



WHEELS IN MOTION

August 2023



Our Team at the Games

**Paralyzed Veterans of America
Central Florida Chapter
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August Board Meeting is a **Zoom/Hybrid** - August 10th 10:30 AM

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**On the cover - Jimmy Green, Roger Sack,
Ray "Buddy" Reynolds, and Eddie Hawks**

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Mission Statement

Paralyzed Veterans of America Central Florida, is a congressionally chartered veteran's service organization that provides a platform of advocacy, education and research, communication, adaptive sports and recreation for veterans paralyzed as a result of spinal cord injury or dysfunction, in an effort to afford them with the highest quality of healthcare and life experiences.



Chapter President

Steve Kirk

As I approach my 75th birthday, I am thankful for Gray Panthers founder Maggie Kuhn. After she was forced into mandatory retirement at age 65, she founded the Gray Panthers organization to fight age discrimination and succeeded in the banning of mandatory retirement in most professions. Without her conviction of purpose for the elderly, I might not be president at my age. What follows gives meaning to baby boomers that now are the largest seniors group ever.

At age 65, when many people prepare for quiet years, Maggie Kuhn embarked on the greatest adventure and most important work of her life.

In 1970, forced to retire from her career with the Presbyterian Church at age 65, Kuhn and a group of her friends in similar circumstances organized and founded an organization, which became the Gray Panthers. The organization was created to work on issues of concern to the elderly, such as pension rights and age discrimination, but also to concern itself with larger public issues, such as the Vietnam War and other social concerns. At the core of the Gray Panthers' message was that older people needed to seize control of their lives and be in the active world working for issues in which they believed.

Kuhn's candor, charisma and lively approach to the needs and problems of the old drew major media attention, and the group was successfully launched, coming to represent in the public

mind that power and energy that the elderly can represent. Kuhn fought off efforts by everyone from politicians to the managers of nursing homes to treat the elderly like amusing children, instead insisting on a place at the table and voice in decision-making that affected the lives of the old.

Kuhn's advice to activists interested in creating social change shows the strength of her convictions: "Leave safety behind. Put your body on the line. Stand before the people you fear and speak your mind – even if your voice shakes. When you least expect it, someone may actually listen to what you have to say. Well-aimed slingshots can topple giants. And do your homework."



Kuhn, who continued to play a role in the Gray Panthers until her death at age 89, is considered by many to have started nothing less than a contemporary cultural revolution, both in terms of redefining the meaning of age and through her insistence on "young and old together."

She and the Panthers have been directly instrumental in enacting significant national reforms, including nursing home reform, ending forced retirement provisions, and combatting fraud against the elderly in health care. She authored several books and an autobiography.

Thanks, to the National Women's Hall of Fame.

Steve Kirk

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Executive Director

John DeMauro

By the time you are reading this article I would have completed the first month of my tenth year as your Executive Director. Over nine years ago, I sat in an interview with Steve Kirk, Brian Terwilliger and Jerry Dugan talking about how I could help the Central Florida Chapter improve. From increasing revenue, to expanding programs, to getting more members involved, the task before me would be a challenge and I was willing to give it my best. Nine years later and going into my tenth year there is still much more to accomplish. Within a few months of my first day, we had agreed to host the National Veteran Wheelchair Games and a few years later, we hosted the largest attended games in its history. Even today, athletes still talk about the games in Orlando. We have added programs, purchased a box truck and a modified van. We have started an endowment at Seminole State College and offer our members and their families scholarships to continue their education. We started the Refurbished Equipment Exchange Program where we receive and then redistribute durable medical equipment, hospital beds, scooter and wheelchairs to people in the community that otherwise could not afford to purchase those things (it is a way that our chapter can give back to the community we often ask to help fund our programs). We send any member that wants to attend the National Veteran Wheelchair Games to the Games at no cost to them or their caregivers (if they need one with them). We have a bowling program, a golf program, hunting and fishing programs, bocchia, air rifle, archery, field, hand cycling and we hope to soon begin a softball program and partner with our friends from the south in a scuba diving program. We have a quarterly



recreation event that in the past included karaoke, an excursion at Cape Kennedy and a trip to Deezerland. We continue to seek ways to engage with our members and welcome any suggestions.

As we look to the future, we hope to see more members get involved. The more members are involved the better the chapter will be moving forward. Younger members need to begin to get involved and learn what is involved in leading a chapter like the Central Florida Chapter. Lately, we have seen some of the younger members begin to take an interest in what the chapter is doing and this is good for everyone. I want to begin to put together a five-year plan for the chapter that will include some who are currently involved and hopefully include many who have not yet stepped up. Forty-six years ago, a handful of young paralyzed veterans had a vision for the Central Florida Chapter. A few are still very involved. However, Father Time will catch up to each of us. We need a new vision for the next 46 years and a new group of young paralyzed veterans will need to begin to have that vision. The bible says in Acts 2:17 “.....your young men will see visions and your old men will dream dreams.” In other words, the young see things as they could be and the old see things as they were. The old are wise and the young are willing. When both groups work together, a future is built. As your Executive Director, I am here for the long run and as long as we all want to build a better chapter, I am in. Are you?

John DeMauro

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Washington Update

WHITE HOUSE HOLDS MEETING ON ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORTATION

On July 11, Chief Policy Officer Heather Ansley joined Vice President Kamala Harris and Department of Transportation (DOT) Secretary Pete Buttigieg, along with fellow disability rights leaders, for an event at the White House. The purpose of the event was to mark the 33rd anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act and discuss recent efforts to improve accessibility across the nation's transportation system. The Secretary highlighted recent steps DOT has taken to improve access for people with disabilities in transit, air travel, and other transportation modes.

Ms. Ansley was one of five disability rights leaders selected to present to the Vice President and the Secretary during the event roundtable. She used the opportunity to discuss the lack of accessibility in air travel for passengers with disabilities. In her statement, she noted that passengers will continue to be injured, and wheelchairs mishandled until travelers can remain in their device. In the meantime, however, she called for improvements in training for workers who physically transfer passengers with disabilities and handlers who are responsible for wheelchair stowage. She also spoke of the need for not only stronger enforcement of the law but also amending it to require referral of certain passenger-filed complaints to the Attorney General and establishment of a private right of action.

VA FAMILY CAREGIVER PROGRAM UPDATE

On June 30, VA's Caregiver Support Program held a meeting with stakeholders, including PVA, to provide program updates. Last year, VA convened an Integrated Project Team (IPT) to consider recommendations to reform eligibility for VA's Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers. The IPT has concluded meetings and has agreed to support certain changes to the program.

The recommendations will need to be adopted through regulation. PVA is pleased that one of the proposed changes should amend eligibility criteria to increase access to the program. We look forward to reviewing the proposed rule and will provide comments to the VA.

ADVOCACY AND COMMITTEE ACTION

Disability Accessibility and Discrimination Issues at U.S. Ports of Entry Stories

Have you ever experienced disability accessibility or disability discrimination issues at U.S. ports of entry? PVA is collecting stories on members' accessibility issues or disability discrimination at U.S. ports of entry

by air, land, or sea. This includes any passport kiosks or other technology, forms, passport control processes, inspections, or disability discrimination by Border Patrol agents. If you have encountered any accessibility difficulties or disability discrimination by U.S. Customs and Border Protection

, please email PVA Advocacy Attorney, Danica Gonzalves, at DanicaG@PVA.org

PVAction Force – Spread the Word!

PVA's grassroots advocacy team had the honor of attending the National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Portland, Oregon, the beginning of July, where they spread the word about PVAction Force.

Staff met athletes, families, volunteers, and VA staff to spread the word about PVA policy priorities and get more people involved. PVAction Force is for everyone to get in involved, including family, friends, and the community.

Please contact Lisa Elijah, PVA's Grassroots Advocacy Manager, at LisaE@PVA.org

for more information.

Upcoming Veterans' Committee Activities

Please visit the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee webpages for information on upcoming hearings and markups.

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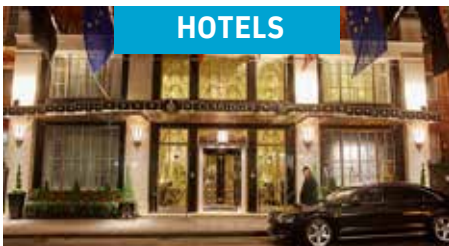
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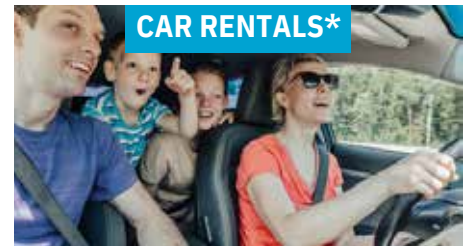
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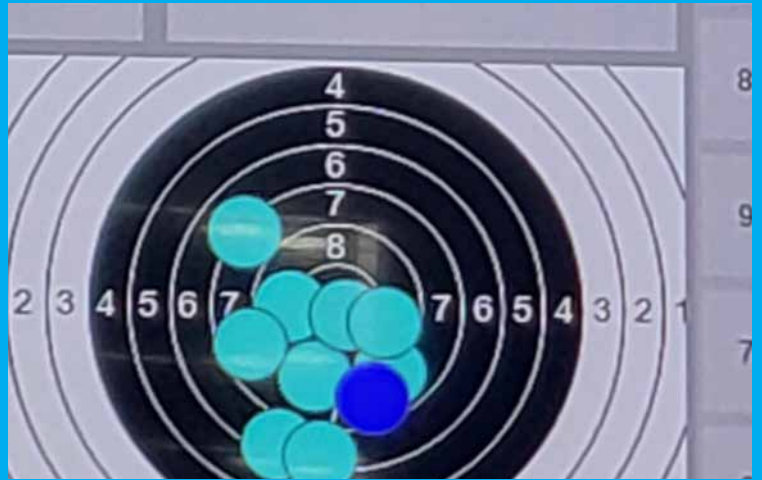


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Sports Director

Roger Sack



Four of five athletes from Central Florida Chapter went to the National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Portland, Oregon. James "Eddie" Hawks, James Green, Jr., Ray "Buddy" Reynolds and myself.

Athletes competed in Air Rifle, Basketball, Boccia, Bowling, Disc Golf, Field Events, and Softball.

Awards:

Eddie: Silver in Air Rifle, Gold in Bowling, was nominated to the NVWG National Softball team to play in Chicago.

Buddy: Gold in Air Rifle

Jimmy: Silver in Basketball, Bronze in Discus and Shot Putt

Some new experiences for Buddy, riding a bus and train, along with airline travel.

Well Done Athletes!!!

More Athletes and More Medals for Next Year.

Next Years's games are in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Before the games I took Buddy to Daytona International Airport to give him a run through of the travel process of traveling

with a disability. Delta Airlines CSM's were helpful in showing us their process and also having an aisle chair to show how they are used. We also had a tour of TSA Security process as well.

Many thanks to the Airport, Delta and TSA for their help in understanding the process of airline travel and answering our questions along the way.

We are currently working on Bowling League in August. This is an in person and Postal league open to all veterans, family or caregivers. For more information, please contact me at rogers@pvacf.org

Archery, hand cycling, scuba diving, hunting and a winter Ski trip are in the planning processes. If you are interested, please reach out and let us know as soon as possible.

Air Rifle Match is taking place Wednesday July 26 starting at 10am and 1pm. Please sign up for your slot to shoot. This is a multi-location match.

There has been some interest in Softball. If your are one of those who would like to learn the game or be a part of a team. Please let us know.

Roger Sack



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Government Relations

Tim Wolfe

This month's Government Relations meeting covered our priorities for 2023. Some of this year's priorities have new names along with new bill numbers for the 118th Congress. The following is a list of what we will be working on for 2023.

- Staffing – S.10 VA Clinician Appreciation Recruitment Education Expansion and Retention Support or CAREERS.
- Infrastructure – S.42/HR 3225 the BUILD for Veterans Act. Focuses on construction and major renovations with VA.
- Infrastructure – S.141/HR 542 Department of Veterans Affairs Minor Construction Threshold Adjustment Act of 2023. As the name indicates, these are smaller projects within VA facilities.
- Concurrent Receipt – S.344/HR 1282 the Major Richard Star Act would allow a veteran with combat-related disability and fewer than 20 years of creditable service to receive retirement pay without reduction, concurrent with disability compensation.
- Survivor Benefits - S.414/HR 1083 Caring for Survivors Act of 2023. This would raise the DIC rate to 55% of a 100% service-disabled veteran's compensation.
- Survivor Benefits – S.1590/HR 3790 Justice for ALS Veterans Act of 2023. This would extend the DIC Kicker to the surviving spouse regardless of how long the veteran was rated totally disabled from the disease.
- Transportation Programs & Supports - HR 1278 – the Drive Act would help veterans with the purchase and modification of vehicle, as well as reimbursement for travel to VA medical facilities for appointments. This bill would also address the flawed system of VA's Beneficiary Travel Self-Service System.
- Home Modification Grant – HR 2818, the Autonomy for Disabled Veterans Act increases the grant to \$10,000 and \$5,000 respectively, and raises the rate to the Consumer Price Index.
- Home Modification Grant – HR 4047, the Autonomy for all Disabled Veterans Act, offer a single grant of \$10,000 for all veterans regardless of disability status and ties future rates to the same index of other VA home modification grants.
- Access to Services and Benefits for Military Sexual Trauma Survivors – S.1028, the Service members & Veterans Empowerment and Support Act (SAVES)
- Assisted Reproductive Technologies – HR 544, the Veterans Infertility Treatment Act of 2023.
- Improve Access to Air Travel – HR 1267, Air Carrier Access Amendments Act (ACAAA)
- Improve Access to Social Security Benefits – S.320/HR 883, Stop the Wait Act
- Improve Access to Social Security Benefits – S.1211/HR 3729, Social Security Caregiver Credit Act

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