Veterans need clear, consistent, and timely information so they can make informed decisions. And VA staff and leadership need to understand vaccine demand so they can maximize distribution.

### THE SOLUTION

A digital COVID-19 vaccine communications mini-hub and tool allow Veterans to get the latest information from one source, sign up for ongoing updates, and share their current level of interest in getting a vaccine.

Whether eager or hesitant about the vaccine, Veterans can better understand VA's plans—and their own options. In turn, VA can better understand vaccine demand and Veteran needs to support more effective planning and communication.

### FEATURES

The Office of the Chief Technology Officer (CTO) designed these digital resources in partnership with Veterans, VA medical centers, and Veterans Health Administration leadership. We incorporated feedback from usability testing to ensure the resources meet Veteran and VA needs.

#### Veteran benefits

- Offers Veterans a first tangible step in their vaccine journey—and connects them to a source of truth for ongoing (potentially personalized) updates
- Gives Veterans eager to get the vaccine an easy way to express their interest—and helps them stay connected while they wait
- Meets Veterans hesitant about the vaccine where they are—and helps them learn more so they can make informed decisions

#### VA benefits

- Gives VA an easy way to provide consistent, timely information to Veterans across the country—and respond quickly to emerging questions
- Helps VA identify gaps in vaccine communications by tracking relative demographic representation of Veterans who've signed up for updates
- Illuminates vaccine demand on a local, regional, and national scale
- Provides facilities with actionable lists of Veterans to contact as vaccines become available to them

## THESE RESOURCES WILL NOT

- Affect any benefit or right of a Veteran
- Change any Veteran’s priority cohort for getting the vaccine
- Obligate VA to provide a specific vaccine or any vaccine to any Veteran
- Be used for marketing purposes, including marketing emails
- Gather any information that is not directly related to vaccine distribution

## HOW THE DATA IS USED

Once stored, a Veteran’s data will be available to facilities individually, in aggregate, or both. We’ll also make summary data available on an internal-facing dashboard. The dashboard will include web analytics data covering Veteran interactions with the content mini-hub and form.

The Office of the CTO will continue to closely monitor usage, performance, and feedback, and will update content and features as needed. For questions or to offer feedback, contact us at [feedback@va.gov](mailto:feedback@va.gov).

### HOW TO USE THESE DIGITAL RESOURCES

To access the “keep me informed” content mini hub and tool, go to [www.va.gov/covid-19-vaccine/](http://www.va.gov/covid-19-vaccine/)



An official website of the United States government [Here's how you know](#)

Talk to the Veterans Crisis Line now

VA U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Menu

Search Contact us Sign in

Home > Health care > COVID-19 vaccines >

Stay informed and help us prepare

## Fill out the form below

We'll send you updates on how we're providing COVID-19 vaccines across the country—and when you can get your vaccine if you want one. You don't need to sign up to get a vaccine.

First name (\*Required)

Last name (\*Required)

Date of birth

**Note:** Your date of birth helps us match your information to your Veteran records so we can better understand your needs.

Month Day Year

Social Security number (SSN)

**Note:** Your SSN helps us match your information to your Veteran records so we can better understand your needs.

Email address (\*Required)

Phone (\*Required)

Zip code (\*Required)

Will you be in this zip code for the next 6 to 12 months? (\*Required)

Yes

No

I'm not sure.

Do you plan to get a COVID-19 vaccine when one is available to you? (\*Required)

Yes

No

I'm not sure yet.

I prefer not to answer.

Submit form

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Accessibility | No FEAR Act Data | Office of Inspector General | Plain language | Privacy, policies, and legal information | VA Privacy Service | Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) | USA.gov |





# Government Relations & Advocacy

By: Mike Harris, Executive Director, MPVA

## PVA Advocacy & Legislative Virtual March Conference

**W**hat a difference a year makes. In March of 2020, Paralyzed Veterans of America's (PVA) Chapter representatives make their annual trip to Washington, D.C., for a weeklong Advocacy/Legislation Seminar. Not so this year. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and many restrictions, the PVA Advocacy & Legislative seminar was structured a bit differently and was held in a virtual setting.

PVA representatives from across the country gathered online to learn about issues we are advocating for the first session of the 117th Congress. The theme for this year's conference was "Pushing Access Forward."

The Advocacy & Legislative Conference provides an opportunity to meet one-on-one with elected leaders and push forward PVA's messages to Senators and Representatives on issues and challenges faced by our members and the disability community and how they can support the solutions that PVA feel that are necessary to properly address the issues of concern.

Because all my meetings were through video conferencing, I was able to meet with everyone from the Michigan Congressional Delegation. Presentations to legislators focused on PVA's top three legislative policy priorities:

- *Improve Access to Transportation for the Most Severely Disabled Veterans,*
- *Increase Benefits for Surviving Spouses of ALS Veterans*

- *Preserve Access to VA's Specialized Services*

### **Improve Access to Transportation for the Most Severely Disabled Veterans**

Access to an adapted vehicle is essential to the mobility and health of catastrophically disabled veterans who need a reliable means of transportation to get them to and from work, meet family obligations, and attend medical appointments. The substantial costs of modified vehicles, coupled with inflation, present a financial hardship for many disabled veterans who need to replace their primary mode of transportation once it reaches its lifespan.

The current, one-time *VA Automobile Allowance Grant* of roughly \$21,500 covers anywhere from one-half to one-third of the cost to procure a vehicle to accommodate certain disabilities that resulted from a condition incurred or aggravated during active military service.

In order to ensure veterans have access to safe, reliable, transportation, Congress must pass the "*Advancing Uniform Transportation Opportunities for Veterans Act*" or the "*AUTO for Veterans Act*" (H.R.1361/S. 444), which would allow eligible veterans to receive an Automobile Allowance Grant every ten years for the purchase of an adapted vehicle.

*VA's Automobile Adaptive Equipment (AAE)* program helps physically disabled veterans enter, exit, and/or operate a motor vehicle or other conveyance. VA provides necessary equipment for veterans with qualifying service-connected disabilities such as

platform wheelchair lifts, UVLs (under vehicle lifts), power door openers, lowered floors/raised roofs, raised doors, hand controls, left foot gas pedals, reduced effort and zero effort steering and braking, and digital driving systems.



*Speaking to representatives on PVA's key topics during Advocacy and Legislative Week.*

The program also provides reimbursements (to service-connected veterans) for standard equipment including, but not limited to, power steering, power brakes, power windows, power seats, and other special equipment necessary for the safe operation of an approved vehicle.

Support for veterans with non-service-connected disabilities is limited to assistance with ingress/egress only. Veterans need the independence AAE provides, allowing them to transport themselves to and from work, medical appointments, and other obligations.

Congress must pass legislation that allows veterans who have non-service-connected catastrophic disabilities to receive the same type of adaptive automobile equipment as veterans whose disabilities are service-connected.

### ***Increase Benefits for Surviving Spouses of ALS Veterans***

If a veteran was rated totally disabled for a continuous

period of at least eight years immediately preceding death, their eligible survivors can receive an additional \$288.27 per month in Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC). This monetary installment is commonly referred to as the DIC “kicker.”

Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) is an aggressive disease that quickly leaves veterans incapacitated and reliant on family members and caregivers. Many spouses stop working to provide care for their loved one who, once diagnosed, only has an average lifespan of between two to five years.

Sadly, because so few veterans survive beyond five years, the surviving spouses of veterans with ALS rarely qualify for the additional DIC benefit. VA already recognizes ALS as a presumptive service-connected disease, and due to its progressive nature, automatically rates any diagnosed veteran at 100 percent.

In December of 2020, legislation was signed by President Trump which eliminates for ALS patients the required five-month waiting period to begin receiving benefits under the Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) program. Gaining SSDI will also give ALS patients immediate access to Medicare health coverage.

Congress now needs to take this a step further and extend the “DIC kicker” to the surviving spouses of veterans who die from ALS regardless of how long they were service connected for the disease prior to death.

### **Preserve Access to VA's Specialized Services**

PVA members require specialized health care and rely on the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Spinal Cord Injuries and Disorders (SCI/D) System of Care to meet their specialized health care needs. VA's specialized systems of care follow higher clinical standards than those required in the private sector. Preserving and strengthening VA's specialized systems of care—such as SCI/D care, blinded rehabilitation, amputee care, and polytrauma care—remains our

highest priority. This includes access to high-quality prosthetics through VA's Prosthetics and Sensory Aids Service.

If VA continues to shift care to the private sector and woefully understaff and underfund its facilities, the Department's capacity to treat veterans will be diminished, and could lead to the closure of facilities and reductions in services offered to catastrophically disabled veterans. PVA is very concerned about efforts to permanently reduce inpatient beds in some SCI/D Centers, including at facilities that provide specialized long-term care. The capacity of the system to provide a continuum of care must be preserved and strengthened to meet the needs of paralyzed veterans.

Staffing problems tend to have a direct impact on the SCI/D System of Care. According to VA's Fourth Quarter MISSION Act Section 505 data, the Veterans Health Administration reported having 30,578 vacancies across the entire VA health care system. Within the SCI/D System of Care, lengthy, cumbersome hiring processes and a high cost of living in some locations make it difficult to hire and retain staff which prohibits SCI/D Centers from meeting adequate staffing levels necessary to care for this specialized veteran population. SCI/D Centers with

nursing shortages limit bed availability for admission to an SCI/D Center. This limits access to care for specialized care delivery.

**PVA believes Congress must do the following:**

- *Increase oversight to ensure that VA retains the capacity in its system for specialized services such as those provided by the SCI/D Centers.*
- *Ensure sufficient funding is allocated to meet the needs of veterans requiring specialized services such as SCI/D.*
- *Ensure proper staffing of VA's specialized services by ensuring the Department has the authority to provide additional pay, compensation, and retention incentives to make VA service more competitive with the private sector.*



# ADA 101 & COVID WEBINAR

**When:** Thursday, April 29, 2021

**Where:** Via Zoom—

Register in advance for this meeting by emailing: [jkochis@michiganpva.org](mailto:jkochis@michiganpva.org)

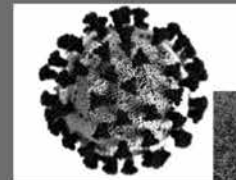
**After registering, you will receive a confirmation email  
containing information about joining the meeting.**

**Time:** 1:00 PM EST

**Cost:** Free



Funded in part by ADA Michigan, an affiliate of the Great Lakes ADA Center, through grant #90DP0091-01-00 from the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living and Rehabilitation Research."





# Sports & Recreation

By: Ray Brown

## Wheelin' Team 457 Ice Fishing Tournament



*Ice shanties were all over the Phelps Lake to enjoy Free Fishing Weekend.*

**T**he temperature on Saturday, February 12th was only 18 degrees. I could hear the crunching of snow from my truck tires as I arrived at Phelps Lake in Mayville, Michigan. I was met by ten volunteers who quickly unloaded my truck and escorted me into a heated garage that felt great!

Door prizes, registration, coffee, and doughnuts followed. 22 men had registered and came to hit the 12 inches of ice. The day went fast and we were treated to brats, hotdogs, bbq venison, and deep fried walleye midday. Lunch disappeared quickly and it was then time for awards. Many neighbors and friends joined us as we handed out our first place award to Mike and Jason Vebo from Flint, with 255 combined inches of fish!




*Brad Bates and Mitchell Pepilinski of North Branch enjoying Free Fishing Weekend with Wheelin Team 457.*

In keeping with our mission statement to provide Sports and Recreation to all, the Michigan PVA and Wheelin Team 457 continue to provide successful events like this! See ya in the woods or on the water—‘cause that is how we roll!!



# Picture Perfect


RT '11  
Rollin' Times from the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America



Staff Sgt. Kenneth Hubbard and his young daughter join him for the last few steps of a 23 mile march he did with Sgt. First Class Jason Holley and Sgt. First Class Russell Tansey in order to raise funds for the MPVA!

July/August 2011


RT '11  
Rollin' Times from the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America



Michael Harris, MPVA Executive Director, takes a moment to reflect at Oakland Hills Memorial Garden's POW/MIA Memorial site. National POW/MIA Recognition Day is on September 16, 2011.

September/October 2011

RT '11  
Rollin' Times from the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America




The 2011 Detroit Free Press Marathon Wheelers get ready to set out onto the 26.2 mile course through Detroit and Canada on Sunday, October 16, 2011  
Photo By: Kelly Whelan

November/December 2011

## The Ad Agency


RT '12  
Rollin' Times from the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America



MPVA Board Director, Teresa Kamphorst, gets a golf lesson from Scott Millman of The Simple World of Golf at MPVA's Open House on April 12, 2012.

May/June 2012

RT '12  
Rollin' Times from the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America



Staff Sgt. Kenneth Hubbard is joined by his daughter, Ali, as he finishes a 23 mile march he completed in support of the MPVA on May 19, 2012!

July/August 2012

RT '12  
Rollin' Times from the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America




Scot Severn, MPVA Sports Director, wins bronze medal in 2012 Paralympic Games  
Photo Courtesy of: Kevin Biele, Davids County Advisor

November/December 2012

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RT '13  
Rollin' Times from the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America



Melissa Stockwell, 2012 Salute to Veterans Gala Keynote Speaker, shares her compelling story  
Photo Courtesy of: Bill Lynn

January/February 2013


RT '13  
Rollin' Times from the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America



This photo was captured by Brenda Wheaton, MPVA Administrative Assistant, while vacationing this past winter at The Homosassa Springs Wildlife Park in Florida. The park acts as a rehabilitation center for injured or disabled animals that would not be able to survive in the wild.

March/April 2013

RT '13  
Rollin' Times from the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America



MPVA Members take time out from playing baseball to present the Plymouth Miracle League with a donation while sharing their outstanding facility during the MPVA's 2013 Membership Picnic

September/October 2013



**Paralyzed Veterans  
of America**

Michigan Chapter

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2021 Spring Edition

**gift your  
old wheels  
for good.**

Paralyzed Veterans  
of America

WHEELS HELPING  
WARRIORS

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](https://www.pva.org/careasy) 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.