



# GATEWAY GAZETTE

The Official Publication of the Gateway Chapter Paralyzed Veterans of America  
A Member Chapter of the Paralyzed Veterans of America



## St. Louis Veterans Day Parade 2014 It was cold...



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*"Veterans with Spinal Cord Injury or Disease, Living Life to the Fullest"*

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<http://www.gatewaypva.org>

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**Paralyzed Veterans  
of America**

Gateway Chapter

**Annual JB SCI Chili Cook-Off**

Start testing your Chili recipes because January 15th will be here before you know it! What happens on January 15th you ask? Well only the greatest chili cook-off in the entire galaxy, that's what! We're ready to crown a new champion, so if you think you have what it takes, bring in a crock pot and put it to the test!

See my article on page 5 for the details.

**VA's Got Talent**

Thursday, February 12, 2015, at 5:30 p.m.  
Jefferson Barracks Theater

**VA Visual Arts Show**

Friday, February 27, 2015, at 11:30 a.m.  
Jefferson Barracks Gym

**Burial Plans?**

In one of our most unusual donations received, we have been given 2 adjacent burial plots at Laurel Hill Memorial Gardens. This cemetery is located in North St. Louis County, 2000 N. Pennsylvania Ave., St. Louis, MO 63133.

Call the office for details on the Section, Lot and Grave numbers. The donor will transfer the deed for both spaces. The spaces are already paid for and the veteran recipient will incur no additional cost. If interested, please call or email the office by January 16, 2015, at close of business.

**Has your address changed? Please inform us by email:**  
[susanlyle@gatewaypva.org](mailto:susanlyle@gatewaypva.org), or you may write or call us  
at the following:

**Gateway Chapter PVA**  
**1311 Lindbergh Plaza Center**  
**St. Louis, MO 63132**  
**Office (314) 427-0393 or (800) 426-4058**  
**Fax (314) 427-4183**



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**editor@gatewaypva.org** or via US mail at the address shown to the left and send to the attention of the editor.



## President's Message

By Stanley Brown



### *The Phoenix VA Scandal and the VA Response: VACAA*

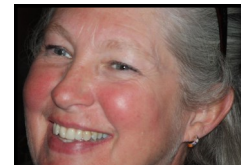
Following the aftermath of the VA problems with veterans receiving timely appointments, both for initial care/consultations, and also appointments with specialists, the Veterans Access, Choice, and Accountability Act (VACAA) was signed into law on August 5, 2014. On November 13, 2014, new VA Deputy Secretary Sloan Gibson appeared before a House Committee on Veterans Affairs' inquiry on the status of implementing the new law. Specific questions were directed toward disciplining, to include firing, Senior Executive Service (SES) staff, those higher management individuals with salaries above the GS scales, and the VA employees responsible for the delays in care and deception regarding the scheduling and reporting of delays. There was testimony that nationwide 5,000 VA employees had been listed for disciplinary action, and 1,000 of those for termination. As of the date of the hearing, only 42 employees had been listed for removal for lying or being deceptive concerning wait times. The VA scandal and revelations concerning the lack of timely appointments and deception in reporting appointment times, started with whistleblower complaints and investigation of the Phoenix VA. On November 24, 2014 the VA removed the Director of the Phoenix VA healthcare system. VA Secretary Robert McDonald cited "lack of oversight and misconduct by VA leaders runs counter to our mission of serving veterans, and VA will not tolerate it."

It may be some solace to believe that the VA is "cleaning house" when it comes to problem employees, but how will those disciplinary moves and the new law, affect our care as veterans with a spinal cord injury or disease? By now you should have already received an email or hard copy by mail, or both, of a letter dated November 2014, from the National PVA President and Executive Director. Their message is basically one of "caution" before seeking non-VA care for your special needs. To qualify under the new law for "choosing" non-VA care, veterans must live more than 40 miles from any VA healthcare facility or be told they must wait more than 30 days from their desired appointment time. By January 2015, VA "Choice Cards" should be mailed to everyone. If the veteran qualifies under one of the two requirements just mentioned, the veteran would call the program administrator listed on the back of the VA "Choice Card" he receives. It's my understanding that names of participating hospitals, physicians, and specialists in the veteran's area will be available from either the TriWest or HealthNet (the Choice contractors) websites. It's also my understanding that for a hospital or physician to participate in the program (be an available choice), they must be willing to accept Medicare payment rates for services.

If you are not confused by these initial directions and your new "choices" from the VA, you should be. Our national PVA guidance in the November 2014 letter, is also my best advice, and that is to contact one of our local PVA Service Officers or the national PVA Medical Services Helpline (800-232-1782). As you start to access and negotiate this new program from the VA, please let us know your experience. Call me direct at the office. I personally think, and this has not been endorsed by the chapter or the national organization, the results of this new law implementation or as it's called on the back of the VA card: "Veterans Choice Card Temporary Program," may be used to forward a complete voucher system where veterans would basically be able to choose VA or non-VA care in every instance. In that case, the VA and the non-VA voucher system would be competing for the same funding dollars.

## Reflections

By Kathryn Ricker, LMSW



As I approach the day of my retirement, I find myself reflecting on my career with the VA. Unlike many, I wasn't a young college grad with zero life experience when I came to work here. My career in social work was my third career and born out of a desperate period in my life. Following a whirlwind 4 years of college to complete my BSW & MSW as a single parent with 3 daughters, (one with special needs), I found myself at the KCVA in the practicum necessary to complete my Master's in Social Work. I was initially leery of frequently finding myself the only woman in an elevator full of men here at the VA and I shared, tearfully, with my field placement office, that I didn't think I could work in this environment. However, in her wisdom, she asked if I would try it for one month and promised she would move me if I still felt uncomfortable. Over the course of that month, I came to respect and love the veterans with whom I worked and knew beyond any doubt the VA was where I was supposed to be. My career here at the KCVA has truly been THE MOST rewarding season of my life.

I started out working in Mental Health because I truly thought that's what I wanted to do in my career. After two years, I realized that wasn't really my calling. I went on to work inpatient for a couple of years and had the privilege of working with the "Mother Teresa of Oncology," Dr. Sarah Taylor. From Oncology, I went on to manage VA Extended Care programs and experience the challenges of keeping good quality nursing homes under VA contract - the excitement of heading up the inspection team for two new Missouri State Veterans Homes, and the early years of the VA Homemaker Home Health program that we've come to rely on heavily for the additional care needs of our veterans with spinal cord injury.

During 2004, I was asked to be detailed to Spinal Cord Injury following the retirement of my predecessor and a lengthy stretch of not having an SCI Coordinator. I came reluctantly, but again found myself thoroughly enjoying my work with the veterans I've had the pleasure and privilege of working with during these past 10 years. Initially, I was scared to ask how you (the veterans) sustained your spinal cord injury. I didn't want to cause discomfort or pain, and I certainly didn't want to offend by asking "the wrong question." Over the years you've taught me to be comfortable with asking the tough questions. You've helped me learn the real meaning of patience and time-management. You have welcomed me and made me a part of your family. We've traveled together, laughed and cried together. We have learned together that there are many things you can do with the proper equipment and motivation. We got good momentum going and I hope you'll all use your self-advocacy skills to see that the momentum continues in the right direction.

In my early years, I thought I would be called to the mission field. A couple of years ago I was told I was on my mission field. I can say with deepest sincerity – I have been well and truly blessed during my 10 years of working in spinal cord injury. I will miss each and every one of you. Thank you for the memories.

## It's Show Time!

By Becky Ballard



The St. Louis VA will be hosting several events in 2015 that will highlight your creative talents at the local creative arts festival. The first event taking place is the **Creative Writing Competition**. We are accepting poetry, short story and essay entries on or before January 23. There are specific guidelines to follow concerning length and content, so please contact Matt at 314-652-4100, Ext. 66602, or Becky at 314-652-4100, Ext. 64512 for

clarification. The **8<sup>th</sup> Annual VA's Got Talent** night will take place February 12, 2015, at 5:30 p.m. in the Jefferson Barracks Theater. All performing arts, drama and dance entries will be due on or before January 30. And last, but not least, will be the **Visual Arts Show** held in the Jefferson Barracks GYM on February 27, 2015, at 11:30 a.m.



Entries for the Visual Arts Show are due on or before February 13. Contact Matt, Charley or Becky for details! We can't wait to see what you have in store for us!

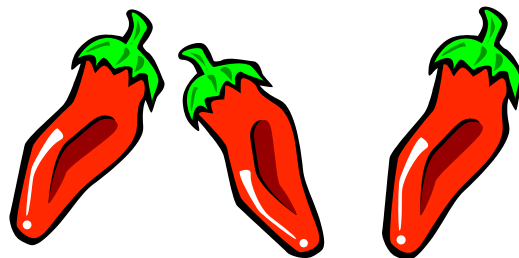
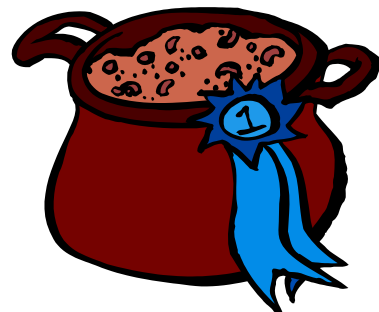


Even if you don't enter the contest, join in on the fun, get inspired, support your fellow veterans and check out the VA's Got Talent and Visual Arts Show! You'll be glad you did!

## Annual SCI Chili Cook-Off and PVA Luncheon

Come and join us for the greatest chili cook-off known to the VA. Yes, that right—it's once again time to start perfecting your favorite chili recipe and then put it to the test on Thursday, January 15, 2015. All crock pots of chili must be in the Jefferson Barracks SCI dining room by 11:30 AM. There will be chili tastings and voting, followed by a wonderful luncheon provided by the Gateway Chapter PVA. Please inform us if you plan to bring a pot of chili so that we have adequate table space for all of the entries.

To reserve your spot, to get more information, or to have any questions addressed, please contact me (Matt) at 314-894-6602 or Charley at 314-652-4100 Extension 64590.



### *In memory of...*



Frank Ballance	Kansas City, MO	10/02/14
Donald Black	Bowling Green, MO	10/04/14
George Conner	Union, MO	09/24/14
Gary Dole	Machesney, IL	10/23/14
Dade Farnham	Cahokia, IL	01/31/14
Michael Kearney	St. Charles, MO	07/22/14
Clark Smith	Castana, IA	01/30/14
Francis Williams	Kansas City, MO	10/21/14



Please have someone contact our Chapter in the event of a member's death so that we can update our database, as well as inform other members who might wish to pay their respects to the departed.



## Tips From the Regional Office Regarding Claims

Submitted By Alan Knabe, NSO Candidate, Written by Robert C. Kamei, NSO



When dealing with ratings from the VA Regional Office, there are a few things that take place that most people do not realize or understand. The biggest misconception most people have is that they think the percentages they receive are cumulative, or are capable of being added to each other. For instance, if you received 50% for PTSD, 30% for urinary incontinence and 10% for tinnitus, basic math would state you are rated at 90%. However, the VA has a different method to compute overall ratings through their quasi-complicated rating chart that bases the rating through the highest percentage. In this case, the overall rating is actually a 69%, which rounds out to a 70%, since all overall ratings will end with a zero.

**What does it mean if I see that I am *permanent and total* and what does that entitle me to?** Permanent and total, or P&T as we professionals call it, is a VA term where, “total disability will be considered to exist when there is present any impairment of mind or body, which is sufficient to render it impossible for the average person to follow a substantially gainful occupation.” **38 CFR 3.340(a)** Here is where this term becomes complicated: “total disability may or may not be permanent.” Paragraph b of the same section states that “permanence of total disability will be taken to exist when such impairment is reasonably certain to continue throughout the life of a disabled person.” The words *reasonably certain* is a subjective term that has various levels of interpretation. In addition, if the rater believes that there is a chance of improvement, they will schedule a future appointment for follow-up to that condition. For example, I have a client that was rated 70% for PTSD and qualified for individual unemployability (IU) at the 100% level, and was considered P&T. Ironically, the veteran received an increase to 100% for his PTSD, but lost his P&T status because the rater believed that there was a chance for improvement and scheduled a future appointment in 2015! So as I stated before, total disability may not be permanent even if they were considered permanent in a previous rating. So for future reference, if you do have a P&T rating, I would not file for an increase unless you are applying for Aid and Attendance (A&A) or for some higher level of Special Monthly Compensation (SMC). To answer the second part of the question, entitlement to P&T at the 100% rate qualifies you for CHAMPVA (medical coverage for dependents) and chapter 35 educational benefits, also for dependents. Chapter 35 pays approximately \$1,000 a month to the veteran’s dependents that are full-time students, as long as the veteran is no longer claiming them financially as their dependent (children only). CHAMPVA is a healthcare network that you pay approximately \$100 a year to maintain and pay co-pays at the institution you go to. In my opinion, CHAMPVA is a more attractive alternative to TRICARE Prime in which you must be enrolled in Medicare part B, requiring you to pay \$100 a month to maintain.

**What is Aid and Attendance (A&A) and Special Monthly Compensation (SMC)?** Aid and Attendance (A&A) is a VA term meaning that the veteran needs the assistance of another person to assist with activities of daily living (ADLs). These include, but are not limited to: “inability to dress or undress oneself or to keep oneself ordinarily clean and presentable; frequent need of adjustment of any special prosthetic or orthopedic appliance, that by reason of the particular disability cannot be done without aid; inability to feed oneself through loss of coordination of upper extremities or through extreme weakness; inability to attend to the wants of nature; or incapacity, physical or mental, which requires care or assistance on a regular basis to protect oneself from hazards or dangers incident to one's daily environment.” **38 CFR 3.350(b)**. A&A applies to both pension and compensation, however with pension, it only increases the amount of allowable income where compensation will actually increase the income. Special Monthly Compensation (SMC) is a more difficult concept to understand due to the complexity of factors that must be determined to formulate a rating. To establish SMC, it is a rating that is a compilation of multiple service-connected disabilities involving the anatomical loss or loss of use of certain extremities and/or the loss of certain bodily functions.

One final note, whenever you have a Compensation and Pension (C&P) exam and the doctor starts off by asking, “How you are feeling?” don't lie and say you're feeling fine - which is the traditional response to that sort of question. The examining physicians will write that in their notes stating that you are “feeling fine”, which will work against you if you are there for a mental disorder exam (PTSD, anxiety disorder, depression, etc.). Whenever you go to a C&P exam, you make sure it is your worst day. Do not take prescription medications to mask your disabilities that you live with every day, because the doctors will not see you when your medications wear off. If it's absolutely necessary for you to take your prescriptions before your exam, inform the physician that you had to take those prescriptions to make it to the appointment. People say looks can be deceiving and if you are looking and feeling good going into a C&P exam, you might not be feeling the same when you get the results from your rating decision.

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 10**

## AMBUCS

By LaRoy Smith



National AMBUCS, Inc. is a national charitable service organization. The goal of AMBUCS is to create mobility and independence for people with disabilities. The AMBUCS mission is fulfilled by members of local chapters who among other things provide AmTryke therapeutic tricycles to people with disabilities.

Earlier this year, the organization contacted the recreational therapists at Jefferson Barracks and told them they were coming to St. Louis for their annual convention and, per their mission, wanted to donate bikes to disabled veterans. A day was set aside at the JB Gym for applications and fittings. With much hope, the veterans came and applied and were fitted for the best type of bike for their condition. Then the wait began.

On Wednesday evening, October 29, over 30 veterans from our area were treated to a dinner at Union Station. Afterward, there was an individual introduction and indoor parade of all the veterans riding their new bikes. Much applause, many tears.

Here's a hat's off to AMBUCS and all their participating sponsors who made this possible. Thank you AMBUCS for our new bikes. Hand-cycling here I come!

That could be the end of this article, but no, there's more. Many of us who already receive our healthcare from the VA know about the benefits of the therapies we receive from our dedicated therapists and of the participation in the many athletic and other opportunities provided by PVA at the Winter Sports Clinic in Colorado and both the Golden Age Games and the National Wheelchair Games. It's an awesome collaboration.

Now, I challenge all of you who haven't yet participated to come to JB Spinal Cord Unit and challenge yourself to any of a myriad of adaptive opportunities – Air Guns, Archery, Arts & Crafts, Basketball, Boccia, Bowling, Clay and Skeet Shooting, Computer Classes, Creative Writing, Dominoes, Fishing, Golf, Hand-Cycling, Nine-Ball, Photography, Recreational Outings, Scuba, Softball, Snow Skiing/Snowboarding, Swimming, Theatre Arts, Track & Field Events, Water Skiing, Water Therapy, Weightlifting and much more.

Surprised? Never tried any of these before? Don't worry, many of us in these programs hadn't either before we worked with our therapists. Those of us who have tried many of these new activities are here to encourage you and share the fun we're already having. Come on, get involved in PVA and any or all of the activities above at the VA.

## GATEWAY CHAPTER PVA

### WISHES TO WELCOME OUR NEW MEMBER

Dennis Cabanting ..... St. Louis, MO

Frank Rayfield ..... Piedmont, MO

Jared Smith ..... St. Louis, MO

Kenneth Fletcher ..... Mound City, IL

Michael Savidge ..... Lansing, KS

# MIA

Richard Banton

Chad Kocina

Raymond Radecki

Dale Salyer

Otis Fowler

Jonathan Lewis

Joe Sabo

Rick Taylor



*Have you seen or know the whereabouts of these members? They are in danger of being dropped from the PVA roster. Please call us, write to us, or e-mail us if you know where they are! Our contact info is inside the front cover.*



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## Retirement of Kathy Ricker, LMSW, KCVAMC SCI Coordinator

By Bonnie Hilburn, Gateway PVA Member and Retired PVA Service Officer



The Kansas City VA Medical Center Spinal Cord Injury Clinic has been blessed to have Kathy Ricker as our Spinal Cord Injury Coordinator since 2005. She received her Bachelors of Social Work in 1990 from the University of Central Missouri, and her Masters of Social Work in 1991 from the University of Kansas. She was then employed at the Kansas City VA Medical Center first as MSW candidate June 1990 & full time January 1991.

When I came on board with Paralyzed Veterans of America in 1991, Social Worker (SW) Kent Porter had established one of the first VA SCI Clinics in the country. At that time, it was nearly impossible to find out who was eligible for the clinic. He ran a very elite group that he hand-picked. Kent always spoke very highly of Kathy. He told me how she promoted the Practice of Random Kindness and Senseless Acts of Beauty Theory to him in 1993. This was many years before Kevin Spacey's movie "Pay It Forward" (2005), and before it became popular to do random acts of kindness. After Kent retired, we went through two other SCI Coordinators that really did nothing for our clinic or SCI patients. It wasn't until 2005, that Kathy took the position that our group actually saw a multitude of improvements for our SCI Clinic and the entire Physical Medicine Department.



Kathy initiated the SCI Registry. She started our first SCI Support Group with the help and support from our former Director Kent Hill. She started a newsletter to keep us all involved with the many community events that were happening around town. She served as Acting Chief PM&R June, 2006-February 2007. She encouraged veteran participation in Adaptive Sports & Recreation programs since 2007. She facilitated contact with the Gateway Chapter PVA main office in St. Louis and helped establish membership forums with Gateway officers.

Kathy opened the doors for all SCI eligible veterans to a variety of medical benefits such as the Bowel and Bladder Program and the Catastrophic Disability Program. She helped us to get special parking and procured a bus with a wheelchair lift for outings. She set up travel to events that many SCI veterans wouldn't have been able to attend without her help. She even drove the VA bus on several occasions. Kathy has done whatever needed to be done for our Kansas City veterans.

Kathy is married and has three adult daughters; six adult step-children; twelve grandchildren and one great grandson. She will tell you that her greatest achievement was being a single mom to Billie, Ashley (who is disabled) & Lindsay, and now her marriage to Richard in 1994. She is a member of the Praise & Worship team at her church. But, she feels that her biggest mission since she began her career at Kansas

City VA was being blessed by all of her encounters with veterans & co-workers.

Kathy Ricker is retiring at the end 2014, and she will be sorely missed by all of us. She is the most dedicated and kind person that I know. Whoever takes her place will have big shoes to fill! If anyone deserves an Atta Girl, it is her. Best wishes on your retirement, on behalf of all the veterans, thank you for your dedication.



## Veterans Curation Program

The VCP is a training and employment opportunity primarily for wounded, disabled, and recently separated veterans, who served during the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts. Veterans work as archaeological laboratory technicians for up to five months. During this time, they build on the skill set that they learned in the military and gain financial stability as they transition to the civilian workforce. There are three VCP labs, located in Alexandria, VA, Augusta, GA, and St. Louis, MO. In these labs, the veteran participants preserve archaeological collections administered by the Army Corps of Engineers. Since 2009, the VCP has employed and trained 203 veteran participants. Of the veterans who have graduated the program, 69% have obtained employment and 20% have continued their education. Our upcoming term starts on May 4<sup>th</sup>. Visit our website at [www.VeteransCurationProgram.org](http://www.VeteransCurationProgram.org) and our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/veteranscurationproject](https://www.facebook.com/veteranscurationproject).

**CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6**

Ratings at the VA Regional Office are an ongoing collaboration and we work to ensure that the appropriate level of compensation is awarded. The VA is trying to make it easier for you, the veteran, to file for claims with their paperless filing system, eBenefits. However, as noted in the example on page 6, filing a claim for increase on your own may cause more harm than good. When in doubt, contact your nearest PVA Service Officer to answer any questions you may have regarding your past, current or any future claims. Contact information for your local Service Officers are located on page 2.

**Trivia Night 2015—Canceled**

By Debbie Gray

- \* *Years that VA Trivia Night has existed: 11*
- \* *Funds that VA Trivia Night has raised for veterans to participate in National sporting events: nearly \$100,000*
- \* *Memories of a VA gym full of happy people all gathered for a good cause: Priceless*



All that being said, VA Trivia Night will not happen in 2015. The event is taking a hiatus due to several extenuating circumstances. The first VA Trivia Night occurred in 2004, when St. Louis VA was preparing to host the National Veterans Wheelchair Games. The success was immediate, and continued on with the primary goal of raising funds that allow veterans with SCI/D to attend the national sporting events. The SCI therapy group took on the role of both organizing and implementing this fun time. We've had a super time doing it, too! This cause certainly continues to be worthy.

Thank you so very much to the Gateway PVA for their support. And thanks to all the individuals who sold tickets, bought rounds, donated/bought auction items and brought in tables full of players. And thank you to the athletes who benefitted from the proceeds and expressed their gratitude for those funds. It's been a great run and we're sad for the decision, but also excited for whatever will come next. This therapy group that's so proud to serve our veterans with SCI/D has got to be one of the most fun groups anywhere, and we assure you something else will be coming that will need your time, energy and support to accomplish. Stay tuned!

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# January

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1 <b>Happy New Year!</b> <b>Office Closed January 1-2, 2015</b>	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13 BOD Mtg. @ GPVA 4:00 pm 15 pts. non-BOD Mbr.	14	15  Chili Cook-Off & GPVA Luncheon at JB @ Noon 5 pts.	16	17
18	19 M. L. King's Birthday Office Closed	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31



# February



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2 Newsletter Articles Due 15 pts. published	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10 BOD Mtg. @ GPVA 11:30 am 15 pts. non-BOD Mbr.	11	12 VA's Got Talent JB Theater 5:30 p.m.	13	14 <i>Happy Valentine's Day</i>
15	16 Washington's Birthday Office Closed	17	18	19 Member/Patient Luncheon at JB @ Noon 5 pts.	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27 Visual Arts Show JB Gym 11:30 a.m.	28





**Paralyzed Veterans  
of America**

Gateway Chapter

**1311 Lindbergh Plaza Center  
St. Louis, MO 63132**

Address Service Requested

### **Thank You St. Louis Rams!**

The St. Louis Rams extended a special invitation to our members to attend a private practice at Rams Park in November. They also generously sent us five (5) sets of accessible tickets for their game on December 11th.

If you were checking your email, you were aware that these last minute opportunities were available.

Throughout 2014, the Gateway Chapter PVA had drawings for tickets to Cardinals games, Blues games and Rams games in St. Louis, as well as Royals and Chiefs games in Kansas City. Make sure to check upcoming newsletters and your email for more giveaways, fun events and opportunities in 2015! If we don't have your email address on file, then we can't send you information about last minute giveaways! Please call us with your email address so you're not missing out—also make sure to update all info whenever it changes.



**“Veterans with Spinal Cord Injury or Disease, Living Life to the Fullest”**