

PARAPLEGIA NEWS FEBRUARY 2026

# PN

Improving SCI/D Care

PVA updates Clinical Practice Guidelines

Captivating Columbus

Check out this accessible Georgia city

# Big Knockout

Adaptive boxing delivers striking benefits



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MASON SYMONS  
Member, Paralyzed Veterans of America  
U.S. Army Veteran

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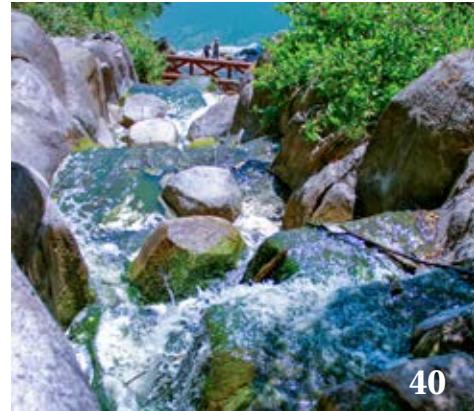
Adaptive boxing is gaining popularity and interest across the country.

Photo by Manolo Anico/  
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If you like wheelchair sports and recreation,  
you'll love our sister publication — Sports N Spokes!  
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Now in its 80th 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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FEBRUARY

# Editor's DESK

The new year isn't quite so new now, as we're well past the hustle and bustle of the holidays and into the relatively mundane month of February. One of the bigger highlights of the month is the Super Bowl, which has been a sports staple across the country for more than 50 years.

Meanwhile, another type of contact sport that's been around a long time is gaining new participants in an adaptive version that's even more physical. *Packing A Punch* on page 24 takes you into the ring with adaptive boxing. While it may not be as popular or widely known as other adaptive sports, you might be surprised to learn that it's growing and getting some big support, including from boxing's national governing body.

Another thing you may find surprising in this month's issue is an unexpected place for a fun and interesting getaway. *Southern Gem* on page 30 takes you to Columbus, Ga. Other places in Georgia may get more attention, but this city blends traditional Southern charm with a strong history, a connection to the military and some unique attractions.

There's plenty more, of course, in this edition of *PN*, including a Valentine's Day-related article on great accessible places to "pop the question" (Exploring Our World, p. 40). We hope you enjoy all that content and everything else in this month's issue.



Andy Nemann, Managing Editor

## DIGITAL HIGHLIGHTS

### GO BEYOND THE PAGES

Excellent content doesn't end with this month's issue of *PN*. Visit [prononline.com](http://prononline.com) for even more stories of interest to veterans and others with spinal cord injury and disease. Designed to be different from the print magazine, the website offers more immediate content, including unique articles, photos and videos.

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ROBERT L. THOMAS JR.  
NATIONAL PRESIDENT

# PVA from the TOP

## Just Like Phil

### **It's been a pretty tough winter. The**

Midwest was consistently blanketed with snow and frigid temperatures, and the East Coast was cold earlier than usual. I know most of us just can't wait for this season to pass. But as we move into February, we may see a little reprieve or could potentially have an early spring.

Although February is the shortest month of the year, we always get our hopes high because it is filled with a lot of different events. One of the most significant ones for us is Groundhog Day.

I don't know which groundhog you follow, but I live in Ohio, close to Pennsylvania, and we follow Punxsutawney Phil every year when he comes out of his little home and predicts whether there will be several more weeks of cold or an early spring.

I've often wondered why we even have groundhogs and who came up with the idea that a groundhog could predict the weather. Sometimes, he has been correct and, of course, there have been some years he has been completely off.

As you all have read in past articles, I'm a big history buff, so I did some research. According to The Punxsutawney Groundhog Club website ([groundhog.org](http://groundhog.org)), the origin of Groundhog Day comes from the Christian religious holiday of Candlemas, which has become most commonly associated with the current celebration.

But its roots are older than that.

The celebration started in Christianity as the day (Feb. 2) when Christians would take their candles to the church to have them blessed. This, they felt, "would bring blessings to their household for the remaining winter," according to the website.

There are even several songs that highlight the change in weather, including this old English ditty:

*If Candlemas be fair and bright,  
Come, Winter, have another flight;  
If Candlemas bring clouds and rain,  
Go Winter, and come not again.*

However, it wasn't until this traditional belief was introduced to Germany that an animal was brought into the tradition, and if, according to German lore, a hedgehog saw his shadow on Candlemas, there would be a "second winter," or six more weeks of bad weather.

As German settlers came to the United States, they carried their traditions and folklore with them. Because hedgehogs weren't abundant in the United States, a similar hibernating animal, the groundhog, was chosen and has continued into today's traditions.

While sitting indoors avoiding the cold weather in December and thinking about what to write for this column, I chose Groundhog Day because I felt just like Phil — locked in and hibernating due to the inclement and frigid weather.

All I can say is, I hope when we celebrate Groundhog Day, no shadow is seen. I hope everyone stays well and safe, as we anticipate sunnier days and warmer air. ■



# pva service office roster

PN

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# reasons & remarks

AL KOVACH JR.  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

## Purpose & Wisdom

**From its earliest days, Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) has understood that civil rights aren't optional — they're essential.**

That conviction was tested almost immediately after PVA's founding. In 1947, during PVA's first board meeting, the organization planned a celebratory banquet at the Hotel John Marshall in Richmond, Va. Unfortunately, the hotel's management let PVA know that some veterans would be turned away, not because they used wheelchairs, but because they were Black.

At the time, Virginia's constitution protected racial segregation. In other words, discrimination was legal there. But PVA's leaders refused to accept it. They declared that paralysis knew no bias and neither did PVA. By any means necessary, every member would dine together in that ballroom.

Days later, two Black paralyzed veterans took their seats beside their fellow delegates at the Hotel John Marshall. It was a small victory by some measures, but it marked the beginning of PVA's long fight for justice. For one of those men, Joseph A. Jordan Jr., it may have been the spark that reshaped his life.

Jordan saw, in that moment, a renewed call to service, not as a soldier, but as an advocate.

Born in Norfolk, Va., in 1924, Jordan grew up in the Jim Crow South, where segregation dictated nearly every aspect of daily life. From an early age, he learned which doors were closed, which schools were underfunded and which opportunities were denied. The message was constant and corrosive. Yet within his family, church and community, Jordan found strength, pride and a belief that something better was possible.

After graduating from Booker T. Washington High School, he enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1943. Like many Black men of his generation, Jordan sought opportunity and hoped

service, sacrifice and patriotism might finally earn equality at home. The military, however, was deeply segregated. Yet, while stationed in Europe, Jordan experienced a startling contrast — societies that treated him with more dignity than he had ever known back home in the United States.

That promise of a broader world was crushed in 1945, when Jordan's Jeep veered off the road and into a minefield in northern France, leaving him paralyzed due to a spinal cord injury (SCI). His military career was over and his life forever altered.

Jordan belonged to the first generation of paralyzed veterans to survive such injuries. Back then, there was no roadmap for recovery, which meant living with paralysis came with immense hardships.

Following the war, the nation spoke of unity and shared sacrifice, but Black veterans returned to a country still ruled by racial division. They had fought fascism abroad only to confront racism at home. Their military service offered no protection against discrimination.

Jordan was admitted to a newly constructed veterans hospital in Richmond, but even there, segregation prevailed. He was sent to rehabilitate in a facility named after a Confederate physician turned Jim Crow advocate, which was a bitter reminder that equality remained out of reach.

The promises of the then-named Veterans Administration and the GI Bill were similarly compromised. Though designed to support all veterans, a Black veteran often faced delays, denials and discriminatory treatment by local agencies, banks and universities. Still, Jordan refused to be defined by injustice or by his paralysis.

He rebuilt himself through education. He enrolled at Virginia Union University, earning a sociology degree, then moved north to attend Brooklyn Law School. He continued his studies at New York University, focusing on labor law. Education became both his refuge and his weapon.

By 1954, Jordan had moved to Norfolk, Va., to open a law practice. He immersed himself in civil rights litigation, challenging segregation

**Jordan's life traces an arc of courage, accountability and growth.**



GRAPHICS BY FREEDK AI

and disenfranchisement at every turn. His most consequential work came in the fight against Virginia's poll tax, which was a deliberate barrier designed to silence poor and Black voters.

Representing local activist Evelyn Thomas Butts, Jordan challenged the tax in court. The case reached the U.S. Supreme Court, where Jordan joined forces with Thurgood Marshall (yes, that Thurgood Marshall). On March 24, 1966, the court ruled that Virginia's poll tax violated the 14th Amendment. It was a landmark victory that dismantled a powerful tool of voter suppression.

Jordan's leadership soon carried him into public office. In 1968, he was elected to the Norfolk City Council, becoming the first Black councilmember since 1889. He later served as vice mayor and, in 1977, was appointed a judge on Virginia's General District Court. From the bench, he was known for fairness, integrity and a belief that the law should uplift people, not diminish them.

Yet Jordan's career wasn't without controversy. In 1979, the Virginia Supreme Court publicly censured him for judicial miscon-

duct relating to violations of defendants' constitutional rights to due process. Jordan acknowledged that his errors "may have been unintentional," but he reaffirmed his commitment to what he called "the common sense of justice," according to an Aug. 29, 1979, *Washington Post* article. Accountability, for him, was not the end of service; it was part of it.

Jordan retired in 1986 and died in 1991 at the Department of Veterans Affairs hospital in Hampton, Va. His legacy endures in the Martin Luther King Jr., monument he envisioned, in a public library renamed in his honor and in the countless lives shaped by his work.

From that first confrontation at the Hotel John Marshall to decades of principled service, Jordan's life traces an arc of courage, accountability and growth. He transformed racial adversity into purpose and injuries of war into wisdom.

His story proves a truth that still guides us today: You're not defined by what happens to you. You're defined by what you do with it.

As always, please share your thoughts with me at [al@pvamag.com](mailto:al@pvamag.com). ■

## Supporting Sirus

**A young boy in Strasburg, Pa., with spinal muscular atrophy who was facing daily harassment from impatient drivers as he was loaded onto his school bus received support and gifts from the Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) Colonial and Central Florida chapters last December.**

COURTESY OF PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA COLONIAL CHAPTER



Facing harassment as he was being loaded onto his accessible school bus, 7-year-old Sirus Miklos was made an honorary member of the Paralyzed Veterans of America Colonial Chapter last December.

The parents of 7-year-old Sirus Miklos told WHP TV in Harrisburg, Pa., last October that for several years, drivers were “swerving their cars, swearing and harassing them” because it took extra

time for their son and his wheelchair to be loaded onto an accessible bus.

The story went viral, and it prompted the local community and the PVA chapters to come out to support Sirus. PVA Colonial Chapter Executive Director Jo Ann Bedsworth, Marketing Director Jason Spohn and Treasurer Chris Bryant, along with PVA Central Florida board member Amy Patterson, visited Sirus Dec. 5.

The PVA Colonial Chapter made Sirus a honorary member and also helped him out with other gifts. Bedsworth says they gave Sirus a new tablet computer, a new SmartDrive for his wheelchair and brought him to the Colonial Chapter's Christmas party.

Bedsworth says Sirus is interested in wheelchair rugby and hopes to attend July's National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Detroit.

To read the WHP TV story about Sirus, visit [tinyurl.com/yeufubcm](http://tinyurl.com/yeufubcm).

## Weis Donation

**Celebrating 10 years of** partnership with Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA), Weis Markets made a \$170,000 donation to PVA last November.

The most recent contribution from the supermarket chain headquartered in Pennsylvania was generated through a comprehensive four-week customer



COURTESY OF PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA

Paralyzed Veterans of America CEO Carl Blake, standing fourth from the left, receives a \$170,000 donation on behalf of Weis Markets from the staff of the chain's Nottingham, Md., store last November.

fundraising initiative last October, combined with a corporate donation.

“We’re honored to support PVA, an organization that provides essential resources to those who have sacrificed for our nation,” says Weis Vice President of Marketing and Advertising Maria Rizzo in a Nov. 13 PVA press release. “Having employed thousands of veterans throughout our history, this partnership embodies our enduring commitment to those who have served. PVA creates meaningful change for veterans and their families, and we’re proud to advance this vital mission together.”

PVA's partnership with Weis Markets dates back to 2016 and has amassed more than \$3 million in

donations. It also includes involvement in vital PVA programming, such as its Honor The Spot public service announcement, which was filmed in the parking lot of the Brunswick, Md., store and raises awareness about the importance of accessible parking spaces.

Weis Markets operates 202 stores in seven states. For more information, visit [weismarkets.com](http://weismarkets.com).

## Pampering PVA

**For the second straight** year, Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) members and their families got a day of pampering from L’Oréal USA.

PVA partnered with L’Oréal USA for the cosmetic company's Have A Beautiful



Paralyzed Veterans of America teamed with L'Oréal USA for the second time last November to treat 60 veterans with disabilities and their families to a day of pampering and relaxation at four sites across the country.

Day event created to honor U.S. veterans, military personnel and their families.

More than 60 veterans with disabilities and their families were treated to several beauty and relaxation services from L'Oréal

Nov. 12, in New York City, El Segundo, Calif., Tampa, Fla., and Clark, N.J. Attendees met with hair and makeup stylists, nail technicians and massage therapists.

"L'Oréal USA is proud to partner with Paralyzed

Veterans of America and host its celebrated Have A Beautiful Day event this year," says North America L'Oréal Groupe Chief Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Officer Liliahn Majeed in a Nov. 17 PVA press release.

"We believe that beauty can inspire confidence and belonging, and we are honored to extend that spirit to those who have served and sacrificed for our country. By working together, we can show the world that we are all more alike than we are different."

PVA and L'Oréal's work together is far-reaching. PVA provided pro bono architectural consultation to improve accessibility at L'Oréal's U.S. headquarters in New York City's Hudson Yards and awarded the company a PVA Disability Innovation Award in 2024.

Meanwhile, L'Oréal was a sponsor for the 2025 National Veterans Wheelchair Games and participated in PVA's first Partner Summit, which encouraged other brands to prioritize corporate social responsibility and get involved with PVA.



COURTESY OF PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA

## Raise For Vets

Calling it "arguably the most important ancillary benefit for veterans with severe, service-connected disabilities," Paralyzed Veterans of America National Treasurer Tom Wheaton stressed the importance of increasing the Special Monthly Compensation rates for veterans with disabilities, along with asking for an increase to Dependency and Indemnity Compensation for surviving spouses, during his testimony before a Dec. 3 hearing of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee on Capitol Hill.



# on the hill

HEATHER ANSLEY, ESQ., MSW



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## 2026 Policy Focus

**This year starts the second session** of the 119th Congress.

With the midterm elections on the calendar for November, the legislative window will be short. Congress members will spend several weeks back in their states and districts in the fall trying to encourage voters to return them to Capitol Hill for another term.

Although few bills made it across the finish line in 2025, Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) made progress on highlighting the issues of concern for its members and worked to gain support for new legislation to address its priorities.

PVA's policy priorities for 2026 reflect the progress made last year and the areas the organization hopes to advance this year.

### Foundational Support

In 2026, PVA will continue to support strengthening the foundations of the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) specialized health care services.

Last year, nearly 3,700 individuals signed PVA's petition to oppose any efforts to dismantle the VA's spinal cord injuries and disorders (SCI/D) system of care. Veterans with SCI/D choose the VA for their care because it's unmatched in the community.

However, chronic staffing and infrastructure deficiencies continue

to have a direct, adverse impact on VA specialty care. This year, PVA will continue to advocate for legislation and policies that would address these deficiencies and prioritize infrastructure projects that support the unique services the VA provides.

Another critical priority is the need to maximize access to VA long-term services and supports. Veterans with SCI/D often need long-term services and supports, whether in their homes or through facility-based care, throughout their lives. Care in community nursing homes is often lower quality and has poorer outcomes than that provided in the VA.

However, there are few SCI/D long-term care beds available in the

VA. As with acute care, PVA supports the VA prioritizing infrastructure projects focused on increasing specialized VA long-term care facilities for veterans with SCI/D.

The passage of the Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act of 2025 in the last Congress was a major victory for PVA members.

Now, PVA needs Congress to conduct oversight of the VA to ensure the provisions to expand access to the VA's home- and community-based services, including the Veteran Directed Care program, are implemented as intended. These services should be available to catastrophically disabled veterans, regardless of where they live.

## Strengthening Efforts

PVA is heightening its efforts to make sure the VA's Bowel and Bladder Program works for veterans and their caregivers.

The current program is fraught with challenges for caregivers and is unevenly applied across the VA. Timely reimbursement and the tax treatment of payments are the chief complaints, along with a lack of due process in its administration.

PVA wants to establish the program in statute to make it easier to address reimbursement problems and ensure equitable treatment of payment for veterans' caregivers.

In addition to strengthening the foundations of VA's specialized sys-

tem of care and maximizing access to VA long-term services and supports, PVA also seeks to increase SCI/D veterans' access to health care services. The focus areas will include accessing accessible transportation within the VA, the needs of women veterans with SCI/D and helping catastrophically disabled veterans grow their families.

Transportation is often one of the biggest barriers to health care for veterans with SCI/D. Missed health care appointments result in worse health outcomes and higher costs. The solution to transportation problems is often owning a vehicle.

The VA's Automobile Adaptive Equipment (AAE) program provides necessary vehicle adaptations, but

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changes in the program's administration have made it more bureaucratic for service-connected catastrophically disabled veterans to access statutorily granted benefits.

Also, the VA's travel mileage reimbursement rate has remained stagnant, even while gas prices and other costs like auto insurance and vehicle maintenance have increased significantly.

PVA's recommendations include streamlining the AAE program by decreasing bureaucratic hurdles that make it more difficult for veterans to purchase and access vehicles that meet their needs and increasing the reimbursement rate for veterans' travel expenses to improve their access to health care services and reduce their financial burden.

## Financial Help

Fortifying the financial security of veterans with SCI/D, their families and survivors is another of PVA's major priorities.

The focus areas include increasing special monthly compensation rates for veterans with catastrophic disabilities, boosting survivors' benefits and ensuring access to employment. PVA is also working to increase the funding available for housing modifications through the VA's Home Improvements and Structural Alterations grant program. All of these critical benefits help to ensure the economic well-being of PVA members and their families.

Finally, PVA supports equal opportunity and full participation for catastrophically disabled veter-

ans in their communities. Despite the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), access barriers remain, unfairly limiting opportunities for veterans with disabilities, including those who use wheelchairs.

That's why PVA opposes any efforts to weaken freedoms by imposing requirements that would decrease ADA compliance or hinder adoption of regulatory requirements that improve disability access.

Access to all modes of transportation, including sidewalks, autonomous vehicles, trains and planes, remains a top PVA priority. Despite the ADA and other disability rights laws, access to ground transportation continues to be fragmented.

PVA supports efforts to include provisions in the next Surface Transportation Reauthorization that will provide funding and support to tackle these issues.

The organization also urges Congress to conduct effective oversight of implementation of the 2024 FAA (Federal Aviation Administration) Reauthorization Act provisions that would improve disability access in air travel. Furthermore, PVA will lead the charge in opposing any efforts to roll back regulatory requirements for wheelchair users in air travel.

Bills addressing many of these priorities have either been introduced or will be soon. PVA needs your help to get Congress members to pursue them. You can help by visiting PVAAction Force ([pva.org/research-resources/pva-action-force](http://pva.org/research-resources/pva-action-force)) and sending messages to your Congress members.

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

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# caregiver

## connection

### Love Always

**Our designated month of love** has many stories of its origin, some pleasant and others gloomy. But we're not limited to one month for a designated representation of love — we love daily. Love has always been a positive force in uniting people.

Going through the motions as caregivers, we can sometimes be blind to the multitude of daily expressions of love.

I believe love is to consider yourself and others, no matter the history. To observe this, one must have gratitude for the gestures, big or small. The thought does truly count! When present, you notice these compact moments in magnitude, bringing pure joy to one's heart and soul.

We don't have to wait for those moments to occur with our veterans and friends, or even a stranger. We can create and show love.

### Everyone Deserves Love

Sometimes with our military veterans, we place our emotions and needs to the side. Other times, there is a great outward expression of emotion, for the reality of life looks a little different for us.

It's important to find ways to keep our love life going when the normal takes on additional steps as caregivers. Reminding ourselves to care for our personal pampering is love, too. Personal health adjustments, both physical and mental, communication, understanding and compromise are key attributes in any relationship.

My husband and I have maintained doing things we loved together from the start and try other dating plans/suggestions, enjoying each other's time. Give individual space for growth, and love each other through the changes in life.

Now, I didn't forget about the caregivers themselves. No matter if you're single or married, treat yourself to a date. Set those designated days to be pampered, go to the salon or barber, get a manicure or pedicure, go to a coffee shop or your favorite restaurant. Go shopping and invite friends.

It's almost like refueling to continue to give your best efforts of love to your loved one and spouse. Arrange care for your loved one to allow date time. Shop for Valentine's Day gifts or create personal ones for the person you care for. Everyone deserves love.

### Keeping The Spark

For those who prefer staying at home to avoid being in the public eye and the holiday hassle, create a Valentine's Day date night at home.

Being romantic doesn't have to be grand. Simple things are sweet, and surprises are nice. Order your favorite takeout, or cook if it's your thing. Have some wine, set the table for a candlelight dinner or porch barbecue. Arrange the living room for a movie night.



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Invite friends over for double dates, board games, card games, trivia or video games. Play your favorite songs, and dance inside your home with your spouse or loved one.

If your loved one uses a standing frame, take full advantage of the standing moments while you have the chance. Embrace the hugs and touches while he or she is standing.



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Share individual creative plans and talk to each other about the outcome or how things are throughout your day; these are great conversation pieces. Cuddle sessions are a must!

These activities aren't limited to just one month.

For couples who enjoy being out and about, plan a minimum once-a-week outing. There are more accessible places available for out-of-the-home adventures. If you have any questions regarding safety for your spouse, ask your physician.

Wheelchair options, including beach wheelchairs, off-road chairs and several others, are available when visiting different places for outdoor activities. Or enjoy the classic activities, such



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as going the movies or arcade, dining, short vacations or shopping.

There are lots of ways to keep the spark alive. Just sitting outside, chatting and taking in the sun can be romantic.

### A Commitment

As American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote, "The first wealth is health."

Maintain routine reproductive health checkups, and have awareness of autonomic dysreflexia for sexual health.

Uncomfortable conversations will lead to understanding the limits for more romantic experiences. Avoid some of those awkward moments by

turning preparation time into theater and keeping it spicy.

For family planning, speak with your health care providers for help. Conversations can be more intimate than the physical act.

As it is written in the *Bible*, "Love is patient, love is kind." It's a lifelong commitment. Love grows stronger over time while learning who your partner truly is and the challenges you face dealing with his or her physical needs.

In return, he or she is learning who you are. See the naked side of each other without any boundaries. Take care of your own health and personal needs, and stay whole to pour into each other.

Love is everywhere, from strangers, to friendships, to those giving and receiving care. It's a commitment filled with superior moments that carry on for eternity and through the duration of rugged times that feel like they will never cease.

Remember how far you have made it, continuing to love each other through it all. Love may look a little different for us caregivers, but the bonding of love is the same. Enjoy this lovely month! ■

*Kimberly Outlaw is a caregiver and wife of Paralyzed Veterans of America Southeastern Chapter member Charles Outlaw and lives in Charlotte, N.C.*

# It's your turn

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# NEW Resources

PVA's Clinical Practice Guidelines provide the latest information on care for people with SCI/D.

by Lindsay Perlman, MPH

## A key tenet of Paralyzed

Veterans of America's (PVA) mission is the research and education addressing spinal cord injury and disease (SCI/D), in order to be the leading advocate for those living with disabilities.

The PVA Research & Education program is the home of this mission within PVA, including the development and promotion of its Clinical Practice Guidelines (CPG). In partnership with the Consortium of Spinal Cord Medicine, a collaboration of health care professional and consumer organizations involved in the continuum of care after spinal cord injury (SCI), PVA develops these CPGs, written by a panel of experts, in order to improve access to quality SCI care and treatment for veterans and others living with SCI/D.

CPGs are used by thousands of health care providers around the world to provide evidence-based quality treatment to those with

SCI. Through the collaboration of the consortium members and the CPG panels, the guides are truly interdisciplinary, as well as an innovative and peer-reviewed resource. They have been translated into 31 languages, and several have companion Consumer Guides, which are intended for individuals living with SCI and their formal and informal caregivers.

## Upcoming CPGs

The process of developing a CPG, beginning with the topic selection and panel formation, through the final design and editing process, is both labor- and time-intensive. The support of both PVA leadership and PVA members is vital to ensuring these resources can continue to be produced at the highest possible caliber.

There are currently two CPGs that are in the final stages of development, and publication is anticipated early this year.



The first, an update on a 1999 CPG, speaks to outcomes after SCI. This important update will present evidence-based recommendations for all clinicians who may be presented with a person living with a new SCI — from outcomes and recovery to the level of independent activity that can be expected, to what equipment and assistance may be required.

This updated CPG will also look extensively at recommendations for social

and community reintegration, as well as a variety of challenges that a person living with a new injury may face.

By providing these evidence-based recommendations across a wide swath of categories, this updated CPG will help clinicians communicate and plan effectively alongside the patient on outcomes after an SCI.

The second CPG currently in development is a new CPG on managing pain after SCI. The issue of pain and pain management after SCI is a very common but often elusive problem.

There are different types of pain. Some can be associated with the injury itself, while others are a result of adapting to living with an SCI. Both can cause varying levels of intensity and discomfort for the person living with SCI and present a real struggle for management options.

The intended purpose of the new CPG

The Clinical Practice Guidelines cover a variety of topics related to spinal cord injury and disease.



The Clinical Practice Guidelines are written to improve access to quality spinal cord injury care and treatment.

is to provide a comprehensive overview of how to manage pain after SCI through a wide range of topics, including prevention, assessment and treatments. This CPG will serve as a resource for clinicians when talking about pain management after SCI with consumers and will help identify gaps in the medical literature and research areas where more work needs to be done.

In addition to these two CPGs that are in the final development stages, PVA is beginning work on two more CPGs, one that is an update on an old resource and one that is another new topic.

The first CPG is the long overdue update on bladder management after SCI, another topic that is significant for the SCI community. This CPG will focus on updated recommendations based on the latest evidence for bladder management for SCI, in order to be relevant for a wide variety of clinical disciplines.

PVA is also in the first stages of a new CPG on the topic of women's health and SCI. This CPG will focus on a variety of topics that fall under women's health issues, concerns and questions for those living with SCI. By providing evidence-based recommendations, as well as suggestions for new and continued research into women's health concerns after SCI, this CPG intends to provide a valuable resource to clinicians in this often-understudied and underrepresented area.

The process that PVA follows to develop a new guideline or an update on a previous guideline is based on a model derived from the federal Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality and is considered an innovative and cost-efficient method for guideline development.

The approach recognizes the specialized needs of the United States SCI medical community, encourages the participation of both providers and consumers and emphasizes the utilization of graded evidence drawn from

international scientific literature. The process involves extensive field review, medical editing and a legal review.

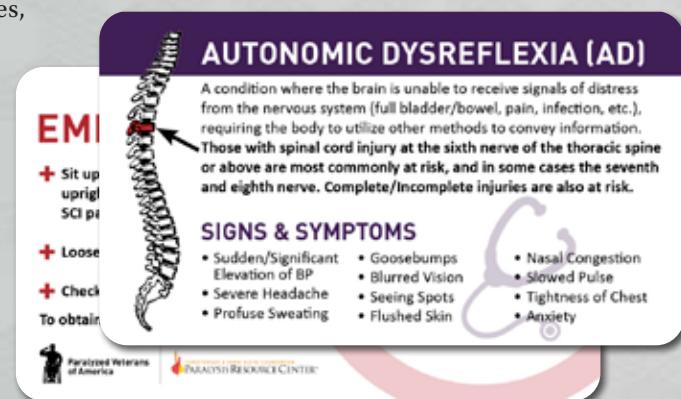
## Other Resources

In addition to the CPGs, the PVA Research & Education program produces several other educational resources that are available to PVA members.

Consumer Guides are companion texts to each CPG and contain the most important, need-to-know, distilled information on each CPG topic.

These guides are intended for use by consumers, their families and their caregivers and provide them with a way to be proactively informed about every aspect of their own care.

PVA also produces wallet cards, one on the signs and symptoms of autonomic dysreflexia (AD) and another for those living with multiple sclerosis (MS). These laminated, wallet-size cards are intended to stay on your person in case of an emergency to inform any



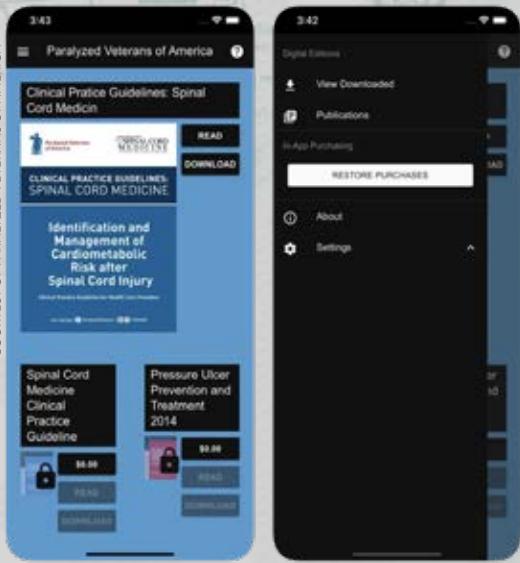
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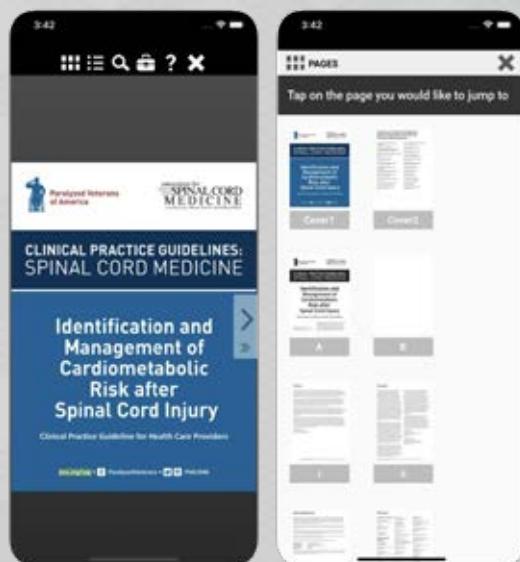
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health care provider or emergency worker about the way to identify and handle an AD episode or an MS symptom.

PVA is dedicated to educating clinical providers and consumers about best practices for



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ePubs



The Clinical Practice Guidelines can be downloaded from Paralyzed Veterans of America's ePubs app, available in the Apple App Store. For information, visit [pva.org/research-resources/publication](http://pva.org/research-resources/publication).

the care of those living with SCI/D. The global challenge of ensuring those who care for persons living with SCI/D are knowledgeable and current in their practice takes a concerted effort by dedicated professionals. The scope of care for individuals living with SCI encompasses many topics, from acute care for the newly injured, rehabilitative care to restore function and continued care and support throughout life. CPGs address many of these topics and secondary conditions that persons living with SCI may encounter, including preventative care and psychosocial issues, and offer their care providers a state-of-the-art resource.

There is no CPG that provides the definitive and final answer to any question of SCI care — these are a living resource. CPGs provide recommendations for a higher standard of care, with the knowledge that they will eventually be updated and replaced with better information, more effective methods and improved standards of care as needed. PVA and the providers who contribute to these resources are committed to this endeavor.

PVA members are urged to give their health care providers information about how to access all the CPGs. They are available for free digitally at [pva.org/research-resources/publication](http://pva.org/research-resources/publication).

For more information on the CPGs or any of PVA's resources, contact the Research and Education staff: Director Lindsay Perlman at [lindsayp@pva.org](mailto:lindsayp@pva.org) or Associate Director Jennifer Massey at [jenniferm@pva.org](mailto:jenniferm@pva.org). We cannot provide clinical information or advice about these topics but are happy to assist you in accessing the CPGs.

*Lindsay Perlman, MPH, is PVA's director of research and education.* ■





# PACKING A PUNCH

There's far more to wheelchair boxing than just fighting someone.

## To the uninitiated,

wheelchair boxing may appear to be a bloody slugfest, a mere sport of anger, violence, bruises and tears. To wheelchair boxers, it's instead about finesse, tactics, self-defense, attention to detail, honor and community.

"I don't see it being about hitting. It's more of building a lot of respect between boxers. You see how they talk to each other, all hype, before a bout, but in the end, you go your rounds, find your defense, learn

how to use your blocking, shade, pullbacks and all the good stuff that makes it interesting. You find that one-second hole that opens to land a legal punch, and it becomes like a dance," says Paralyzed Veterans of America Mountain States Chapter member and Army veteran Orlando "The Wheel Deal" Perez.

Perez, of Strike Boxing & Fitness Club in Utah, was among the first athletes to join in wheelchair boxing exhibitions when, in 2024, he faced Jonathan "Suavecito" De La Cruz at

by Jennifer Best



Paralyzed Veterans of America Mountain States Chapter member Orlando Perez, right, fights Jonathan De La Cruz in a 2025 wheelchair boxing bout.

the first Wheelchair Boxing Showcase hosted by Virginia-based DPI Adaptive Fitness.

“Being a veteran, the one-on-one battle with someone calls to me,” Perez says. “It’s the adrenaline of a contact sport. You’re training your mind and your body to fight a person and to win. In the end, you respect each other.”

That spring, USA Boxing also launched an adaptive program focused on athletes with lower limb deficiencies. Resources include USA Adaptive Boxing Rule Modifi-

cations, classification standards and details related to adaptive boxing bout exemption requirements and opportunities to compete in USA Boxing-sanctioned events.

“USA Boxing is excited to bring these new boxing opportunities to disabled athletes with lower limb deficiencies. Our leadership team has focused on creating diverse access points into the sport. We’re looking forward to providing



COURTESY OF ORLANDO PEREZ



Orlando Perez, left, prepares to enter the boxing ring.

new opportunities to a whole new community of boxers," USA Boxing Executive Director Mike McAtee says.

### Hitting The Bags

Wheelchair boxers appreciate that the sport doesn't require huge financial outlays for equipment. All that's needed to get started in the gym is an everyday wheelchair and hand wraps. To spar or fight, additional required equipment includes proper head gear, a mouthguard and chest protector, along with a wheelchair, a belt and leg stabilizers.

"If you have the slightest inkling what boxing is about and you have an interest, don't hesitate to give it a try. While other sports are expensive because of the special adaptive equipment that's needed, we can box in our everyday chairs," says Joanna "The Real Deal" Bonilla of Virginia.

Formerly a soccer player and dancer, Bonilla picked up fitness boxing in 2019, seven years after she sustained a spinal cord injury (SCI) at the T11 level. While she has full range of motion in her arms and hands and some trunk stability, at a certain level, she says, she loses that control.

"Boxing is great cardio, and the best way to start is through boxing fitness," Bonilla says. "It's easy and adaptable to anybody at any level, as long as you are ready to get a good workout, and any adaptive trainer will figure out ways to get you where you need to be."

She got after the bags thanks to her trainer, Devon Palermo, at DPI Adaptive Fitness, where Palermo was kicking off a wheelchair boxing club. He invited her to join.

COURTESY OF JOANNA BONILLA



Joanna Bonilla, left, says adaptive boxing has given her the confidence she didn't have before.

"At first, it was a definite, 'No! Boxing is not for me!' I was freshly injured. For him to offer me boxing, it didn't click. But he talked me into giving it a try," says Bonilla, now a competitive boxing coach, co-founder and chair of Adaptive Fitness Legion and a United Adaptive Boxing Council (UABC) committee member. "Boxing has given me the confidence I didn't have prior to starting it and that I had lost when I was injured. Without my sports, I didn't know where I belonged. Now, I have confidence, I feel stronger. I can defend myself, but also boxing helped me start to trust my body again and has given me a place in my community."

Perez also found his way to boxing through injury and other wheelchair sports. He began playing wheelchair basketball in 1999, three years after a level T4-T6 SCI that paralyzed him from the mid-chest down. In his rookie year, Perez qualified for the Puerto Rico national team, for which he played 17 years including three Parapan American Games and two Americas Cup tournaments. He also earned a wheelchair basketball scholarship to Oklahoma State University.

Somewhere along the way, he picked up alpine skiing. He competed in the 2022 Beijing Paralympics representing Puerto Rico, the territory in which he was born, raised and returned to recover after his injury. Now, he's gunning for March's Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Paralympic Games in Italy.

Perez gave cardio boxing a go during the off-season to help build his core, improve his balance and maintain his cardio endurance.

"Being a para, it's hard to find core workouts," Perez says. "By sparring or punching on a bag or mitt work, your stomach and your core clinches automatically, since it's looking for balance."

Entering the ring, dropped hands means receiving blows.

"By keeping your hands up and punching, it forces you to do certain things with your body to keep straight and upright. In the long run, I've noticed it helping with my core," Perez says.

Initially, Perez started boxing as a way to strengthen those core muscles, but he soon

COURTESY OF JOANNA BONILLA



**Joanna Bonilla,**  
blue shirt, started  
fitness boxing in 2019  
and moved on to  
adaptive boxing later.

realized there was an even greater benefit: improved skiing on the mountain.

"My ski coaches see how I'm stronger to bend the ski, throw my body on one side and curve on my ski," Perez says.

## Gaining Confidence

The sport is starting to grow across the United States, as well.

Palermo, Bonilla and Perez joined Fighters Nashville coach Mindy Vernier, DPI Adaptive Fitness boxer Abe "Freight Train" Waugh and DPI Adaptive Fitness coach Alec Pritchard to form the UABC in January 2025 to serve as the governing body for U.S. adaptive boxing competitions. UABC also aims to develop safe standards and advance the sport for Paralympic recognition and has coordinated with international adaptive boxing organizations, including Dragon Krakow Paraboxing in Poland, which holds matches across Europe, and programs in Ghana, Italy, Nigeria and the United Kingdom.

Founding affiliated clubs include: DPI Adaptive Boxing Club of Fairfax, Va. (coach Palermo); Boxing Resource Center of Nashville, Tenn. (coach Vernier); Strike Boxing & Fitness Club of Clearfield, Utah (adaptive



MANOLO ANICO

boxer Perez); The Thump Yard Boxing & Fitness of Brentwood, Md. (coach and adaptive boxer De La Cruz); and Z's Boxing Gym of Annandale, Va. (coach Eric Zimmerman).

The organization offers titles in six classes: men's and women's heavyweight (175-plus pounds), middleweight (140-174 pounds) and lightweight (110-139 pounds).

COURTESY OF ORLANDO PEREZ



Orlando Perez, in wheelchair, and his family. Perez has participated in adaptive boxing since 2024.

Orlando Perez, right, says he likes to adaptive box with his wheelchair locked in place.

Eligible fighters must be evenly matched beyond weight classes. Additional factors include ability and skill levels based on the number of sparring/bouts.

Additionally, Marine Corps veteran Donahue Fields founded U.S. Adaptive Boxing and runs Hannibal Camp out of the Bronx, N.Y. He's a bilateral amputee who was paralyzed in 2003 after a stray bullet hit him at age 19, and he later lost both legs below the knee.

As for boxers, they may fight with their wheelchairs locked in place or may be mobile.

"I like the locked-in, stationary bouts because you have to protect yourself at all times. It seems a little more wild, like a street fight. It makes it more exciting. It's continuously punching, moving, punching, moving. Two minutes seems like an hour," Perez says.

Last September, the inaugural UABC Adaptive Boxing Showcase III in Burke, Va., found Perez again facing off against De La Cruz for three 2-minute rounds. De La Cruz defeated Perez by split decision to win the men's U.S. UABC middleweight title, and Alijah "King Kong" Liggins Gonzalez defeated Waugh by split decision for the heavyweight title.

"I think Joanna and Devon are doing a great job," Perez says. "They brought it from being an exhibition in a park two years in a row with, like, 15 or 16 family members watching to this indoor facility that was packed and loud. It was so loud! People were screaming and really into it."

On the women's side, Kelley "The Truth" Simoneaux defeated Claudia "Baby Tyson" Palacios by split decision to win the women's U.S. UABC lightweight title, while Bonilla defeated Shelby "Lethal" Lemmon by unanimous decision to take the middleweight title.

"Boxing gives you the confidence not only to enter the ring, but to do other things that you were scared of doing before, whether it's a recreational sport or a family event or whatever. Things you kind of shield yourself from," Perez says.

He'd like to see bimonthly events. Both Utah and Tennessee are working toward filling cards for this year.



Orlando Perez shows how he tapes up his hands before adaptive boxing.

"I think a lot more adaptive organizations will find it interesting enough for boxers to be calling their facilities. Whether you take it on as a permanent or transitional sport, it's pretty cost-effective, and you'd be surprised how



COURTESY OF JOANNA BONILLA

Joanna Bonilla, seated with blue shirt, and her family, celebrate her winning last September's U.S. United Adaptive Boxing Council women's middleweight title.

## Ring The Bell

Here are a handful of wheelchair boxing resources, including the national organizations and gyms, that can help get you started with the sport.

- **United Adaptive Boxing Council**  
[adaptivefitnesslegion.org/uabc-adaptive-boxing.html](http://adaptivefitnesslegion.org/uabc-adaptive-boxing.html)
- **USA Boxing Adaptive Boxing**  
[membership@usaboxing.org](http://membership@usaboxing.org)
- **DPI Adaptive Boxing Club, Fairfax, Va.**  
[dpiadaptivefitness.co/dpi-adaptive-boxing-club.html](http://dpiadaptivefitness.co/dpi-adaptive-boxing-club.html)
- **Boxing Resource Center, Nashville, Tenn.**  
[boxingresource.com/adaptive](http://boxingresource.com/adaptive)
- **Strike Boxing & Fitness Club, Clearfield, Utah**  
[strikeboxingclub.com](http://strikeboxingclub.com)
- **The Thump Yard Boxing & Fitness, Brentwood, Md.**  
[ttyboxing.com](http://ttyboxing.com)
- **Z's Boxing Gym, Annandale, Va.**  
[zboxinggym.com](http://zboxinggym.com)



FREEPIK

many gyms are open to it. Just give them a call, tell them you'd like to park your chair in front of the bags. That's exactly what you need," Perez says. "Find Crossfit boxing or a fighting gym or a cardio gym. Hit the bag. Learn the combos and from there, it can move on."

If calling local gyms doesn't pan out, reach out to Palermo, who has connections and can help boxers and coaches find each other. To move from practice to the ring, register for a class and talk to coaches. And when it comes to sparring partners, go ahead and rope-in able-bodied partners.

"They're hesitant at first, but once they've tried seated sparring, they want to do it again because it gives them practice for situations when they can't move, when they're stuck in the corner, when they can't use their legs to move around," Perez says. "Sitting and sparring with someone in a wheelchair gives them practice moving their hips and core to evade." ■



JIM TWARDOWSKI



# Southern Gem



Columbus, Ga., is a surprising travel destination that offers plenty of accessible history, beauty and fun.

by Barbara & Jim Twardowski

## When it comes to plan-

ning a visit to Georgia, places such as Atlanta and Savannah get most of the attention. But tucked away on the state's western border, there's a fun, interesting and accessible vacation destination that's worth the trip.

Nestled beside the Chattahoochee River and 90 miles southwest of Atlanta, Columbus Ga., offers a variety of unique and affordable attractions. The city of roughly 200,000 people also has a strong connection to the military.

One of the largest military installations in the country, the Army's Fort Benning is located just south of the city and is also a major influence on the area. A community of more than 120,000 active-duty military, family members, retirees and civilian employees call the area home.

## RiverWalk

Although we arrived just before the trees changed to autumn hues, Columbus was a visual delight with storefronts and historic



neighborhoods adorned in displays of fall flowers, pumpkins and Halloween decorations. Rolling along the Uptown area, we stopped to admire the public art and

fountains. This section of the city could easily be the setting for a Hallmark Channel movie with coffee shops, restaurants and a Kilwins ([kilwins.com](http://kilwins.com)) candy store. The friendly staff melt caramels in a copper pot and prep chocolate on a marble slab.

Established in 1828, Columbus boasts an abundance of historic buildings. Driving in our

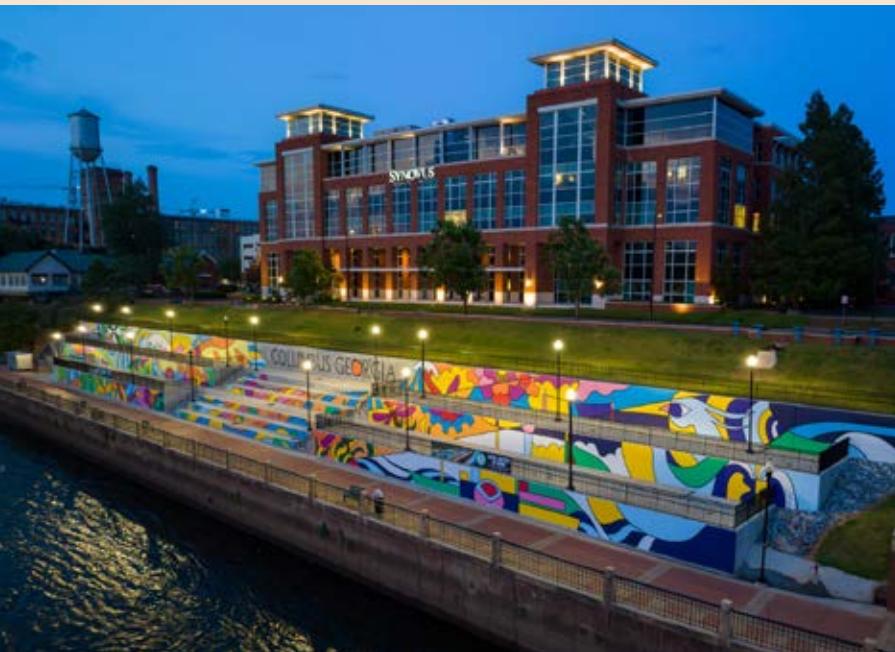


wheelchair-accessible van over bumpy brick-paved streets, we saw dozens of beautiful homes from the Victorian era. Many featured large welcoming porches, intricate latticework and beveled glass doors.

For a closer inspection, I accessed the sidewalk by riding my power wheelchair via a residential driveway. Historical markers are on many of the lawns. The Octagon House, built around 1830, might be the only example of a double-octagon home in the country. The space-saving design offered occupants more light and lower utility bills.

You can refuel and admire more architecture at the Iron Bank Coffee Co. ([ironbankcoffee.com](http://ironbankcoffee.com)) in Uptown. The largest cast iron building in the state, circa 1860, is eye-catching inside and out.

At the back of the building, the original bank vault has been turned into a cozy and



**The 15-mile Chattahoochee RiverWalk offers views of the Chattahoochee River, which possesses the world's longest urban whitewater rafting course.**

coveted spot to sit for patrons who can climb steps or cross a raised threshold. Snacking on an afternoon cookie, we sat at a large communal table under chandeliers and enjoyed the sunlight beaming through rows of large, arched windows.

The 15-mile Chattahoochee RiverWalk made of concrete and asphalt is wheelchair-accessible. The wide path runs beside the Chattahoochee River, which possesses the world's longest urban whitewater rafting course. It's a huge draw for adventurous folks paddling canoes and kayaks.

Rolling on the RiverWalk just before sunset, we caught a glimpse of the city's iconic 20-foot-tall, 2,300-pound fiberglass bovine, Kadie the Cow, a group of adults practicing yoga, runners and bicyclists. Some portions of the wide path are hilly, but I had no difficulty maneuvering my power chair past gorgeous trees.

You can access views of the river on foot, by vehicle (there are many spots to park) and from the outdoor raised deck (access via a ramp) of the Banks Food Hall ([banksfoodhall.com](http://banksfoodhall.com)), which is housed in a historic warehouse. A variety of food and beverage vendors ensure everyone gets their favorite, from poke bowls to tacos, or you can opt for an adult beverage.

Another lively spot to enjoy the water without getting wet is the Eighteen85 Rooftop Bar & Kitchen at the Hotel Indigo Columbus, an IHG property ([www.eighteen85rooftop.com](http://www.eighteen85rooftop.com)).

Opened in 2021, the popular bar doesn't take reservations. Seating is available beside coffee tables and at bar-height tables.

## Infantry Museum

There's an eclectic assortment of attractions and museums in Columbus, but one of the most popular has ties to the area's strong military connections.

Considered one of the nation's top military attractions, the National Infantry Museum and Soldier Center ([nationalinfantrymuseum.org](http://nationalinfantrymuseum.org)) chronicles the history of the Army infantry. Located on the south side of town near Fort Benning, the 190,000-square-foot museum is a captivating look at the life and bravery of these individuals. Dozens of young soldiers were exploring the museum on the day we visited.

JIM TWAROWSKI



**The National Infantry Museum and Soldier Center chronicles the history of the Army infantry.**

Nearly every week on Thursday and Friday mornings, the Fort Moore one-station unit training graduating ceremonies are held on a field adjacent to the museum. Proud loved ones come from across the country to witness this milestone. Museum visitors are welcome to attend.

You could easily spend the day absorbing the stories of real-life heroes. The family-friendly museum features virtual reality simulators, the Giant Screen Theater, a gift shop and a restaurant. Additional exhibits and memorials are located on the grounds.

Disabled parking is located at the front of the three-story museum. To avoid a long roll, drop-off is at the traffic circle. Manual wheelchairs may be borrowed at no charge from the information desk. There is no admission fee, but a \$5 donation per person is suggested.

## American Art

Back toward the middle of town, The Columbus Museum, or COMU ([comuga.org](http://comuga.org)), is the second-largest museum in the state.

Reopened in 2024 after a \$30 million renovation, the museum is focused on American art and regional history through its permanent collection, temporary exhibits and educational programs. The COMU delivered the type of experience we expect from a major metropolitan institution.



Barbara Twardowski in front of Dale Chihuly's Boat Installation, a hand-blown glass sculpture in the permanent collection at The Columbus Museum.

During our visit, a temporary exhibit on surrealism was on display. Running through June 14, America Fantastica: Memories, Dreams, and Chance is a fascinating show that includes pieces from the Museum of Modern Art in New York City and a private collector.

The wheelchair-accessible museum has family restrooms on all three levels, an elevator and an accessible entrance on the east side. Pathways in the Bradley Olmsted Garden, designed in the 1920s, are made of pea gravel and weren't suitable for my power wheelchair.

Admission to The COMU is free, but a donation is suggested.

## Lunch Boxes & Cars

On the north side of the city, you'll find a quirky collection of eight museums in a restored 1946 tile and marble warehouse/showroom called the Columbus Collective Museums ([columbuscollectivemuseums.com](http://columbuscollectivemuseums.com)).



The Columbus Collective Museums include The Lunch Box Museum, left, and Hatcher Family Cola Museum, right.

The founder uses a power wheelchair, and the museums are accessible. However, some ramps felt rather steep, and I chose to descend backward.

The museum features more than 3,000 lunch boxes in The Lunch Box Museum, antique cars in The Car Museum, a look at

the Nehi Corporation and Royal Crown in the Hatcher Family Cola Museum and so much more. The Folk Art Museum is the newest addition and focuses on folk art created by locals (available for purchase).

The gift shop stocks a variety of vintage and antique treasures. I came home with a milk glass piece for my table. General admission is \$12, with \$10 tickets for military members and seniors.

### Learning Space

A learning environment for students and the public, the Coca-Cola Space Science Center ([ccssc.org](http://ccssc.org)) is part of Columbus State University and Georgia's only such facility dedicated to providing experiences in astronomy and space science.

Here, visitors get up close to objects such as the space shuttle main engine nozzle used on nine missions. They can also engage with interactive displays, including flight simulators and simulated space missions. Shows at the WestRock Observatory are scheduled several times each day.

Admission is \$8, with a \$1 discount for military members and seniors.

**Barbara Twardowski explores the Coca-Cola Space Science Center.**



JIM TWARDOWSKI

### Civil War History

Another military-centered museum that covers an often-overlooked portion of the Civil War can be found in the southern part of the city along the Chattahoochee River.



COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL CIVIL WAR NAVAL MUSEUM

**The National Civil War Naval Museum highlights stories and naval artifacts from the Civil War.**

The National Civil War Naval Museum ([portcolumbus.org](http://portcolumbus.org)) is a 40,000-square-foot exhibition that explores the stories of ships, sailors and naval battles during a painful chapter of American history. The museum features the largest surviving Confederate warship, the *CSS Jackson*, a full-scale replica of the *USS Monitor*'s famous turret, wreckage and reproductions of other ships, as well as other authentic artifacts.

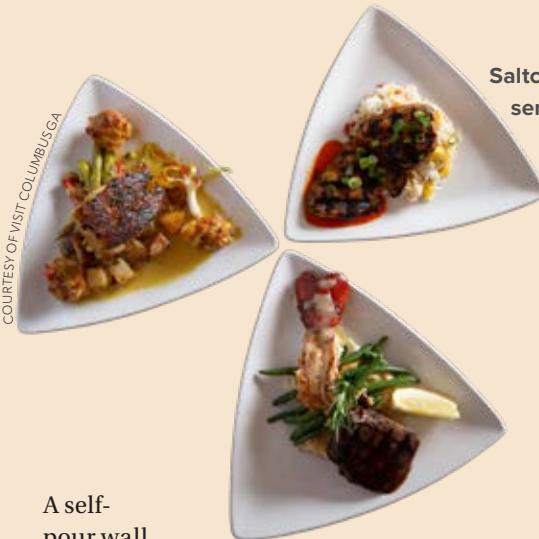
Long ramps provide access to viewing areas. Tickets are \$12 and \$10 for military members and seniors.

### Dig In

Eating is easily one of the top activities of any good trip, and you'll find a wide range of places in Columbus.

A new restaurant in town, Saltcellar ([saltcellar.com](http://saltcellar.com)), serves delicious seafood and steaks. It has a large selection of starters, including our favorite, the crab cakes. Be sure to leave room for their decadent cheesecake.

An eclectic menu with flavors from around the world and the freshest ingredients can be found at The Mix Market ([themixmarket.com](http://themixmarket.com)).



**Saltcellar in Columbus, Ga.,**  
serves seafood and steaks.

A self-pour wall provides

a selection of 40 on-tap brews. Sit inside or people-watch at a sidewalk table.

If you're looking to indulge in some local delicacies in a historic setting, then Dinglewood Pharmacy ([dinglewoodpharmacy.com](http://dinglewoodpharmacy.com)) is the place to go. Opened in 1918, this nostalgic lunch counter and soda fountain serves a local specialty, the Scrambled Dog (sliced hot dog on a bun with onions, chili, pickles and oyster crackers). It's a working pharmacy, too.

Breakfast is served all day at Midtown Coffee House ([midtowncoffeehouse.com](http://midtowncoffeehouse.com)). Seating is available inside and at bistro tables outside. Close to The COMU, it offers light lunch items, fresh baked goods and an awesome cup of coffee.

## Good Night

Just as you'll find a wide range of dining choices, Columbus also offers a great selection of places to stay.

The Marriott Columbus ([marriott.com/en-us/hotels/csgmc-columbus-marriott](http://marriott.com/en-us/hotels/csgmc-columbus-marriott)) is built around a former cotton mill from 1861. Some of the original brick can be seen in the



A Marriott Columbus accessible guest room.

hotel's atrium lobby. Our mobility-accessible guest room had a king-size bed that was approximately 22 inches high and had open space underneath that could accommodate a Hoyer lift.

The roll-in shower had a built-in folding bench. Moving from a wheelchair to the toilet might be awkward due to a lack of transfer space.



A Hotel Indigo accessible guest room and bathroom.

TWO PHOTOS BY JIM TWAROWSKI



Disabled parking is available in an outdoor lot for a daily fee. The on-site Houlihan's restaurant provides a large breakfast buffet. The hotel's location is convenient to the river and attractions.

The contemporary Hotel Indigo Columbus ([ihg.com/hotelindigo/hotels/us/en/columbus/csggo/hoteldetail](http://ihg.com/hotelindigo/hotels/us/en/columbus/csggo/hoteldetail)) sits at the edge of the Chattahoochee River. The hotel's mobility-accessible guest rooms have either a tub or a roll-in shower. The bed is approximately 20 inches high, and there is open space underneath.

The pet-friendly property, with an on-site restaurant, also has a chair lift beside the heated outdoor pool.

For more information on the city, check out [visitcolumbusga.com](http://visitcolumbusga.com). ■

## Promising SCI Drug Candidate

**Researchers at the University** of California (UC) San Diego School of Medicine have harnessed bioinformatics, which combines biology and computer science to analyze data, to fast-track the discovery of a promising new drug for spinal cord injury (SCI).

The results will also make it easier for researchers around the world to translate their discoveries into treatments.

specific pattern of genes related to neuronal growth and regeneration. To translate this fundamental discovery into a treatment, the researchers used data-driven bioinformatics approaches to compare their pattern to a vast database of compounds, looking for drugs that could activate these same genes and trigger neurons to regenerate.

Their approach identified thiorphan — a drug previously tested in humans for non-neurological conditions — as a top candidate.

eration into the injury site. Rats treated with thiorphan alone had a 50% increase in recovery of hand function after SCI compared to untreated animals and another 50% improvement in hand function when thiorphan was combined with a neural stem cell implant. The researchers are now considering combining thiorphan with stem cell technology in clinical trials that are planned for the near future.

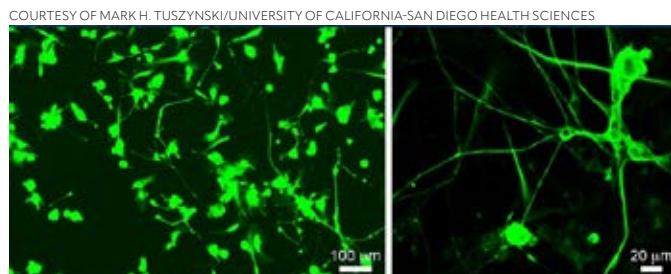
"We were very happy to see that a drug that worked on cells in culture also showed effectiveness in an actual animal model of spinal cord injury," says Erna van Niekerk, PhD, assistant project scientist in the Department of Neurosciences at UC-San Diego School of Medicine and lead study author, in an October UC-San Diego release. "This is not always the case in new drug development."

Because it has already undergone safety testing in humans, thiorphan could quickly advance into clinical trials for SCI. The study exemplifies how technology can accelerate drug discovery by breathing new life into shelved drugs that have already been tested for other diseases.

"We succeeded in culturing adult human brain cells in large numbers in this study, offering a powerful new tool for the discovery of treatments for neurological disorders," says Mark H. Tuszyński, MD, professor in

the Department of Neurosciences at UC-San Diego and senior study author. "These are not stem cells; they are adult brain cells that previously were not possible to culture. The ability to culture adult brain cells could be useful for testing new drugs or gene therapies for many brain diseases."

The study was published in October in *Nature*.



Human brain cells are notoriously difficult to culture in the lab, but University of California-San Diego researchers successfully grew human brain cells, shown here, in order to test a new treatment approach for spinal cord injury.

One of the reasons SCI results in permanent disability is that the neurons that form our brain and spinal cord cannot effectively regenerate. Encouraging neurons to regenerate with drugs offers a promising possibility for treating these severe injuries.

The researchers found that under specific experimental conditions, some mouse neurons activate a

The researchers successfully tested thiorphan in adult human brain cells, finding that it increased neurite outgrowth, a key metric of regeneration.

The researchers also tested the drug in rats with SCI, finding that when combined with neural stem cell grafts, thiorphan led to significant improvements in hand function and an increase in neuronal regen-

## BCI Company Receives Funds

**Precision Neuroscience** corporation, a brain-computer interface (BCI) company, announced in November an investment from SCI Ventures, a pioneering venture philanthropy fund focused on paralysis.



Michael Mager

COURTESY OF PRECISION NEUROSCIENCE



Precision Neuroscience received a funding boost for its brain-computer interface technology.

ter, SCI Ventures' support will accelerate Precision's mission of restoring independence to people living with paralysis and other neurological conditions.

BCIs represent a new class of medical technology that can translate brain signals into digital commands, enabling people with paralysis to operate

computers, communicate with loved ones and control external devices with their thoughts. Precision's flagship technology, the Layer 7 Cortical Interface, recently

received U.S. Food and Drug Administration clearance and is distinguished by its nonpenetrating design, which allows for safe and scalable deployment.

SCI Ventures' investment in Precision reflects the firm's belief in the potential impact of the BCI field. The fund provides not only capital, but also deep networks of clinicians, regulatory experts and patient advocates to the companies it backs — an ecosystem that can help shorten the path from innovation to real-world use.

## Empowering Veterans with reduced grip strength

Carbonhand® is an active grip-strengthening glove that enables people with hand impairments from spinal cord injury, ALS, MS, and other conditions to regain independence in daily life.

Already trusted by more than 20 VA centers nationwide.



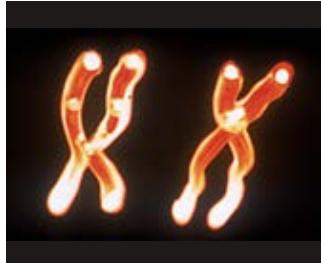
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"The support of SCI Ventures, backed by the Reeve Foundation and other leaders in spinal cord injury advocacy, gives us added momentum at a pivotal time for brain-computer interfaces," says Michael Mager, cofounder and CEO of Precision Neuroscience, in a November Precision Neuroscience release. "People living with paralysis deserve solutions that are safe, effective and practical to deliver at scale. With SCI Ventures as a partner, we're one step closer to bringing this transformative technology to those who need it."

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## Gene Behind MS

**New research by UCLA**  
Health in Los Angeles has identified a sex-chromosome linked gene that drives inflammation in the female brain, offering insight into why women are disproportionately affected by conditions such as multiple sclerosis (MS) and Alzheimer's disease, as well as offering a potential target for intervention.

The study, published in October in the journal *Science*

*Translational Medicine*, used a mouse model of MS to identify a gene on the X chromosome that drives inflammation in brain immune cells, known as microglia. Because females have two X chromosomes, as opposed to only one in males, they get a "double dose" of inflammation, which plays a major role in aging, Alzheimer's disease and MS.

When the gene, known as Kdm6a, and its associated protein were deactivated, the MS-like disease and neuropathology were both ameliorated with high significance in female mice.

"It has long been known that there are sex differences in the brain. These can impact both health and neurological diseases," says study lead author Rhonda Voskuhl, MD, director of the MS Program at UCLA Health and lead neurologist for the UCLA Comprehensive Menopause Program, in an October UCLA Health release. "Multiple sclerosis and Alzheimer's disease each affect women more often than men, about two to three times as often. Also, two-thirds of healthy women have 'brain fog' during menopause. These new findings explain why and point to a new treatment to target this."

When first author Yuichiro Itoh, PhD, of the Voskuhl lab genetically "knocked out" the gene Kdm6a in brain immune cells, the inflammatory molecules shifted from being activated to a resting state. Addition-

ally, the Voskuhl team performed a pharmacologic "knock down" of the protein made by this gene using metformin. Metformin is widely used as a treatment for diabetes but is currently being researched for potential anti-aging properties.

While these interventions were highly significant in female mice, their effect was almost undetectable in males, Voskuhl says.

University of Portsmouth, the study analyzed data from 172 participants with chronic pain, using statistical models to understand how pain resilience affects the relationship between pain and physical activity.

The study examined factors such as fear of movement, frailty, the number of painful areas, pain duration, and intensity, both individually and together, to identify which most influenced activity levels.

It found that high pain resilience was the key component associated with higher physical activity levels, while other aspects such as kinesiophobia, or fear of movement, did not make a significant contribution.

The study suggests it's not the pain itself, but how well people cope with it that largely determines



GETTY IMAGES/GALIONE

## How Attitude Outweighs Pain

**Pain affects activity** levels, but how individuals understand and act in the face of pain can make a difference, a new study from the University of Portsmouth in Portsmouth, England, has found.

The paper, published in *PLOS One* in October, identified that pain resilience — how well individuals cope with pain — affects physical activity independently of pain, and boosting resilience could enhance both pain management and overall health.

Led by Nils Niederstrasser, PhD, from the School of Psychology, Sport and Health Sciences at the



activity levels. This underscores the central role of pain resilience, which continued to be a key predictor of activity even after accounting for pain intensity. This emphasized the need to build resilience rather than focus solely on reducing pain.

The researchers also concluded that treatments focusing on building resilience could help chronic pain patients become more active and improve their overall health.

"People with greater resilience can maintain a

positive attitude and push through discomfort, and this psychological factor is a better predictor of physical activity than pain intensity itself," Niederstrasser says in an October University of Portsmouth release. "This is a significant shift from historically focusing on negative factors, like fear of movement, to understanding the power of positive psychological resilience in managing chronic pain."

This research builds on a previous study by Niederstrasser which showed that high levels of physical

activity can lower the risk of developing chronic pain. The research detailed how pain prevention programs should include exercise, weight management and support for social inequalities.

"Moving forward, further research could examine whether enhancing resilience in individuals with chronic pain leads to increased activity levels, potentially through targeted interventions," Niederstrasser says. ■



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A DIAMOND IS FOREVER/PVA PUBLICATIONS STAFF

## Accessible Proposal

**With Valentine's Day** right around the corner, February is often when thoughts turn to love — and marriage.

For wheelchair users or their significant others who are planning to pop the question, the first order of business is choosing the perfect romantic setting for the proposal.

To help, bridal experts at A Diamond Is Forever have revealed the top 10 wheelchair-friendly proposal destinations across the U.S.

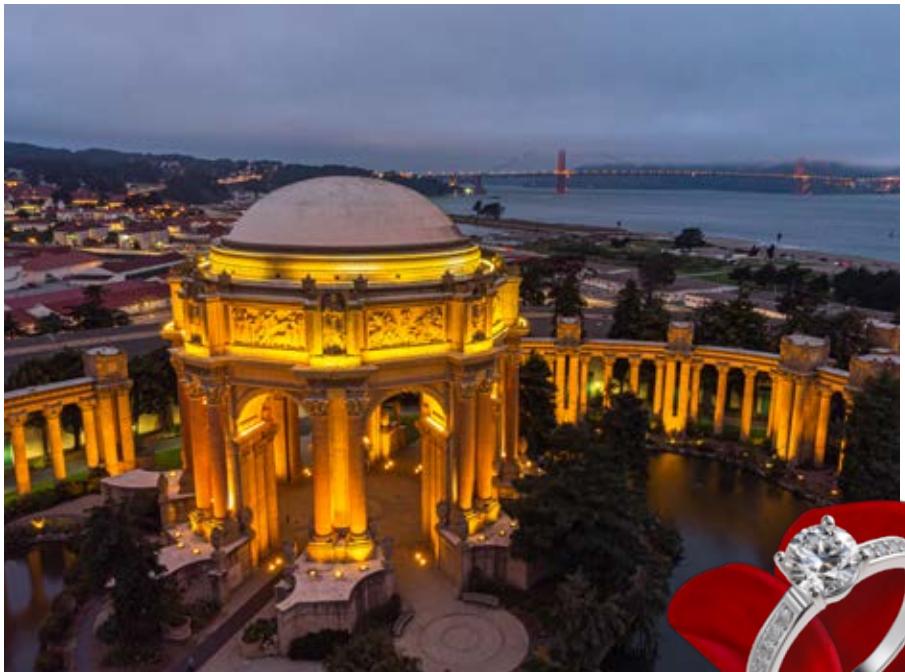
FREEPIK



A Diamond is Forever created a Proposal Destination Index by evaluating 30 locations across the U.S. and worldwide. The index scores each destination on 10 key metrics, on a scale from "1" (poor) to "10" (best) for each. The metrics are accessibility, cost of entry, Instagramability, surprise factor, exclusivity, cultural and spiritual impact, amenities, safety, weather stability and noise level.

The scores for all metrics were then totaled, producing a final score out of 100 that ranks each destination's overall appeal for proposals.

All destinations were selected based on TripAdvisor popularity, number of visitor reviews, related Instagram



Palace of Fine Arts

© GETTY IMAGES/CHIYI

post frequency and/or features within travel or marriage proposal guides.

Rankings were made based on comparisons between these 30 destinations to showcase a variety of highly sought-after and memorable proposal spots. Lower rankings do not mean that a particular venue is objectively "poor."

Among the 30 locations evaluated overall, the following 10 locations, in no specific order, were found to be the most accessible.

### Palace of Fine Arts (California)

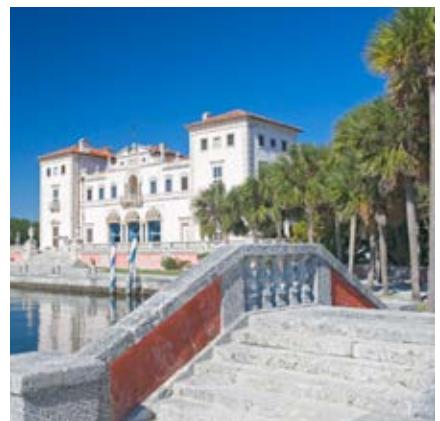
This San Francisco gem offers stunning Old World architecture, a peaceful lagoon and full accessibility for wheelchair users.

Whether arriving by car, public transport or on foot, the site has been carefully optimized for visitors with access needs, making it a timeless backdrop for unforgettable proposals.

### Vizcaya Museum & Gardens (Florida)

A cultural treasure in Miami, this historic estate has been thoughtfully adapted to maximize accessibility.

Located near the Vizcaya Metrorail, visitors will find ramps, elevators and accessible paths that ensure every corner of the grounds can be enjoyed.



Vizcaya Museum & Gardens

© GETTY IMAGES/FRANZ MARC FREI



Garden of the Phoenix

## Garden of the Phoenix (Illinois)

Hidden within Chicago's Jackson Park, this Japanese-style garden offers an intimate and serene setting. While most areas are wheelchair accessible, some paths may be uneven. Yet its tranquil ponds, bridges and seasonal cherry blossoms make it an enchanting choice for a romantic proposal.

soms make it an enchanting choice for a romantic proposal.

## Zilker Botanical Garden (Texas)

Nestled in Austin, Texas, this lush destination features accessible pathways throughout its themed gardens. The most accessible pathway into the



Zilker Botanical Garden



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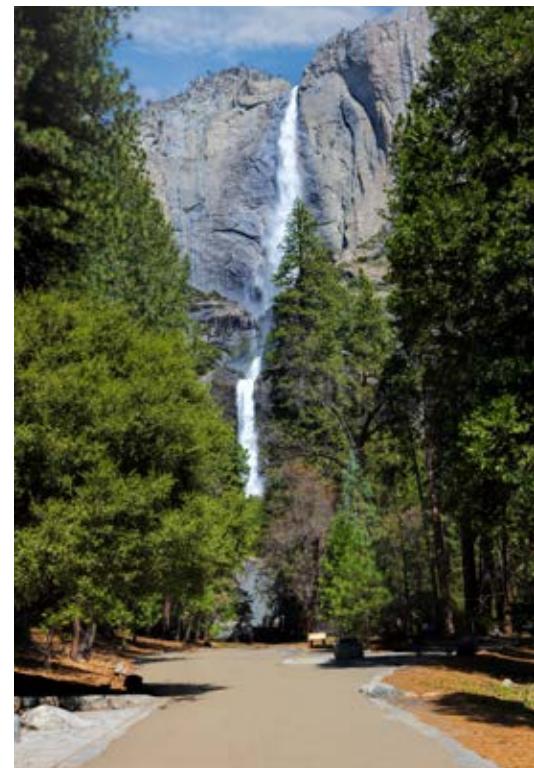
garden is the Trail of Passages, leading from the top of the hill by the kiosk from the parking lot to the bottom of the hill in the rose garden. It also goes to the tea house at the edge of the Japanese garden.

With easy access by public transportation or foot, it's a blend of natural beauty and inclusivity, ideal for an intimate proposal surrounded by vibrant blooms.

## Yosemite Falls (California)

Within Yosemite National Park, accessible shuttle buses and the wheelchair-friendly Lower Yosemite Falls Trail make it possible for everyone to enjoy the awe of one of the tallest waterfalls in North America. Its natural majesty ensures a proposal spot that feels both powerful and intimate.

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Yosemite Falls





Niagara Falls

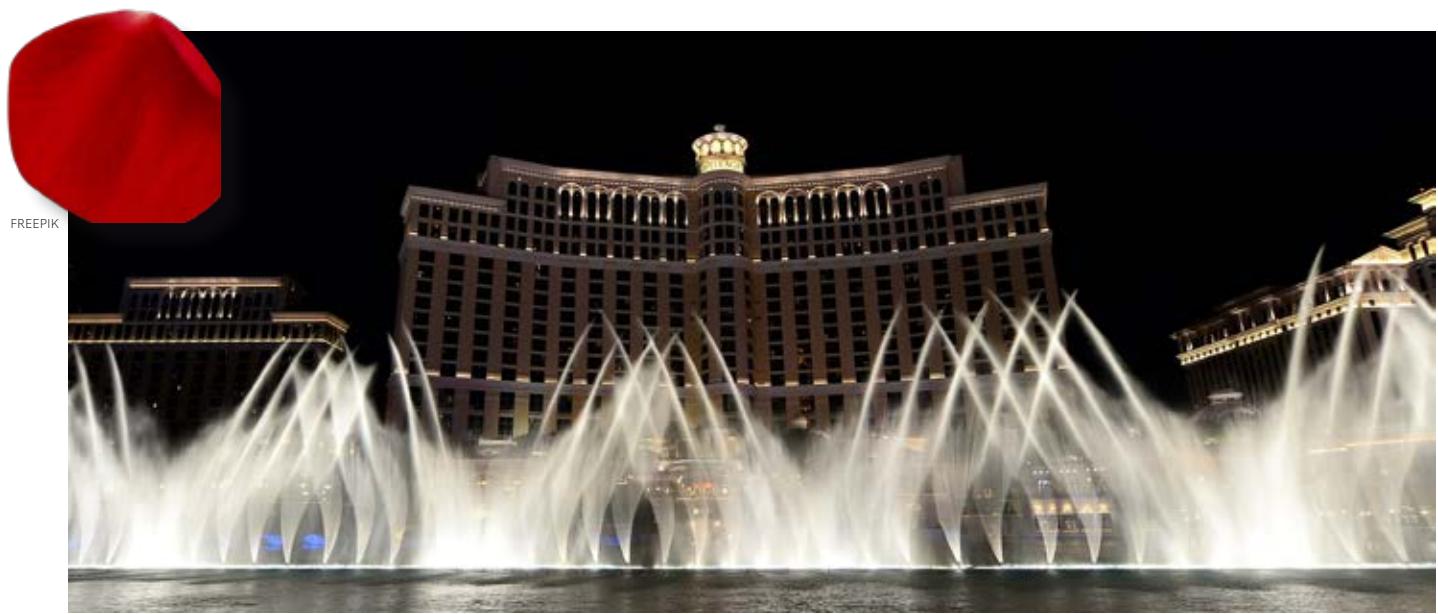
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Huntington Falls

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Fountains of Bellagio



Mather Point

nishings, including benches and picnic tables, to achieve Americans with Disabilities Act compliance.

While some trails may not be fully suitable, the area's seating and peaceful setting make it an inviting location for a heartfelt proposal.

### Mather Point (Arizona)

Overlooking the Grand Canyon, Mather Point is fully wheelchair accessible, with parking located just minutes away. Its sweeping views of the canyon's colorful layers make it a breathtaking stage for a proposal.

### White Sands National Park (New Mexico)

Known for its otherworldly white gypsum dunes, White Sands offers accessible paved areas and the ability to drive through the park.

This unique landscape provides a dreamy and serene backdrop, perfect for a proposal that feels truly magical.



FREEPIK

For a full breakdown of rankings and metrics by location, visit [tinyurl.com/yc2ah647](http://tinyurl.com/yc2ah647).

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White Sands National Park

# veteran **advisor**

WHITNEY BROWN, NSO II

## Thrill Of The Chill

### **When the temperature drops**

and the first snowflakes fly, it's a signal for millions to retreat indoors. That can feel like a lockdown for people with spinal cord injury and disease (SCI/D).

The winter season for wheelchair users in many parts of the country can too often be defined by slick ramps, frozen chairs and inaccessible terrain. The idea of getting outside to take part in the exhilarating world of winter sports can feel like a distant memory or an impossible dream.

But on mountains and ice rinks across the country, that perception is being shattered.

Thanks to a revolution in adaptive equipment and a network of

world-class nonprofit programs, winter is no longer a season to be endured; it's a season to be conquered.

### **Skiing**

The rush of carving your way down a mountain or the impact of a full-contact body check on the ice isn't only possible, it's readily available.

For veterans and others with SCI/D, participation hinges on specialized "sit-sports" equipment. This gear, honed over decades, levels the playing field and makes the mountain accessible.

Adaptive alpine skiing (downhill) is the most popular entry point. It offers several equipment options based on your level of injury, core strength and, frankly, your appetite for speed.

**The bi-ski:** Think of this as the ultimate introductory tool. It consists of a molded fiberglass bucket seat mounted to a frame with two skis underneath.

A wide base provides significant stability, making it a perfect starting point for beginners or those with higher-level injuries. For your first time, a trained instructor will ski behind you, controlling your speed and turns with tethers. As you progress, you can take control with handheld outriggers, which are short crutches with miniature skis on the bottom, to initiate turns yourself.

**The monoski:** This is where independence takes off. The monoski features a similar bucket seat, but it's mounted on a single, standard alpine ski with a shock-absorber system.



© GETTY IMAGES/NATHAN BILOW

This option is a game of balance, requiring core strength and active leaning, much like an able-bodied skier. You ski independently, using the outriggers for balance and turning.

It's the high-performance option that allows you to charge through moguls and carve deep paths on groomed trails right alongside your friends and family.

## Sled Hockey

If you miss the camaraderie and intensity of team sports, sled hockey (para ice hockey) is your answer.

This isn't a polite game of tag. It's the full-contact, fast-paced and physically demanding equivalent of stand-up ice hockey. Players sit in lightweight, custom-fitted sleds that

rest on two skate blades. The real genius is in the sticks. Players use two of them, which are shorter and have a blade on one end for shooting and passing. On the opposite end, they are tipped with sharp metal picks.

Players propel themselves by digging these picks into the ice, creating a powerful "poling" motion that's uniquely taxing and builds incredible upper-body strength.

## Adaptive Nordic

For those who prefer endurance and tranquility over the adrenaline of the slopes, adaptive Nordic (cross-country) skiing offers a powerful workout and a deep connection to the quiet of winter.

Using a lightweight bucket seat mounted on two long, thin cross-country skis, you propel yourself with standard ski poles. It's a rhythmic, challenging cardiovascular endeavor that opens up miles of snowy trails.

## Wheelchair Curling

For an adaptive winter sport that doesn't require as much athletic skill or equipment, wheelchair curling might be a good option.

Similar to the popular able-bodied version you'll see during this month's Winter Olympics in Italy,



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wheelchair curling is about precision and strategy. It's a fun, social and team-oriented sport.

A bit like shuffleboard, you sit in your own wheelchair on an ice sheet and use a delivery stick to push a 42-pound granite stone, or rock, down the ice and closest to the center of a four-ringed target, or house, for points.

To learn more about wheelchair curling, read *Rocking Out* in the January issue of *Sports N Spokes*.



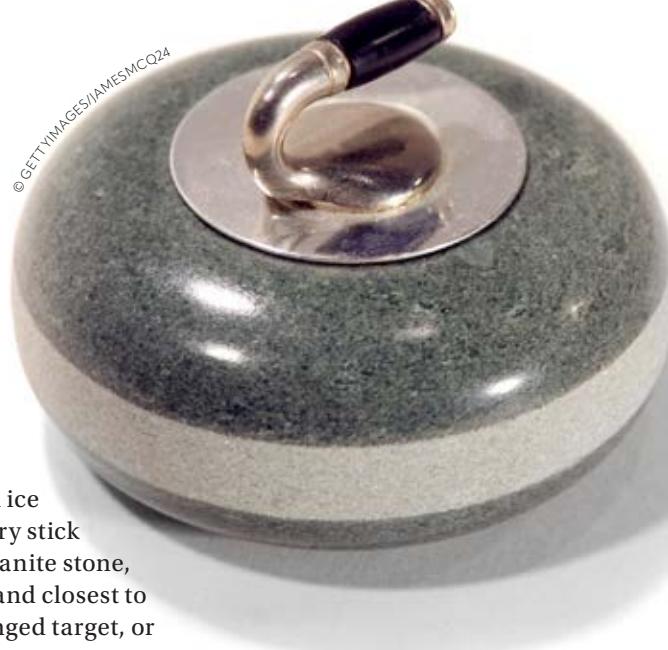
All those activities may sound interesting, but the most common question is, "How do I get started?"

The answer is simple — you find a program.

Virtually every major ski resort in the United States has partnered with or hosts a nonprofit adaptive sports school. These organizations provide everything, including the lesson, the lift ticket and all the specialized equipment. Many ice rinks across the country also feature adaptive programs.

There are multiple places and organizations to check out across the country, including:

- The National Sports Center for the Disabled ([nscd.org](http://nscd.org)) Winter Park, Colo.
- The Breckenridge Outdoor Education Center ([boec.org](http://boec.org)) Breckenridge, Colo.



- The National Ability Center ([discovernac.org](http://discovernac.org)) Park City, Utah
- Vermont Adaptive Ski & Sports ([vermontadaptive.org](http://vermontadaptive.org)) Killington, Vt.
- Move United ([moveunited.org](http://moveunited.org)) More than 200 national chapters

Winter doesn't have to be a barrier. It's an open invitation to try new sports, develop new skills, gain new confidence and even improve your health.

You can get a look at many of these adaptive winter sports and more by watching coverage of next month's Winter Paralympic Games in Italy, checking out the latest issue of *Sports N Spokes* or visiting [sportsnspokes.com](http://sportsnspokes.com).

For help with anything in this article or any benefits, contact the nearest Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) national service officer (NSO) from the roster on page 9.

*A Navy veteran, Whitney Brown is a PVA NSO II in Chicago.* ■

COURTESY OF PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA



An Army veteran, Greg Lewis-Seals, standing, has been elected as the National Wheelchair Basketball Association Military Division's chairperson.

## NWBA Military Division Update

### The National

Wheelchair Basketball Association's (NWBA's) Military Division has elected two new executive committee members, Greg Lewis-Seals and Yunus Butt. Both were elected on Nov. 16 and will serve on the Military Division's executive committee until 2028.

An Army veteran who served for 29 years, Lewis-Seals was elected as the NWBA Military Division's chairperson. He also coaches the NWBA Adult Division II Tampa Bay Strong Dogs, based out of Florida.

Meanwhile, Butt has been elected as the Military Division's secretary. He serves as both an adaptive athletics assistant coach and high-performance adaptive athletics coach at Eastern Washington University in Cheney, Wash. He also coaches ParaSport Spokane's Military Division team and has coached at the University of Illinois. ■

# EVENT SCHEDULE

## FY26

### October 2025

PVA Intro to Paracycling Series: Denver	October 3-4, 2025	Denver, CO
PVA Wheelchair Football Camp - Augusta	October 10-11, 2025	North Augusta, SC
PVA Off-Road Paracycling Camp: Pocahontas State Park	October 16-18, 2025	Chesterfield, VA
PVA Billiards Tournament Series: Mid-South	October 17-18, 2025	Memphis, TN
PVA Pickleball Camp	October 18-19, 2025	San Antonio, Texas
Paracycling: High Performance Road Racing Camp	October 27-31, 2025	Colorado Springs, CO

### November 2025

Intro to Paracycling Series: Phoenix	November 12, 2025	Phoenix, AZ
PVA Off-Road Paracycling Camp: Phoenix	November 13-16, 2025	Phoenix, AZ
PVA Billiards Tournament Series: Buckeye	November 14-15, 2025	Westerville, OH

### December 2025

PVA Bowling Tournament Series: Nevada	December 4-7, 2025	Las Vegas, NV
PVA Boccia Tournament Series: New England	December 6-7, 2025	Brockton, MA

### January 2026

PVA-USA Boccia Regional Tournament	January 24-25, 2026	Tampa, FL
PVA Wheelchair Rugby Invitational	January 30-February 1, 2026	Louisville, KY

### February 2026

PVA Boccia Tournament Series: Bayou Gulf States	February 7-8, 2026	Gulfport, MS
PVA Airgun Tournament Series: Central Florida	February 14-15, 2026	Orlando, FL
PVA Bowling Tournament Series: Florida Gulf Coast	February 25-27, 2026	Tampa, FL
PVA Outdoor Experience: Maine Winter Sports	February 25-March 1, 2026	Carrabassett Valley, ME

### March 2026

PVA Bowling Tournament Series: Tri-State Tournament	March 13-15, 2026	Beaverton, OR
PVA Billiards Tournament Series: Mid-Atlantic	March 14-15, 2026	Midlothian, VA
PVA Bass Tournament Series: Southeastern Challenge	March 27-29, 2026	Appling, GA

# EVENT SCHEDULE

FY26

## April 2026

PVA Bass Tournament Series: Bluegrass Bass Bash	April 10-12, 2026	Kuttawa, KY
PVA National Air Gun Camp	April 13-17, 2026	Centreville, VA
PVA Off-Road Paracycling Camp: Pocahontas State Park	April 16-18, 2026	Chesterfield, VA
PVA Bass Tournament Series: Citrus Slam	April 17-19, 2026	Kissimmee, FL
PVA Bowling Tournament Series: Texas	April 22-24, 2026	San Antonio, TX
PVA Billiards Tournament Series: Mid-America	April 23-25, 2026	Oklahoma City, OK
PVA Wheelchair Pickleball Tournament	April 25-26, 2026	Franklin, WI

## May 2026

PVA Bass Tournament Series: Land of Lincoln	May 1-3, 2026	Sesser, IL
PVA Boccia Tournament Series: Puerto Rico (Year-End)	May 2-3, 2026	San Juan, PR
Intro to Paracycling Series: Salt Lake City	May 4-5, 2026	Salt Lake City, UT
Intro to Paracycling Series: Milwaukee	May 20-21, 2026	Milwaukee, WI
PVA Trapshooting Tournament Series: Vaughan	May 22-24, 2026	Elburn, IL
PVA Bass Tournament Series: Buckeye Bash	May 29-31, 2026	Cortland, OH
PVA Airgun Tournament Series: Texas	May 30-31, 2026	San Antonio, TX

## June 2026

PVA Bass Tournament Series: Capital Clash	June 5-7, 2026	Marbury, MD
PVA Wheelchair Basketball Camp	June 8-14, 2026	Arlington, TX
PVA Trapshooting Tournament Series: Wisconsin	June 12-14, 2026	Green Bay, WI
PVA Outdoor Experience: Teton	June 22-26, 2026	Jackson Hole, WY
PVA Bowling Tournament Series: National Championship	June 25-28, 2026	Omaha, NE
PVA Trapshooting Tournament Series: Iowa (Year-End)	June 26-28, 2026	Cedar Rapids, IA

## July 2026

National Veterans Wheelchair Games	July 9-14, 2026	Detroit, MI
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# and finally...



## Presidential Meeting

In recognition of Presidents' Day this month, take a look back at this *PN* cover from July 1963, which features then-U.S. President John F. Kennedy, left, and then-Paralyzed Veterans of America National President John Farkas.

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