

PARAPLEGIA NEWS JUNE 2024

# PN

## Action On The Hill

Advocacy/Legislation Seminar  
highlights policy priorities

## Working Together

PVA gala salutes  
women veterans

# Dedicated Leader

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1. UTI risk factors defined by Kennedy ML, et al. (2019), 1.0.1155/2019/2757862 Study supported by Coloplast.

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# contents

JUNE 2024 VOL. 78 NO. 6

## ON THE COVER

Former Sen. Elizabeth Dole was presented with Paralyzed Veterans of America's 2024 Gordon H. Mansfield Congressional Leadership Award.

Photo courtesy of Paralyzed Veterans of America

16



16



34

## FEATURES

### 20 Role Models

by Brittany Martin

PVA members recall their forefathers' influence.

### 34 Calling On Congress

by Heather Ansley, Esq., MSW

The PVA Advocacy/Legislation Seminar looks to advance key priorities on Capitol Hill.

### 26 Igniting Change

by Brittany Martin

This year's PVA gala was for the girls.

## ALSO IN THIS ISSUE...

- |                      |                              |                    |
|----------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|
| 6 Editor's Desk      | 42 Newsbeat                  | 53 Classified Ads  |
| 6 Contributors       | 47 Sports & Rec              | 54 And Finally ... |
| 8 PVA Chapter Roster | 52 PVA Service Office Roster |                    |
| 12 PVA Points        | 53 Index of Advertisers      |                    |



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"She is just such a humble servant leader. She has such an affinity for the work we do because that population has been part of her life for decades."

– Heather Ansley, Esq., MSW

16



50



26

## DEPARTMENTS

### 7 PVA From the Top

Robert L. Thomas Jr.

### 9 Reasons & Remarks

Al Kovach Jr.

### 14 On The Hill

Lisa Elijah

### 16 People

Brittany Martin

### 38 Around the House

Rachel Y. Krishnan, AIA

### 50 Veteran Advisor

Michael Snape, NSO

Now in its 78th year and the official publication of Paralyzed Veterans of America, *PN* is a national, monthly magazine that covers news, health, research, lifestyle and issues of interest and concern to veterans and others with spinal-cord injury and disease. Anyone interested in submitting an article to *PN* should consult the Contributors Guidelines found on our website at [pnonline.com](http://pnonline.com). *PN* neither endorses nor guarantees any of the products or services advertised in the magazine. Readers should thoroughly investigate any product or service before making a purchase.

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# JUNE Editor's DESK

**There's that old saying** that "timing is everything," and while the phrase is mostly heard in reference to comedy performances, it was front and center when it came to putting this month's issue of *PN* together.

Although the ideas for this month's feature articles had been in place since last summer, the timing in creating them was something else. There are only nine of us in the office, including three in editorial and a web manager, which makes traveling to cover events tricky. There are only so many of us to go out on the road, and someone has to be in our Phoenix office to take care of the day-to-day editorial operations.

During the second week of April when this issue was being put together, Assistant Editor Brittany Martin was in the Washington, D.C., area to cover the Paralyzed Veterans of America Igniting Change Gala, while Assistant Editor John Groth and Web Content Manager Chris Di Virgilio were in Glen Allen, Va., to cover National Wheelchair Basketball Association (NWBA) championship events for our sister publication *SPORTS 'N SPOKES (S'NS)*. With others taking time off, it was a lonely office.

Despite the tight deadlines and cross-country travel, everything was covered, the magazine was printed on time, and we have some great articles for you in this issue, including about the gala (*Igniting Change* on page 26) and about the NWBA events in the pages of May *S'NS*, as well as online at [sportsnspokes.com](http://sportsnspokes.com). We hope you enjoy all the great content in these issues of *PN* and *S'NS*.



Andy Nemann, Managing Editor

## contributing to this issue...



**Heather Ansley,  
Esq., MSW**  
(p. 34)



**Rachel Y.  
Krishnan, AIA**  
(p. 38)

## PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA

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## A Team Approach

**It's hard to believe that last month,** Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) hosted its 78th Annual Convention in Minneapolis.

This means it has been a year since I was elected to the position of PVA national president. I joined this organization in 1992, and ever since then, I have been trying to be more than just a member.

I began volunteering with the PVA Buckeye Chapter, where I was eventually voted to the board of directors as an alternate member. Who would have believed back then that I would become the national president of such an organization?

writing articles in this section didn't make him feel as though he's on the top, and anyone who becomes the national president should always try and stay humble and do not believe that you are above anyone else.

I remember what Al wrote, and I have been trying to stay well-grounded and keep in mind that no one individual can do it alone. It is all about the team and our mission.

For most of fiscal year 2024, the PVA Executive Committee was down one team member, but that didn't hinder us from working hard at trying to accomplish our mission. We worked collaboratively to begin the process of establishing a chapter in the New York area, along with assisting each other with chapter issues when needed.

We've worked closely with each and every department inside PVA to keep the focus on our members and their needs.

By the time this article is published, we will know who the PVA national president and executive committee members are for fiscal year 2025. If I'm reelected, I will continue to use the team approach to solving problems and finding new ways to move the organization forward. I will continue to work on ensuring that those who take care of us are taken care of, too.

As legendary Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame coach Phil Jackson said, "The strength of the team is each individual member.

The strength of each member is the team."

We know one person can make a difference, but the results are immeasurable when you work together.

Thank you to everyone who is a part of Team PVA. ■

**"The strength of the team is each individual member. The strength of each member is the team."**

— Phil Jackson



Robert L. Thomas Jr.

Over the past year, I have represented PVA to the best of my abilities and ensured that we are seen in a good light by all the other service organizations and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

I remember reading a PVA From The Top column in *PN* by then-PVA National President Al Kovach Jr., who stated (and I paraphrase)



# pva chapter roster

## ARIZONA

### Arizona PVA

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www.azpva.org

## CALIFORNIA

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800-273-6789  
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www.bawpva.org

### California PVA

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Bldg. 150 Room R-204  
Long Beach, CA 90822  
562-826-5713

### Cal-Diego PVA

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3350 La Jolla Village Dr.  
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Willoughby Hills, OH 44092  
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804-378-0026 (fax)

## WASHINGTON

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Burien, WA 98166  
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414-328-8910  
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## Tuesdays With Dad

**Mom died last August, so Dad has**

been pretty lonely. To keep him company, I push my wheelchair more than a mile to his home every Tuesday afternoon.

I know if you're my age, you're probably reminded of the *New York Times* best-seller *Tuesdays with Morrie*. However, unlike the book, Dad doesn't teach me any of life's greatest lessons, but I do enjoy listening to his stories while I drink his beer.

Dad is 85 years old, so with the average life expectancy in the United States at 76 years, I should consider myself lucky to have this opportunity to spend so much time with him.

Father's Day falls on June 16 this year. Under normal circumstances, Dad couldn't care less about a holiday to celebrate his role as our father, nor did he ever want us to go to the trouble of buying a gift or giving him a card. However, with this being the first Father's Day without Mom, Dad surprised me when he asked if he could spend time with me and my children.

Growing up, I always considered Father's Day as a consolation prize for dads. I mean, Mother's Day is in May, and we always treated Mom like she was queen for the day while showering her with gifts, cards and kindness.

But Father's Day is celebrated just a few weeks later and with little fanfare, as if we feel guilty and don't want Dad to feel left out. I ask myself, "Why bother? Dad just wants to be alone and watch golf on his television. Does Hallmark need to sell more cards, and does Dad really need another cigar?" After a little research on the history of Father's Day, I found my cynical assumptions weren't far from the truth.

Father's Day was the idea of Sonora Smart Dodd. She was inspired by a sermon at her church in 1909 that explained the incredible series of events that led to the establishment of Mother's Day. With strong roots tied to the children and mothers who survived the Civil War, Dodd believed that fathers also needed to be honored for their efforts during the war.

After all, Dodd's father, a Civil War veteran, was a single parent who raised his six children following his wife's death.

Dodd's idea of honoring fathers was seen as a noble cause, but it didn't get much traction at first. However, American-style capitalism went into effect, as Hallmark began printing Father's Day cards by the 1920s.

In the 1930s, Dodd's advocacy for the celebration of dads began to receive support from manufacturers of ties, cigars and men's clothing retailers. Matter of fact, any trade group that could benefit from such a holiday jumped on board. Unfortunately, Congress repeatedly defeated the idea of Father's Day, perceiving the holiday as an attempt by merchants to duplicate the commercial successes of Mother's Day.

Nearly 60 years after Dodd came up with the idea of honoring fathers, then-U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson issued a presidential proclamation designating the third Sunday in June as Father's Day. Yet, it didn't become a national holiday until then-U.S. President Richard Nixon signed it into law April 24, 1972.

As my siblings and I grew up, Dad always served as our fearless leader — the strong patriarchal figure that we needed him to be. With age, his ability to continue in that role has diminished, and I see him becoming more dependent upon us.

I know he hates the attention, but with Mom gone, I find myself spending more time with him. Sometimes sharing a beer with Dad every Tuesday can get a bit mundane; after all, he hasn't come up with any new stories in a really long time. However, I know our visits have had a positive impact on Dad's mental health, and that's all I can hope for.

I guess I should consider every Tuesday as Father's Day, but I'll forego the traditional gifts like ties and cigars. Maybe just making the effort to spend time with my father, politely listening to him repeating the same old stories while I drink his beer will be the greatest gift I can give to him.

Happy Father's Day to all the dads out there.

As always, please let me know your thoughts at [al@pvmag.com](mailto:al@pvmag.com). ■

I know our visits have had a positive impact on Dad's mental health, and that's all I can hope for.

# Look Ma! No Hands!

**Discover New Found Freedom When  
Self-Balancing Technology Meets  
Hands-Free Innovation**

In the realm of technological innovation, few advancements have captured the imagination quite like self-balancing technology. Allowing for stable movement without the need for manual balancing by the user, self-balancing technology represents a fundamental shift in the way we interact with our environment and offers newfound levels of convenience and accessibility across various aspects of daily life. It is an especially exciting time in the adaptive technology industry, where the integration of self-balancing technology has ushered in a transformative era where personal mobility is redefined and life-limiting barriers can be shattered.

## The Evolution of Self-Balancing Technology

Although its foundations can be traced back to early experiments in robotics and motion control, it wasn't until American inventor Dean Kamen unveiled the Segway in 2001 the general public was introduced to the incredible potential of self-balancing technology. Thanks to continued advancements in sensors, actuators,

and artificial intelligence algorithms, self-balancing technology has made incredible progress in recent years. Today, self-balancing technology has become standard in devices like electric scooters and hoverboards, all of which have revolutionized how we move and interact with our surroundings.

## Personal Mobility Redefined

Electric scooters equipped with gyroscopic, self-balancing stabilization systems have become ubiquitous in urban areas worldwide, offering people a convenient, user-friendly alternative to traditional modes of

transportation. Beyond their urban transportation applications, however, self-balancing mobility devices are also enhancing accessibility and creating new life-expanding opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

For example, self-balancing wheelchairs have emerged as a game-changer for individuals with mobility impairments, enabling them to overcome barriers to accessibility and empowering them to lead more active, independent, and fulfilling lives. These devices utilize sophisticated algorithms to help users maintain stability on a variety of terrains, allowing them to navigate uneven surfaces and obstacles with safety and confidence.

**"I'm not a motorized chair kind of guy, but I saw the Omeo and thought this could be the best mobility device I've ever seen!"**





## Get to Know the Omeo

One such self-balancing personal mobility device, the Omeo, was developed in New Zealand by engineer/product designer Kevin Halsall for his friend Marcus Thompson, with whom he shared a keen interest in archery. After seeing the mobility challenges that Marcus, a paraplegic, faced when using his traditional wheelchair in the outdoors doing archery, Kevin challenged himself to design a device that would increase Marcus' mobility and give him the freedom of movement to compete as an equal.

Now also available in the U.S. and Canada, the Omeo uses self-balancing technology to improve the lives of people across the country and around the world – enabling them to do more, see more, and enjoy more freedom and independence. Several unique features and functions differentiate the Omeo from other products in the self-balancing category:

- **Hands-Free Navigation or Joystick Steering** – Users control the direction, speed, and braking of their Omeo through body movement. Active Seat Control gives users the freedom to drive hands-free by shifting their body weight to move left and right or forward and backward. Those who prefer to be more hands-on can control the Omeo using its joystick, which enables users to move left and right with the joystick and control their forward and backward movements by shifting their body weight.

- **Off-Road Capability** – While the Omeo in its standard configuration handles beautifully on a wide variety of terrain, the popular Off-Road Kit allows users to take their Omeo just about anywhere. It includes wheel guards and rugged all-terrain wheels that are suitable for outdoor use and a wide range of environments. Because the larger off-road tires have no crown and operate at low pressure, they provide a smooth ride and great traction on surfaces including sand, packed snow, gravel, and dirt.



"The Omeo opens a whole new world to someone in a wheelchair. For me, the beach was off-limits until getting one. Now I can enjoy that activity with my wife and kids."

- **0-Degree Turning Radius** – When navigating the Omeo in a tight space, its 0-degree turning radius allows users to move smoothly and change directions in busy, crowded areas or small rooms with perfect precision.

- **Long Battery Life** – The Omeo's lithium-ion batteries allow for travel of up to 30 miles on a single charge. Its dual battery system backup makes the Omeo the ideal personal transport, even for busy days out.

Manual wheelchair users will also appreciate another benefit of the Omeo: avoiding wear-and-tear injuries to the shoulder joint that many traditional wheelchair users experience due to the repetitive nature of wheelchair propulsion.

## Real-Life Omeo Stories

Retired U.S. Navy SEAL David Charbonnet uses his Omeo to get him out to the water's edge with ease. A San Diego native who lives just minutes from the ocean, he takes his family to play at the beach on most weekends. With his Omeo, he also accompanies his wife on her marathon training runs, an activity they enjoyed together before his injury. For David, the Omeo is more than a personal mobility device; it is a tool that gives him the freedom to say

"yes" to activities that bring his family closer together.

As a gold and bronze medalist in track and field events at the National Veteran Wheelchair Games, Patrick "Mac" McElrath, a retired U.S. Army Ranger, has always pushed himself to be competitive in any and every activity. The idea of being able to keep up with his kids on their longboard adventures and hunting excursions was one of the first things that attracted him to the Omeo – and it was the thing that ultimately sealed the deal. "I'm not a motorized chair kind of guy," says Mac, "but I saw the Omeo and thought this could be the best mobility device I've ever seen!"

## The Future of Self-Balancing Technology

Self-balancing personal mobility devices like the Omeo represent a monumental leap forward in the quest for a more interconnected, equal, and inclusive society. By reimagining how we move, these innovations are transforming people's lives and reopening doors that would otherwise have been closed. To learn more about the Omeo and how it might work for you, scan the QR code below.

To know more  
visit [MyOmeo.com](http://MyOmeo.com) or  
call (520) 561-8444





## An Accessible Home Run

### The Washington

Nationals' commitment to making the national pastime open to everyone is being recognized by Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA).

PVA awarded the Nationals the 2024 Barrier-Free America Award before a

sivity at Nationals Park in Washington, D.C.

"The Washington Nationals helped set the standard for accessibility across professional sporting venues," says PVA National President and Chair of the Board Robert Thomas Jr., in an April press release. "Their commitment to ensuring all fans can fully

Not only have the Nationals put in a tremendous effort to remove physical barriers for attendees who utilize assistive mobility devices, like my power wheelchair, but they have also worked hard to ensure each fan feels included and thought of from the moment they enter the stadium to the moment they leave."

Built in 2008 with accessible recommendations made by PVA, Nationals Park works to simplify the game-day experience for fans who utilize assistive mobility devices, such as wheelchairs and scooters.

More than half of stadium-goers can access their seats without using escalators, elevators or ramps because of the intentional, inclusive way the field is positioned below street level.

The ballpark has several Americans with Disabilities Act-compliant features, including accessible drop-off areas, parking spaces and ticket booths, as well as accessible restrooms and concession stands.

It exceeds legal accessibility design standards with its PVA-recommended

wheelchair-accessible seating throughout the stadium, so everybody has a chance to sit in a variety of areas regardless of ticket price.

"We are honored to receive PVA's Barrier-Free America Award," says Senior Vice President & General Manager of Nationals Park Frank Gambino in the press release. "Accessibility has been a priority since the ballpark was conceptualized and designed prior to its opening in 2008, and we continually work to ensure that every single guest has a world-class experience. This recognition is a testament to our staff's dedication and commitment to creating an inclusive environment for all."

PVA's Architecture Department advises on accessible design projects, from public buildings and stadiums, like Nationals Park, to memorials, cultural venues and many other structures. They help develop building codes and standards for building designers, developers, facility owners and contractors nationwide.

For more information on the Barrier-Free America Award, including past winners, visit [pva.org/bfaa](https://pva.org/bfaa).

## Honoring Women Veterans

The Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) Mid-Atlantic Chapter was recognized March 21 during a ceremony at the

COURTESY OF PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA



Senior Vice President & General Manager of Nationals Park Frank Gambino, holding award, accepts Paralyzed Veterans of America's (PVA) 2024 Barrier-Free America Award April 8 in Washington, D.C., from PVA CEO Carl Blake, far left, PVA National President and Chair of the Board Robert Thomas Jr., seated, and PVA Director of Architecture & Facilities Mark Lichter, far right.

home game April 8 to celebrate the team's dedication to accessibility and inclu-

participate in the excitement of America's favorite pastime is truly exceptional.



Paralyzed Veterans of America Mid-Atlantic Chapter Vice President Jessie Oliff, right, shakes hands with Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin.

Virginia War Memorial in Richmond, Va.

The ceremony celebrated women veterans' longstanding history of service in defending the country.

Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin and Lt. Gov. Winsome Earle-Sears, a Marine Corps veteran, recognized PVA Mid-Atlantic Chapter Vice President Jessie Oliff for her efforts in unifying the support of the PVA Mid-Atlantic Chapter Women's Council to push forward the introduction of a new Virginia license plate honoring women veterans.

The council initiated a petition drive to secure the

signatures necessary to have the license plate approved.

The day celebrated the achievements of women veterans and showcased the chapter's commitment and dedication to the PVA mission.

## Penske Donates \$1.17 Million

In celebration of its more-than-decade-long partnership with Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA), longtime supporter Penske Automotive Group donated \$1.17 million in 2023 to the nonprofit to support paralyzed veterans nationwide.


The amount is composed of donations from generous customers and employees of Penske Automotive Group, along with a matching contribution from the company.

"As we commemorate this remarkable milestone, we express our enduring gratitude to Penske Automotive Group for their unwavering dedication and longtime partnership to serve those who have sacrificed for our country," says PVA National President and Chair of the Board Robert Thomas Jr., in an April release. "Penske Automotive Group's support helps fuel our mission at PVA and enables us to provide critical support and services to veterans with catastrophic injuries and diseases like MS [multiple sclerosis] and ALS [amyotrophic lateral sclerosis]. Together, we have forged an indispensable alliance rooted in our shared values of resilience, service and compassion, making a profound difference in the

lives of paralyzed veterans, their families and caregivers."

Over the last decade, Penske Automotive Group is responsible for nearly \$10 million of donations to PVA. This year's donation, raised through Penske Automotive Group's annual Service Matters campaign, will directly benefit veterans nationwide by providing the resources they need to live full and independent lives.

"We are honored to mark our 10th year alongside PVA, making a real difference for veterans facing spinal-cord injuries and illnesses," says Robert H. Kurnick Jr., president of Penske Automotive Group. "We offer our deepest gratitude to our dedicated team and customers who champion PVA's mission and give so generously. Together, we're empowering our heroes."

Visit [pva.org/pagserves](https://pva.org/pagserves) or contact a Penske Automotive Group dealership to learn more about their Service Matters campaign. 

## Help Make *PN* A Better Publication

Dear Readers,

I'd like to take a moment to ask for your help. We are conducting a reader survey with the help of Readex Research to learn about you, your interests and use of *PN* magazine. A group of subscribers has been selected at random to receive the survey.

Later this month, if selected, you may receive a print version of the survey in your mailbox or an email from

Readex Research asking you to participate in an online survey. The email message may end up in your spam folder, so if you'd be so kind as to check there and take a few minutes to complete the survey, I'd be grateful!

We'd really like to hear from you!

— Al Kovach Jr., Editor-In-Chief

## Make Your Voice Heard

**Every year, Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) chapters send members and staff to Washington, D.C., to take on Congress and advocate on important policy priorities.**

Previously, the PVA Advocacy/Legislation Seminar coincided with early March's annual joint session of the Senate and House Veterans' Affairs committees, when the PVA national president testifies on PVA's policy priorities.

This year looks a little different, with the seminar taking place June 11-13, but the mission is still the same. During this time, PVA advocates will speak with their senators and representatives and share their personal stories as to why the organization's policy priorities are important.

## Grassroots Advocacy

The PVA Advocacy/Legislation Seminar is where the real magic happens in the halls of Congress.

At its core, grassroots advocacy empowers individuals to create tangible policy changes through their life experiences. Congress has a responsibility to listen to those people they represent.

Bills have been created based on a singular constituent having a meeting with a Congress member on an issue he or she wished to resolve. The voice of the people is a powerful tool — one that, as a collective, PVA uses to push issues across the finish line.

PVA understands just how important the experiences of advocates are and created a series of advocacy webinars to assist members and supporters in becoming even better at telling their stories and influencing policy. For anyone new to the

advocacy space, or even those who wish to refresh their knowledge, the series includes five webinars with additional resources to educate advocates on the history of Congress, the

PVA.ORG/RESEARCH-RESOURCES/DISABILITY-RIGHTS-ADVOCACY/WEBINARS



makeup of committees and the role of stakeholders, as well as giving guidance from former congressional staffers and advocates.

The webinars, in order, include:

- Fundamentals of Government
- The Legislative Process
- Stakeholders of Advocacy
- Understanding the Issues and Becoming a Change Agent
- Connecting the Dots

In addition to watching the videos, you can also learn more by reviewing PowerPoint presentations and additional resources for each topic. Even if you watched the sessions live, now is a good time to check them out again at [pva.org/research-resources/disability-rights-advocacy/webinars](https://pva.org/research-resources/disability-rights-advocacy/webinars).

## Join The Webinar

The time of year for the PVA Advocacy/Legislation Seminar isn't the only thing that has changed.

This year, PVA has introduced a way for all PVA members to be advocates on the organization's behalf. On June 4, there will be an Advocate All-Call webinar, where PVA staff will go over the issues they plan to advocate for with Congress and ask you to reach out to your own representatives on issues that are important to you.

You can register for the webinar at [pva.zoom.us/join/register/3717121852745/WN\\_3rlunH6mSYa92-6d-RFlNw#](https://pva.zoom.us/join/register/3717121852745/WN_3rlunH6mSYa92-6d-RFlNw#/) registration. There will also be a social media toolkit and a list of campaigns at [pva.org/research-resources/pva-action-force](https://pva.org/research-resources/pva-action-force).

While it's not possible to have every PVA member come to Washington, D.C., for the seminar, these new opportunities and resources can help more members advocate on the issues.

## Sign Up

PVA Action Force is a national grassroots advocacy network.

This tool isn't reserved for PVA members alone. Anyone interested in





the issues PVA supports can act. In fact, the more voices taking action on issues, the more Congress will listen.

PVA intends to use every tool at its disposal to raise awareness on the issues that are important to the organization. That's why PVA needs you to share information about its work with your families, friends, caregivers, co-workers, social media followers and anyone else.

Sign up on the PVA VoterVoice platform ([votervoice.net/PVA/home](http://votervoice.net/PVA/home)), and make sure you're getting updates on new campaigns PVA has launched; blog posts keeping advocates up-to-date on



news and information; and a quarterly newsletter highlighting some of the noteworthy news happening in the government relations realm.

PVA needs your voice to help expand its grassroots effort. If a campaign is of personal significance to you, PVA would love to hear your story. Life experiences are what drive policy into becoming law, and PVA needs your voice make an impact.

*Lisa Elijah is PVA's grassroots advocacy manager in Washington, D.C. She can be reached at [lisa@pva.org](mailto:lisa@pva.org).* ■

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BRITTANY MARTIN

## Honoring Elizabeth

**A former senator with a name** that might be familiar to Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) members has earned the organization's 2024 Gordon H. Mansfield Congressional Leadership Award.

Elizabeth Dole was presented with the award during a VIP reception prior to PVA's Igniting Change Gala April 12 at the MGM National Harbor & Casino hotel in Oxon Hill, Md. The award is PVA's highest honor given to current and former members of Congress who have moved the needle or advanced legislative priorities in the areas of veterans' health care, benefits and disability civil rights.

"Let me just say, I have the greatest admiration and respect for PVA, and this means the world to me to receive this beautiful award. Thank you so very much. It's something I'll treasure the rest of my life," Dole says upon receiving the award from PVA National President and Chair of the Board Robert Thomas Jr. "And, you know, PVA has always been such a strong voice for our wounded veterans and for their caregivers, and I'm so grateful for that, for the opportunity to work even closer with PVA now."

Dole was selected for the award due to her extensive history of advocacy and support for the care of veterans and their caregivers. PVA CEO Carl Blake says in recent years, Dole has come to the forefront with her Elizabeth Dole Foundation, which she founded in 2012. The foundation raises awareness and support for young spouses, mothers, fathers, siblings, children and other loved ones who care for the nation's wounded warriors at home.

"Their whole mission is essentially wrapped around the concept of military and veteran caregivers. And the fact is,



KETH MELLINCK

Former Sen. Elizabeth Dole

as veterans' organizations go, probably no organization in the veteran community understands the importance of caregivers better than PVA," Blake says. "Nearly all of our members rely on a caregiver of some type to support them, to live their daily life, to be independent. And it just felt like, given her long history, both when she was in the Senate and since she left, in support of that community, it seemed like a natural decision to recognize all of, really, her lifetime of work, both when she was in the Senate and now as an advocate to the U.S. Congress, to benefit that population."

### Lifetime Of Service

Dole's life is dotted with many "firsts" for women.

A native of Salisbury, N.C., Dole graduated with honors from Duke University in 1958 and earned a master's degree in teaching from Harvard University in 1960 and a law degree from Harvard Law School in 1965.

Serving in various roles throughout her career, Dole sought ways to help marginalized communities reach their full potential and enhance their well-being.

She served as deputy to the special assistant for consumer affairs under then-U.S. President Richard Nixon, launching a career of dedication to public safety. She spent six years as a member of the Federal Trade Commission (1973-79) and two years as assistant to then-President Ronald Reagan for the Office of Public Liaison (1981-83). In 1983, she became the first woman to be appointed U.S. secretary of transportation, serving for five years.

In 1991, Dole took over as president of the American Red Cross. During her eight years as president, she led a massive transformation of the way the Red Cross collects, tests and distributes one-half of the nation's blood supply.

She also was only the second woman to serve as president of the





Red Cross since Clara Barton founded the organization in 1881.

Following the Red Cross, Dole sought the Republican presidential nomination, becoming the first viable female candidate from a major political party. In 2002, Dole became the first woman elected to represent North Carolina in the U.S. Senate, and she served until 2009.

## Working With PVA

Dole's history with PVA began in the 1980s and continued throughout her time in the Senate. She was a champion for veterans because she was married to a veteran with a disability, the

KEITH MELLNICK



The Gordon H. Mansfield Congressional Leadership Award has been presented since 2015.

late Sen. Bob Dole, whom she married in December 1975 and who died in 2021.

A World War II Army veteran who sustained paralyzing injuries to his right arm and hand, Bob was the recipient of the inaugural Gordon H. Mansfield Congressional Leadership Award in 2015 in celebration of the 25th anniversary of the

Americans with Disabilities Act.

Blake helped present the award to Bob in 2015 and says giving the award to Elizabeth this year felt like a “full-circle moment.”

“Bob Dole’s one of my heroes,” Blake says. “And to me, Bob Dole and Elizabeth Dole are the epitome of individuals who have spent their entire life devoted to service. And, you know, we could have given it to them together because they spent their life together serving the country in various forms.”

PVA Chief Policy Officer Heather Ansley, Esq., MSW, says Elizabeth has done so much for PVA, paralyzed veterans and their caregivers. Ansley says it has been

Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) leaders and staff presented the award prior to PVA’s Igniting Change Gala.

an honor to work alongside the Elizabeth Dole Foundation to highlight veterans’ caregivers — whom Elizabeth calls the “hidden heroes.”

“She is just such a humble servant leader,” Ansley says. “She has such an affinity for the work we do because that population has been part of her life for decades. Senator Bob Dole was a disabled veteran because of his military service. And she lived it. And then through that, she saw the work of organizations like ours, and so, she not only has really dedicated her life to disabled veterans, but now to caregivers. And I think that she sees that in our mission and in the work that



Paralyzed Veterans of America Chief Policy Officer Heather Ansley, Esq., MSW, left, with Elizabeth Dole.

we do. And also to know that she is continuing to carry on her husband’s legacy, I think is a real joy for her.”

During the gala, Elizabeth surprised PVA leaders with a \$100,000 donation. She praised the work PVA has done in conjunction with her foundation, especially on the Elizabeth Dole Home Care Act in support of veterans’ caregivers.



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KEITH MELLNICK



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Gordon H. Mansfield

If passed, the act would put into statute requirements for Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) home and community-based services, and it would remove the cap on the amount of money the VA can spend to help a veteran stay at home. At press time in early May, the legislation had not passed yet, though Ansley remained hopeful.

## The Award

The Gordon H. Mansfield Congressional Leadership Award is given each year to one current or former elected official who has consistently demonstrated exemplary leadership and steadfast support for PVA's priorities in the areas of veterans' health care, benefits and disability civil rights.

The award is named in honor of late former PVA Executive Director and Army veteran Mansfield, who sustained a spinal-cord injury while rescuing a fallen comrade during the Vietnam War in 1968. He later served as acting VA secretary and deputy secretary and VA chief operating officer.

Mansfield died in January 2013, and the award was established in 2015 by the PVA Board of Directors at the 69th Annual PVA Convention in San Diego. ■

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# IMPACTING LIVES THROUGH SCIENCE: Funding Research to Improve Life After SCI/D

## 2025 GRANT CYCLE OPENS APRIL 1

Paralyzed Veterans of America Spinal Cord Injury Research Foundation funds grants to promote innovative research to find treatments and cures for paralysis, support efforts to improve lives of individuals living with SCI/D, and fund SCI/D Fellowships to encourage young researchers to specialize in the area of spinal cord research.

Awards will be made in November 2024 for the funding period beginning on **January 1, 2025**.

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# Role

PVA members recall their forefathers' influence.

*by Brittany Martin*

## Multi-generational

military families are not uncommon among Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) members. Many have grandparents, parents, siblings, aunts, uncles or cousins who've served before, with or after them in the armed forces.

And in honor of Father's Day June 16, PVA members reflected on how their fathers', grandfathers' and even great-grandfathers' military service impacted them and their decision to join the military, as well. Here are some of their stories.

### Tonya Andrews

PVA Lone Star Chapter member Tonya Andrews is 44 years old and lives in Argyle, Texas. She served in the Air Force from 2002 to 2008 and has multiple sclerosis (MS).

Her late grandfather, Alex Thibodeaux, served in the Army during World War II.

"For me, it was his dedication. I mean, it was a hard time for African-Americans in America, but he wanted to give back to his nation," she says.

Her dad, Joseph Guillory, also served in the Marine Corps for 22 years. She joined because she wanted to continue his love of country, giving back and dedication to the Constitution. She says she always knew she'd be joining the Air Force and signed up her first day of college in 1998.

"When my dad left me at college, he told me two things. He said, 'Don't cut your hair, and don't join the military.' So, I learned the fastest way to anger an enlisted Marine is to become an officer in the Air Force. He did not want me to join because he felt he did his time for his family," she says. "But the drive and the skills and the life goals that he instilled in his family he got from being in the military. And I wanted





# Models

ILLUSTRATION BY KERRY. © GETTY IMAGES/ STRIZH/ PETEKARICI

that in my life. I mean, my dad truly believes in his country, and he gave that down to me. You know, that love of country, as well as the love of family and the love of God, and I wanted to continue that. If I wouldn't have gotten sick, I would have stayed in my entire career. Just that dedication to duty, that dedication to a mission and that camaraderie you get with your fellow service members. I saw that my entire life growing up that he had with his fellow Marines, and I wanted that in my life."

Andrews says her father and grandfather shared many stories of their time in the service, from fun memories to some of the struggles they had learning to co-mingle.

"My grandfather being in a totally Black unit and struggling when he came back home to the racism he felt that he didn't have in the military," she says. "My dad and my uncles were the same way. They were Vietnam-era veterans — to face what they faced over

there and to come home to an ungrateful nation. For me, it was the exact opposite that I felt when I came home from deployment. I came home to a very grateful nation. So, the stories that they shared with me really emphasized to me the importance of service to your country. And I can see that reflected through my cousins and the rest of my family, too — that desire to give back to the country that gives you everything, that drive to just serve."

THREE PHOTOS COURTESY OF TONYA ANDREWS





TWO PHOTOS COURTESY OF JAY HENCHEN



## Jay Henchen

PVA New England Chapter member Jay Henchen is 48 years old and lives in Rochester, N.Y. He worked in communications in the Air Force from 1995 to 1996 and sustained a level C5-C6 spinal-cord injury (SCI) in a 1996 motorcycle accident.

they had better facilities and because he would have a guaranteed job.

"He explained, 'It's not for everybody. It's for certain people. But what you're doing now is not working. You've got to try something else,'" Jay says.

Jay tried going to community college but decided it wasn't for him. He wanted to get to work and start making money.

"I just felt like I was still doing everything I was doing in high school, just hanging out with my friends," he says. "You know, maybe getting into trouble. Not big trouble like the police or anything, but you're just not doing anything relevant or important."

He talked to his dad, who told him how quickly you grow up when you're in the military.

"And I think that's what I got from my military experience right away, is just how quickly I turned into a man," Jay says.

## Cynthia Lee

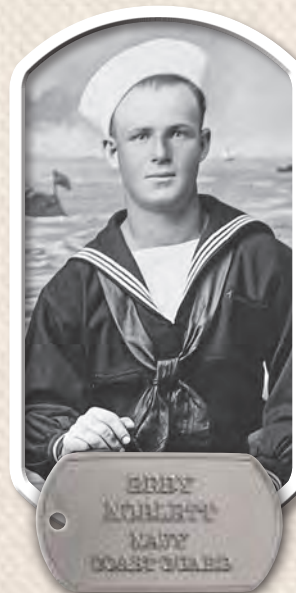
PVA Gateway Chapter member Cynthia Lee is 54 years old and lives in Cherokee Village, Ark. She served as a cryptologic technician interpretive in the Navy from 1990 to 1993 and has Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, which causes loose or unstable joints and fragile skin that tears easily.

"His experience was actually quite different than mine, and probably he would say he had to grow up, going into a military conflict right away and over to Vietnam." — Jay Henchen

Several of his family members have served in the military, but he says his father, Michael Henchen, who joined the Marine Corps at age 17 and served during the Vietnam War, was his biggest influence.

"His experience was actually quite different than mine, and probably he would say he had to grow up, going into a military conflict right away and over to Vietnam," Jay says.

Jay says his father encouraged him to join the Air Force because



TWO PHOTOS COURTESY OF CYNTHIA LEE



"I thought it was kind of cool that my grandfather and my father were in the Army. I kind of wanted to continue the tradition. I didn't think any of my cousins were going to go into the military, so I'm pretty much the only person in my generation that joined the Army." — **Melanie Parrett**

Her great-grandfather, Erby Noblett, served in the Navy during World War I and later became a pipefitter in the Coast Guard.

Noblett died when Lee was about 11 or 12 years old, but she says he impressed upon her that serving your country's military was the honorable thing to do.

"He was trying to get me to be the first woman to go into the military in the family," she says. "He wanted me to be honorable and to love my country and love God and be a good citizen. He always said it was very important to be a good example to your family and your country."

She says she idolized her great-grandfather, so joining another branch was never even an option.

"It was so neat to be so different from someone, yet serving for one purpose, no matter what the job you were doing was," she says. "I've never had another job that felt so purposeful and so meaningful."

## **Melanie Parrett**

PVA Northwest Chapter member Melanie Parrett is 42 years old and lives in Tacoma, Wash. She served as a linguist in the Army from 2000 to 2006 and has MS.

She says she joined the military because she wanted to get out of her hometown of Seattle and see the world. Her dad, Robert Clairmont, served as a heavy duty mechanic in the Army during Vietnam.

"He was stationed in Germany, and just what he would talk up was the experience of being in and the people you meet and the places you get to go and the camaraderie," she says. "And then also the benefits. He did talk to me about the benefits of going in, like, 'This is how you can go to school,' which he was the first person in his family to attend college, and then I was the first person that actually graduated. It's not that he didn't want me to join the Army, but he told me the Air Force had better food. He told me they used to drive to a different base in Germany just to go to their dining hall."

TWO PHOTOS COURTESY OF MELANIE PARRETT



Her late grandfather, Phillip Clairmont, also served in the Army during World War II.

"I thought it was kind of cool that my grandfather and my father were in the Army," she says. "I kind of wanted to continue the tradition. I didn't think any of my cousins were going to go into the military, so I'm pretty much the only person in my generation that joined the Army. I do have a sister that went into the Navy. And at the time also, they told me that I didn't have to cut my hair. That was a big deciding factor in the '90s. I did not want to cut my hair."

## **Joe Bludeau**

PVA Texas Chapter Treasurer Joe Bludeau is 45 years old and lives in New Braunfels, Texas. He served in the Army from 2001 to 2017 and has MS.

His father, Herbert Bludeau, served in the Army during Vietnam from 1961 to 1964.

"He basically got his draft number and said, 'Screw you, I'm going to do this on my own,'" Joe says. "He's like, 'I'm gonna at least pick what I'm doing.'"



Herbert served in air defense artillery and worked with the Nike Hercules missile.

"Most of his stories were like what he calls 'water cooler stories,' funny stories," Joe says.

Joe followed in his father's footsteps, first serving in air defense artillery, but spending most of his career in the Army Judge Advocate General's Corps.

TWO PHOTOS COURTESY OF JOE BLUDEAU



Joe says he was in Army ROTC in high school and wanted to join the Army right after graduation, but his parents "bribed" him to go to college by promising to buy him a truck. He didn't like college, so he joined the Army at age 22.

"I just think it's such a familiarity in my family that I just always knew Army, and that's the only one [military branch] that really was in my mind," he says.

And now Joe's 30-year-old stepson, Zach, is continuing the tradition as an Army drill sergeant.

"In our family, everyone serves," Joe says.

## Terry Hayes

PVA Florida Gulf Coast Chapter member Terry Hayes is 65 years old and lives in North Fort Myers, Fla. She served in the Army from 1977 to 1979, and she is a paraplegic due to a progressive brain disease.

Her late father, James C. Hayes, served two years in the Navy and 20 years in the Army. He was in World War II, Korea and Vietnam, and Terry says he was a big factor in her decision to join the Army.

"He was just extremely proud to be a soldier," she says. "I mean, he spent countless hours shining his boots, shining his brass. He always just wanted to be impeccable in his uniform, and he was. I think that he was just so proud to be an American and so proud to wear a military uniform and serve his country, and he just took such pride in it, and that just made a big impression on me that serving your country is something that you should do. It's a way to give back."

She decided to enlist in the Army after spending a year in college and didn't even consider the other branches.

"My dad made flashcards of all the Army ranks because he said, 'You have to know these, so we're going to practice, and you have



TWO PHOTOS COURTESY OF TERRY HAYES



to physically get in shape.’ And he said, ‘Don’t volunteer for anything.’ So he gave me lots of tips and pointers for basic training,” she says. “And then when I finally got to see him at our graduation, I was

McDonald, in the Navy. For Lewis, hearing stories about their unique travels was the biggest factor in her decision to join the military.

“My grandfather, Frank, was on a battleship in the South Pacific during the missions to drop off the H-bombs,” she says. “He wasn’t on the [USS] *Indianapolis* or anything like that, but just the amount of travel that they did was kind of the biggest thing. I mean, the fact that even going to war, which is a horrible thing, my grandfather went to Guam and Japan and Hawaii and Midway Island [Atoll] and all these tiny



THREE PHOTOS COURTESY OF JESSICA LEWIS

just ready to bust a gut with pride for him to see me in my Army uniform. That would have to be one of the happiest days of my life is when he finally got to see me wearing an Army uniform.”

## Jessica Lewis

PVA Lone Star Chapter member Jessica Lewis (McDonald) is 37 years old and lives in Leander, Texas. She served as a signals intelligence analyst in the Army from 2005 to 2011, and she has MS.

Her dad, John McDonald, served as a Seabee in the Navy Reserve and then transitioned to active duty Army after she and her brother joined. She enlisted shortly before her 19th birthday.

“I grew up in a very pro-military family, and it was the natural choice for me,” she says. “I remember planning on joining one of the armed services as far back as 10 years old.”

Both of her late grandfathers served during World War II, with her mom’s father, Prat Cambre, in the Coast Guard and her father’s father, Frank

little South Pacific atolls. And I always thought that was the most interesting thing about the military was the fact that you would just be taken to all of these unique places.”

Her dad enlisted in the Reserves in 2001 and was discharged from the Army in 2011.

She and her dad were even deployed in Iraq at the same time in 2009, although they never got to see each other.

“I would get a call every once in a while, because we’re both intelligence analysts. He was an all-source intelligence analyst. And so I would get a call in my office every once in a while and people would say, ‘Sergeant McDonald, your dad’s calling on the secure line.’ And I was like, ‘Oh, yeah, he’s at one of the bases over in Baghdad.’”

For more stories, visit [pnonline.com](http://pnonline.com). ■





This year's PVA gala was for the girls.

by Brittany Martin  
photos courtesy of  
Paralyzed Veterans  
of America

**Paralyzed Veterans of America** (PVA) has been making positive changes in the lives of its members and all people with disabilities for over 76 years. But it hasn't done it alone.

That's why the organization brought together about 300 of its partners, members, special guests and donors April 12 to honor the people and companies that are blazing a path forward and joining PVA in its mission to

make the world a little kinder for veterans with spinal-cord injuries and diseases (SCI/D).

This year's Igniting Change Gala at the MGM National Harbor & Casino hotel in Oxon Hill, Md., featured a special emphasis on the contributions of women veterans, influencers and innovators who have championed inclusivity in the areas of accessibility, employment and medical care.

PVA CEO Carl Blake says over the last several years, PVA has tried to energize its focus





From right, sports journalist and gala emcee Hannah Storm, country music artist Martina McBride and Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) women members celebrate at PVA's Igniting Change Gala.

# Change

The Paralyzed Veterans of America Igniting Change Gala focused on women veterans, influencers and innovators.

around its women members, including developing a Women Veterans Empowerment Retreat and women veterans initiative.

"We wanted them to understand that we're trying to lead change that benefits them, not just sort of the age-old stereotype of who veterans are, who members of the organization are, and it really became an opportunity," Blake says. "I've been with PVA for quite a long time, and I can't recall a time where we really put the focus on this part of our membership, our women members. The time has always been right. We should have done it long before now, and I'm embarrassed to say it took us this long, but I'm glad we're doing it now."

The evening reception began with an honor roll procession of women PVA members led by DMV Percus-







Paralyzed Veterans of America National Vice President Tammy Jones, left, greets sports industry pioneer and author Bonnie-Jill Laflin.

sion Academy, followed by the introduction of emcee and renowned sports journalist Hannah Storm. Guest speakers Wendy Lawrence, a retired Navy captain and former NASA astronaut, and sports industry pioneer and author Bonnie-Jill Laflin, who broke down barriers for women in sports as the first female scout in the NBA, spoke about their challenges.

And to cap off the event, award-winning country music artist Martina McBride performed several of her hits, including the finale, *This One's For The Girls*, during which women PVA members were invited on stage to sing with McBride.

For 45-year-old Army veteran and PVA Buckeye Chapter member Tiffany Davison, who served in 2001 and sustained a level L5 SCI after falling off a confidence wall the size of a multi-story building, getting up on stage with other women PVA members was like a family reunion.

Davison was part of PVA's Veterans Career Program's first 10-week self-employment program in 2023, and she earned a \$2,500 small business grant to help her launch Handy No Cap LLC that designs and manufactures adaptive sportswear for athletes with disabilities.



Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) CEO Carl Blake thanks PVA's partners and sponsors.



Paralyzed Veterans of America Wisconsin Chapter member Angela Walker sings the national anthem.



"I've been with PVA for quite a long time, and I can't recall a time where we really put the focus on this part of our membership, our women members. The time has always been right. We should have done it long before now, and I'm embarrassed to say it took us this long, but I'm glad we're doing it now." — Carl Blake

"Honestly, I was just honored that they invited me to be a part of this," Davison says. "But what it does mean is it gives us female veterans a larger platform. And to be a part of this, it just says to me that they appreciate our input and they're acknowledging us in a society that doesn't necessarily acknowledge what the females do."

## Awards

The evening also included the presentation of several awards: the Veterans Career Program Award presented to Windstream Holdings, the Inclusiv-

ity Award presented to Target Corporation and the Disability Innovation Award presented to L'Oréal. Blake says the honorees have led change in the past and continue to do so today.

Mary Michaels, chief human resources officer, and Paul Strickland, vice president of customer care at Windstream Holdings, a telecommunications and software company, took the stage to accept the Veterans Career Program Award from Charles McCaffrey, director of the PVA Veterans Career Program, Small Business Administration Deputy Administrator Dilawar Syed and Davison.

Windstream Holdings' Paul Strickland, second from left, and Mary Michaels, third from left, accept the Veterans Career Program Award from Dilawar Syed, left, Charles McCaffrey, second from right, and Tiffney Davison.





Retired Navy captain and former NASA astronaut Wendy Lawrence, right, and Paralyzed Veterans of America National Vice President Anne Robinson, center, present the Inclusivity Award award to Target Corporation's Justin Burns.

McCaffrey says Windstream's dedication to veterans extends beyond recruitment. The company actively promotes a work environment where veterans can contribute their unique skills and experiences. As a result, about 14% of Windstream employees are veterans, military spouses or veteran spouses. In addition, the company uses inclusive language in job descriptions, provides remote work options, veteran-focused employee resource groups and accessible accommodations. The company has also supported PVA at the National Veterans Wheelchair Games and regularly participates in Veterans Career Program webinars.

"This award is a reminder of creating a workplace that values diversity, inclusivity and accessibility, and I hope that it will serve as a reminder for all of us and a catalyst for all of us in this room tonight to continue working together to create a future where every individual, regardless of their abilities, can achieve their full potential," Michaels says after accepting the award.



Retired Navy captain and former NASA astronaut Wendy Lawrence speaks about her fight against stereotypes.





Paralyzed Veterans of America National Vice President Tammy Jones, right, presents the Disability Innovation Award to L'Oréal USA's Nicholas K. Iadevaio Jr.

Lawrence followed with a speech describing her struggle to prove her worth to her male counterparts and superiors in the military, then joined PVA National Vice President Anne Robinson to present the PVA Inclusivity Award to Target Corporation.

"The PVA Inclusivity Award is a tribute to our founders, who bravely stood against discrimination, and our current members who continue to fight the same battle today, refusing to accept anything less than they earned, ensuring PVA maintains the highest standard in equality and inclusion," says Robinson during the award presentation. "Target's support of our service members, their families, accessible shopping experiences and offering products that cater to diverse needs demonstrates their dedication to ensuring everyone can enjoy the simple pleasures of everyday life."

Army veteran Justin Burns, Target's senior vice president of assets protection and executive sponsor of the Military Business Council, an employee resource group, says Target's purpose is to bring joy to all families.

"As a veteran, I've always been proud of Target's commitment to military members and their families and the way we show up for

our guests and communities," Burns says after accepting the award. "That commitment comes to life through initiatives like our popular military discount, deeply rooted community partnerships and support for our team."

Next, Laflin described her fight for credibility in the NBA and what drove her to start her nonprofit Hounds, Heroes and Horses, which turns rescue dogs into service and therapy dogs for wounded veterans, and also provides veterans with equine therapy retreats. Laflin then joined PVA National Vice President Tammy Jones to present the Disability Innovation Award to Nicholas K. Iadevaio Jr., vice president of diversity, equity and inclusion for L'Oréal USA.

As the son of a World War II Army veteran, nephew of Ralph Marino, one of the first documented triple amputees of World War II, and a person with disabilities himself, Iadevaio spoke about PVA's long history of innovation and commitment to funding medical research and education and how that aligns with L'Oréal's goals.

"This night is about honoring and celebrating the work of so many amazing women veterans who are challenging the status quo every



The Paralyzed Veterans of America Igniting Change Gala honored the contributions of women veterans.

single day,” Iadevaio says after accepting the award. “At L’Oréal, we are committed to inclusive beauty, which we define as beauty for all and beauty for each. Our mission is to create

the beauty that moves the world. We are driven by a commitment to ethical practices, inclusivity, sustainability and positive solutions. This extends to all of our employees, our diverse global consumers and the communities that we engage with in our business endeavors.”

## Final Thoughts

PVA Chief Operating Officer Shaun Castle closed the evening’s presentations with a deeply personal speech about how the women in his life have supported him throughout his school, military, sports and professional careers.

“I know in my life I have a lot more yesterdays than I have tomorrows,” Castle says. “So, I refuse to do anything with my tomorrows that I don’t believe with every fiber in my being is going to make a difference for them. So, I choose PVA ... But nothing you have seen tonight happened alone. Nothing that needs to happen next can happen alone. So, to paraphrase a past president [then-U.S. President Barack Obama], I’m not asking you to believe in my ability to ignite change. I’m not even asking you to believe in PVA’s ability to ignite change. I’m asking you to believe in all of our abilities to ignite change together.”

The gala was made possible by sponsors and supporters, including the Jeffrey M. Carlton Foundation, TriWest Healthcare Alli-



Paralyzed Veterans of America Chief Operating Officer Shaun Castle gives an emotional speech to close the gala.





Penske Corporation founder and chairman Roger Penske, on screen, speaks about Team Penske's commitment to supporting Paralyzed Veterans of America members and their families.

ance and longtime partner Penske Automotive Group and Penske Truck Leasing, which made a \$500,000 donation to PVA through the Penske Foundation.

In a recorded video statement, Roger Penske, founder and chairman of Penske Corporation, said the company has been proud to

help provide essential resources and support to assist paralyzed veterans and their families for over a decade.

"By supporting PVA, we can all make a difference in the lives of those who have sacrificed so much for our country," Penske says in the video. "Whether it's through a contribution

charitably or by volunteering to help the cause, we encourage everyone to give however you can."

For more on the gala, read People on page 16 and visit [pnonline.com](http://pnonline.com). ■



Paralyzed Veterans of America Immediate Past President Charles Brown, right, with former Sen. Elizabeth Dole.



# Calling on

# Congress

COURTESY OF PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA

The PVA  
Advocacy/Legislation  
Seminar looks to  
advance key priorities  
on Capitol Hill.

*by Heather Ansley, Esq., MSW*

**This month, the annual Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) Advocacy/Legislation Seminar** is taking place June 11-13 in Arlington, Va.

This year's meeting will be a little different from past seminars, as PVA is taking advantage of technology to shorten the in-person training by one day. But we aren't shortening our time on Capitol Hill.

Any bills not passed by the end of this year will need to be reintroduced, so PVA will take advantage of crunch-time leading up to the August congressional recess and the election campaign season to promote our top priorities.

PVA hopes to either get some of our priorities over the finish line or set them up for success in the next Congress.





## Making An Impact

PVA's advocacy on its policy priorities is already in full swing.

On March 6, PVA National President and Chair of the Board Robert Thomas Jr., testified before a joint session of the Senate and House Veterans' Affairs committees regarding PVA's public policy priorities. During the hearing, Thomas stressed the need for comprehensive support systems and policies that address the unique challenges faced by the nation's veterans with catastrophic injuries and diseases.

He increased the impact of his message by referencing real-life challenges faced by PVA members, including Army veteran and PVA National Vice President Anne Robinson and her husband, Harry, who are among those unable to hire direct care workers due to the low pay and labor shortages.

Throughout his testimony, Thomas addressed several key policy priorities, including the dire need to protect and strengthen the

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) specialized systems of care; address VA staffing shortages; expand access to long-term care services; improve availability of home and community-based services; and enhance VA benefits for paralyzed veterans and their survivors.

While in town to testify, Thomas and members of the PVA Executive Committee participated in targeted meetings on Capitol Hill to discuss PVA's 2024 legislative priorities and related VA budget recommendations developed by the *Independent Budget (IB)*. The *IB*, which is formulated by PVA, Disabled American Veterans and the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S., serves as a comprehensive road map to ensure the VA is fully funded and capable of carrying out its mission to serve veterans and their families, both now and in the future.

PVA's leaders covered the House and the Senate, meeting with several member offices who sit on the Veterans' Affairs committees and members who sit on the Appropriations committees. The bipartisan meetings were a success, as PVA leaders shared their experiences at the VA with Congress members and their staff. There were also opportunities to meet with both majority and minority staff for the Veterans' Affairs committees. PVA is already seeing direct results from these meetings.

**Paralyzed Veterans of America National President and Chair of the Board Robert Thomas Jr., testified before a joint session of the Senate and House Veterans' Affairs committees March 6.**



**Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) National President and Chair of the Board Robert Thomas Jr., far left, references real-life challenges of PVA members.**

We also called on PVA members to join us from around the country in advocating virtually on PVA's priorities. In late February, PVA Government Relations hosted a webinar for PVA members to provide an overview of PVA's current policy priorities and gave a sneak peek at Thomas' March 6 testimony.

Working with PVA Communications, the PVA Government Relations Department developed a toolkit that it shared with webinar attendees and advocates on PVAction Force, PVA's national grassroots advocacy network. The toolkit encouraged members to use PVAction Force to take action on our priorities during the week of Thomas' testimony. Members and advocates showed up, as PVA saw a big spike on March 7 in letters and an overall increase in action in the following weeks.

## Hopeful For Some Wins

Now, PVA heads to Capitol Hill with members and chapter leaders from around the country, as we continue to push access forward in the remainder of this Congress.

PVA Advocacy/Legislation Seminar participants will be advocating for the benefits, services and disability civil rights paralyzed veterans have earned and deserve. Congress didn't have a very productive 2023, and we saw few priorities signed into law. PVA has several

critical priorities that appear to be lining up for passage either immediately before or after the PVA Advocacy/Legislation Seminar. We're hopeful that we'll have some "wins" to thank members of Congress for, but we'll be ready if we still need to advocate for final passage.

One of those pieces of legislation is a top PVA priority — improving access to home and community-based services (HCBS) available through the VA. These services help members receive the support they need to remain in their homes with their families.

One of the issues addressed in Thomas' March testimony was the need for passage of the Elizabeth Dole Home Care Act. This legislation would make important reforms, including increased access to programs such as Veteran Directed Care.

It would also allow the VA to spend up to 100% of the cost of nursing home care on HCBS. Expanding access to VA HCBS would greatly improve the everyday lives of catastrophically disabled veterans and their families.

Another piece of legislation that might make it across the finish line is the reauthorization of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). After several PVA provisions were included in the 2018 FAA Reauthorization Act, PVA has worked



**Former Sen. Elizabeth Dole speaks before the joint Senate and House Veterans Affairs committees.**



tirelessly to ensure the next reauthorization also includes provisions that would improve the experience of passengers with disabilities, particularly those who use wheelchairs.

Such provisions include, at a minimum, increased training for workers, better data collection and analysis, improved complaint processing, continued study into the ability of passengers to fly while seated in their wheelchairs and improved disability access standards.

## More Priorities

Other PVA priorities still need more advocacy. One of those is the top ongoing priority — ensuring that legislators understand the importance of protecting the VA's spinal-cord injuries and disorders (SCI/D) system of care.

In order to remain strong, the SCI/D system must have adequate funding, as well as proper staffing and infrastructure. We know this system of care is unequalled in the community, and we will take every opportunity to make sure this message is known on Capitol Hill.

PVA also has a few other priorities that could benefit from additional, in-person advocacy. Housing adaptations are a lifeline for veterans who need housing modifications due to a disability. The VA's Home Improvements and Structural Alterations (HISA) grant program hasn't seen an increase since 2010.

Meanwhile, the cost of home modifications and labor have risen significantly during the same time frame. Congress must pass the Autonomy for Disabled Veterans Act (HR 2818/S 3290), which would raise HISA rates to appropriate levels and tie them to a formula that raises rates annually to help keep them that way.

PVA is also advocating to remove disability access barriers veterans encounter at VA facilities and while using VA websites. The Veterans Accessibility Act (HR 7342/S 2516) aims to address disability access concerns across the VA. This bill would authorize an advisory committee to focus on improving the accessibility of the VA's infrastructure, websites, benefits and services.

The committee will also review accessibility barriers to care in the community. Lastly, the bill requires the committee to review the acquisi-



Then-Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) National President Charles Brown, left, and PVA CEO Carl Blake speak at PVA's Advocacy/Legislation Seminar in 2023.

tion process to ensure it results in the VA having products, services and equipment that meet accessibility requirements.

Another priority is ensuring access to additional VA benefits for surviving spouses of veterans with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS). VA regulations recognize ALS as a presumptive service-connected disease. Due to its aggressive nature, veterans diagnosed with ALS are automatically rated at 100% once service connected.

Unfortunately, many veterans are unable to meet the eight-year requirement for their surviving spouses to receive additional Dependency and Indemnity Compensation because the average life expectancy for a person with ALS is three to five years. PVA believes Congress must pass the Justice for ALS Veterans Act (HR 3790/S 1590) to address this inequality.

## Get Involved

Even if you can't attend the seminar, you can still get involved in advocating for PVA's priorities.

PVA needs all members, their caregivers and families to help by letting your senators and representatives know about the organization's priorities and why they need to be passed this year. Outreach to your legislators will greatly magnify our efforts on Capitol Hill. Using PVAction Force to advocate on these priorities is quick and easy.

For more information on how you can advocate for PVA's priorities, read this month's On The Hill article on page 14 or visit [pva.org/research-resources/pva-action-force](http://pva.org/research-resources/pva-action-force).

*Heather Ansley, Esq., MSW, is PVA's chief policy officer in Washington, D.C. ■*

# around the HOUSE

## More Than Open & Shut

**Residential doors can provide** privacy, security and style, but certain door installations can present barriers to people using wheelchairs or other assistive devices.

When selecting doors for your home, consider their purpose and carefully evaluate available options to avoid pitfalls. Accessible doors must:

- Be wide enough to allow comfortable passage
- Have enough maneuvering clearance to open, pass through and then close
- Have no to low threshold, so wheels don't catch or create tripping hazards
- Have hardware that's operable with limited hand dexterity and has ease of closure

## Exterior Doors

Exterior swinging doors are typically 36 inches wide, internally insulated and weather-stripped to provide a barrier to the outside environment. In most homes, exterior doors are installed at the front entry, garage, decks or patios. Each installation requires a different door type.

The primary entrance door, when located in a foyer, usually has adequate maneuvering space to provide accessibility. Pay close attention to the door threshold, as floor materials typically change as you move inside.

While thresholds can improve the effectiveness of weather-stripping, they must be carefully designed so they minimize or eliminate level changes and avoid becoming barriers or tripping hazards.

For safety, front door visibility to the exterior may be from a peephole,



A low-profile exterior threshold along with a gentle exterior slope away from the door combines a good weather barrier with relatively level transition from inside to out. The storm door is protected along its bottom by a kickplate accessory. For safety, glass sidelights provide exterior visibility.

glass door panels or sidelights (fixed glass side panels). These features that provide visibility to the exterior should be located low enough to accommodate a wheelchair user's sight line.

Patio doors can be swinging or sliding units, depending on available space, and are typically largely transparent to allow unobstructed views to the outside and allow daylight inside.

To enhance the panorama, they can be installed in pairs. With a pair of French doors, each door should be wide enough for wheelchair passage, allowing you the option to only open one door.

Most wheelchair users find that good quality sliding door units are easy to operate, but floor tracks should be recessed or low-profile to prevent tripping and obstructing a wheelchair.

Manufacturers offer tapered wedges to reduce track obstruction.

Screen doors are installed to swing outward, while glass doors swing inward. Negotiating this arrangement is awkward for many wheelchair users. One suggested solution is to install a single, full-light (glass) door paired with an operable window that can be screened for ventilation.

## Interior Swinging Doors

Swinging doors are the most common interior type and should be wide enough to provide comfortable access.

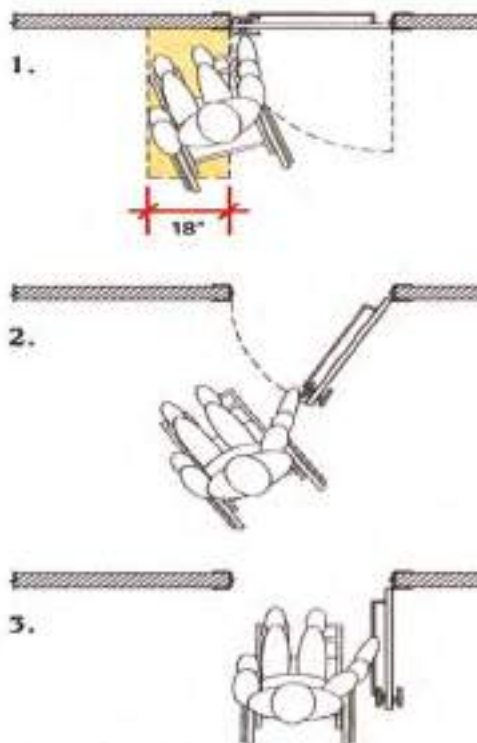
This is generously provided by 36-inch-wide swinging units, which have a clear opening of 34 inches when open 90 degrees. Analyze the available maneuvering space when the door is in both the open and closed positions to maximize accessibility. The



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A swinging patio door with a low-profile threshold makes an easy transition to an outside deck.



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Clear door space is needed adjacent to a latch/handle on the pull side of a swinging door, giving clearance for the swing arc as the door is opened.

selected door's width should match the need for pass-through or reach-into functions.

To operate a swinging door, adjacent floor clearance must be available to position a wheelchair conveniently while the door is opened. On the in-swinging side, this requires floor space clear of the door's arc. Without this space, wheelchair users must back up as the door opens. If sufficient clear space isn't available, several options may improve the situation.

The swing direction may be reversed, either left to right or in to out. Reversing the door swing requires modifications, both to hinges and latch hardware, so the frame and door must be replaced or repaired if the door swing is changed.

## Pocket & Barn Doors

Both pocket and barn doors slide to close and open, rather than swing. Less maneuvering space is required during operation.

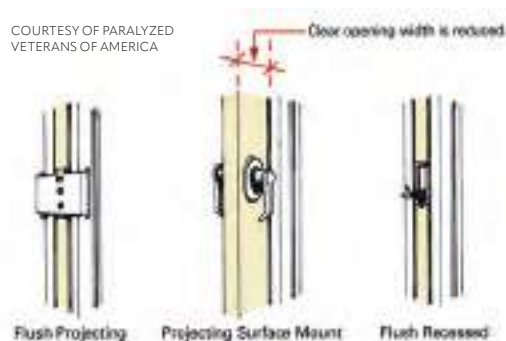
The pocket door's primary advantage is that it slides sideways into the adjacent wall. Pocket doors, however, don't fit every location because sufficient wall length may not be available. The "pocket" requires a thicker-than-standard wall and eliminates available wall space for electric switches and outlets, air ducts, pipes or other functions.

Door units are hung from an overhead track, so threshold requirements aren't a consideration. Since the sliding mechanism is concealed in the wall, maintenance may be more difficult over time. If you have good hand function, recessed pull hardware can be used. If you need surface-mounted pull hardware, the door will not fully recess into the pocket, so the opening width is effectively reduced.



Pocket doors do not require as much maneuvering space as swinging doors, but the adjacent wall space must be wide enough to accommodate the door and be clear of utilities and structural parts.

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Choose pocket door hardware based on hand dexterity. Flush projecting hardware is easy to grasp but does not fully close the opening. Projecting surface mount hardware is easy to grasp but reduces the clear opening width, since the door won't fully recess into the wall pocket. Flush recessed hardware requires fine hand function to operate.



Barn doors hang from the top track only, are easy to open even when larger than 36 inches wide and reduce necessary maneuvering space. However, they do not provide complete sound privacy or security.

Barn doors slide across the wall face and hang on an exposed, horizontal track. They utilize surface-mounted pulls and hardware that are easy to maintain. Because a slight gap remains between the door and wall, they lack complete privacy. You must also consider where the door will be “parked” when open, relative to electrical outlets, light switches or other wall protrusions.

### Hardware, Etc.

Selection of locksets, deadbolts and peepholes is critical for successful safety and security.

The amount of strength needed to open and close a door, ability to grip hardware and position of



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Lever-style lockset hardware should be used on all doors to ease use for those with limited hand dexterity.



Home security electronic card readers can assist with locking for those with severely limited hand dexterity.

functional elements are important accessibility design drivers. Locksets should be installed with lever-type handles to ease use for those with limited hand dexterity.

For some wheelchair users, the key itself is difficult to insert and rotate. Special assistive devices are available to help grasp and turn keys. Electronic

card readers can ease locking functions and automate door operation.

If there's insufficient clear floor space for a wheelchair user to operate



A push plate actuator, part of a residential door automation system, should be located outside the door swing but along the route to the door.

a door, but the opening is wide enough for passage, a power operator can be installed. Power units are opened by a wall switch, actuator touch button or infrared reader and are closed automatically after a time delay. The operator is wall-mounted or concealed above the door.

Automatic door systems can be connected to a home automation system using smart devices, remote controls and voice commands to control door operations and improve your independence. Security functions that can be controlled remotely include locking doors, unlocking doors, set-

ting alerts for doors left ajar and even allowing access for pets.

## Further Considerations

- Visit showrooms to test door configurations, hardware, thresholds and automatic openers.
- An animated six-minute video explaining maneuvering at doors can be watched at [www.access-board.gov/ada/guides/animations/maneuvering-at-doors.html](http://www.access-board.gov/ada/guides/animations/maneuvering-at-doors.html).
- An Innovations article on automated doors can be found in the April 2022 issue of *PN*.
- To prevent costly changes, consult a residential architect with accessible design expertise.

For more information on this or any accessible architecture issue, email [pvaarchitecture@pva.org](mailto:pvaarchitecture@pva.org) or call 202-416-7645.

*Rachel Y. Krishnan, AIA, is project manager of architecture services with the Paralyzed Veterans of America Architecture Program. ■*



Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) has published *Accessible Home Design: Architectural Solutions for the Wheelchair User* as a detailed resource for homeowners, architects and builders. It's available for purchase by calling 800-424-8200, ext. 7645, or emailing [pvaarchitecture@pva.org](mailto:pvaarchitecture@pva.org). The cost is \$9.99 for PVA members or \$14.99 for non-members. You can also purchase the book for \$14.99 on Amazon: [amazon.com/s?me=A1K1VT0E51SAX3&marketplaceID=ATVPDKIKX0DER](https://amazon.com/s?me=A1K1VT0E51SAX3&marketplaceID=ATVPDKIKX0DER) or by using the QR code.

## SCI & Stem Cell Therapy

### A Mayo Clinic study

shows stem cells derived from patients' own fat are safe and may improve sensation and movement after traumatic spinal-cord injuries (SCI). The findings from the phase 1 clinical trial appear in *Nature Communications*.

In the study of 10 adults, the research team noted seven participants demonstrated improvements based on the American Spinal Injury Association (ASIA) Impairment Scale. Improvements included increased sensation when tested with pinprick and light touch, increased strength in muscle motor groups and recovery of voluntary anal contraction, which aids in bowel function. The scale has five levels, ranging from complete loss of function to normal function. The seven participants who improved each moved up at least one level on the ASIA scale. Three patients in the study had no response, meaning they did not improve but did not get worse.

"This study documents the safety and potential benefit of stem cells and regenerative medicine," says Mohamad Bydon, MD, a Mayo Clinic neurosurgeon and first author of the study, in a March Mayo Clinic release. "Spinal-cord injury is a complex condition. Future research may show whether stem cells in combination with other therapies could

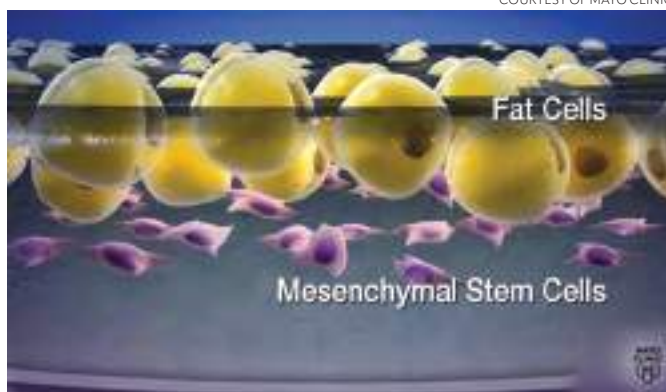
be part of a new paradigm of treatment to improve outcomes for patients."

In addition to evaluating safety, this phase 1 clinical trial had a secondary outcome of assessing changes in motor and sensory function. The authors note that motor and sensory results are to be interpreted with caution given the limits of phase 1 trials.

Participants' stem cells were collected by taking a small amount of fat from a 1- to 2-inch incision in the abdomen or thigh. Over four weeks, the cells were expanded in the laboratory and then injected into the patients' lumbar spine in the lower back. Over two years, each study participant was evaluated at Mayo Clinic 10 times.

Stem cells are used mainly in research in the U.S., and fat-derived stem cell treatment for SCI is considered experimental by the Food and Drug Administration.

An important next step is assessing the effectiveness of stem cell therapies and subsets of patients who would most benefit, Bydon says. Research is continuing with a larger, controlled trial that randomly assigns patients to receive either the stem cell treatment or a placebo without stem cells.



A phase 1 clinical trial found mesenchymal stem cells derived from fat cells could be utilized to treat traumatic spinal-cord injury.

Additional research is underway among a larger group of participants to further assess risks and benefits.

The full data on the 10 patients follows a 2019 case report that highlighted the experience of the first study participant who demonstrated significant improvement in motor and sensory function.

In the multidisciplinary clinical trial, participants had SCI from motor vehicle accidents, falls and other causes. Six had neck injuries; four had back injuries. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 65.

Two of three patients with complete injuries of the thoracic spine — meaning they had no feeling or movement below their injury between the base of the neck and mid-back — moved up two ASIA levels after treatment. Each regained some sensation and some control of movement below the level of injury. Based on researchers' understanding of traumatic thoracic SCI, only 5% of people with a complete injury would be expected to regain any feeling or movement.

## Heroes On The Water Partners

**Heroes on the Water**, a nonprofit organization based in Allen, Texas, that provides recreational wellness experiences to veterans, first responders and their families, announced a partnership with SeaSucker, a Florida-based designer and manufacturer of car racks, marine accessories and mounts for small electronics.

The partnership will help provide opportunities for Heroes on the Water to expand its kayak fishing programs through SeaSucker's Give Back Color Collection.

SeaSucker's innovative vacuum-mount technology seamlessly attaches racks to cars and marine accessories to boats and more without the worry of scratching surfaces or drilling holes.





A portion of proceeds from select SeaSucker products will benefit the nonprofit Heroes on the Water, which provides kayak fishing opportunities for veterans and first responders.

Through their Give Back Color Collection, SeaSucker will donate 25% of select items purchased to Heroes on the Water.

"We're excited to collaborate with SeaSucker in a partnership that focuses on our shared passion for recreation therapy and community engagement," says Neil Mullaney, Heroes on the Water executive director, in an April release. "Together, we're making waves by providing kayak fishing experiences to more veterans, first responders and their families."

Heroes on the Water has 57 volunteer-led chapters and seven therapeutic programs across the United States. Its chapters hold regularly scheduled kayak fishing events at no cost to veterans, first responders and their families. These programs incorporate structured

activities in a pressure-free environment, creating opportunities for community building and personal healing.

Kayak fishing and outdoor recreational therapy can alleviate stress and anxiety, improve relationships and increase confidence. In its 16-year history, Heroes on the Water has served over 61,000 veterans and first responders and more than 15,000 family members.

"Through committed partners like SeaSucker, we are expanding access to these healing outdoor activities, empowering more heroes to find solace and joy on the water," says Mullaney. "We're deeply grateful for SeaSucker's commitment to our mission."

For information, visit [heroesonthewater.org](http://heroesonthewater.org) and [heroesonthewater.org/seasucker](http://heroesonthewater.org/seasucker).

## Employment Resource Hub

The U.S. Department of Labor has introduced a resource aimed at boosting the participation of people with disabilities in competitive integrated employment.

The Competitive Integrated Employment Transformation Hub brings together resources from across the federal government to provide practical guidance, policy information and evidence-based best practices for people with disabilities, their families, employers, employment service providers and state agencies.

Competitive integrated employment ensures that people with disabilities are paid competitive wages and work in environments where the majority of employees do not have disabilities.

"A large and dedicated movement across America is working to advance a competitive integrated employment model in our workplaces, and we want to give them easy access to resources that will help them succeed," says Assistant Secretary for Disability Employment Policy Taryn M. Williams in a March release. "Families and workers need guidance on benefits planning and wraparound services, for instance. Providers need technical assistance to adapt their service delivery models. State agencies need information about funding options. Employers need support regarding accommodations and inclusive policies and practices. The Competitive Integrated Employment Transformation Hub is a central tool they can all rely on for help."



COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES HEALTH SCIENCES



Rhonda Voskuhl, MD

The hub is part of the Office of Disability Employment Policy's (ODEP) broader effort to promote competitive integrated employment. Through various initiatives, ODEP collaborates with federal partners, states and employment service providers to enhance opportunities for people with disabilities to participate and excel in competitive integrated employment.

For information, visit [dol.gov/agencies/odep/program-areas/cie/hub](https://dol.gov/agencies/odep/program-areas/cie/hub).

## Dystel Prize For MS Research

**Rhonda Voskuhl, MD**, a professor of neurology at University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) Health, has been awarded the 2024 John Dystel Prize for Multiple Sclerosis (MS) Research in recognition of her outstanding contributions to MS research and treatment.

Voskuhl holds the Jack Skirball chair in MS research, is the director of the MS program and a faculty neurologist in the Comprehensive Menopause Care Program at UCLA Health.

The annual award was established in 1994 by the National MS Society and the American Academy of Neurology.

"Professor Voskuhl has been a driving force in elevating our understanding of the mechanisms involved in sex differences

in MS," says executive vice president of research at the National MS Society Bruce Bebo, PhD, in an April statement. "She is one of very few clinician-scientists who has made basic laboratory discoveries and then translated those discoveries and tested them in clinical trials to find better treatments for people with MS."

Voskuhl received the award, which includes an unrestricted \$40,000 prize, at the American Academy of Neurology's 2024 Annual meeting April 14 in Denver.

To read the original release, visit [newsroom.ucla.edu/dept/faculty/rhonda-voskuhl-multiple-sclerosis-research-award](https://newsroom.ucla.edu/dept/faculty/rhonda-voskuhl-multiple-sclerosis-research-award).

## Fluid Biomarker For ALS

**Two progressively** degenerative diseases, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS)

and frontotemporal dementia (FTD), are linked by more than the fact that they both damage nerve cells critical to normal functioning — the former affecting nerves in the brain and spinal cord leading to loss of movement, the latter eroding the brain regions controlling personality, behavior and language.

Research studies have repeatedly shown that in patients with ALS or FTD, the function of TAR DNA-binding protein 43, more commonly called TDP-43, becomes corrupted. When this happens, pieces of the genetic material called ribonucleic acid (RNA) can no longer be properly spliced together to form the coded instructions needed to direct the manufacture of other proteins required for healthy nerve growth and function. The RNA strands become riddled with erroneous code sequences called "cryptic exons" that instead affect proteins believed to be associated with increased risk for ALS and FTD development.

Until now, it was unknown if this abnormality occurred early or late in the clinical courses of ALS and FTD. In a study in the February issue of the journal *Nature Medicine*, Johns Hopkins Medicine researchers tell how they answered that long-pondered question.

"We developed a method for locating a specific cryptic exon-linked protein, hepatoma-derived growth factor-like 2 [HDGFL2], that

is associated with the loss of TDP-43's function," says senior study author Philip Wong, PhD, professor of pathology and neuroscience at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, in a March release. "By doing so, we believe we've discovered a biomarker that could potentially be used to detect ALS and FTD in their earliest stages — even before symptoms appear."

The hunt for the biomarker began with the researchers first identifying cryptic exon-linked proteins associated with TDP-43 function loss. Then, using fragments from those proteins known as cryptic peptides, they created monoclonal (laboratory-made) antibodies specific to each one. Placed into patient samples of blood or cerebrospinal fluid (the protective fluid that surrounds the brain and central nervous system), the monoclonal antibodies will seek and lock onto only the cryptic peptides for which they were designed, making those proteins detectable.

"Of all the cryptic peptides for which we made monoclonal antibodies, the one that worked best was the one designed for the cryptic HDGFL2 protein," says study lead author Katie Irwin, an MD/PhD student at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. "We used that monoclonal antibody to develop an extremely sensitive detection test for



the cryptic HDGFL2 protein in body fluids.”

After validating their detection method in the lab, the researchers used it to test blood and cerebrospinal fluid samples from three different collections, encompassing people with the most common forms of familial (genetic) ALS and FTD linked to a mutation in the C9orf72 gene, sporadic (not defined as genetic) forms of ALS and FTD and healthy controls. The collections also contained biofluid samples from patients with ALS and FTD prior to their

diagnoses, meaning that the researchers could look for cryptic HDGFL2 at both pre-symptomatic and symptomatic stages of the diseases.

“Our test found cryptic HDGFL2 in the presymptomatic stages of patients who were genetically predisposed to ALS and FTD, and were expected to go on to develop the diseases, giving the method credibility as a potential preclinical biomarker for predicting risk of ALS and FTD,” says Irwin. “And we discovered that the test also could detect elevated levels of

cryptic HDGFL2 in fluids from people with sporadic disease cases where no family history of ALS or FTD was known.”

Wong says having a biomarker capable of detecting cryptic HDGFL2 in the biofluids of presymptomatic patients enables them to compare its findings to results using an established biomarker for ALS and FTD.

“The current biomarker for ALS and FTD looks for structural components of central nervous system [brain and spinal cord] nerves called neurofila-

ments that are shed into the biofluids, but only after symptoms begin appearing,” Wong says. “If we use it and our cryptic HDGFL2 biomarker to determine both presymptomatic and symptomatic ALS and FTD, we can map the course of these diseases and obtain greater insight into each of their stages.”

Wong says that knowledge could help steer patients into clinical trials for new ALS and FTD therapies earlier and “at a time when it might truly make a difference.” ■



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The advertisement features a blue background with a grid pattern. It displays various representations of the PN magazine: a print issue titled 'Sleep Well', a tablet showing the 'PN' logo, a smartphone showing a 'TIPS' section, a magazine spread titled 'Update', and a computer monitor displaying a 'Step-By-Step' guide. A circular QR code with the PN logo is located in the bottom right corner.



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## Wolfpack Vets Net NWBA Title

### The Wolfpack Vets let

Russ Norris wheel, steal and deal in the National Wheelchair Basketball Association Military Division championship game.

Norris scored a game-high 34 points and had six rebounds, while Jhoonar Barrera added 13 points and three rebounds, as the Wolfpack Vets rolled to a 68-53 title-game win over the Charlotte Rollin' Hornets April 28 at the Plassman Athletic Center at Turnstone Center for Children & Adults With Disabilities in Fort Wayne, Ind.

A Paralyzed Veterans of America Northwest Chapter member, Norris was also named the Military Division Championship Game Most Valuable Player and selected to the Military Division's All-Tournament first team.

An Army veteran and 44-year-old Seattle resident, Norris served from 2002 to 2008 as an infantryman and sustained a level L1 incomplete spinal-cord injury in a 2008 four-wheeler accident because of an improvised explosive device. Norris went 17-of-26 from the field and 0-of-1 from the foul line. He says he just capitalized on openings and was certainly grateful and honored to receive the accolades.

"I just didn't realize how many points I had or any of that until the end. You've seen me play enough to know I'm hot



JOHN GROTH

The Wolfpack Vets won the 2024 National Wheelchair Basketball Association Military Division championship on April 28, defeating the Charlotte Rollin' Hornets, 68-53, at the Plassman Athletic Center at Turnstone Center for Children & Adults With Disabilities in Fort Wayne, Ind.



JOHN GROTH

Charlotte Rollin' Hornets player Dale Thomas, with ball, is defended by Wolfpack Vets player Perry Price, while Wolfpack Vets player Brandi Evans keeps an eye on the ball in the April 28 National Wheelchair Basketball Association Military Division championship game.

and cold. So, today was just my day," Norris says.

Perry Price, who was named the Military Division Tournament's Most Valuable Player, added nine points and seven rebounds, while Hector Varela had six points and seven rebounds for the Wolfpack.

Jesse Lind led Charlotte with 18 points (hitting 8-of-14 field goals and 2-of-4 free throws) and had three rebounds. Dale Thomas added 13 points and eight rebounds, while Mark Hartney had eight points and five rebounds.

## Citrus Slam Results

**Ted Liefer took home the** Individual Open Division title and finished just out of the top three in the Team Open Division at the April 5-7 Paralyzed Veterans of America Citrus Slam Bass Tournament in Kissimmee, Fla.

Liefer (Havelock, N.C.) won the Individual Open Division title with 13.17 pounds, besting Nick Vadney (Palm Bay, Fla.; 12.03 pounds) and Bill Frazier (Amarillo, Texas; 9.83 pounds) for the title.

Angler Chris Miller (St. Cloud, Fla.) and boat partner Daniel Fay (Orlando, Fla.) won the Team Open Division title, finishing with 17.40 pounds. They beat angler Tony Choe (Manassas, Va.) and boat partner Dylan Rodden (Palm Harbor, Fla.), who had 15.50 pounds, and angler Kurt Glass (Grovetown, Ga.) and boat partner Daniel Hart (Orlando, Fla.), who had 14.49 pounds. Liefer and boat partner Jerry Heigerken (Leesburg, Fla.) finished fourth with 14.40 pounds.

Angler Jim Bruner (Shelbyville, Ky.) won the Individual Bank Division with .83 pounds over Charles Hampton (Madison, Ill.), who had .17 pounds. They were the only two of five competitors who caught fish.

Anglers Robert Avery (Axson, Ga.) and Hampton won the Team Bank Division title with 4.97 pounds, beating Susie Lane (Balch Springs, Texas) and Bruner, who had .99 pounds. ■



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Note: \*\* means this is not a PVA-sponsored event.

## Air Guns

- **Wisconsin Air Gun Tournament**  
March 8-9, 2024  
Milwaukee, WI
- **Texas Air Gun Tournament**  
May 4-5, 2024  
San Antonio, TX

## Bass Fishing

- **Citrus Slam Bass Tournament**  
Hosted by Florida Gulf Coast PVA  
April 5-7, 2024  
Kissimmee, FL
- **Bluegrass Bass Bash Bass Tournament**  
Hosted by Kentucky-Indiana PVA  
April 19-21, 2024  
Kuttawa, KY
- **Capital Clash Bass Tournament**  
Hosted by PVA National  
June 7-9, 2024  
LaPlata, MD

## Billiards

- **Mid-Atlantic Billiards Tournament**  
March 15-17, 2024  
Midlothian, VA
- **Mid-America Billiards Tournament**  
May 23-24, 2024  
Oklahoma City, OK

## Bowling

- **Nevada Bowling Tournament**  
November 30 - December 3, 2023  
Las Vegas, NV
- **Florida Gulf Coast Bowling Tournament**  
January 31-February 2, 2024  
Tampa, FL
- **Texas PVA Bowling Tournament**  
May, 8 2024  
San Antonio, Texas

## Boccia

- **Bayou Boccia Tournament**  
February 2-3, 2024  
Gulfport, MS

## Paracycling

- **PVA Racing High Performance Racing Camp**  
January 28-February 4, 2024  
Brooksville, Florida
- **Swamp Classic\*\***  
February 3-4, 2024  
Gainesville, FL
- **Valley of the Sun Stage Race\*\***  
February 17-18, 2024  
Phoenix, AZ
- **PVA Pocahontas Off-Road Spring Camp**  
April 10-14, 2024  
Chesterfield, VA
- **PVA Off-Road Classic (PVA Off-Road Race)**  
April 13, 2024  
Chesterfield, VA
- **PVA Paracycling Learn to Race Camp**  
June 21-22, 2024  
Milwaukee, WI
- **US Paracycling Road National Championships**  
(PVA High Performance Team)  
TBD 2024  
Location TBD

## Trapshooting

- **Cal-Diego Trapshoot**  
March 22-24, 2024  
Redlands, CA
- **Vaughan Trapshoot**  
May 24-26, 2024  
Elburn, IL
- **Wisconsin Trapshoot**  
June 7-9, 2024  
Green Bay, WI
- **Iowa Trapshoot (Year End)**  
June 21-23, 2024  
Cedar Rapids, IA

## Non-Series Events

- **PVA Rugby Invitational**  
January 11-14, 2024  
Louisville, KY
- **National Veterans Wheelchair Games**  
July 25-30, 2024  
New Orleans, LA

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# veteran **advisor**

MICHAEL SNAPE, NSO

## Adding Dependents

**An often-overlooked benefit** for veterans is adding dependents to their Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) compensation.

### When Are Veterans Eligible To Add Dependents To Their Awards?

If a veteran has a 30% or higher disability rating from the VA, the person can add dependents to his or her disability compensation benefits. Adding dependents to a veteran's compensation award allows the veteran to receive additional VA compensation.

### Who Is Considered A Dependent For VA Purposes?

A spouse is considered a VA dependent (this includes same-sex and common law marriages).

Note that a common law marriage is recognized by the state where it occurred and whether that state recognizes common law marriages.

Parents can be recognized as dependents if you care for them directly and their income and net worth are below a certain amount.

The VA also considers children as dependents, including adopted children or stepchildren, if they're unmarried below age 18, or between ages 18-23 and enrolled in school, or if they become permanently incapable of self-support prior to turning 18.

### How Do Veterans Add Dependents To Their Awards?

The form will vary depending on which dependents you're adding and when you're adding them.

To add a spouse, children under 18, helpless child or dependent parents, submit VA Form 21-686c, Application Request to Add and/or Remove Dependents. In the case of a helpless child, evi-

dence must show that the child became permanently incapable of self-support due to a mental or physical disability before the child's 18th birthday.

This information should be verified by a statement from an attending physician showing the nature and extent of the child's physical or mental impairment. You'll want to submit your claim and supporting information for your helpless child no earlier than three months before the child's 18th birthday.

If a child is turning 18 and still attending high school, you'll want to submit VA Form 21-674, Request for Approval of School Attendance, no earlier than three months prior to the child turning 18. The VA will pay the child as a dependent through the end of the month of graduation.

Also use this form if you know your child will be attending college. Complete the form three months prior to the date college begins. After your child starts the semester, the VA will send you a VA Form 21-674b, School Attendance Report, which needs to be completed to verify that your child is currently attending the school.

If you're submitting a claim for school after your child has started college, you need to complete just VA Form 21-674.

Veterans receiving non-service-connected pensions or special monthly pensions can also request to add a dependent to a pension award using the same forms/information noted previously.

Be aware that this is considered an increase in income and may result in the veteran receiving a reduced or discontinued pension, contingent on the amount of additional income.

## Removing A Dependent

Veterans' situations involving the need to remove dependents from their benefits will change, whether through



divorce, death, their child turning 18 or through other circumstances.

When this occurs, you'll want to provide timely notification to the VA of the changes that are occurring with your dependents in order to have them removed from your compensation award.

Failure to notify the VA in a timely manner will likely result in a veteran incurring an overpayment of VA compensation, which the veteran will then have to pay back.

official to verify the date the child terminated school.

### **Mandatory Verification Of Dependents**

The VA periodically verifies the status of a veteran's dependents by sending out VA Form 21-0538, Mandatory Verification of Dependents.

The VA allows veterans 60 days to complete this form and return it. Failure to do so may result in the VA proposing to remove the dependents



© GETTY IMAGES/VIKTOR CVETKOVIC

A veteran can request to remove a dependent by completing VA Form 21-686c, Application Request to Add and/or Remove Dependents, with their local Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) national service officer (NSO), applying via the va.gov website or by contacting the VA National Call Center at 800-827-1000.

Also, if a child terminates school earlier than his or her expected graduation date, the veteran should submit VA Form 21-674b, which is required to be certified by a school

from the date they were last verified on the veteran's award, which in some cases could result in a significant overpayment being incurred by the veteran.

For more information on this program or help with other benefit issues, contact a PVA NSO from the roster on page 52.

*A Marine Corps veteran, Michael Snape joined PVA as a NSO in 2019 and works in the Augusta, Maine, office. ■*

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# pva service office roster

For assistance, please refer to the directory below to identify the PVA Service Office nearest you. Also, you may contact the PVA Veterans Benefits Department located at our headquarters in Washington, D.C., at 866-734-0857.

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VARO, Montgomery  
334-213-3433

## ARIZONA

VARO, Phoenix  
602-627-3311

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501-370-3757

## CALIFORNIA (Hawaii, Manila)

VAMC, Long Beach  
562-826-8000, ext. 23774

VARO, Los Angeles  
310-235-7796

VAMC, Mather  
916-843-2602

VAMC, Palo Alto  
650-493-5000, ext. 65046

VARO, Rancho Cordova  
916-364-6791

VAMC, San Diego  
858-552-7519

VARO, San Diego  
619-400-5320

## Veterans Career Program

San Diego  
202-733-8807  
(covering AK, AZ, CA, HI, ID, NV,  
OR, WA)

## COLORADO (Wyoming)

VARO, Denver  
303-914-5590

## DELAWARE

VARO, Wilmington  
302-993-7252

## DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

**PVA National Office**  
202-872-1300

## FLORIDA

VAMC, Lake City  
386-755-3016, ext. 2236

VAMC, Miami  
305-575-7180

VAMC, Orlando  
407-631-1000, ext. 11835

VARO, St. Petersburg  
727-319-7470

VAMC, Tampa  
813-978-5841

## GEORGIA

VARO, Atlanta  
404-929-5333

VAMC, Augusta  
706-823-2219

## Veterans Career Program

Atlanta  
202-710-6437  
202-304-8544  
(covering AL, AR, FL, GA, LA, MS,  
NC, PR, SC)

## ILLINOIS

VARO, Chicago  
312-980-4278

VAMC, Hines  
708-202-5623

## INDIANA

VARO, Indianapolis  
317-916-3626

## IOWA

VARO, Des Moines  
515-323-7544

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VAMROC, Wichita  
316-688-6875

## KENTUCKY

VARO, Louisville  
502-566-4430 / 4431

## LOUISIANA

VARO, New Orleans  
504-619-4380

## MAINE (Vermont, New Hampshire)

VAMROC, Augusta  
866-795-1911 / 207-621-7394

## MARYLAND

VARO, Baltimore  
410-230-4470, ext. 1020

## MASSACHUSETTS (Connecticut, Rhode Island)

VARO, Boston  
617-303-1395

VAMC, Brockton  
774-826-2219

## Veterans Career Program

Boston  
202-257-0144  
(covering CT, DE, MA, ME, NH, NJ,  
NY, PA, RI, VT)

## MICHIGAN

VARO, Detroit  
313-471-3996

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VAMC, Minneapolis  
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VARO, St. Paul  
612-970-5668

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Minneapolis  
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VAMC, St. Louis

866-328-2670 / 314-894-6467

VARO, St. Louis  
314-253-4480

## NEBRASKA

VARO, Lincoln  
402-420-4017

## NEVADA (Utah)

VARO, Las Vegas  
702-791-9000, ext. 14458

VAMC, Reno  
775-321-4789

## NEW JERSEY

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973-297-3228

## NEW MEXICO

VAMC, Albuquerque  
505-265-1711, ext. 5046

VARO, Albuquerque  
505-346-4896

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VAMC, Bronx  
866-297-1319  
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VARO, Buffalo  
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VARO, New York  
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VAMC, Syracuse  
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VARO, Cleveland  
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VARO, Muskogee  
918-781-7768

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VARO, Philadelphia  
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VARO, Pittsburgh  
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## PUERTO RICO

VACHS, San Juan  
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VARO, San Juan  
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## SOUTH CAROLINA

VARO, Columbia  
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## SOUTH DAKOTA (North Dakota)

VAMROC, Sioux Falls  
605-333-6801

## TENNESSEE

VAMC, Memphis  
901-523-8990, ext. 7795

VARO, Nashville  
615-695-6383

## TEXAS

VAMC, Dallas  
214-857-0105

VAMC, Houston  
713-794-7993

VARO, Houston  
713-383-2727

VAMC, San Antonio  
210-617-5300, ext. 16819

VARO, Waco  
254-299-9944

## Veterans Career Program

San Antonio  
202-714-4777  
(covering CO, KS, NM, MO, OK,  
TX, UT)

## VIRGINIA

VAMC, Hampton  
757-722-9961, ext. 2943

VAMC, Richmond  
804-675-5316

VARO, Roanoke  
540-597-1707

## Veterans Career Program

Richmond  
202-769-7387  
(covering DC, IN, KY, MD, OH, TN,  
VA, WV)

## WASHINGTON (Alaska, Montana)

VAMC, Seattle  
206-768-5415

VARO, Seattle  
206-220-6149

## WEST VIRGINIA

VARO, Huntington  
304-399-9393

## WISCONSIN

VARO, Milwaukee  
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## INDEX OF ADVERTISERS

	PAGE
Abilities Expo .....	2
Boston VA Research Institute . . . .	18
Coloplast Corporation .....	3
Concepts in Confidenc .....	18
Diestco Manufacturing Corp. . . . .	51
Omeo America . . . . .	10,11
Orion Medical Group Inc. ....	50
ProBed Medical USA Inc. . . . .	15
PVA Membership .....	40
PVA Research Grants .....	19
PVA Sports .....	49
Rollx Vans . . . . .	55
Sunrise Medical . . . . .	56
University of Miami .....	51
Veterans Career Program . . . . .	46

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andfinally...



## Leadership Legacy

Late former Sen. Bob Dole, right, is pictured with his wife, Elizabeth Dole, center, and then-Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) National President Al Kovach Jr., in 2015 when PVA presented the inaugural Gordon H. Mansfield Congressional Leadership Award to Bob. Elizabeth was this year's award recipient.





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