

GATEWAY GAZETTE

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



Team photo (courtesy Mark Sanders) of the 2007 St. Louis JB/Gateway PVA NVWG taken in Milwaukee Wisconsin

Great Games on a Great Lake

by Amy Will

On June 18th, 2007 athletes from Team St. Louis traveled to Milwaukee, WI to participate in the 27th National Veterans Wheelchair Games. Those athletes included: Aubrey Youngs, Floyd Porter, Henry "Bud" Boyle, Ruth Kult, Rose Ganz, Bobby Jackson, Dennis Durrwachter, Denis Canoy, Robert Kiger, James Williams, Charles Barnes, Joel White, William "Chuck" Norris, Joey Avellone, Lonnie Crider and Jamey Bollinger. It was apparent that Team St. Louis athletes were well conditioned when they brought home medals in almost every event. Some of the weeks highlights included Dennis Durrwachter winning the bronze medal in his Handcycling event, he placed 4th overall...Now that is something to brag about. Ruth Kult helped her team capture the silver medal in Softball, Ruth stated that she greatly enjoyed the sport and was looking forward to continuing to compete in future Softball games. William "Chuck" Norris commanded the court in his Quad Rugby events. In fact, the entire team came out to cheer "Chuck" and Joey on. Lonnie Crider, Bobby Jackson, Bob Kiger, Doug Barnes

and Denis Canoy made terrific runs in the slalom event. Joel White and Joey Avellone competed fiercely in their Field events, while Bud Boyle and Rose Ganz excelled at their swimming events. The Bowling event included Team St. Louis' own Floyd Porter, Jamey Bollinger and James Williams. Aubrey Youngs proved that practice does make perfect by winning the gold medals in both her Archery and Table Tennis events. The team bonded throughout the entire week; cheering and encouraging others seemed to be the priority. Milwaukee proved to be a great host...the Block Party, Ceremonies and Hospitality were all remarkable. "Great Games on a Great Lake" truly summarizes the 27th National Veteran Wheelchair Games experience. More pictures on page 10.

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And much more!

Stan Brown
Bonnie Hilburn
Matt Wilcox
Ruth Kult

Gateway Chapter Paralyzed Veterans of America

<http://www.gatewaypva.org>

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Has your address changed? Please inform us by email to: sgokenbach@gatewaypva.org, or by writing or calling using the below information:

Gateway PVA

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St. Louis, MO 63114

(314) 427-0393 (800) 426-4058

FAX (314) 427-4183

Retired RN with 25 years experience will help with daily living activities. Light housekeeping. Will travel. Call Karen @ 314-832-2178.

Ultrasound Tests

The Robert M. Woolsey SCI Center is pleased to announce that ultrasound tests are now being offered in Building 52 on the main clinic day of Thursday. Ultrasounds will be performed in Room 1N115 (next to Mr. Sontag's office). This is part of our ongoing quality improvement efforts with the goal of making it easier for veterans to get the medical care they need without having to make multiple trips. We hope that this change will result in more patients getting this important evaluation completed in the most efficient way possible. We will continue to strive to make our services reach the high level of excellence that our patients deserve.

Florian Thomas, MD

Director, Spinal Cord Injury Service

Free Gateway PVA Cardinal Baseball Tickets

It's a long and humorous story but we were finally able to obtain some donated tickets for the Cardinals/Phillies evening game on Tuesday, September 18, 2007. We have several "regular" outfield loge box seats and some infield loge box wheelchair seats (spaces) that we are going to give away to you and your family members or caregivers. Even if you don't want to go in a wheelchair and want tickets for your parents or spouse, please let us know. No confusing phone calls, just send us a postcard or letter and tell us how many tickets and who will use them. Our address again is: Gateway PVA, 9738 Lackland, Overland, Missouri 63114.

VA Medical Centers Extending Hours

In order to provide more health care for more veterans, especially mental health services, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jim Nicholson has directed the 153 medical centers of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to keep their doors open longer. "Illness doesn't follow a 9-to-5 schedule," Nicholson said. "I'm directing our medical centers to provide extended hours to ensure we're there for the veterans who have earned our care."

The material contained herein expresses the opinions of the writer and not necessarily the opinions of the editor or the Gateway Chapter, Paralyzed Veterans of America. All material in the *Gazette* may be reprinted unless specifically prohibited. Readers are encouraged to submit their articles or rebuttals to:

ddurrwachter@gatewaypva.org or in the US mail at the address shown to the left and mark with attention to the editor.

President's Report

By Stan Brown



Let me begin by providing an update on what remains the most important issue facing our membership-**VA healthcare**. Since my last message on our efforts to improve care of our members at John Cochran Hospital, I believe we have at least gotten the attention of VA health officials. In May one of our members was admitted to John Cochran and spent some time in the ICU area. He was fortunate to have a family member present much of the time to monitor his care. His care was not satisfactory and our National PVA healthcare monitoring staff came and got involved. Matt Wilcox and I were also involved with the special site visit. Our National PVA organization is recommending to the VA Secretary that one full-time nurse practitioner be added to specifically supervise care and monitor SCI/D patients while at John Cochran Hospital. In addition, there is a recommendation to set up a 5-10 bed SCI/D unit at John Cochran Hospital. If the beds are not filled with acute care SCI/D veterans, the beds might be used for long-term care or annual physicals. When agreeing to this recommendation, I urged that these changes not be considered as a "first step" to moving the SCI/D unit from Jefferson Barracks to John Cochran. Every once in a while that bad idea gets raised with the inference our members are spoiled by Jefferson Barracks and need to face the real world of John Cochran. To everyone who has served the country, our commitment to see you receive the best care possible, remains our most important mission. For the Iraqi war soldier I spoke with last week, paralyzed from a sniper bullet wound in his neck, you deserve to be "spoiled" from the VA.

I have received contact from the National Multiple Sclerosis Society about an important earmark within the DOD budget appropriating \$15 million for MS research on the connection between military service and multiple sclerosis. They have identified 5,345 cases of MS among US veterans that were deemed "service connected." Some research suggests a link between exposure to neurotoxins and the development of neurological disorders. Gulf War Veterans specifically may be at increased risk. Advocates for the funding have testified before Appropriations Committees' Subcommittees on Defense. The research program is part of the Congressionally Directed Medical Research Program (CDMRP). As more information becomes available, I will forward it to you. In the interim, I would urge you contact your US Senators and Representatives, to urge their funding of the research. In the House, Congressman Carnahan has been a leader in this effort. In the Senate, both Senators Durbin and Obama have advocated for the appropriation. Contacting Senator Bond would be especially helpful because he is a member of the Appropriations Subcommittee.

I want to remind everyone that the PVA Annual Convention will be in St. Louis the week of August 13-19 at the same hotel and convention center as the 2004 Wheelchair Games. Let me know if you want to watch any of the sessions or would be willing to volunteer to help staff the "local information" station we will host. Lastly, I want to complain about the attendance at the monthly trap shoots (third Friday each month). A couple of people (the Stratmanns) are doing a lot of work to make this happen and less people are showing up. Olin Corp. is also donating the range and their staff. If you want to see this event continue, you need to start attending.

Dental Care:

As most PVA members are aware, the VA Medical Center's eligibility guidelines for dental care are very restrictive. For those who are in need of dental care and have no idea where to go, you might want to try either of the following:

Family Health Care Centers, 314-353-5190. Their 2 sites are at 401 Holly Hills Avenue and 4352 Manchester in St. Louis. Details are available at: http://www.familycarehealthcenter.org/dental_services.asp

Southern Illinois University School of Dental Medicine, 618-474-7000. Their 2 sites are at 2800 College Avenue in Alton (main facility) and in East St. Louis in Illinois. Details are available at: <http://www.siu.edu/sdm/care/becoming.html>

Bob Sontag, LCSW, Social Worker

Robert M. Woolsey Spinal Cord Injury Center 314-652-4100, x6-4819

New JB SCI Web Site:

http://www.visn15.med.va.gov/st-louis/SCI_and_Disability_Service_Welcome.asp

Problems With VA Hospital Unauthorized Medical Expenses

By Bonnie G. Hilburn, KC SNSO

Federal Regulations for payment to civilian hospitals for emergency medical treatment outside of the VA is under the provisions of Code of Federal Regulation (CFR) 38 CFR 17.120 through 17.131. A veteran who is being treated for emergency care for a service connected condition or is 100% service connected (Permanently and Totally (PT) disabled for any disability) is eligible for "Unauthorized Medical Expenses" to be paid for by the VA Hospital nearest where the emergency care was received.

The fact is that civilian hospitals are supposed to be obligated to bill VA before billing to second or third party *if* the veteran has informed them to do so. This isn't happening. Non-VA facilities would much rather bill Medicare due to the ease of billing and speed of reimbursement the Medicare system offers. This takes VA off the hook because of the existing laws that won't allow Medicare and VA to pay on the same bill.

However, when Medicare or your private insurance pays, the veteran is obligated to pay the co-payment (20% in most cases). The law says they should bill VA first. But when they are asked to send the money back to Medicare and bill VA, they are reluctant to do so. There is no punishment to the hospital for billing and collecting before VA has the chance to pay bills pending. If the hospital refuses to pay the money back, the veteran is responsible for paying the additional 20%. Many veterans have ended up with their credit ruined because they were waiting for the Fee Basis Dept in the VA Medical Center from the area of jurisdiction to fix the mistake.

The veteran assumes that the VAMC will eventually pay but rarely do they understand where the problem begins or ends. Payment by the VA requires the non-VA facility to submit a claim with all relevant documentation. If it is denied, the veteran must appeal within two years (for the veteran if he is service connected for the disability being hospitalized for or 100% service connected (PT) disabled). Its only 25-30 days for the Millennium Bill for those veterans who have no insurance or service connection. A non-service connected veteran who has Medicare or other insurance isn't eligible for the Millennium Bill.

Usually, the veteran will contact Fee Basis at the VAMC and then expect the problem to be resolved in their favor and when it's not, the veteran's credit is ruined because the hospital sends it to collection agencies. Some hospitals and doctors try to bill for the additional 20% even though on the bottom of the check they receive from the VA it says this is considered "payment in full". I have seen where VA has paid and the veteran's name is still tarnished because they pursue the additional 20% and send it through collection agencies.

One episode of emergency need for hospitalization encompasses bills from laboratory testing, ER doctor's bills, specialist's bills, and ambulance bills. It takes a great deal of time and patience to try and straighten out each and every bill. When it is discovered that the veteran's claim has been denied by the VA, contact must be made to each non-VA facility billing department and someone has to explain what needs to be done in order for VA to pay.

There are many errors made by both VAMCs and civilian hospitals. Trying to sort out whose error it is can be incredibly complex. Sometimes, it may be that two different VAMCs are fighting over which one is responsible for a bill. Another common problem associated with claim denial is if the Emergency Room (ER) doesn't properly address whether the visit is considered life threatening. If you wake up in horrible agonizing pain and go to the nearest hospital for care, there is no guarantee the VAMC will consider that an emergency and the claim will be denied according to the ER report. An example of this is an attack from passing kidney stones which is not considered a life threatening emergency, and therefore would be denied if the bill is submitted as an Unauthorized Medical Expense.

Another bill that was denied was because the veteran who is 100% service connected (PT) for quadriplegia had a fever of 103 degrees. The claim was denied as a non-emergency event. The clinician denied this one probably because they were unfamiliar with autonomic dysreflexia. This is a life threatening emergency to a quadriplegic and can result in a cerebral vascular accident. Once this was appealed and medical evidence presented, it was granted. It still took several months for the account to be settled.

If an appeal is filed and the VAMC must issue a Statement of the Case, the appeal will take another two years when it goes to the Board of Veterans Appeals. You can't completely blame the non VA hospitals for insisting on timely payment. But, no one is held accountable except the veteran.

It is important for you as the veteran to know this so that you can be prepared to contact all parties involved (VA, non VA hospital involved, all doctors and labs involved) if this should happen to you. Under the Patients Bill of Rights, you can request the hospital to not send your case to "collections" until this bill is resolved. Just as important, you must contact the VAMC Fee Basis Dept and inform them within 72 hours after admission that you are in the civilian hospital. If you have any questions or need assistance call your local National Service Office.

Hospital Liaison's Report

By Matt Wilcox



The recent issues involving patients and John Cochran have brought the ongoing problem the attention that we have needed. Also the *Riverfront Times* article helped greatly. We have tried working with the charter committee with little success. The recent visit chronicled the past site visits, their recommendations, and their results. They phrase it well:

"For the past several years, the charter team has not proven to be a vehicle to bring about resolution to lessen patient's complaints nor provide for continued staff education!"

The chapter has to make sound decisions concerning the Charter Committee. If we continue, we can address situations as they arise and monitor the effectiveness. They can also say they are working with the Chapter. If we find it totally ineffective and withdraw, it could be said the chapter was asked for their input but chose not to participate!

Anyone that has any comments on John Cochran needs to get with the chapter! We have developed a survey for patients and we try to reach everyone. You can call the office 800 number or e-mail me at: MWilcox@gatewayvpva.org

The major recommendation of the Site Committee is to establish a "satellite unit" at the John Cochran division under the direct responsibility to be supervised by the SCI Chief and fall under VHA directives for staffing. When and if the satellite is sent up it will be supervised by the SCI Center Chief. He has a number of other duties and will be involved in the pain clinic that will be starting up soon. The satellite at John Cochran is still in the planning stage, but it may require staff from the SCI Center.

Senator McCaskill had a Town Hall Meeting June 1, 2007, at the Overland VFW Hall. Stan Brown, Bob Huskey and I attended along with about 50 other veterans, state representatives and the media. Stan was recognized and thanked the senator for what she has done, but very clearly emphasized how the problem with SCI individuals at the John Cochran Medical Center is still present. She said she would get back with the Chapter directly and help deal with specific problems.

VA Canteen on-line:

<http://www.vacanteen.va.gov/>

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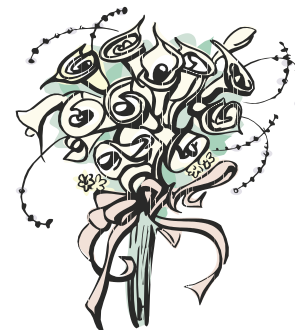
Please have someone contact the Chapter in the event of a member's death so that we can inform other members who might wish to pay respects to the departed.

In memory of....



Braun, Glenn
Maxwell, Darrell

Cape Girardeau MO 01/21/2007
St Petersburg FL 05/29/2007



Paralyzed Veterans of America is pleased to announce the first Membership Directory!

This handsome publication will be a welcome addition to your personal library. It is a great way to show pride in being a member of the PVA, and a valuable resource as well! Harris Connect, a leading publisher of alumni and membership directories for over 40 years, has been selected to compile this first ever edition of our directory. It is expected to be the definitive "who's who" of our community, and an excellent tool that you can use to connect with other members. The hardcover print directory or CD ROM will contain as much information as each member desires. All members will be given the opportunity to opt out or provide any of the following information:

Name
Favorite Photographs
Residence and business information including addresses, telephone numbers and email addresses
Years and branch of service
Highest military rank attained and military awards received
Conflicts served in
Chapter affiliation
Sports participated

In addition to the biographical section, there will also be cross-references in separate sections for career networking and geographical location.

Don't be left out. Be a part of our 2008 Directory!

Over the summer, you will be contacted about how you can be included in the directory. We have entrusted Harris Connect, a company with a reputation of integrity and many years of experience in the industry, with the task of compiling our directory. **Special Note: If you do not inform Harris that you wish to opt out you will be listed by name, city, and state.**



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Attaboy

By Ruth Kult

ALL FOR ONE AND ONE FOR ALL!
THREE CHEERS FOR MATT LUITJOHAN!



Everyone may or may not know him well yet. As luck would have it, this guy is a keeper. He is one of the few male therapists at the whole Jefferson Barracks complex, and he is making his mark.

We just got back from Milwaukee only a few hours ago and let me tell you it was fantastic. Matt helped to make it that way. He isn't afraid to get his hands dirty. There is one major thing he did that impressed me to no end. We were on our way to a hand-cycle race. This happens to be both Rose Ganz and Dennis Durrwachter's favorite events. We rode on the bus to the event. There was Rose, but no Dennis in sight.

Victor Ganz (one of the coaches) called Matt to try to track down Dennis. Apparently Dennis's nine-ball event ran longer than expected. He was playing for the Bronze medal and the game just kept dragging on. Victor called again and this time nine-ball was finished and Dennis and Matt were on a bus in route to the event. Matt pushed/ran Dennis' wheelchair from the third floor all the way to the bus pickup. Dennis had to skip lunch because of the lack of time, but Matt came to the rescue there also. He provided Dennis with a much needed breakfast bar.

Oh the excitement. Almost everyone, with exception of Dennis, was lining up to start racing. A lot of people were bumming because it looked like the Big "D" would miss his favorite event. As the intensity of the whole 'missing his favorite event' grew, dun-ta-da-da, here came Super-Matt wheeling a late Dennis through the crowd, down the road and over to his bike. This, my friends, is called dedication.

Another quality noticeable of Matt is he will do the deed with you. Example of this is he swims with you...actually watches over you and he also swims with you. Don't get me wrong, because Amy does too. She is quite the awesome recreational therapist, but this is Matt's shining moment.

I believe that Matt brings a lot to the table and he is a keeper. Take it from a person that was an in-patient many, many moons ago; the weekends drag by because there is no action. Matt started working at JB on the weekends and now works there full time including the weekends. Since then, the weekends don't seem to drag anymore according to the in-patients. There's a limited staff, but I'm sure Matt's around keeping the place hopping with something to do.

A hospital is a hospital, but there is no reason you have to hate it, at least not while Matt is around!

Thanks for reading.

Garnishments

By Fred Bradley, NSO

For those of you who are subject to co-payments for your out-patient & in-patient care and sometimes for prescription co-payments, (I'm sure you know who you are) be advised it is a good idea to make sure you pay the bills for your care. The VA Medical Center has the authority to garnish your Social Security, Railroad Retirement, Civil Service Retirement or any other income you may have in order to collect the debt.

The Medical Center will send you a bill for whatever care you had. They will give you several chances to make payment. If payment is not received, they will garnish whatever income you have. This usually occurs without advanced warning. I have had several veterans call or ask me about money withheld from their Social Security payments. Upon calling the Social Security Administration, they are informed that VA sent them a garnishment order for unpaid medical bills at a VA Medical Center. My advice is to pay the bills as they come in and avoid the hassle of having income garnished.

If you are subject to co-payments and are not sure if you should be, contact your local National Service Officer. We can help determine if you are subject to co-payments and whether there is a way to make you exempt. This is based on many factors and I won't go into all of it. Just be sure to call if you have questions or concerns about it.

An Invitation to Veterans and their Guests

By Becky Ballard



The 2007 National Veterans Creative Arts Festival will take place in St. Louis during the week of October 22-29. The Festival, presented by the Department of Veterans Affairs, the American Legion Auxiliary, and Help Hospitalized Veterans, is the celebration and grand finale stage and art show that is the culmination of talent competitions in art, creative writing, dance, drama, and music for veterans treated in the VA national health care system.

Approximately 130 veterans will exhibit their artwork or perform musical, dance, dramatic or original writing selections in a variety show. A professional orchestra will accompany the performance. The veterans invited to participate are selected winners of year-long national fine arts talent competitions in which thousands of veterans enter from VA medical facilities across the nation.

The talents of these veterans are remarkable and so are the stories of challenge and courage behind each individual involved. Music and the arts have helped them conquer many physical and emotional battles. Their bravery and accomplishments deserve a standing ovation.

You are invited to attend the stage show performance and art exhibit on Sunday, October 28th at 2:00 p.m. at the Touhill Performing Arts Center on the campus of the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

The 50-piece art exhibit will open at 12:30 p.m. in the theatre lobby and the stage show performance will start at 2:00 p.m. Veterans can obtain **complimentary tickets** (free of charge) for the stage show performance while tickets are available by calling (341) 894-6530 or writing to Becky Ballard at the below address.

Return by October 15, 2007 to:

**Becky Ballard
2007 NVCAF 128 J/B
#1 Jefferson Barracks Dr
St. Louis, Mo. 63125**

Include the following information:

Name, Return address, Phone number, and Number of tickets required.



Pictures from the Elks Pool Tournament held May 19 at the High Ridge Elks Lodge.

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Local Wheel Chair Games



2007 NVWG at Milwaukee



<i>July 2007</i>						
<i>Sunday</i>	<i>Monday</i>	<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>Wednesday</i>	<i>Thursday</i>	<i>Friday</i>	<i>Saturday</i>
1	2	3	4 Independence Day	5	6	7
8	9	10 BOD Meeting Overland 11:30	11	12 Patient Support Group at JB 1:30 - 2:30	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20 Trap Shoot 10:00 AM	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

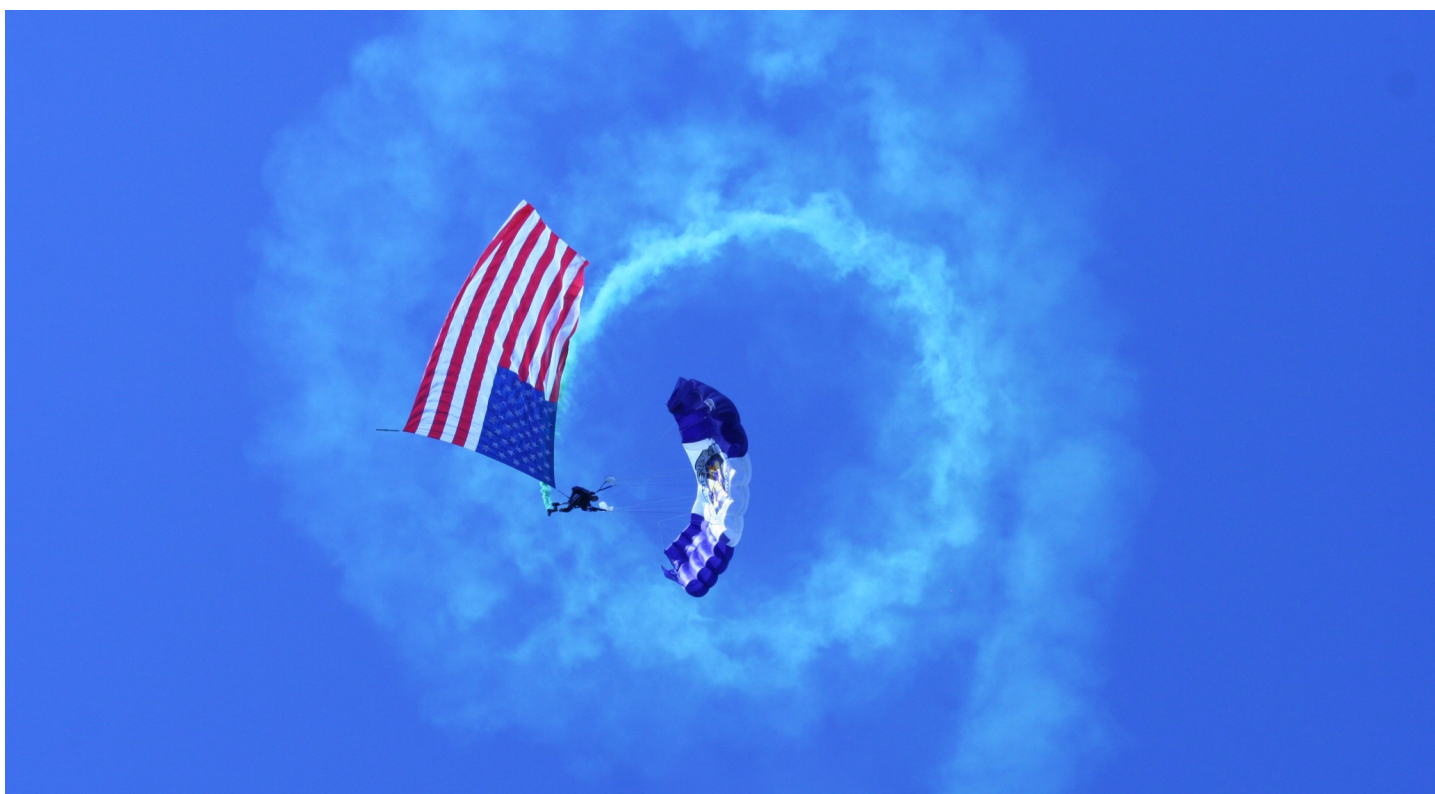
<i>August 2007</i>						
<i>Sunday</i>	<i>Monday</i>	<i>Tuesday</i>	<i>Wednesday</i>	<i>Thursday</i>	<i>Friday</i>	<i>Saturday</i>
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7 BOD Meeting Overland 11:30	8	9 Patient Support Group at JB 1:30 - 2:30	10	11
12	13 STL National Convention	14	15	16	17 Trap Shoot 10:00 AM - Newsletter Articles due	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

Address Service Requested

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Dana Bowman parachuting into the NVWG Block party in Milwaukee Wisconsin (Courtesy of M. Sanders)



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