

Gateway Gazette

January/February 2021

Volume 45 Number 1



Paralyzed Veterans
of America

Gateway Chapter

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

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**Paralyzed Veterans
of America**

Gateway Chapter

Time to update your address or email?

Please email us at info@gatewaypva.org or write or call us at the following:
Gateway Chapter PVA • 1311 Lindbergh Plaza Center • St. Louis, MO 63132
(314) 427-0393 or (800) 426-4058 • Fax (314) 427-4183

We are offering the option to receive our Chapter's newsletter by email. Members taking advantage of electronic delivery will help to reduce the cost of printing and postage. In turn, this will allow the Chapter to put more funds toward our members and member programs. If you have not done so already, please contact Administrative Assistant Amber Lee at amber@gatewaypva.org, or Executive Director Chris Blanchard at chris@gatewaypva.org, if you would like to start receiving your newsletter electronically.



President's Message

by Stanley D. Brown

Vaccines

Goodbye and Good Riddance 2020

Advocacy and Legislation Zoom Training

Pixel 3 and 4 Smart Phones Available

Vaccines

I previously sent an email to everyone with an attached VA news release dated December 10, 2020, the VA announced its initial plans for COVID-19 vaccine distribution. VA hospitals and staff will fall under the CDC guidelines for the first tier of vaccines to be distributed. Both St. Louis and Columbia VA hospitals will be receiving vaccines to administer to their inpatients and staff. The link for the news release is <https://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=5580> and the link for the VA website on the vaccine is <https://www.va.gov/health-care/covid-19-vaccine/>. I specifically asked the St. Louis VA Medical Center Director when we might expect vaccines for SCI/D outpatients and he said he was awaiting guidance from the VA Central office. That's the same response I received from the national PVA office. As of now, the St. Louis VA will be receiving the Moderna vaccine which does not require the extraordinary freezer. Staff are now getting vaccinated. Inpatients should get vaccinations in early to mid January. A charter committee will determine the next tiers to include outpatients in SCI/D in particular. On December 18, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued an Emergency Use Authorization of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine, which is the second COVID-19 vaccine to be authorized. The Moderna vaccine will be available at the Kansas City VAMC and the Poplar Bluff and Marion spokes. The link to that press release from the VA can be found at <https://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=5591>.

Both vaccinations require a second round which should be administered around 28 days after the first injection. The only press I have seen on reactions involve individuals with allergies requiring use of an EpiPen, plus some pain at the injection site and fatigue for a day or two. The very moment I receive additional information I will share it by email with everyone, which is another reason to share your email address with us.

Goodbye and Good Riddance 2020

Can you remember such a dreadful year? Perhaps the year of your accident or when you were first diagnosed with your spinal cord disease would qualify. It has and will continue for a short (hopefully) while longer to cause additional mental stress and anxiety. One of my attendants recently moved on and I have been carefully and unsuccessfully trying to replace her. During this period two of my workers tested positive and I spent an anxious 14 days after each one told me. You no doubt have had similar experiences. One of our Gateway Board members told us he just got out of the hospital after nine days dealing with the virus and at times wondering if they were "going to make it." If this happens to anyone please let us know or have a family member call. We'll do what we can and at the very least pray for you. In general, let us know if there is anything the chapter could do for you. In response to Gateway's first offering of \$75 cards, we gave out 95 cards. In response to the second offering, we've given out 39 cards so far. Also remember that the National

PVA has a disaster relief fund that can be used for expenses related to COVID-19. Those requests require receipts and should be forwarded to us at the chapter office for approval and service officer comments. Several members have used this fund for groceries and supplies which had to be delivered.

Advocacy and Legislation Zoom Training

Training for the Advocacy and Legislation meetings will be March 1-2, 2021. We will not be performing in-person congressional office visits in Washington DC this year, but I will try to schedule zoom meetings with the congressional offices for March 3-5. If you think you are interested in advocacy in this area please let me know and I will give you instructions to sign up for the training. Gateway can have up to 10 people for the training, so even if you are only mildly curious, please contact me.

Pixel 3 and 4 Smart Phones Available

Following their generous donation of Pixel 2 smartphones last year, Premium Retail Services has offered to donate Pixel 3 and perhaps Pixel 4 smartphones to our members this year. We are waiting to hear about the actual number of phones to be donated and the exact date of the donation, but we think that we will receive them in early January 2021. If you are interested in this offer, please contact Amber Lee at amber@gatewaypva.org or Chris Blanchard at chris@gatewaypva.org or simply call the office at 314-427-0393 to reserve a phone.

Remembering 2020

by Rodney Harris, Senior Benefits Advocate

Christmas time is here again and the holiday season gatherings of family and friends begins. The hustle and bustle of shopping, fighting crowds and getting that perfect gift for someone can create undue panic and anxiety. We get so caught up in trying to make every detail perfect (or as near as possible) that we forget to relax and enjoy Christmas and what it really means. Hours of planning, shopping and wrapping comes down to the sounds of gift wrap being torn and thrown about which may only last minutes. Christmas is celebrated in many ways throughout our country and no matter how it is celebrated there are certain things that make the season brighter when you give a little of yourself to others.

Christmas cheer can be defined as “Food and Drink, especially alcoholic beverages consumed around the Christmas holiday.” We all know the feeling food and drink can bring when enjoyed during the holidays. We eat or drink too much and then we have to either nap or loosen a belt buckle a notch or two. Christmas cheer is also defined as the “Joyful and generous attitude expected of people at Christmas.” Now this definition is obvious when you watch Christmas movies on Hallmark but is it present everywhere?

You may also feel Christmas cheer when you hear your favorite Christmas song. Whether it is “Silent Night” or “Jingle Bells” we all get that feeling of the season singing along. This feeling can be described as the Christmas Spirit that fills you up with happiness and joy. This Spirit can help to remove any unhappy thoughts of the past year and replace them with hope and a brighter outlook for the New Year that approaches.

Many people will be staying in a hospital or nursing home this holiday season. Whether they are veterans or not most will miss out on sharing with family and friends. Some may have lost loved ones this year and could be struggling to hold the thoughts of them close. They will not get that hug or kiss that always makes things better for them.

So remember that Christmas time is about spreading happiness and joy to our fellow women and men. Begin by filling yourself with the Christmas Spirit (not the locally made “Spirits”) which will help you to spread the Christmas cheer to those who need it most this season.

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!



Government Relations Report

by Stanley D. Brown, Acting Relations Director

Advocacy and Legislation Week March 1-March 5, 2021

While we are still in the midst of the pandemic, the March 2021 advocacy week with visits in Washington has been canceled. We will be scheduling zoom meetings. As I mentioned in my President's Message, if you are interested please contact me at the office and I will provide a link for the training. Recent legislation that has passed and one bill that will be submitted again are as follows:

Special Adapted Housing Improvement Act

If you qualify, this grant has been increased to \$98,492 and the number of times you can apply has increased from three to six. If you have not used all three of the grants you are now eligible for six. Contact your service officer to apply.

AUTO for Veterans Act

Qualified veterans originally got a grant to help purchase their first vehicle. If this passes, you will be able to apply, if it's been 10 years, for another grant of \$21,488 to purchase another vehicle. The costs of adapting the vehicle is covered separately

and do not count against the purchase grant. This bill is not yet law and will be cosponsored by Missouri Senator Roy Blunt in the next session. Once it is filed, I will be asking members to use a PVA email app, Voter Voice, to email your representatives for passage. If you're thinking of buying a new vehicle, which I am, you might consider waiting until this bill passes.

Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers

This bill has passed and is effective now. Previously it only applied to service-connected seriously injured veterans injured after September 11, 2001. It now applies to injuries on or before May, 1975 (the end of the Vietnam War). The bill also now covers for the first time spinal cord diseases, like MS and ALS, that are incurred/ diagnosed during the time frame. Figuring the disease "incurred" date is a little tricky. All ALS veterans who served during those time frames would be eligible. Veterans with a MS diagnosis within seven years of active duty would also qualify if they served during those time frames. In addition to family member caregivers, the law applies to live in caregivers. Contact your service officer to help apply. Please feel free to ask me questions also.

VVC Program *by Matthew D. Luitjohan, CTRS*

Hello, we hope you and your loved ones are healthy and doing well throughout these challenging times. In March, when the COVID-19 pandemic caused a dramatic shift in all of our daily routines, we started doing daily video calls to help offset the decrease in social interactions many of our veterans experienced. Since that time, the program has expanded to include morning and afternoon classes as well as an evening meditation class on Thursdays. We offer a wide range of classes and each one ends in a group chat. The group chat allows you to visit with your fellow vets and discuss topics as they arise.

We encourage you to try out a class or two to see what it is like, learn, enjoy the comradery, and socialize with peers and staff. The current class schedule is listed to the right for you to review, but it does change occasionally. The classes are available to all. No advanced reservation is required, but feel free to reach out to Matt or Charley if you are having technical challenges and need assistance. The classes are not something you need to commit to daily or even weekly. You'll see that some of our participants join when they can but may not be on regularly whereas others are on many calls a week.

How does it work? Email Charley (Charles.wright6@va.gov) or Matt (matthew.luitjohan@va.gov) if you are interested and we will add you to an email list. Each day there is a class, you will receive a link to click on. That link is good for all the classes for that day; however, there is a new link each day. If you are currently receiving our daily emails and wish for them to stop please email us and we will remove you. If you have any questions, concerns, etc. please email Matt and/or Charley to have them addressed. We miss all of you and hope to see you soon!

Schedule is as follows but is subject to change:

- 10:30 AM Mondays:
15/20 minutes of Seated Tai Chi with Lars
Remainder Open Chat
- 1:30 PM Mondays:
20 minutes Seated Yoga with Kat

- 10:30 AM Tuesdays:
15/20 minutes of Strength and Stretching-Focus is Boxing Stretching
- 1:30 PM Tuesdays:
20 minutes "Where in the world is Amy Ikpeama" Exploring Our World

A wide range of guest speakers are also scheduled at this time.

- 10:30 AM Wednesdays:
15/20 minutes of Seated Yoga with Kat
Remainder Open Chat
- 1:30 PM Wednesdays:
20 minutes Strength and Stretching-Focus is Dumbbells, Resistance, and Stretching with Kat

- 10:30 AM Thursdays:
15/20 minutes of Trivia with Lars
Remainder Open Chat
- 1:30 PM Thursdays:
20 minutes Seated Tai Chi with Lars
- 7:00 PM Thursdays:
45 minutes iRest Yoga Nidra Guided Meditation with Matt

- 10:30 AM Fridays:
30 minutes Jackie J. Show Friday Feast (showcasing new and delicious recipes)
Remainder Open Chat
- 1:30 PM Fridays:
20 minutes Seated Aerobics Class with Kat

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General Information

JAN 2021

Dec 24 to Jan 1-
OFFICE CLOSED

Jan 12 -
BOD Meeting
11:30am via Zoom
15 pts for non-BOD mbrs

Jan 18 -
OFFICE CLOSED

FEB 2021

Feb 9 -
BOD Meeting
11:30am via Zoom
15 pts for non-BOD mbrs

Feb 15 -
OFFICE CLOSED

*Gateway Chapter monthly luncheons at Jefferson Barracks Building 52 are canceled until further notice. The luncheons will resume when the VA determines it is safe to host them again.

Welcome to New Members

Edwardo Domenech

In Memory of

James Gebhart of Florissant, MO	12/06/19
Robert Vago of Mascoutah, IL	08/05/20
Michael Penrod of Carbondale, IL	10/12/20
Theodore Sinker of St. Joseph, MO	10/17/20
Frank Otterman of Kansas City, MO	10/21/20
William Coleman of St. Louis, MO	10/26/20
James Helton of Arnold, MO	11/06/20
James Thompson of Pevely, MO	11/12/20

Missing in Action

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.

Ronnie Anderson • Steven Cathey • Kevin Jackson •
David Kliros • Matthew Nichols • Jerold Reynolds •
Joseph Roberts • Laurice Sappington • Henry Thilking •
Willis Walker

Gateway Chapter Grants

As a reminder to all Gateway members, once your Gateway membership has been approved by both the Chapter and the National PVA office, there are many accessibility grants available. A new or transferring member's home must reside in the Gateway Chapter's catchment area for 6 months before receiving any of Gateway Chapter's grants and if the potential member is not in the catchment area, the member is required to move into the catchment area within one year of member application. These grants include our Accessible Vehicle Grant, Hand Control Grant, Home Accessibility Grant and Generator Grant. Please note that members can not use any Gateway grants for reimbursement of completed work. Members must have a Gateway Board approved bid before starting any work, and the vendor will be paid directly after member satisfaction has been confirmed. ***Photos of work before and after work must be submitted to the Chapter by either the member or the vendor. Lien waivers must also be submitted to the Chapter.*** See below for specific information on availability of the grants. If you have further questions on any of the grants please contact our office.

HOME ACCESSIBILITY GRANT (YEAR-ROUND)

Members must first obtain two quotes from reputable contractors for the accessibility work on their home. If one of the quotes is from a family member who is a contractor, that contractor must be accredited by the Better Business Bureau and have a recorded performance bond. The two quotes must be obtained and presented to the Gateway Board of Directors for approval prior to any work being started. The quotes likewise must be for the exact same accessibility work on your home. ***Photos of work before and after work must be submitted to the Chapter by either the member or the vendor. Lien waivers must also be submitted to the Chapter.*** Gateway PVA's Housing Accessibility Grant is available in the amount of \$10,000 to all non-service connected members, and \$7,500 to service connected members. Funds will be paid directly to the approved contractor after successful completion of the work. This grant is available only after a member has exhausted all other available VA funding. Be sure to NOT have the work done prior to the Board approval, members will not be reimbursed after the fact.

HAND CONTROL GRANT (YEAR-ROUND)

Non-service connected members, after exhausting any eligible modifications through the VA, may receive funding to obtain and have hand controls installed. Members must obtain two bids/quotes from reputable sources to obtain and have the necessary equipment installed for hand controls to drive the vehicle. The bids will be presented at an upcoming Gateway Board of Directors meeting for approval. Members must also provide proof of completed hand control training and proof of a valid drivers license. Gateway will pay the vendors directly after the work is successfully completed. Be sure to NOT have the work done prior to the Board approval, members will not be reimbursed after the fact.

GENERATOR GRANT (ANNUAL)

The announcement of the grant opening will be made in the newsletter, email and social media, typically during the summer. This grant is for the amount of \$5500 or less, and will only be paid to contractors after the work is done, or vendors after delivery. Grants can be applied to a portable generator (which should cost less than the \$5500) or go toward an automatic permanent home generator (which will cost more than that grant amount). In either case, portable or permanent home generator, members are required to obtain two bids for the same product or scope of work. If the cost of work exceeds \$5500, the member is responsible for the remaining amount. ***Photos of work before and after work, and lien waivers, must be submitted to the Chapter by either the member or the vendor.***

ACCESSIBLE VEHICLE GRANT (ANNUAL)

Typically in February and March, the Gateway Board of Directors will assess the financial status of the Chapter and determine how much funding to make available for vehicle modification grants. The announcement of the grant opening will be made in the newsletter, email and social media. Applications will need to be completed for the Board to assess eligibility. Gateway will award \$10,000 grants for members to use in trading in their existing accessible vehicle to purchase a newer model (***Photos of work before and after work must be submitted to the Chapter by either the member or the vendor. Lien waivers must also be submitted to the Chapter.***), or a \$35,000 grant for first time vehicle buyers (number of grants given are dependent on the financial status of the Chapter each year). These grants will be used for cost over and above any VA funds. Each year numerous applications are received and once the individual is determined eligible, names are randomly drawn and the winners are notified.

We proudly support Gateway PVA



If you have a **service-connected disability**, you may qualify for VA funding assistance for wheelchair accessible vehicles or driving modifications. If your current mobility is more than two years old, you may even qualify for a brand new conversion.

St. Louis North

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St. Louis, MO 63134
Local: (314) 989-1010
Toll-Free: 877.501.8267

St. Louis South

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New Items of Note *Washington Update - Volume 26, Number 20*

“Ready to Roll” Initiative to Improve Disaster Preparedness for Wheelchair Users

United Spinal has announced the launch of a comprehensive disaster preparedness initiative for individuals with spinal cord injuries and disorders, designed to lessen the effects and risks associated with natural or human-caused disasters. The “Ready to Roll” initiative will address the significant challenges wheelchair users and other individuals living with disabilities face when disasters strike.

<https://unitedspinal.org/ready-to-roll/>

Research Brief: “The Extra Costs of Living with a Disability in the U.S.”

National Disability Institute (NDI), in partnership with the Stony Brook University School of Social Welfare and the University of Tennessee College of Social Work, released a brief that summarizes research on out-of-pocket expenses faced by individuals with disabilities compared to individuals without disabilities. Research indicates that a household with an adult who has a work-related disability will need an average of 28 percent more income to obtain the same standard of living as a comparable household without a member who has a disability.

The brief recommends “resetting the policy table” for greater equity by addressing the tax code and eligibility criteria for public benefits. To review the brief, please visit <https://www.nationaldisabilityinstitute.org/reports/extra-costs-living-with-disability>.

HVAC Survey on C&P Exams

The House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs wants your input on VA compensation and pension or C&P exams. If you are currently scheduled for a C&P exam, or have received one in the past, please fill out their survey to ensure our members’ voices are represented. You can access the at <https://veterans.house.gov/candp-delays>.

Free National Parks Access for Veterans

The U.S. Department of Interior recently announced they will be granting free entrance to national parks, wildlife refuges, and other federally-managed public lands to all U.S. military veterans and Gold Star families. Unlike previous years where fees were waived for a set period, this change is permanent—meaning entrance fees and standard amenity fees charged by the Bureau of Land Management and Bureau of Reclamation will be waived for veterans and Gold Star families from this point forward. For purposes of this program, a veteran is identified as an individual who has served in the United States Armed Forces, including the National Guard and Reserves, and is able to present one of the forms of identification listed below.

- Department of Defense Identification Card
- Veteran Health Identification Card (VHIC)
- Veteran ID Card
- Veterans designation on a state-issued U.S. driver’s license or identification card



Paralyzed Veterans of America

Gateway Chapter

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