

RT '26

Rollin' Times from the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America



MPVA members, Patty and Tony Soma delivering a heartwarming presentation of the Missing Man Table at our Veteran's Day Event in November.



Winter Edition 2026

About this Issue:

The MPVA has had a busy winter! 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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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

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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 email Brenda Wheater at:

chapterhq@michiganpva.org

Let us know that you'd like to "opt in to receiving the RT electronically".



Interested in getting some business recognition? **Advertise with MPVA!**

The Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America (MPVA) is a nonprofit service organization that works to address the needs and concerns of veterans who have sustained an injury or disease of the spinal cord. You may not know, but, the MPVA services the entire state of Michigan!

One of our largest resources is our quarterly newsletter:

"The Rollin' Times."

This magazine reaches out to over 2,000 individuals and businesses throughout Michigan and beyond.

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Contact, Brenda Wheater, Office Manager, at
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Advertisement Size	Specifications	Cost
Business Card	3.5 x 2 in; size of a standard business card. Black and white ad that is featured on one of issue.	\$50.00
1/2 Page	8.5 x 5.5 in. Black and white ad that is featured on one page of issue.	\$150.00
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Full Page Color	8.5 x 11 in. Full Color ad on inside, back cover.	\$300.00
1/2 Page Back Cover/Color	5.5" x 8.5"; Full Color on the outside, back cover. <i>(This is a preferred ad spot as it is located right next to the mailing address!)</i>	\$400.00



President's Report

By: Scot Severn, President, MPVA

The National Wheelchair Games Are Coming to Detroit — And So Is Your Opportunity!

In case you haven't heard, the National Veterans Wheelchair Games are coming to the great city of Detroit! From July 9th–14th, this event will be the largest gathering of wheelchair athletes in the United States in 2026—and possibly the largest ever. Whether you're a seasoned competitor or someone who has never tried adaptive sports before, there is a place for you at the Games.

I've always been drawn to the most physically demanding sports like wheelchair rugby, track and field and weightlifting, the ones that really push your limits. But last year, things changed. A scan revealed a complete tear in my rotator cuff and a partial tear in my bicep tendon, something that can happen after decades of pushing a wheelchair. My doctor made it clear: slow down, avoid intense physical activity, and prepare for surgery.

At first, it was frustrating, but instead of skipping the Games, I adapted. I shifted from high-intensity events to recreational ones like cornhole, ladder ball, and table tennis. And you know what? I still had an amazing time. I competed, I connected, and I was reminded that the Games aren't just about how hard you can push—they're about showing up, trying something new, and being part of something bigger.

The National Veterans Wheelchair Games offer far more than medals. Participation can help you:

- Maintain a healthy body weight
- Combat chronic conditions such as obesity, hypertension, and type 2 diabetes

- Increase energy and improve sleep
- Boost mood and self-esteem
- Reduce anxiety and depression
- Build new friendships and experiences
- Challenge stereotypes about disability
- Improve employment outcomes through increased confidence, productivity, and reduced absenteeism

The National Veterans Wheelchair Games website is: www.nationalveteranswheelchairgames.org. As of February 2nd, you can register for the games and registration is available through April 3rd. Registration does require coordination with your VA doctor, including completion of a medical clearance form.

If you've ever thought, "Maybe this isn't for me," let me assure you—it is. No matter your ability level, injury status, or experience, there is something you can do at the Games.

If you're interested and need help getting started, contact us at MPVA. We're here to support you every step of the way.

Detroit is ready.

The Games are coming.

Are you?



MPVA & Wheelin' Team 457 — Partnering for Great Events

Wheelin' Team 457 is an adaptive recreation organization in Michigan that provides outdoor and indoor adventures such as hunting, fishing, sports outings, and social events for veterans and individuals with disabilities.

MPVA has a long-standing partnership with Wheelin' Team 457, and our organizations regularly team up to co-host and support each other's events. Adding to this strong connection, MPVA's Sports Director Ray Brown also serves as the President of Wheelin' Team 457.

Best of all, Wheelin' Team 457 has warmly invited MPVA members to attend and take part in their events throughout the year — and we strongly encourage you to join in!

If you're interested in participating in any WT457 activities, reach out to Ray at raybjav@gmail.com or check out the Wheelin' Team 457 Facebook page for event updates.

(See the WT457 2026 event calendar on this page for upcoming opportunities.)

2026 Events

<p>January 14th Euchre Starts every Wed</p>	<p>February 8th Super Bowl @ Green's Deer Lodge 14th Ice Fishing @ Roger's 21st Bowling Gerlach's TBD Goose Hunt</p>	<p>March 7th Crow Hunt 14th Rabbit Hunt 28th Buffalo Dinner</p>
<p>April 19th Billiards @ Cascadden's Metamora 30th-May 3 Turkey Hunt</p>	<p>May</p>	<p>June 15th Free Fishing @ Otter Lake Park 30 Guns 30 Days Tickets go on Sale</p>
<p>July 12th Loons Baseball Game Midland 9th-14th PVA Games Detroit TBD Kids Fishing Crystal Creek Golf Course 18th Golf Outing @ Washakie</p>	<p>August 1st Ben's Expo 29th Bowling Gerlach's</p>	<p>September 11-13th Woods n Water Imlay City Fairgrounds TBD Goose hunt</p>
<p>October 15-18th Independence Hunt 18th Harvest Dinner TBD Duck Hunt</p>	<p>November 15th Buck Pole @ Ben's 20-22nd Pink Out Hunt</p>	<p>December 1st 30 Guns 30 Days drawing starts 3-6th Muzzleloader Hunt 12th Bowling @ Gerlach's</p>
	<p>January 2027 10th Planning Meeting</p>	



Executive Director's Report

By: Brian VanSingel, Executive Director, MPVA

Executive Director's Update – Winter 2026

After a few months in my role as Executive Director, I want to personally thank our members and community partners for the warm welcome and overwhelming support. It has truly been a pleasure meeting and learning about so many of you. These conversations have shown me just how talented, skilled, and diverse our membership is.

One of our goals as a chapter is to better connect with you and serve your interests. Over the coming months, I want to hear more from you about what matters most, so we can plan events, programs, and activities that reflect your interests. To do that effectively, we first need to make sure we can reach you.

With that in mind, I ask all Lifetime and Associate Members to please review the four important items below:

1. Membership Contact Update (Action Required)

One of our top priorities this year is updating our membership contact roster. Having your current mailing and email address ensures you receive information about our events, programs, benefits, and opportunities from our community partners.

Please take **2 minutes** to update your information:

1. Visit: <https://www.michiganpva.org>
2. Click the “**Membership Update**” tab (top right corner)
3. Submit the form

This small step makes a big difference in helping us

serve you better.

2. Stay Connected on Social Media

For those who use social media, these platforms are often where we share time-sensitive updates and opportunities first. If you come across information that could benefit our members, **please tag us, message us, or send it directly** so we can share it with the broader MPVA community. Please also consider liking, following, and sharing our pages with friends and family:

- Facebook: www.facebook.com/michiganpva
- Instagram: www.instagram.com/michiganpva
- LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/company/michigan-paralyzed-veterans-of-america

3. Member Interest Survey (Coming Soon)

In the coming months, you will be invited to participate in our Member Interest Survey. This survey will help us understand what types of events, activities, and services interest you and how we can increase participation across the chapter. Your feedback will directly shape our future programming.

4. Call for Volunteers – NVWG 2026

This July, Michigan will host the 45th National Veterans Wheelchair Games, the world's largest annual wheelchair sports and rehabilitation event for military veterans. We are honored to serve as the host chapter and excited to showcase our state and our chapter to thousands of athletes and volunteers from across the country.

We are seeking volunteers to help make this event a success. Opportunities are available both before and during the Games, including remote and in-person roles. If you, or your family and friends, are interested in volunteering, please contact us by phone or email. Your time and talents can make a lasting impact.

I appreciate your continued support and engagement, and I look forward to working with you and hearing more about how we can best serve you in the months ahead.



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Paralyzed Veterans of America
Michigan Chapter

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How it works!



1. Simply call or complete our form online.



2. Schedule your free pick-up.



3. Receive a donation receipt.

Vehicle donations to PVA are tax-deductible! Most vehicles are sold through local used-car markets. Our Vehicle Donation Program works to get the highest return per vehicle and handles all the paperwork, too!

Call **877-900-VETS** or donate online at pva.careasy.org



Sports & Recreation

By: Lane Smith & Ray Brown, Sports Recreation

The Hunt of a Lifetime

Forward by Sports Director Ray Brown

We are always tested during our passion to get out into Michigan's great outdoors. The deer hunt is no exception. Having completed the hunt, firearms are oiled and cleaned. Gear has been sorted and stored, and we continue to enjoy the many meals and snacks the harvest provides. Alas, taxidermy has been sought out, and the way our mount will be created has been discussed. The hunt usually results in many new friends. Navy Veteran Lane Smith was our 2025 Line of Duty Hunter and is soon to be one of our newest MPVA members. Friending Lane, I learned that he does his own taxidermy. The following article is Lane's account of his Line of Duty Hunt... Put your mind to it, unlock your brakes, and enjoy your passions as the Michigan Chapter is always there to assist. Great job, Lane! "Cause this is how we roll!"

I met Ray Brown, (MPVA Sports Director), at the Woods and Water Show. He had a booth set up, and my wife Sharon stopped there first. A moment later, both Ray and Sharon called me over. Ray began telling me about his hunting program, and I filled out the paperwork. After that, I waited, thinking I probably wouldn't hear back from him.

A few weeks later, Ray called and asked for more information, which I gave him. Again, I thought I probably wouldn't hear back, lol. Then more time passed, and Ray called to say I had been selected for the hunt because I fit all the criteria. We picked a few dates that worked for me, and I was extremely excited.

I was given a choice between hunting a huge deer or a bison. I asked my friends and family what they thought, and everyone said the bison. So, the trip began!

I arrived at Green's Ranch, and Mr. Green himself greeted me. We went inside the game ranch building, which was amazing to see with all its trophies and decorations. Everyone introduced themselves, and then they loaded us onto trailers to take us out to our hunting locations.



Lane Smith proudly honoring the spirit of the bison and the journey of the hunt

It didn't take long before we started seeing wildlife. First, we saw elk, the huge, amazing beasts. There was a herd with one male and many females. The male bugled as other elk approached, protecting his herd and chasing others away. Later, some deer came through, and the size difference between deer and elk was incredible.

Then Mr. Green said I had the opportunity to hunt a bison if we went back a little farther. After waiting patiently, two huge bison appeared. The first one was smaller, and behind it was a much larger one. Mr. Green

told me to aim at the neck area, so I did. I waited patiently and fired my first shot. The bison shook it off like a bee sting.



Ray Brown, Lane Smith, and Mike Green, owner of Green's Deer Ranch in Caro

Mr. Green quickly told me to shoot again. I aimed and fired a second shot near the first impact. This time, the bison finally went down. They loaded the bison onto the tractor and took it to be processed, then transported it back to the lodging area.

By this time, I had texted my family and friends to tell them I had harvested a huge bison. One of my friends, who I won't name (Robert), didn't believe how big it was, so Mr. Green spoke to him on the phone to confirm it. Everyone else congratulated me on the hunt. It truly was the hunt of a lifetime for me.



The beauty of wildlife

A few weeks later, the meat arrived, and it filled not only my freezer but my mom's as well. The best part of this hunt was meeting new people and making new friends who changed my life for the better. I can't thank them enough. A special shout-out goes to Mr. Green and his ranch, as well as Ray Brown.



Nature's gentle grace



Office Manager's Report

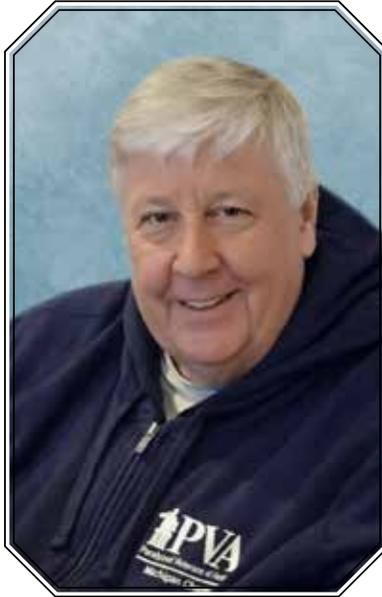
By Brenda Wheater, Office Manager

In Memory of our friend, Michael Harris

As February 13, 2026, marked one year since the passing of our friend and mentor, Mike Harris, I would like to honor his memory by reflecting on some of his accomplishments, and fond memories I have of him.

In 2012 when I was hired at the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America (MPVA), I remember first meeting Mike in person at our chapter in Novi. He was so welcoming, warm, and lighthearted, I immediately felt like I knew him forever. A vivid memory I have from that day was him asking me, "can I give you some money to hold you over until you get your first paycheck?" I couldn't believe his thoughtfulness and generosity for asking me that. He continued to be thoughtful, generous, kind, honest, compassionate, and so much more, as that was the man he was.

Before becoming President of the Michigan chapter in 2018, Mike served as our Government Relations Director from 1996-2007, and then Executive Director until 2015, then passing the torch to Jaclyn Kochis as Executive Director. Mike had a deep passion for Advocacy and Government Relations therefore he was on numerous boards as he could share his expertise regarding spinal cord injuries as well as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Just to mention a few, he was on the Customer Advisory Board for Delta Airlines, The Senior Alliance (Area Agency on Aging), and he was appointed by the Governor to represent the Michigan Barrier Free Design Board.



In 1986 Mike was injured in an auto accident at the age of 29, which caused his spinal cord injury, and partial paralysis. It was around that time he made a conscious decision to turn something negative into something positive. He proved that by continuously helping and serving others. He also proudly served in the Marine Corps from 1975-1979.

He has touched the lives of so many and made such a positive impact on the disability community. For those of you lucky enough to have known him, I'm sure you would agree what an amazing guy he was.

Over the 13 years that I knew Mike, he became like family to not only me, but to Jaclyn Kochis (she's known him since 2008), and we both have so many fond memories of him. We often shared many stories about family, music (he loved the Beatles), sports, and much more. Jaclyn and I vowed to keep Mike's memory and legacy alive, and that, we will do. Speaking of family, Mike cherished his two sisters, Mary Ann and Eileen, and his niece Meagan.

Although he has been gone over a year, I feel his presence and guidance every day, and I'm honored to have known him.

As Mike would say "Peace, Love, Dove" ...until we meet gain.



Join Us!

Celebrate PVA Awareness Month at “The Big House!”

MPVA Member & Guest Stadium Tour

University of Michigan Stadium
Thursday, April 23, 2026 | 1:45 PM

FREE

* Only 75 spots available — first come, first served *



Reserve by April 2, 2026

 **Kristin – 810.266.0595**



*This event is organized by Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America.
It is not affiliated with or sponsored by the University of Michigan.*



Photo: Stephanie Strickland, Senior National Service Officer

The Impact of a Federal Government Shutdown on the Department of Veterans Affairs and Veteran Services

When the U.S. federal government enters a shutdown because Congress fails to pass funding legislation, various federal agencies must curtail nonessential operations, furlough employees, or shift functions to emergency or “excepted” status. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is a unique agency in this context: its mission involves health care, benefits, memorial services, and veteran support. This paper examines how a shutdown affects VA operations—what services continue, which services are curtailed, how staffing is handled, and what risks or challenges emerge. The goal is to provide a balanced, evidence based assessment of how the VA weathers funding lapses and what gaps or vulnerabilities remain.

The VA is tasked with supporting veterans through medical care, benefits (disability compensation, pensions, education, housing), national cemeteries, veterans’ appeals, and related services. Given the high stakes for veterans’ well-being, the VA develops contingency plans to maintain core operations during funding lapses. Nevertheless, not all VA functions are immune to disruption. This paper explores in depth how a shutdown affects the VA, assessing which services are preserved vs. curtailed, staff impacts, operational tradeoffs, and longerterm consequences for veteran care and benefits.

The VA’s Contingency Planning

One reason the VA is more resilient than some agencies during a shutdown is that portions of its funding structure rely on advance appropriations or mandatory funding. Advance appropriations are funds made available in a prior fiscal year to cover specified future-

year obligations, so those funds are not subject to new-year appropriations lapses.

Because these funds are already committed, the VA can continue certain essential services even when a shutdown prevents new appropriations from being enacted.

What VA Services Continue During a Shutdown (“Excepted” Functions)

Because of the contingency plan and funding structure, many VA services remain operational in a shutdown. Below is a breakdown:

Health Care & Medical Facilities

- VA Medical Centers, Outpatient Clinics, and Vet Centers remain open and continue patient care operations.
- Veterans Crisis Line (Dial 988, then press 1) continues to operate 24/7.
- Suicide prevention, homelessness services, caregiver support—all of which are considered critical—continue to run. Because medical care for veterans is essential and often life-or-death, shutting it down would risk harm; thus, it is preserved under the contingency plan.

Benefits, Compensation, and Pensions

- Disability compensation, pensions, education benefits, housing benefits, and other VA-

administered payments continue to be processed and disbursed on schedule.

- Board of Veterans' Appeals continues making decisions on cases.
- Burials at national veterans' cemeteries, including the processing of applications for headstones, markers, and burial benefits, continue uninterrupted.

The underlying idea is that these services are considered critical to veterans' ongoing welfare and have statutory or advance funding bases that allow them to continue.

Call Centers & Crisis Reporting

- The VA's primary call center (1-800-MyVA411) remains in operation.
- The VA Benefit Hotline (1-800-827-1000) remains open, typically with hours of 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. ET on weekdays.

These contact points are vital for veterans seeking information or support during the shutdown.

What VA Services Are Curtailed, Paused, or Suspended

Despite the robust contingency planning, several VA programs and activities are classified as nonessential during a shutdown and are thus suspended or scaled back until funding is restored.

Benefits Regional Offices & Public Access

- VA benefits regional offices (VBA regional offices) are closed for public in-person services.
- As of October 8 (in a recent shutdown), more than 7,000 employees in VBA were placed on furlough, leading to closure of all 56 regional offices to the public.
- As a result, personal interviews, educational or vocational counseling, outreach programs, and in-person hearings mediated in regional offices

are unavailable.

This closure can slow or block certain case processing, appeals, or benefit claims that require in-person submissions or hearings.

GI Bill, Transition & Career Counseling

- The GI Bill Hotline (1-888-GIBILL-1) is closed.
- The VA transition and career counseling programs are paused.
- VetSuccess on Campus programs (which assist veterans with career, education, and employment) are affected as regional offices are closed.

For veterans who are newly transitioning from active service, these support services can be vital, so their suspension may impede onboarding into civilian life.

Cemeteries, Memorials, and Grounds Maintenance

- The permanent placement of headstones/markers in national cemeteries is suspended during the shutdown.
- Grounds maintenance, landscaping, and upkeep at VA cemeteries are halted.
- Processing of "pre-need burying" applications, which plan for future burials in VA cemeteries, is paused.
- Printing of new Presidential Memorial Certificates are stopped.
- Public affairs, outreach, social media communications, Vet-Resources emails, and responses to press inquiries are suspended.

While not directly life-critical services, these memorial and public-facing functions contribute to dignity, recognition, and public engagement for veterans and

their families.

Excepted vs. Non-Excepted Staff

As noted, the VA estimates ~97% of its workforce will continue to work. Those employees performing “essential” or statutory functions, especially in medical care, crisis support, benefits payments, and appeals, fall into this excepted category.

Non-excepted staff—often in support roles, public-facing regional offices, outreach, or administrative tasks—are subject to furloughs during the shutdown period.

Furloughs and Back Pay

While furloughs temporarily suspend work for non-essential employees, federal precedent indicates that when a shutdown ends and funds are restored, agencies typically reimburse back pay for furlough employees. However, during the period of furlough, employees may experience financial hardship, as they lack pay, benefits, or day-to-day work.

The uncertainty of when pay will resume or how back pay will be administered can create stress, morale

issues, and retention challenges.

Cemetery & Memorial Delay

Funerals and burials proceed, but certain aesthetic or long-term memorial services (placing headstones, grounds upkeep) are deferred. For grieving families, these delays may diminish the dignity or timeliness expected in memorialization.

Conclusion

While the VA is better protected than many agencies during a shutdown, disruptions still occur—particularly in public-facing services, education support, and administrative functions. Veterans relying on in-person help or career transition programs may experience delays. Strengthening funding flexibility and remote capabilities can help ensure that essential services to veterans continue smoothly, regardless of federal funding gridlock.

For further information concerning this topic, please contact your local service officer.

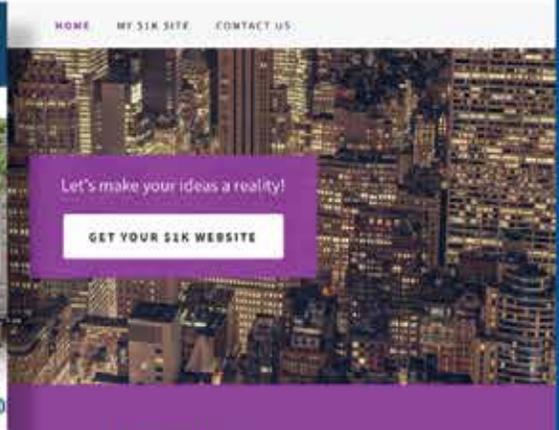


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RT '22

Rollin' Times from the Michigan Paralympic Volunteers of America

BILKIE FAMILY FIELD

Michael Harris, MPVA President, and Bob Vance, MPVA Vice President, present a check to Miguel Tezcu, Miracle League of Plymouth (MLP) Game Day Manager, to the MLP to help further their mission of providing inclusion and recreation for children and adults with disabilities.

Fall Edition 2022



Social





One of our MPVA members, Bobby Gean, is active on Facebook and he reached out to us to share some of his poetry. As he is very talented, some of our members suggested we share an example of his writing in our Rollin' Times Newsletter. So, without further ado, below is a little more about Bobby and one of his well-written poems.

As a disabled veteran of the US Army, with a spinal cord injury classified as incomplete paraplegia and rated 100% disabled, I share my life with my wife and three daughters in Northern Michigan. I am currently at the Hines VA Spinal Injury and Disorder Hospital, where I will spend the next six weeks learning to use the Indego exoskeleton. My approach to life is centered

on gratitude and optimism, and I deliberately avoid dwelling on negative thoughts. Writing poetry has been a transformative experience for me, allowing me to channel my emotions and manage PTSD symptoms. At 59, I discovered that putting my thoughts into verse brings me peace and helps me navigate life's challenges.

- Bobby Gean

Poem by Bobby Gean

Paralyzed Veterans of America walks for me.

The PVA stands quite near,

They share the truths we need to hear.

A sense of self they help instill,

Against the doubt that tries to kill.

They show a path of honest worth,

A reason for our time on earth.

For us they offer steadfast stay,

Through every challenge of the day.

Their presence strong, a constant guide,

With every step they walk beside.

For fairness they will always strive,

To keep our aspirations alive.

With open hearts and actions bold,

A worthy story to be told.

Their daily stand is plain to see,

A steadfast source of dignity from the PVA.

45th



NATIONAL VETERANS
**WHEELCHAIR
GAMES**

DETROIT 2026
JULY 9-14

CO-PRESENTED BY:

VA



U.S. Department
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FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT:
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Photos from Veteran's Day Event





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DATED MATERIAL — PLEASE EXPEDITE!
2026 Winter Edition



Did you know that the MPVA has a Loan Closet Program? Our Loan Closet Program offers durable medical goods, free of charge, on a first come first served basis. The MPVA qualifies "durable medical goods" as any device that may assist with mobility (wheelchairs, walkers, canes, commode seats, shower chairs, adult diapers, and more). These gently used, donated items, are donated to us and are available for those who may need them. **You do not have to be a veteran to utilize this program and there is no cost!**

To find out more about this program and the items that are available, contact or email Brenda Wheeler at:

Phone: (800) 638-6782 or (248) 476-9000

Email: chapterhq@michiganpva.org

Please keep in mind that these items change on a daily basis and are dependent on items that are donated. We also ask that you schedule an appointment to drop off or pick up items.

Please help in spreading the word about this program!

Thank you so much!

Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America
46701 Commerce Center Drive
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www.michiganpva.org