

RT '22

Rollin' Times from the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America



Attendees and honorees take a moment to pose for a photo at the Athletes with Disabilities Hall of Fame that took place on June 24th at MotorCity Casino.



About this Issue:

The MPVA was proud to partner with the RIM Foundation to host the relaunch of the Athletes with Disabilities Hall of Fame (HOF) this summer! Learn more about the inductees and the HOF by reading the Development Report!

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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.

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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

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President's Report

By: Michael Harris, President, MPVA

Lydia May Graber: A Life of Service

The Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America is deeply saddened by the recent loss of our longtime friend, Lydia May Graber. Lydia passed away June 3, 2022 at the age of 71. There is no single way to characterize Lydia. She was one of the most unique and authentic people I ever knew. Always full of life and fun-loving, she was the type of person who lights up a room the moment they enter.

Lydia was a dedicated activist, a loving wife, and someone who was always challenging you: making you think and then making you laugh. She devoted her life to fighting for the rights of people with disabilities, herself included. She's not only been at the forefront of great strides in the disability rights movement, but she also led the charge.

Lydia May was born on November 1, 1950 in Detroit to John and Jeanne Thomas. She was the youngest of three girls, growing up in the Brightmoor neighborhood. Lydia was born with pseudoachondroplasia (PSACH), a form of dwarfism characterized by disproportionately short arms and legs.

Lydia attended Holy Cross Lutheran School for elementary and Lutheran High West before transferring to Redford High School where she completed her education in 1968. Growing up, Lydia was always tenacious and ambitious. If Lydia wanted something, she went after it with brazen determination. This attitude assisted her as she went through life with the many challenges she faced. From childhood, Lydia underwent countless surgeries and therapies but kept persevering.

At 22, Lydia packed her bags and made the trip out West to Los Angeles, settling in Burbank, an area north of Hollywood. She began to pursue her dreams. Lydia

found herself working as a stunt double and stand-in for both *Irreconcilable Differences* and *Under the Rainbow* before landing a role as an Ewok in *Star*



Lydia posing in her Ewok costume on the set of *Star Wars*.

Wars: Episode VI Return of the Jedi. After spending several years in California, Lydia made her way back home to Michigan.

In 1986 at an annual Little People of America (LPA) convention, Lydia met the love of her life, Marvin Graber. The two instantly connected and before too long, Marvin moved to Michigan from Indiana to be with Lydia. The couple celebrated their love with a large wedding on October 1, 1988 at Our Shepherd Lutheran in Birmingham. Lydia and Marvin lived happily in Waterford before finding themselves in Sumpter Township, where they've resided for almost 30 years.

Although Lydia was short in stature and stood only 3' 11", for people who knew and worked with her she stood tall throughout her life. She turned her life experience into triumph by advocating passionately on behalf of people with physical challenges; especially to the challenges experienced by people born with dwarfism. Throughout her life she tried to help people understand that they could have fulfilling lives despite their disabilities; that life was about possibilities, not limits.



Posing with Lydia at one of our Salute to Veterans events.

Her life's work was not to champion the causes of those with wealth, power, or special connections, but instead was to give a voice to those who otherwise would not be heard. She was a steadfast humanitarian who served as an example to all, with a multitude of achievements and accomplishments. Lydia served on numerous disability advisory boards.

Lydia was a member of LPA since the early 1960's, serving as Region & District President (covering 5 states) for a number of years. She was appointed by Governor John Engler to the Michigan Commission on Disability Concerns, served on the Delta Airline Disability Advisory Board, and played a pivotal role

in ensuring that Comerica Ballpark, Ford Field, and Little Caesar Arena were designed/built to federal/state accessibility guidelines. She saw the importance of ensuring that anyone attending events at those facilities could have a positive experience without having to encounter architectural barriers.

But just as important to her was being public, being seen and being heard, and celebrating her uniqueness. She always wanted to educate people about dwarfism—believing that was the secret to breaking stereotypes and showing everyone that people with disabilities are no different than anyone else.

Even though Lydia embraced her uniqueness and was not someone to easily be defined, there is one word that speaks volumes of Lydia Graber. The word in this case is service. Her remarkable record of service reminds us that one person's efforts can have a positive impact on many, as well as on themselves.

Lydia did not let her disability define her; she defined her disability.

Rather than react with anger or despair to her predicament in life, Lydia treated it as a call to action. Her work has enhanced the quality of life of the disability community and has left a legacy of service that will continue to touch lives for years to come.

Some folks may never know that their lives are better off because of Lydia. That's okay. Certainly, for Lydia, acclaim was never her motivation for helping others.

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

We join in extending to the members of her bereaved family our heartfelt sympathy.

Rest in Peace, my friend!!





Executive Director's Report

By Jaclyn Kochis, Executive Director, MPVA

Not Too Early to Think of Veterans Day

Although we are busy enjoying the summer months, it is never too early for us to think about the most important holiday as a veteran service organization—and that's Veterans Day!

This year, we will continue the tradition we established a few years ago of hosting a virtual "Salute to Veterans: Run, Walk, Wheel" event. Please join us from November 4th-November 18th in honoring our service men and women (and to raise money for an awesome cause benefiting veterans!) by participating in your choice of a virtual 1 mile race, 5K race, or 10K race.

WHAT IS A VIRTUAL RACE?

A virtual race is a race that you can run, walk, bike, jog, or wheel from any location you choose. For example—you can run, jog, walk, or wheel on the road, on the trail, on the treadmill, around your home, or even on the track. You get to run your own race, at your own pace, and time it yourself!

HOW WILL MY TIME AND DISTANCE BE RECORDED?

You can use a smartphone app or device of your choosing to record your distance and pace. Simply take a photo or screen shot of your final time and distance, along with a photo of yourself after your finish, and email it to: chapterhq@michiganpva.org no later than November 18th at 5 PM EST.

PARTICIPANTS WILL RECEIVE:

- Participation Medal
- Social Media Buzz

- A great feeling for supporting the MPVA's mission
- A great way to remember and honor Veteran's Day

COST FOR PARTICIPANTS:

- \$40 flat fee

WHERE TO REGISTER:

You can register at: www.michiganpva.org

SPREAD THE WORD:

You can help spread the word on your social media by sharing the event link, along with the hashtag: #MPVASalutetoVeterans

Results of the races will be posted on MPVA's Facebook page upon completion! We encourage you to challenge your friends and family to join you! After all, Veterans Day is not just any ol' day of the year—it's a day to take time out and remember those who so honorably served. What better feeling than supporting service men and women on Veterans Day while being healthy?





The Ad Agency is a full service digital agency creating memorable and effective media for print and web

An advertisement for the Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) Michigan Chapter. The image shows a man and a woman standing in front of a silver car, looking at it together. The background is a blurred outdoor setting. The PVA logo is in the top right corner, with the text 'Paralyzed Veterans of America' and 'Michigan Chapter' below it. The main headline reads 'Turn Your Used Vehicle Into Support For Paralyzed Veterans Of America'. Below this, a paragraph states: 'We'll use the proceeds from the sale of your car, truck, RV or boat to change lives and build brighter futures for our seriously injured heroes.' At the bottom, it says 'To learn more, call or visit us online: 877-900-VETS | pva.careasy.org'.



From The Development Office

By Robin Bennett, Development Coordinator.

From Where I Sit: Athletes with Disabilities Hall of Fame Breakfast Ceremony June 24, 2022

Welcomed, excited, hungry. These were the top 3 feelings flooding me as I wheeled through the doors of the MotorCity Casino Sound Board in downtown Detroit for the long-awaited Athletes with Disabilities Hall of Fame relaunch. This

people with physical disabilities. I immediately felt understood and at home. It has been a while since I have had the opportunity to be surrounded by people who I intrinsically know live life with similar barriers and routinely are more than people think. Learning more about Elizabeth, Kevin, and Phil--the honorees of the morning--made me even prouder to view the event from my "seat" in life.



Awards to honor our inductees.

event would be a celebration of athletes who understand living life from a viewpoint like mine.

Feeling welcome at an event has become no small feat as I have progressed throughout my life as a woman using a wheelchair; there are times I feel more and more defined by my seat in life, as opposed to all the other qualities I possess, when I enter a room full of people I do not know. Rolling into the Athletes with Disabilities Hall of Fame event was like my whole body exhaled. Entering a beautifully decorated room filled with appetizing smells was a real cherry on top, but the ice cream sundae of it all was a room dotted with



From left to right: Jaelyn Kochis, MPVA Executive Director, Inductee Elizabeth Stone, Katie Spillane, RIM Foundation

The excitement for me came from knowing that the individuals who would be honored are accomplished people with inspiring stories. I had met each of the honorees before with my work for the MPVA.

- Elizabeth Stone, awarded for her athletic determination as a Paralympian, did not want to be known as someone with a disability when she was young, only to embrace it as part of her to be proud of in adulthood. Embracing that unique part of herself allowed her to highlight her abilities and empower others through sport. I can relate



From left to right: Jaclyn Kochbis, MPVA Executive Director, Inductee Phil Chester, Katie Spillane, RIM Foundation

on a certain level (although, I certainly will not call myself anything like a Paralympian athlete!); I know what it is to downplay the parts of you that make you “different”, only later to realize that they are what empower you to be “unique”.

- Kevin Bradley, a veteran of the United States Army, shared his experience with a disease, like mine, during his acceptance video. He has been knocked around throughout his life, with a disability stemming from what



From left to right: Jaclyn Kochbis, MPVA Executive Director, Katie Spillane, RIM Foundation, Inductee Kevin Bradley

is thought to be a genetic response to his father’s exposure to Agent Orange during service. However, Kevin has not let that keep him down; he has gone on to experience accomplishments, adventures, and advocacy that gives me hope for a continued quality of life.

- Phil Chester has found great fulfillment in dedicating much of his life for the past 20+ years coaching adaptive sports. Coming alongside individuals who have disabilities to help them reach experiences that they would not have thought they could have after an injury or diagnosis, has been a distinguishing part of Phil’s story. Having interviewed him for the MPVA blog, I can say from experience that he has learned as much about himself as he has taught athletes. He is constantly encouraging others to believe more in themselves than what the world maintains. I have been encouraged by his don’t-give-up mentality.



Yes, I came hungry. I like food. And it is a good thing, because man, did they serve up a spread of all the good things! I was surprised to find that there was pretty tasty conversation at the table where I was seated, as well. I think everyone handed out business cards and talked about advocacy for people with disabilities. I thought I knew a lot, but my appetite for knowledge was full at the end of the morning after learning more about the current state of the fallout from auto no-fault reform, PT/OT developments, and recreation opportunities.

Working for the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America, I know firsthand how much work went into relaunching this event, co-hosted with the RIM Foundation. The HOF began its inspiring work in 1999 when Tony Fillipis, of Wright & Fillipis fame, seeing the need of opening Michigan's eyes to the abilities, perseverance, and grit of athletes with disabilities, began honoring the accomplishments of sportsmen,

sportswomen, and adaptive sports. The effect of this innovation was twofold: increasing awareness in disability pride and providing greater equality to sports recognition.

The HOF under Tony Fillipis energized and uplifted Michigan athletics for almost 15 years before going dark. The MPVA and RIM Foundation are excited to continue this work, with 2022 being only the beginning! Please let us know if you have feedback or ideas for making this event a marquee in Michigan for highlighting all that is outstanding about athletes with disabilities!





Veterans' News

By: Kimberly Springfield, National Service Officer

Submitted by: Stephanie Strickland, Senior National Service Officer



Age 65+ Fraud Prevention Campaign

Protecting Our Elderly Veterans Against Fraud

Have you or a loved one received a suspicious call from an organization claiming affiliation with the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA)?

166,235

The number of Veterans VA provides pension benefits to as of January 2022 (65+). Vulnerable populations are frequently targeted for elderly scams by fraudsters.



The A,B,Cs of Pension Poaching

A financial scam targeting Veterans, survivors, and their families

Becoming a preferred method by criminals to defraud the elderly

Commonly involving financial maneuvers to defraud claimants

Tips to Share with Veterans in Your Community

Don'ts:

- Don't share your personal information (e.g., VA.GOV, eBenefits), or other VA login Credentials with anyone.
- Don't sign a blank form to be filled out later without seeing the contents.
- Don't deposit VA benefits directly into a family member or caregiver's bank account unless the person is court appointed or a VA accredited fiduciary.

Do's:

- Do be alert! Identity theft is not always committed by strangers.
- Do frequently change and maintain strong passwords and never use Personally Identifiable Information (PII) in the password.
- Do be vigilant if someone offers to hide or rearrange your assets to qualify for VA pension. You may be required to repay benefits to the government.
- Do know VA does not charge for processing a claim or request a processing fee.

How Can You Help



VA is committed to defeating fraudsters who target elderly Veterans by educating all advocates on the fraud targeting and pension poaching tactics being used against Veterans. Please join us in making VA a hostile environment for fraudsters by encrypting emails when using Veteran information, ensuring antivirus computer updates, and locking your computer when away.

How BDP&R Helps

When a fraudulent payment redirect case is reported or suspected, Veteran Benefits Administration's (VBA) Benefits Delivery Protection and Remediation (BDP&R) team investigates the incident and confirms the fraudulent activity.

- BDP&R determines the necessary actions to protect the Veteran's benefits
- BDP&R reports those responsible for the alleged fraud
- BDP&R immediately reinstating the Veteran's benefits, making the Veteran whole again.

BDP&R works diligently to serve America's Veterans and remains committed to protecting all Veterans and beneficiaries, specifically the most vulnerable, from fraud and abuse.

How to Report Fraud or Pension Poaching

To report suspected fraud, please email [BDP&R](#) or contact the VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) (800)-488-8244.

You may also file a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission by visiting consumercomplaints.fcc.gov



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs



Benefits Delivery Protection & Remediation
Protecting America's Heroes



By: Mike Harris, Executive Director, MPVA

Does Auto No-Fault Apply Retroactively?

On June 7, 2022, the Michigan Court of Appeals heard arguments in *Ellen M. Andary, Philip Krueger, & Eisenhower Center, v. USAA Casualty Insurance Company and Citizens Insurance Company of America*; the lawsuit contends that two provisions of the 2019 auto insurance law—a.) the 45% cut in catastrophic care and b.) the significant limitations placed on the right of survivors to receive reimbursement for in-home attendant care services provided by family members—violate Michigan’s Constitution.

CPAN UPDATE

In the Andary litigation, the Plaintiffs were supported by Coalition to Protect Auto No-fault (CPAN). Their lawyers strongly urged that it would be fundamentally illegal to enforce the medical benefit cuts recently enacted by this new legislation against catastrophically injured auto accident victims who purchased auto no-fault insurance policies and sustained their injury many years before the legislation was passed.

The legal team representing Ms. Andary (George Sinas and Mark Granzotto) argued that the no-fault insurance policies purchased by the Plaintiffs in this litigation specifically required the payment of “all reasonable charges” for reasonably necessary medical care. Given that contractual right, insurers had the duty to pay those benefits to the Plaintiffs without regard to the recently adopted “government fee schedules” and the limitations on reimbursable family provided attendant care. They urged the Court of Appeals to find that any such effort to apply these new benefit cuts to Plaintiffs injured prior to the effective date of the law would constitute an illegal deprivation of the legally vested contractual rights of these Plaintiffs.

In that regard, George Sinas, lead counsel for the Plaintiffs, stated, “The central point in this entire litigation is the fact that, long ago, the Plaintiffs in this case purchased auto no-fault insurance policies that would not permit the enforcement of the benefit cuts contained in this new legislation. In other words, these Plaintiffs purchased the contractual right to the payment of benefits without regard to these limitations and the insurance companies involved charged these Plaintiffs a premium to provide those benefits. Now the insurers contend they can deny payment of the benefits that they sold to these patients, while retaining the premiums they collected to pay them. That would be a classic example of governmental interference with private contract rights as well as a governmentally sanctioned windfall for auto insurers who would no longer have to pay benefits that they collected money to provide.”

The Court’s decision in this case will affect thousands of Michigan citizens who purchased no-fault insurance policies and were injured many years before these new laws were passed. There are approximately 18,000 of these patients who were catastrophically injured and whose medical expenses are now being reimbursed by the Michigan Catastrophic Claims Association (MCCA).

“So, we’re not dealing with litigation that is only going to affect a few people. On the contrary, the number of victims who will be severely harmed if such benefit cuts are allowed by the Court of Appeals, boggles the mind,” said Sinas. “Recently we’ve seen media stories about the famous Detroit Red Wing hockey player, Vladimir Konstantinov, who was catastrophically brain injured many years ago in a motor vehicle accident and will now lose essential in-home attendant care and thus

may be forced to live in an institution. The sad thing is there are thousands of Vladimir Konstantinovs whose tragic stories have not been publicized, but who are similarly experiencing the prospect of such frightening outcomes,” said Sinas.

THE MPVA PERSPECTIVE

Our members were promised lifetime Personal Injury Protection (PIP) benefits at the time of our automobile accident and have not been given the whole truth about no-fault reform. Yes, technically one can say that people still have lifetime PIP benefits, but the long-term care benefits will be paid at 55 percent going forward, which removes true access to long-term care. These benefits do not have value if there is not a care provider to accept the extremely low payment.

MPVA members paid their premiums on time, in some cases for decades, before an auto accident disrupted their lives. At the time, their no-fault coverage guaranteed that all necessary medical care in case of a catastrophic auto accident would be provided for as long as it was needed. Their policies required reimbursement for all reasonably necessary attendant care services regardless of the identity of the attendant care provider and all reasonably necessary products, services, and accommodations regardless of any government-imposed fee schedule. These were the benefits in place of the date of their accident.

Now, our state government is retroactively altering those rights in violation of the pre-existing contractual obligations between the injured individual and their insurance company. MPVA believes that the retroactive application of these two main provisions to individuals injured in an automobile crash prior to the date the new law went into effect is unconstitutional.

It is not clear when the Court of Appeals will issue its decision. It could be weeks or months, court observers predict. Regardless of the decision of the Court of Appeals in Andary, it is highly likely that the case will be appealed to the Michigan Supreme Court for a final determination.





Sports & Recreation

By: Scot Severn

Thunder in the Valley Games



Our veteran athletes at Thunder in the Valley pose for a photo.

After the cancellation of the 2020 and 2021 Games due to COVID, the 2022 Thunder in the Valley Games took place in Bridgeport, MI; a necessary change that was only the beginning of the shifts we would see at this year's Games.

In previous years the housing and athletics were held at Saginaw Valley State University (SVSU), but the school was doing renovations to the dorms that usually house the athletes, as well as maintenance on their swimming pool. However, the Games' Board of Directors were determined to put on the event. Bridgeport High School stepped up to provide the venues needed to have

the competition. Although attendance was down quite a bit from previous years, a very generous sponsorship from Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America (MPVA) allowed a near record number of U.S. military veterans to attend the Games!

Thunder in the Valley Games were modeled after some of the most successful games in the nation, competitions that are also struggling to rebuild after the COVID-19 pandemic. Attendance has been down across the board. The meets that I attended this year were much smaller than in pre-pandemic years. I had just returned from the U.S. Paralympic Track and Field National



In action at the Thunder in the Valley Games.

Championships, where there were about one quarter of the athletes they usually have.

It's disappointing, but also understandable with the cost of travel right now. I drove to the National Championships because the price of a flight to southern Florida was simply outrageous! Gas totaled more than \$400 for the trip, even in a hybrid that got nearly 30 miles per gallon. The high cost of travel undoubtedly is having a very negative affect on these events.

Hopefully, this will improve in the future. Until then, these events will continue to take place in a diminished capacity with the hope that one day they will recover to what they once were for athletes with disabilities, adaptive recreation, and our communities as a whole. In the words of the Thunder in the Valley Games Director, "Thank you so very much Michigan PVA, you have no idea how very much this is appreciated."



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Are you a Veteran with a service or non-service connected Spinal Cord Injury?

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Ret. Army Specialist Gene L.**

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Change Service Requested
DATED MATERIAL — PLEASE EXPEDITE!
2022 Summer Edition

MPVA Spring 2022 Valuable Dates



MPVA Picnic

When: Saturday, September 10, 2022

Where: Bilkie Family Field - Miracle League of Plymouth 357 Theodore St, Plymouth, MI 48170

Time: 5:00 PM to 7:00 PM

Cost: Free

How to Register: Please register chapterhq@michiganpva.org by September 2nd! Join us for accessible baseball! The MPVA will be providing beverages and food! We will have you covered—so join us!