## **GATEWAY GAZETTE**

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

#### Let's Soar Together...

By Susan Lyle

The sky's the limit if you only believe that ANYTHING is possible when you try.

The Gateway Chapter PVA encourages all of our members to participate in life. Think of all the fun you could have meeting new people or traveling to new places. Events like the JB Local Wheelchair Games on Friday, May 3, or our Annual Trap Shoot on Friday, June 7 (registrations are still being accepted) are great places to meet your peers. Or, maybe you're more adventurous and would enjoy participating in the Annual National Veterans Wheelchair Games or the Annual Winter Sports Clinic.

Not into sports? That's okay, we have monthly luncheons at the Jefferson Barracks VAMC SCI Unit that are sure to please! We would love to see you there, so join us the third Thursday of every month in Building 52 for a good meal with friends. We offer peer counseling if you need help coping with a spinal cord injury or disease. We also offer participation points for attending our events and fundraisers; redemption translates into gift cards to area restaurants or movies. All of this gets our members out in the community, which is key to "living life to the fullest."



How about getting out of the house for a baseball or football game? The chapter annually purchases both Cardinals and Rams tickets for our members and advertises drawings for those tickets. In addition, we, at times, receive free Cardinals and Rams tickets, among other items, to disburse to our members. Oftentimes these items are given to us on short notice, so we find ourselves emailing area members last minute for a "first come, first serve" event or drawing. In these instances, we need to be able to reach you. If you have an email address to share, please let me know. You may be missing out on tickets, paid surveys and giveaways! (my contact info is on pg. 2)



Finally, as I stated earlier, "ANYTHING is possible." To prove this, I wanted to give you an example of how, when you try, you can find ways to make things work for you. Our president, Stan Brown (pictured below), trained himself to sign correspondence with a large ink pen placed in his mouth. Using a clip board for support, he personally signs thank you letters to our donors. It's extremely impressive to see a high-level quad travel and do as much as your Gateway Chapter President does!

It's your turn to soar—let us help you...



#### Inside—Important Upcoming Events & More...

# Gateway Chapter Paralyzed Veterans of America http://www.gatewaypva.org

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1311 Lindbergh Plaza Center
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Office (314) 427-0393 or (800) 426-4058
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#### Local Wheelchair Games

Don't miss the local wheelchair games being held at the Jefferson Barracks VAMC on Friday, May 3, from 8:15 am to 4:30 pm. Contact Matt Luitjohan or Charley Wright if you would like to assist as a volunteer: 314-652-4100, ext. 64590

## The 2013 Gateway Regional Games USATF Sanctioned Open Event

May 18-19, 2013

Packet pick-up and registration will be held on May 17, from 6-8 pm at the St. Peters Recreation Complex.

The events will take place at the St. Peters Recreation Complex and the St. Charles West High School track.

Competition events include: swimming, archery, track and field and hand-cycling. Participation is free to military veterans. Lunch will be provided to athletes on Saturday, May 18. Contact DASA prior to May 6, for registration information. Please note that NO late registrations will be allowed. Call (636) 477-0716 or visit their website at:

www.dasasports.org

#### **Show-Me Rally**

Our friends from the Missouri Star Touring & Riding Association has a "Show Me Rally" taking place at the Red Oak Clubhouse in Lake of the Ozarks, MO. Please consider joining them June 7—9, for fun in the sun, games, and great food. Members will receive 20 participation points for attending. Please contact our office for more details at: 314-427-0393

#### **PVA Educational Scholarship Program**

The purpose of the PVA Educational Scholarship Program is to provide assistance to PVA members and their immediate family members by providing scholarship funds to help with a post-secondary education. The 2013-2014 scholarships will be in the amount of \$1,000 for full-time students and \$500.00 for part-time students for an academic year. Deadline to apply is June 17, 2013. For information, please visit www.pva.org or call (800) 424-8200, Ext. 776.



Gateway Chapter Paralyzed Veterans of America

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:

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 D. Brown



#### Spring 2013 Struggles In

March is over with a "bang" of 10 inches of snow in the St. Louis area and extremely cold weather. It was a miserable month for me. Of the 31 days, I spent 30 days either in bed all day, or at least half the day, trying to heal a skin breakdown on one half of my backside. March also graced me with one week in the hospital from low blood pressure and anemia. Mixed with this bed rest and hospital stay, I also attended the Advocacy and Legislation training in Washington, D.C., along with the PVA Mid-Winter BOD Meeting. But enough about me, how is everyone? Our office continued to run smoothly in my physical absence thanks to our Executive Director, Susan Lyle, and Gateway's Vice President, Rose Ganz, who attended many meetings in my absence. Our part-time Administrative Assistant, Jackie Wetteroff, is now back at work after her maternity leave and I'm still interviewing for a Government Relations/Development Director. The City of St. Louis and St. Louis County voters just passed a small sales tax increase to improve the area parks (including accessibility) and major renovations to the downtown Arch grounds (also to include accessibility). The significant changes to the St. Louis Arch grounds include a long green pathway to the actual park area so visitors no longer have to cross a busy street to access the park, which overlooks the Mississippi River.

#### Advocacy/Legislation and Mid-Winter BOD Meeting

The Advocacy/Legislation training and the Mid-Winter Board Meeting was held March 3-10. We spent the first two days discussing and training on legislation and accessibility issues. I participated in a presentation where we related our experience training Delta Air Lines staff on transferring disabled persons at the Atlanta International Airport. We are doing the same thing in April at the Dallas-Fort Worth Airport. On March 6, PVA members from the different chapters and I had planned to meet with our congressional representatives on Capitol Hill, but all the appointments were canceled because Washington shut down due to the impending snow (which never materialized). I spent the day in bed and never want to see another version of Law and Order whatsoever. The Mid-Winter Board Meeting was somewhat uneventful and only took two days. Beginning in 2014, PVA's new fiscal year will now be July through June. I was in favor of this change to help the national organization better budget by having the fiscal year coincide with revenue and expenses from their major fundraiser, which is direct mail solicitation. A resolution from the Mountain States Chapter (Colorado and adjoining states) failed which would have restored National PVA grants to chapters for Executive Directors and Government Relations Directors. I voted against the resolution at this time because I believe this issue, and the amount of the chapter contribution from National PVA (which was \$181,000 and now is \$130,000), needs to be discussed during budget consideration at this summer's annual convention.

#### Free Cardinal Baseball Tickets



Our chapter has purchased seven 2013 Cardinal baseball game tickets for \$800. These are excellent box seats behind home plate and close to the field. Six tickets (3 games) will be given to Recreation Therapy to take inpatients and eight tickets (4 games) will be given by lottery to our members who apply. These 4 games for members (1 wheelchair and 1 ablebodied seat per game) are available for: Saturday, June 1, at 6:15 p.m. against San Francisco; Sunday, June 23, at 1:15 p.m. against Texas; Sunday, August 25, at 1:15 p.m. against Atlanta; and Sunday, September 15, at 1:15 p.m. against Seattle. Members must

call or email the GPVA office by May 23, 2013, at 5 p.m. The drawing will be held on May 24; winners are responsible for picking up their tickets at the GPVA office or requesting that the tickets be mailed to them. Every effort will be made to accommodate the winners with their game of choice, so please specify the desired game date when responding. Please note, our office will be closed on Monday, May 27, for Memorial Day.

#### No More Prosthetics Delays: Time For Action!

By Sherman Gillums Jr., Associate Executive Director of Veterans Benefits

Two years ago, when a veteran received a customized wheelchair, porch lift, or some other "durable medical equipment" from VA prosthetics, chances are the consult or request went from a clinician or therapist to a prosthetics purchase agent, who either put out a competitive bid to vendors or ordered from a reliable major vendor, such as Invacare or Sunrise Medical. While the process was not 100 percent flawless, the veteran generally received the life-critical items without excessive delay.

So when VA decided to transition how it acquires prosthetics by placing limits on the use of "Title 38 authority" and open more government contract opportunities to veteran-owned and small businesses, it would foreseeably and disproportionately impact PVA members, most of which rely on high-cost prosthetics more than any other segment of the veteran population. Before getting into the details of the new policy and its impacts, readers should fully understand Title 38 authority and what it means to limit its application.

Title 38 of the United States Code, section 8123, grants VA authority to procure prosthetics and services in any manner "the Secretary may determine to be proper without regard to any other provision of law." When exercising this authority VA may "procure prosthetic appliances and necessary services required …by purchase, manufacture, contract, or in such other manner as the Secretary [of VA] may determine to be proper" [emphasis added].

Why is this important for PVA members to understand? This flexibility was granted to ensure that veterans with disabling conditions received devices and supplies that met their clinical needs. It also permitted VA to limit bidding competition when physicians require specific devices or equipment for patient care. The Federal Acquisition Register and VA Acquisition Register, the primary directives for the procurement of VA prosthetics, further sanction this intent.

What has seemingly happened though is a decreased emphasis on the needs of veterans in order to meet small business quotas and cut budget corners. As the Veterans Health Administration continues updating its policies and directives to guide clinical and procurement staff on the interpretation of Section 8123, PVA's concern is whether the intent of the statute will reflect a shift from a focus on patients to price tags, and veterans will see more and more instances of delayed or denied prosthetics orders.

Now if this new process works as intended, a consult or prescription submitted by a service provider goes to the local prosthetics purchase agent. If the cost exceeds the statutory "micro-purchase" limit of \$3,000 (as most customized wheelchairs, patient lifts, etc. do), the request is forwarded to a network contracting agent. The contracting agent will solicit bids from vendors, the vendor will deliver the product, and the veteran can get on with life. The order seamlessly moves through the process in a timely manner. The clinical details of the order do not get questioned or modified by contract representatives bearing no clinical expertise. The chosen vendor is capable of meeting the time and spec requirements of the bid. That is what is supposed to happen under the new process. But here is what actually happened to a couple of PVA members:

A veteran with terminal, service-connected ALS (Lou Gehrig's Disease) and his elderly wife were prescribed a whole house generator in order to keep his ventilator working in the event of a power outage. VA prosthetics delayed the request by referring it to a Major Medical Equipment Committee, which demanded that the veteran produce 4 years of records from the electric company and his spouse's health records to substantiate the claim. PVA sought the intervention of the VISN Director, after which the request was immediately approved. The same veteran was later prescribed an artificial ventilator but died 10 days after the equipment order was submitted. Records show the prosthetics chief sat on the request for a week, deciding whether she should rent or buy the equipment. When questioned, she answered there are no established timeframes for procurement and delivery of such devices in instances of terminal illness. (Continued on Page 7)

#### **Annual Trap Shoot**

By Susan Lyle

The Gateway Chapter PVA "Shoot for the Gold" tournament will be held at the Gateway Gun Club located at 13547 Missouri Bottom Road in Bridgeton, MO, on Friday, June 7, 2013.



Registration is required. Automatic shotguns are available on site, or the participant may bring their own. In addition, if the shooter has their own ear plugs and safety glasses, we would appreciate it if you bring them along, but the Gateway Chapter PVA will pay to provide those necessities if you have none. I will personally be donating two boxes of ear plugs for those in need. We are also looking for someone to donate the rounds of shells. We need approximately 80 boxes for this event. Guns will be rented to us by the club at \$15/per gun per day; available on site are ear plugs at 50 cents per pair and safety glasses at \$3 each (all paid for by the chapter and provided FREE to our shooters). Our chapter will also provide a hearty catered lunch for our

sportsmen and women. To compete for a trophy, a non-member must be a veteran. Trophies will be given out at the end of the day to the 1st Place Quad and 1st Place Para, as well as the Grand Champion. The event begins at 10:00 a.m. and goes until approximately 2:30 p.m. If you're interested in volunteering to assist the shooters or would like to register to shoot, please contact me at 314-427-0393 by Thursday, May 30.







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#### **Unauthorized Non-VA Emergency Medical Care**

Submitted By Fred Bradley, Sr. Benefits Advocate

At one point or another, we all have had a medical situation arise requiring 911 to be called and being transported by emergency services to the nearest trauma center to receive the needed care. After knowing we are going to receive the proper care needed, we start to wonder who is going to pay the bill. To be determined an emergency, it has to be decided "if in the mind of an average person, it was a life-threatening situation or that if a delay in care would be life threatening." This is often referred to as the *prudent layperson standard*.

For veterans, many look to the US Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA), to pay for the non-VA emergency care. A lot of veterans believe that because they had served in the Armed Forces, they are eligible to have the VA pay. This is not the case and it is not as simple as having served that would ensure the VA pays for unauthorized non-VA medical care or emergent care. After all, we are dealing with the federal government, so there has to be more to it than that, and there is. There are some questions that need to be answered before the VA can determine if they are going to pay.

First, is the veteran enrolled in the VA Healthcare System? If they are, the VA would have to then determine if it is an emergency by applying the *prudent layperson standard* mentioned earlier.

Now that they have determined the veteran is enrolled and it was an emergency, the VA would have to determine if VA facilities were not feasibly available. This means that an attempt to use VA or other Federal facilities beforehand would not have been reasonable, sound, wise, or practicable, or that treatment had been denied or would have been denied. This also includes the VA being notified of the emergency care within 72 hours from admission. You must remember that when you call 911, the emergency services are required to transport you to the nearest trauma center that can provide the needed care, even though you may request emergency service to transport you to the nearest VA facility. The VA Medical Centers are not registered trauma centers and may route them to the nearest trauma center.

Since payment may be limited to the point when your condition is stable enough for you to be transported to the nearest VA Medical Center, someone will need to contact the nearest VA Medical facility on your behalf and inform them of your admission, preferably as soon as possible, if that is not possible, then within 72 hours of admission.

The VA then must determine if treatment for your non-VA emergency care was for a service-connected disability, or for a non-service connected disability associated with and held to be aggravating your service-connected disability; or any condition, if you are an active participant in the Chapter 31 Vocational Rehabilitation program, and you need treatment to make it possible for you to enter into a course of training, or to prevent interruption of a course of training or other approved reason. If it was determine to be a service connected disability, the VA will pay for your non-VA emergency care.

If the VA determines it was for a non-service connected disability, then the VA may pay for emergency care only if <u>all</u> of the following conditions are met:

- The episode of care cannot be paid under another VA authority—and —
- Based on the average knowledge of health and medicine (*prudent layperson standard*) you reasonably expected that delay in seeking immediate medical attention would have been hazardous to your life or health—and —
- A VA or other Federal facility/provider was not feasibly available—and —
- You have received VA medical care within a 24-month period preceding the non-VA emergency care—and —
- You are financially liable to the health care provider for the emergency care —and—
- The services were furnished by an Emergency Department or similar facility held out to provide emergency care to the general public—and —
- You have no other coverage under a health plan (including Medicare, Medicaid, and Worker's Comp) —and—
- You have no contractual or legal recourse against a third party that would, in whole, extinguish your liability.

One thing to remember is that if any other carrier pays *any* portion, then the VA is unable to pay, unless the facility refunds the first payer. VA is required to pay all—or none of the bill. Sometimes, you will have to insist the treating facility directly bill the VA. Most facilities will, but not unless directed to do so. You may continue to receive billing statements or letters from the facility or creditors even after the bill has been submitted to the VA. (continued on pg 10)

#### Continued from Page 4...

A veteran with quadriplegia had his power chair ordered on August 15, 2012 by an SCI physical therapist. VA medical notes show that the order sat idle for about 4 weeks before being sent to the VISN contract office. The responsible contract representative sought three vendor bids then inexplicably closed the order after receiving none. The NSO contacted the VISN Prosthetics Representative (VPR) to find out why the order was delayed. The VPR attributed the breakdown to miscommunication between the VAMC and contracting, after which she directed her staff to bypass the system to procure the wheelchair locally. Two more orders were discovered to have similarly sat for 3-4 weeks before submission to contracting.

Stories such as these are becoming more common around the country. Although larger procurements like powered wheelchairs and porch lifts represent a small percentage of the total workload for the VA, they also represent the most critical equipment needed by the majority of PVA's members. Delays in these procurements prove costly to both the government, in terms of unnecessarily extended hospital stays while awaiting equipment, and to veterans, in terms of lost independence and quality of life.

Disheartening is the fact that PVA saw this coming and voiced these concerns to VA leadership well before the changes to the process were implemented. As predicted, the process has become broken for far too many veterans who depend on prosthetics items to function. In response, PVA has embarked upon a concerted, nationwide effort to aggressively confront these delays and make the case to VA leaders that immediate action must be taken to fix it. In order to do this, we need to track how often delays occur and tell the personal stories of the consequences. Thus, PVA members should immediately notify their local PVA National Service Officer of delays in the receipt of major prosthetics items, particularly when they result in longer hospital stays. Members may also notify the Veterans Benefits Department National office by phone at 866-734-0857 (TTY: 800-795-4327) or by e-mail at *info@pva.org*.





Have you seen or do you know the whereabouts of our members? The ones listed below are in danger of being purged from the PVA roster. Please call, write, or e-mail us if you have any helpful information! Contact info on page 2...

Michael Acton

**Dennis Bazant** 

**Kenneth Frye** 

**Robert Thompson** 



XL Blackshiers.....Florissant, MO

Jamie Hatfield.....St. Louis, MO



There's still time to enter the "Local Heroes" Contest for the chance to win an accessible vehicle in MOBILITY celebration of National Mobility Awareness Month. Visit www.mobilityawarenessmonth.com for more information and to enter the contest. The voting ends May 10, so hurry!

\*For Sale – Wheelchair Accessible Home with 2-car garage in St. Louis, MO: 3 bedroom / 3 bath home near Shrewsbury MetroLink station in popular Lindenwood Park; completely remodeled in 2007; has 2330 square feet of living space. For photo gallery and additional information, please visit: http://7062lindenwood.canbyours.com





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#### The VA Celebrates: A Day of the Arts!

#### By Becky Ballard

February 15 was the St. Louis VAMC's day to celebrate the ARTS! The day started off with a visual arts display competition at the Touhill Performing Arts Center on the UMSL campus. Many SCI veterans participated in this event including: James Smith, a first time participant who won a first place



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**Entries in the Glazed Ceramics Category** 

victory in both the glazed and painted ceramic categories;

Charles Howard, also a first time participant, was awarded 2<sup>nd</sup> place in stained ceramics and Lloyd Dailey picked up 3<sup>rd</sup> place. Floyd Porter received 2<sup>nd</sup> place in glazed ceramics and John Miriani won 3<sup>rd</sup> place making it a clean sweep for

Gateway Chapter PVA members in both ceramics categories! The mosaic category was dominated with entries from Gateway PVA members, including Devon Carter who received a 3<sup>rd</sup> place win. Hospital-wide there were over 125 entries in 42 categories of art. The visual arts display in the lobby



**Entries in the Mosaic Category** 

was impressive. Over 1000 people were able to view the works of our most talented veterans in this venue.

LaRoy Smith's rendition of The Gettysburg Address

Next up was the St. Louis VA's Got Talent

Show that was held in the Lee Theater of the Touhill. Gateway PVA members La-Roy Smith and Jim Schmitt each entered this division of the competition. LaRoy is the KING of drama as he has entered this category for more consecutive years than any other veteran! This year he did a moving rendition of *The Gettysburg Address* complete with appropriate military attire. He also sang a stirring interpretation of the *Battle Hymn of the Republic*. Jim Schmitt, long-time Gateway PVA member

and musician, had the memorable experience of singing and playing guitar on stage with both of his sons! Jimmy, his oldest son who just returned from Iraq, along with Tommy, his youngest son, rocked the house with *Killing Floor* and *We Got To Get Out of This Place*.



Jim Schmitt and his sons, Jimmy and Tommy.

The day ended with a live performance in the main theater of the Touhill with the St. Louis Valentines for Veterans featuring the Miracles!

Judging for the Creative Writing portion of the competition was held

earlier in the week. Donald Crabtree and Gateway PVA member, Jim Schmitt, entered this part of the competition and represented the SCI unit with their original writings. Copies of all the creative writing entries were available during the art show and concert.

Good luck to all first place winners as they move on to the second phase of judging and come one step closer to the final stage of the National Veterans Creative Arts Competition, which will be held in Reno, Nevada, later this year.

We are so fortunate that the St. Louis VA and Gateway Chapter PVA support veterans healing through the arts! Taking an entire day to celebrate was an amazing opportunity for our veterans to participate and be honored for their many talents! Congratulations to all SCI/GPVA members who entered the contest! If you'd like to get involved next year, please contact: Matt Luitjohan, Charley Wright or Becky Ballard at the St. Louis VAMC.

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Continued from page 6—Article by Fred Bradley

The reason for continued billing statements is because it can be a slow process on the VA's behalf and the bills continue to go unpaid for some time. These bills are ultimately your responsibility, even if it has been submitted to the VA, and can affect your credit report if they go unpaid. You must talk to the creditors and you may refer them to the VA. You may also contact your National Service Officer (NSO) who can assist you with this process. Or you can contact the VA Fee Basis at the responsible VA Medical Center. If possible, you can pay the bill so it does not affect your credit report and then seek reimbursement from the VA. This can also be a slow process.

If you have any questions about this or any other benefits subject, please contact your local National Service Officer for assistance. All contact information can be found on page 2 of this newsletter.

Thank you.

#### PVA Clothing Drop Box Follow-Up by Susan Lyle

Congratulations to our members, Mike Rendleman and Scott Richards, for placing the Gateway
Chapter's very first clothing drop boxes! We now have 2 of the proposed 50 boxes planned to be in place by
the end of May. We are slow to start, but with your help, we can still meet our goals. Please call me at the office, 314-427-0393, and I will email or mail a drop-box placement packet to you. Businesses can benefit by
having one of our clothing drop boxes on their property. They get free advertising on the PVA website as well
as the prospect of new customers coming onto their parking lot to use the drop box. The liability of the box is
solely the responsibility of MPS. They maintain the insurance and will cover all of the cleaning, painting, and
clothing pickups. The business owner will not have to lift a finger or worry about a thing. Members will receive 20 participation points for each box they place. Please spread the word that by placing a drop box for
PVA, they are doing a service to their community and to the paralyzed veterans in their area. We receive 25%
of the thrift store funds for our local programs. What a deal. Be a part of this magnificent fundraiser and help
your fellow veterans. Thank you for your service!

#### In memory of...



Bodney Davis	Cahokia, IL	07/12/12
Raymond Douglas	Excello, MO	08/19/12
Edmund Lewandowski	St. Peters, MO	03/08/13
David Michael	Florissant, MO	02/20/13
Gerald Rav	Bonne Terre, MO	03/18/13



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



## May



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1	2	3 JB Local Wheelchair Games from 8:15 a.m 4:30 p.m.	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Happy, Mothers Day	13	14 BOD Meeting @ GPVA—11:30 a.m. 15 pts. non-BOD Mbr	15	Luncheon at JB  @ Noon (5 pts.)	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27 Memorial Day Office Closed	28	29	30	31	

	4		<u>June</u>	Tr	ap Shoot	
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
2	3	4	5 Newsletter Articles Due	6	7 Annual Shoot for the Gold @ Gateway Gun Club	8 Show Me Rally at Red Oak - Lake Ozarks, MO (7th -9th) 20 pts
9	10	11 BOD Meeting @ GPVA—4 p.m. 15 pts. non-BOD Mbr.	12	13	14 Flag Day	15
16 HAPPER'S	17	18	19	20 Luncheon at JB  @ Noon; Qtr. Mbr  Mtg to follow:  5 pts. / 15 pts. for  non-BOD	21 Summer Solstice	22
23 Clay Shoot @ Blackhawk Valley H Club in Elsberry, MO 20 pts 30		25	26	27	28	29

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## Address Service Requested

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Paralyzed Veterans of America
1311 Lindbergh Plaza Center
St. Louis, MO 63132



