

# RT '25

Rollin' Times from the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America



The Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America (MPVA) Wheelchair Team 2025, in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Sitting left to right—Monica Munir (upcoming athlete), Scot Severn, Ray Brown, James Johnson, Judy Ross  
Back row—Dr. Melissa Tinney, Ann Arbor VA, Phil Chester, CoachMPVA Wheelchair Team, Maureen McDonald Recreation Therapist/Adaptive Sports Coordinator, Detroit VA



Summer Edition 2025

## About this Issue:

The MPVA has had a busy but fun summer! Be sure to read this edition to find out what we've been doing and what is coming up!

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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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## Attention Readers!!!



The MPVA would like to take The Rollin' Times Newsletter to **exclusively electronic format**. This means that readers can receive their copies of the Rollin' Times **via email**.

If you would like to help the Chapter cut costs of printing and mailing and receive your Rollin' Times newsletter electronically, please send to Brenda Wheeler  
at:

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# President's Report

By: Bob Vance, President, MPVA

## President's Report



*Enjoying the Detroit Tiger Game and good conversation are: MPVA-President Bob Vance, Mindy Walker Vukmer-First Nation Group, Vice President, Corporate Development, Cheryl Nilsson, COL USAF (Ret), Founder and Owner First Nation Group*

As summertime in Michigan is known for being good ole' American baseball season, I was thrilled and honored to receive an invitation to attend the Detroit Tiger Game on July 8th, at the amazing Comerica Park, in Detroit. I received an invitation from Mindy Walker Vukmer, First Nation Group, LLC. In attendance at the game aside from Mindy, were Cheryl Nilsson, COL USAF (Ret), Founder/Owner, First Nation Group, Glen Munroe, USAF Veteran, EVP, Operations, First Nation Group, LLC, Brad Coleman, PVA National, and his son. The setting for the baseball game was outstanding, we were in a beautiful suite, with an incredible view of the field, with great people, and delicious food...it couldn't have been better!

While enjoying the game and the festivities, we were able to connect and engage in interesting conversations along with sharing ideas for the upcoming 25th Annual National Veterans Wheelchair Games 2026, in July, in Detroit, which we are so excited to be hosting in our city!!! Detroit has so much to offer, and we can't wait to showcase it to everyone!

So, please keep your eyes and ears open for upcoming announcements, news and updates regarding the 25th Annual National Veterans Wheelchair Games 2026, in July, in Detroit!!!





*Spectacular view of Comerica Park, Detroit, Michigan*



*Delicious and outstanding sushi boat, looks too good to eat!*



*Glenn Munroe, USAF Veteran, EVP, Operations, First Nation Group and MPVA-President Bob Vance sharing stories and ideas while enjoying the Detroit Tiger Game*



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# Government Relations & Advocacy

By: Brenda Wheeler, Office Manager

## PVA's Advocacy Legislative Seminar Week



*Robert Thomas, PVA National President & Chairman of the Board, Carl Blake, PVA Chief Executive Officer and Heather Ansley, PVA Chief Policy Officer, "Pushing Access Forward" and discussing 2025 advocacy priorities at PVA 2025 Advocacy Legislation Seminar, the week of June 8th-13th, in Washington, DC.*

I am proud to say we had a very successful week in June, in Washington D.C. for Paralyzed Veterans of America's (PVA) Advocacy and Legislative Seminar. Our main topics of discussion this year were:

- 1) Protecting VA's Specialized Health Care Services;
- 2) Increasing Access to Long-Term Services and Supports for Veterans with SCI/D.
- 3) Improving Veterans' Financial Security;
- 4) Enhancing Access to Health Care Services for Veterans with SCI/D; and
- 5) Defending the Freedoms of Veterans with Disabilities.

These face-to-face meetings with members of Congress on Capital Hill hopefully will make a difference in getting these bills passed, which we strongly advocate for throughout the year.

One of the bills we focused on was the "Autonomy for Disabled Veterans Act & Autonomy for All Disabled Veterans Act" (Bill # H.R. 2245/S. 1644/H.R. 3309). This bill proposes an increase to the VA's HISA Grant (Home Improvement & Structural Alterations), which has not been increased in over a decade, and obviously the cost of living has significantly increased over the same period.

This bill is specifically for helping veterans and service members in making medically necessary improvements and structural alterations to their primary residence.

There is a national shortage of affordable housing, accessible housing for people with disabilities, including disabled veterans. In stating that, chances are at some point, a veteran will need to modify their home to make it accessible, which is extremely costly, therefore the HISA Grant will come in handy.

Below is a little more detail on the key priorities we discussed:

- Access to VA Healthcare: PVA actively advocates for legislation that ensures veterans with spinal cord injuries and disorders (SCI/D) have access to quality, timely health care at VA medical facilities. This includes preserving access to VA's specialized services, such as its SCI/D system of care, and securing funding to meet the ongoing needs of these veterans.
- Accessible Housing: PVA promotes initiatives to enhance the availability of accessible housing for veterans. This involves supporting increased tax incentives for home modifications, advocating

for legislation that increases the Specially Adapted Housing (SAH) grant amount to keep pace with construction costs, and establishing a supplementary grant for veterans who need to relocate or make further modifications due to worsening disabilities.

- **Eliminating Disability-Related Barriers:** PVA works to eliminate barriers that hinder full participation in society for veterans with disabilities. This includes advocating for improved access to air travel by reforming the Air Carrier Access Act and improving security screening processes, as well as increasing compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) through enhanced tax incentives and increased funding for mediation programs.
- **Veteran Benefits:** PVA champions legislation that ensures veterans, their dependents, and survivors receive adequate benefits, such as compensation, pensions, and insurance. They also focus on promoting VA research related to SCI/D and rehabilitation.

Please feel free to reach out to me at: [chapterhq@michiganpva.org](mailto:chapterhq@michiganpva.org) with any questions or comments that you may have on key issues that you would us to discuss with our legislators.

As Always You Can Make a Difference!!.



*MPVA Office Manager, Brenda Wheeler advocating on Capital Hill*



# The Ad Agency

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## Support your local veterans by partnering with the Paralyzed Veterans of America through our G.I.V.E. Clothing Donation program!

Through the Paralyzed Veterans of America's G.I.V.E. 'Goods Inspiring Veterans Everywhere' clothing donation program, service never goes out of style. Generous donations of clothes, small appliances, and gently used household goods help improve the lives of severely injured veterans and strengthens the fabric of our community. We're looking for community partners to join us by getting involved in the G.I.V.E. program locally. **By doing so, you're changing lives!**

### Ways to Partner

- Residential pick-up
- Drop box

### The Impact

- Currently active in 12 states:
  - Arizona, California, Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, Missouri, Nebraska, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Texas, Washington
- Funds raised through partnership are put directly back into programs/services provided FREE to our members:
  - Veterans Benefits
  - Medical Services
  - Research & Education
  - Sports & Recreation
  - Government Relations & Advocacy
  - Architecture

### Becoming a G.I.V.E. partner requires just a few steps:

- Express interest at your local PVA chapter
- Review logistics with G.I.V.E. program coordinator
- Execute contract process through National Office
- Finalize program details with all involved parties
- **START PROMOTING!**

For more information on G.I.V.E., please contact Tara Shishmanian at [taras@pva.org](mailto:taras@pva.org) or (202) 416-7733.

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Photo: Stephanie Strickland, Senior National Service Officer

## Mental Health Alternatives

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) offers several alternative and complementary treatments for mental health, especially for conditions like PTSD, depression, anxiety, and chronic pain. These are often integrated with traditional therapies (like medication and talk therapy) to provide a more holistic approach to care.

Here's a breakdown of VA-approved alternative treatments for mental health:

### ◆ Whole Health Approach

The VA's **Whole Health** model emphasizes personalized, proactive, patient-driven care. It encourages veterans to explore what matters most to them and tailors care accordingly. This includes alternative therapies.

### ◆ Complementary and Integrative Health (CIH) Therapies

These are evidence-based treatments now widely available at many VA facilities:

#### 1. Acupuncture

- Helps with PTSD, anxiety, depression, and chronic pain.
- Some VA facilities offer this through licensed practitioners.

#### 2. Yoga

- Improves mood, reduces stress and PTSD symptoms, and helps with chronic pain. Some VA facilities offer this through licensed practitioners.
- May include breathing techniques and meditation.

#### 3. Tai Chi and Qigong

- Gentle movement-based practices that improve

mood, anxiety, and physical balance.

#### 4. Mindfulness and Meditation

- Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) is offered at many VA centers.
- Helps with PTSD, depression, anxiety, and sleep.

#### 5. Biofeedback

- Teaches control over certain body functions (like heart rate) to reduce anxiety and PTSD symptoms.

#### 6. Massage Therapy

- Reduces muscle tension, anxiety, and depressive symptoms.

#### 7. Art and Music Therapy

- Useful for trauma processing, emotional expression, and social connection.

#### 8. Chiropractic Care

- Often used for musculoskeletal pain but also linked to improved well-being.

### ◆ Peer Support and Group Therapies

- Veterans with lived experience provide guidance and support in a non-clinical way.
- Group therapy options include mindfulness groups, art therapy groups, and warrior yoga.

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### ◆ Spirituality and Chaplain Services

- Spiritual counseling and services are available for veterans seeking meaning, connection, or healing through faith or spirituality.

### ◆ Animal-Assisted Therapy

- Some VA facilities incorporate animals (like therapy dogs) into mental health programs.
- Shown to reduce anxiety, depression, and PTSD symptoms.

### ◆ Service Dogs (Non-VA Sponsored)

- Although not directly provided by the VA, some veterans access service dogs for PTSD or anxiety through nonprofit organizations.
- The VA may help with some costs under specific programs.

### ◆ Virtual and Mobile Options

- VA offers VA Mindfulness Coach, PTSD Coach, and other mental health mobile apps.
- Telehealth sessions for yoga, meditation, and integrative health are expanding.

#### How to Access These Services:

1. **Talk to your VA primary care or mental health provider.**
2. **Ask for a Whole Health consultation** or about integrative health services.
3. Use the **VA Facility Locator** to check what's offered near you.
4. Visit <https://www.va.gov/wholehealth/> for more info





# Sports & Recreation

By: Coach Phil Chester

## National Veterans 2025 Wheelchair Games

I am thrilled to report that last month, the 2025 National Veterans Wheelchair Games (NVWG) were a powerful testimony to resilience, athleticism, and unity. Even with sparse public detail on team-wide Michigan standings, individual achievements, and the strong Michigan presence, this year, and prior years reflect the state's ongoing impact.

This year's Michigan Team was led by Captain Ray Brown, also on the team were Judy Ross, Scot Severn, James Johnson, and they were, once again, enthusiastically coached by Phil Chester. Our Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America's (MPVA) team proudly brought home an outstanding total of 15 medals...8 Gold, 4 Silver, and 3 Bronze! Now that's what I call teamwork! Also in attendance were Monica Munir, a Michigan chapter member, and she will be joining the team as an athlete next year, which she, and all of us are very excited about.

In addition to the amazing games, one of the most exciting things for us this year, was at the closing ceremonies, when the veteran-led torch was passed on to Scot Severn, Paralympian, and the VP of our MPVA chapter. Scot then lit the torch to commence that the 2026 National Veterans Wheelchair Games are going to be held in DETROIT!!! We are beyond excited, and we are thrilled to have the games right here in our state. Michigan's role will expand—from producing exceptional athletes to welcoming the entire national veteran community. We are excited about our spirited hometown support, increased involvement, and more inspiring stories of transformation to come!! So, if you are looking for an invite to join the MPVA team? This is it.

There are so many events for all to choose from. Come and join the team for the 2026 NVWG in DETROIT, it will be a highlight for you and yours, no doubt!



*MPVA's Ray Brown at the Minneapolis Convention Center with the license plate displaying Detroit, Michigan is the city hosting the 2026 NVWG!*



*Monica Munir, Coach Phil Chester, and Scot Severn relaxing with a friend before their day gets started*



*MPVA's Captain Ray Brown is ready to reel and roll into the NVWG Bass Fishing Tournament*



*MPVA's James Johnson rolling and racing in the handcycling competition*



*MPVA's Ray Brown proudly wearing his 2 gold, 1 silver and 1 bronze medal. MPVA's Scot Severn in background*



*MPVA's athlete Judy Ross and her outstanding medals*



*MPVA's athlete James Johnson sporting his numerous medals*



*MPVA's upcoming athlete, Monica Munir watching and studying the adaptive sport of archery*



*MPVA's athlete Judy Ross and her team, along with the mascot, "Bullseye", the Target dog*



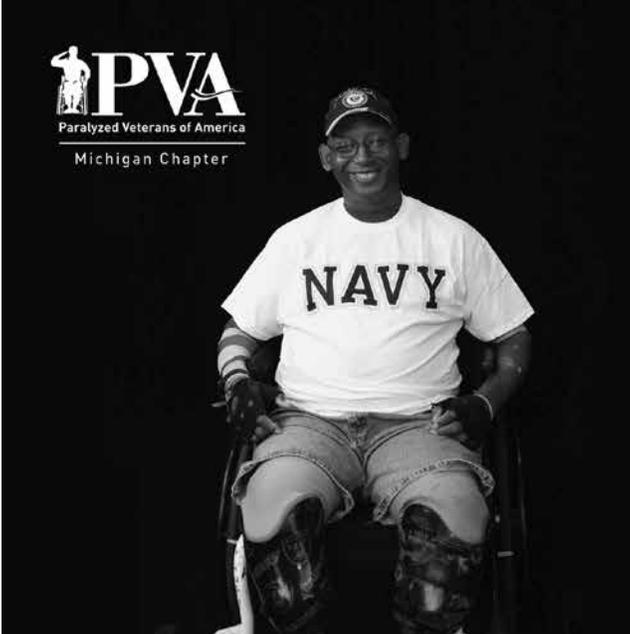
*MPVA's Judy Ross and Ray Brown take time to unwind and share stories*



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## Registration and More Information

For registration details and additional information, please visit the [official PVA website](#). Don't miss your chance to be part of this transformative event.



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*MPVA athlete & Paralympian Scot Severn lighting the torch, as Detroit, Michigan will be the home of the 45th Annual National Veterans Wheelchair Games in July of 2026!!!  
Stay tuned for upcoming details!!!*