

NEPVA Shines at the 2024 Veteran's Games

by Mark Murphy, Executive Director NEPVA

From July 24-31st I was delighted to attend the National Veterans Wheelchair Games in New Orleans, Louisiana for the very first time. We had a fantastic week, and it was wonderful to see our members (and other veterans from across the nation) compete in games like football, cornhole, archery, bowling, billiards, air rifle, slalom, table tennis, swimming, boccia, table tennis, pickleball, disc golf, field discuss and javelin, among many others. The opening ceremonies were particularly impressive, as we marched into the convention center with the Massachusetts delegation and were met with thunderous cheers and applause from the many people in attendance. The opening ceremonies were hosted by ESPN star Hannah Storm, and we were honored to be addressed in person by the Governor of Louisiana Jeff Landry and US Senator Bill Cassidy. Throughout the rest of the week, we walked or rolled down from our hotel to the convention center (or other off-site locations) to see our members compete. There were many medals awarded to our members, (see the complete list on page 5) suffice to say everyone was impressed by

the grit, determination, and competitiveness of our Chapter members throughout the entirety of the Games.

Supporting an important event such as the National Veterans Wheelchair Games takes a lot of time, effort, funding, and logistical support. We are grateful to all the Chap-

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ter volunteers and VA staff members who dedicated their time and talent in supporting the athletes. I want to thank Chapter volunteers Holly Warshaw and Denise Pease in particular for driving the truck (full of important equipment and supplies) roundtrip from Boston to New Orleans. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to them for taking on that crucial responsibility, and we are even more grateful that they made it down and back safely!

As we continue to move along in these last weeks of Summer, we have two important Chapter events that are upcoming. On Monday, August 19th we will be hosting

continued on page 5



We marched into the convention center with the Massachusetts delegation and were met with thunderous cheers and applause from the many people in attendance.



2024 PVA New England Annual Membership Gathering

Get ready for an afternoon of great food and camaraderie at the 2024 PVA New England Annual Membership Gathering! Last year's event was such a success, we decided to do it again. Join us for a casual afternoon of chowder, steak, lobster, chicken and all the accompaniments! Free for Chapter Members and one guest, VA Staff and Volunteers. There will be a DJ, 50/50 raffle, cash bar and lots of fun. Hope to see you there! Sign up for tickets below by scanning the QR code below!

Sunday, September 8, Noon to 4pm

111 Neil Street
Marlborough, MA 01752
Italian American War Veterans (Post 45)
Marlborough, Massachusetts

Scan the QR code to sign up



We had a great time last summer! We hope you will join us again.



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Denise Harvey Holly Warshaw
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Executive Director's Report

continued from page 1

our 4th Annual Chapter Golf Tournament at the South Shore Country Club in Hingham, MA. This is one of our largest fundraising events of the entire year and all the proceeds go directly to our Chapter. This year's tournament is already off to a solid start as we have sold out all the four-somes for the day. Highlights will include a closest to the pin hole, a long drive Champion hole where golfers can use a pro's drive instead of their own, a hole-in one hole that will win someone a \$1,000 American Express gift card, a closest to the line hole, and a double or nothing hole where if you hit the green you double your money. Raffael's will be serving up their famous "Golf in Italy" buffet after golf, and this year our silent auction items are incredible. We have an NBA Champion Kristaps Porzingis autographed Celtics jersey, a signed ball from the New England Revolution soccer team, autographed photos from the Patriots and Bruins, signed hockey pucks from Brad Marchand and Charlie Coyle, Ryder Cup framed photos, and golf rounds at beautiful courses in Florida. We will also be offering ticket auction items which include extensive gift baskets, gift certificates, Bose headphones, and ear buds. It should be a nice day!

I would ask you to see Brad's article for more information about our Annual Chapter Membership gathering on September 8th. I hope you enjoy what is left of Summer 2024!

Sincerely,

Mark Murphy, Executive Director

Thank You Dedham Savings Bank Foundation



The New England PVA was recently awarded a \$10,000 grant through the Dedham Savings Foundation. On Thursday, August 8th Christopher Teachout, Vice-President of Business Banking at Dedham Savings Bank, came to the Chapter office to present Executive Director Mark Murphy and Chapter President and National Director Brad Carlson with the check. Thank you to the Dedham Savings Bank Foundation for their generous support!

By Mark Murphy

Executive Director NEPVA



The Medal Count

Larry Berry = 3 (gold in bowling, bronze in motorized rally, silver in boccia)

Brian Howland = 4 (gold in bowling, silver in club, gold in motorized rally, gold in boccia)

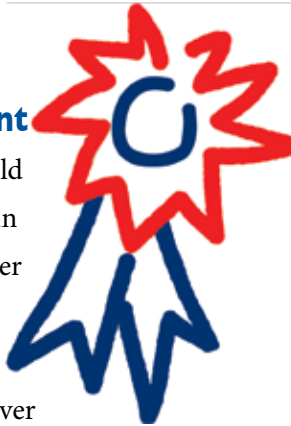
Patricia Thomas = 4 (gold in bowling, gold in club, silver in motorized rally, silver in boccia)

Dick Spizziri = 6 (gold in 9 ball, gold in bowling, gold in table tennis, silver in cornhole, bronze in discus, gold in motorized rally)

Gary Jezierski = 3 (gold in bowling, gold in archery, silver in boccia)

Mark Sanders = 8 (4 gold in swimming, gold in slalom, bronze in table tennis, silver in 9ball, bronze in boccia)

John Melvin = 3 (gold in bowling, gold in slalom, gold in trap shooting from home)



WOMEN VETERANS ROUNDTABLE

On July 16, PVA joined several other veterans service organizations (VSO) on Capitol Hill to meet with congressional staff to discuss the needs of women veterans. Republican staff from the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees welcomed feedback on action items that could be implemented before the end of this Congress.

Most VSOs agreed that the committees, Congress, and the VA need to commit to increased oversight of women veteran health care and benefits, particularly around the Deborah Sampson Act (DSA) (P.L. 116-315). There have been increased conversations focused on the DSA due to several congressionally mandated reports being released over the past few months that show stark disparities for women veterans accessing care.

A particularly troubling report that the VA has provided over the past several years, which was mandated within section 5303 of DSA, focuses on anti-harassment and anti-sexual assault policies implemented by the department, as well as data collection on the number of complaints or reports submitted at each facility. The reports provided to Congress show that assault and harassment complaints on VA cam-

puses have increased each year since the implementation of the anti-harassment, anti-sexual assault, and bystander intervention trainings. The reports paint a troubling picture for women who are seeking care at VA, and they bolster the anecdotal stories shared by many.

Many VSOs, including PVA, highlighted the need for Republican cosponsors on pieces of legislation that support women veterans and would improve their experience with accessing VA care and benefits. Several pieces of legislation discussed are on the PVAction Force webpage. If you'd like to send a letter of support to your members of Congress, you can do so here.

Women veteran legislation can often become unnecessarily partisan but many of the bills which PVA supports are common sense improvements to existing processes, expansion of benefits for women and families in need, and additional supports for all veterans who experienced Military Sexual Trauma (MST), which is often categorized under women veterans despite male veterans also being victims of MST.

If you have an experience with harassment, assault, barriers accessing gender specific care, or if you have felt uncomfortable at your VA facility, please reach out to Julie Howell at JulieH@PVA.org if you feel comfortable relaying your experience.

Status of the Elizabeth Dole Legislation

The Elizabeth Dole Home Care Act (H.R. 542/S. 141) and the Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act (H.R. 8371), which contains the language of H.R. 542, saw little action during the month of July. Lawmakers' wishes to pass the larger package of bills (H.R. 8371) were dashed when opposition to provisions within the bill emerged from both parties. Unable to resolve these differences, which appear to be largely political at this point, congressional leaders decided to set aside further action on this legislation until the fall. Unfortunately, such action is most likely delayed until after the election. PVA, however, continues to meet with congressional officials in an effort to break the deadlock and get this critical legislation across the finish line.

2024 PVA Priorities

Protect Access to VA's Specialized Health Care Services

Expand Access to VA Long-Term Services and Supports and their Survivors

Improve VA Benefits and Health Care Services for Paralyzed Veterans and their Survivors

Protect the Civil Rights of People with Disabilities

Improve Access to Social Security Benefits

Increase Employment Prospects for Veterans with Disabilities

From the President's Desk

by Brad Carlson
NEPVA President

As you know, last month I attended The National Veterans Wheelchair Games in New Orleans along with my wife Kathy, Executive Director Mark Murphy, and many Chapter members, volunteers, and VA staff. About 30 of us attended and we stayed at a beautiful hotel at the very tip of the French quarter. The New Orleans food was excellent, and everyone had a fun week (and long week!) of games. Our athletes from the New England Chapter won a grand total of 24 medals. We are so proud of them! Next year we look forward to attending the Games in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

On August 19th we are very much looking forward to our Annual Chapter Golf Tournament at South Shore Country Club in Hingham, MA. This event has become a cherished tradition in our community, bringing together golfers, veterans, and supporters for a day of camaraderie, competition, and giving back. This year's tournament promises to be bigger and better than ever before, with exciting new features, special guests, and, most importantly, the op-

portunity to make a tangible difference in the lives of our members. As we prepare to tee off for a day of golf and goodwill, it is important to remember that this tournament is more than just a day of golf - the funds raised enable us to continue providing essential programs and services to our members. None of this would be possible without the generosity and support of our sponsors, donors, volunteers, and participants. I want to offer a special thank you to our Golf Tournament Planning Committee comprised of Chapter volunteers Holly Warshaw, Jim Clark, Mitch Fishman, and Mark Murphy. It has been my privilege to work with them throughout the past year in preparing for this tournament.



We are very much looking forward to our Annual Chapter Membership Gathering on Sunday, September 8th from 12noon-4:00pm at the Italian American War Veterans Post 45, 111 Neil St., Marlboro, MA. This event is free for Chapter members, VA Staff, and Chapter Volunteers. Every person who signs up will be allowed one guest. Please sign up by Monday, August 26th from this link to our website: <https://www.pvanewengland.org/event/2024-nepva-membership-gathering/>

2024 PVA New England Annual Membership Gathering, Sunday September 8, 2024 at 12:00 PM

This is a casual get-together with great food and friends as we enjoy a laid-back Sunday afternoon in celebration of our members. Chowder, steak, lobster, chicken, and all the accompaniments. There will be a DJ, games, 50/50 raffle, cash bar, and lots of fun! I look forward to seeing you there.

Sincerely,

Brad Carlson
Chapter President and National Director



Brad with the Marine Color Guard at the Veteran's Games.
www.pvanewengland.org

Government Relations Report

Kristen McCone Gordon
Director of Government and Community Affairs

Dear NEPVA Members,

I hope you are all enjoying a healthy and happy summer.

I want to inform you of a few important updates from our national office. Please keep in mind that while action may be stalled in Washington, our advocacy in New England continues full steam ahead. Our Chapter is in continuous contact with the New England Congressional Delegation to ensure they understand how our legislative priorities impact the lives of paralyzed veterans. We will continue our strong advocacy efforts right up until the end of this congressional session in December. I look forward to updating you on the congressional support we will continue to secure on legislation affecting your lives and the lives of your fellow veterans.



For our NEPVA Veterans with MS members, please note the new date and time of our latest zoom, "Ask a Social Worker!". We are fortunate to be joined by two highly effective VA social workers who will share information on benefits you may not realize you have earned. Please join Director Chuck Houle and I on September 24th at noon. All members with MS and their caregivers are invited to attend. Here is the zoom link: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/83650458384?pwd=bOi4V2A0LG0xJiBPU7IX7bhG9LWaKy.1>

As always, please reach out to me if you would like to learn more about our legislative priorities, join our growing NEPVA Advocacy Team, or discuss the NEPVA Veterans with MS program!

With gratitude for your service,
Kristen McCone Gordon

ANNUAL DEFENSE POLICY BILL STALLS

The Senate planned to debate, amend, and vote on its version of the fiscal year 2025 National Defense Authorization Act by the end of July, but as has often been the case in recent years, they ran out of time. While it's possible the bill could be brought to the floor when lawmakers return after Labor Day, it's more likely the chamber will forgo that part of the process and begin informal negotiations with the House over the recess.

Over a thousand amendments have already been proposed for the bill. They include language that would eliminate the offset between military retired pay and VA disability compensation for veterans with a combat-related rating of at least 10 percent (the Major Richard Star Act, S. 344). Another would provide eligible survivors of veterans who died of service-connected ALS the Dependency and Indemnity Compensation "kicker" (the Justice for ALS Veterans Act, S. 1590). A third, seeks to eliminate the 65 percent cap on non-institutional VA care (included

in S. 141, the Elizabeth Dole Home Care Act of 2023).

Admittedly, the chance of each of these PVA priorities being included in the final version of the bill would be slim even if the Senate pursued its regular legislative process. But it's even less likely if the chamber forgoes floor action and proceeds directly to conference. One thing is certain, final action won't take place on this bill until the fall, most likely after the November elections.

NEPVA's Veterans with MS Program

BUILDING COMMUNITY
INFORMATION SHARING

Dear Members of the NEPVA Veterans with MS program,

I'm happy to share the latest newsletter from the National PVA MS Committee. I hope you find this information as helpful as I have. If you haven't already signed up to receive these newsletters directly to your inbox, please take a moment and do it here: <https://pva.org/research-resources/publication/ms-newsletter/>. I'm consistently impressed with the information our colleagues at National include in each edition and encourage all of you to take advantage of all the opportunities they offer.

I'm also happy to report that our "Ask a Social Worker" Zoom has been rescheduled for September 24th at noon. I highly encourage your participation in what will be a very informative and relaxed event. I will be joined by Michelle Turcotte-Smail, LICSW Spinal Cord Injuries and Disorders Clinic and Polytrauma Clinic Social Work Coordinator at the White River Junction VA Medical Center and Cristina Bird-sall, LICSW Spinal Cord Injury/Disorders Clinical Coordina-

tor at VA Connecticut Healthcare. Michelle and Tina are a both a wealth of knowledge and this promises to be a very informative discussion.

Please consider zooming in and hearing about benefits you may be eligible for through your local VA. Here is the zoom link for the event: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/83650458384?pwd=bOi4V2A0LG0xJiBPU7IX7bhG9LWaKy.1> We'll be sharing this via email and Facebook (be sure to follow us if you don't already!) as well.

I hope you all enjoyed a wonderful summer and I look forward to seeing you in the fall!

Sincerely,
Chuck Houle
Chapter MS Liaison



Scan the QR for MS Newsletter

"CARING FOR CAREGIVERS" — LEGISLATIVE AGENDA LAUNCHED

Sen. Edward Markey (D-MA), Chairman of the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Subcommittee on Primary Health and Retirement Security, recently launched a comprehensive legislative agenda to improve the economic security, support and resources, and protection and promotion of caregivers and their loved ones. His effort includes three PVA endorsed bills. The Home Modifications for the Climate Crisis Act (S. 4734) would clarify that home modifications, which support older Americans' ability to safely age in their homes and communities under the Older Americans Act, can include measures related to heating, cooling, air quality, energy efficiency, and assistance with utility and power. The Financial Services Improving Noble and Necessary Caregiving Experience (FINANCE) Act (S. 4735), would help provide financial planning for family caregivers (including older relative caregivers) within the Older Americans Act. This would include information on budgets and saving, debt and bankruptcy, discussions about long-term care planning, referrals to the National Education and Resource Center on Women and Retirement Planning's

publications for caregivers and older adults, and referrals to legal assistance providers for estate and will planning, among other provisions. Some of these financial planning services are being offered to older adults, but not to their caregivers under the Act. At PVA's recommendation, the bill includes accessibility and inclusivity language to ensure all communities could benefit from these services.

Finally, the Respite Care and Resources for Everyone (CARE) Act (S. 4736), supports the development or establishment of integrated settings where family caregivers can receive respite care simultaneously with other supportive services. This would improve the accessibility of both respite care and supportive services. These supportive services under the Older Americans Act include counseling, financial planning, nutrition literacy, and information about other available programs for older adults and their caregivers.

2024 National Veteran's Games in New Orleans



**OUR MEMBERS
EARNED
21 MEDALS,
RECONNECTED
WITH FRIENDS,
& MADE
MEMORIES
THAT WILL
LAST A
LIFETIME.**



**When not competing
Members & Volunteers
enjoyed
the sites around New Orleans**



Service Officers Report

by Zachary T. Nuetzel
National Service Officer

The following article will be a continuation of the Character of Discharge (COD) article authored by Service Officer Mike Snape in last month's Service Officer's Report. Prior to the article, I wanted to provide the PVA New England Chapter with an update. On 08/12/2024, I officially transferred positions as the Service Officer for the Manhattan Regional office to the Hospital service officer in West Roxbury/ Brockton. With this transfer, I will be covering more area within the PVA New England Chapter. I look forward to working more closely with the Chapter and its members.

Last month's article covered the changes to the Character of Discharge determinations based on the final rule for AQ95, "Update and Clarify Regulatory Bars to Benefits Based on Character of Discharge," which was published in the Federal Register and became effective on June 26, 2024. In the last article Mr. Snape discussed the changes to the regulatory and statutory bars for character of discharge determinations to determine if a person meets the eligibility requirements for VA Benefits under title 38 of the United States Code. Mr. Snape's article provides insight into the changes. I want to discuss another option that differs from the COD determination. This article will discuss discharge upgrades, the process of upgrading the discharge, and what you will need to provide for a discharge upgrade.

If our chapter members are unsuccessful in the review process, they also have the option to consider applying for a discharge upgrade. This process can either be done as an alternative to the COD determination, or as a continuation in the process of VA Benefit Eligibility. A Discharge Upgrade is a request from a veteran for an upgrade of their character of discharge from the Department of Defense (DOD). In order to request a discharge upgrade, veterans need to complete DD form 293; Application for the Review of Discharge or Dismissal from the Armed Forces of the United States. Once submitted, the veteran will have two options for the review. They can present their case at a Discharge Review Board (DRB) in Washington, DC, or have a records review board without presenting the case in person. Obtaining a successful discharge is rarely approved and thus requires the submission of evidence.

The standard for receiving a discharge upgrade is high. The veteran needs to convince the board that the character of discharge was "inequitable" or "improper". In order to do this, the veteran should submit supporting evidence. This would include evidence such as supporting statements from former supervisors, commanders, chaplains, and/or anyone with direct knowledge of your military service. Although the board may not consider the evidence, post

On 08/12/2024, I officially transferred positions as the Service Officer for the Manhattan Regional office to the Hospital service officer in West Roxbury/ Brockton.

service history and conduct information is often provided as evidence. If the reason for discharge is mental health related, evidence should provide a current clinical diagnosis and point to evidence in service treatment records and military personnel records that show how the mental health issues contributed to the incidents resulting in discharge.

Of note, Discharge upgrade requests must be done within 15 years from separating from active duty. After 15 years, you must submit for a correction of records which is a different process. **The process for a discharge is rarely approved and requires the submission of evidence to show the COD was "improper" or "inequitable."** **Chapter members who are interested in applying for a discharge upgrade should contact their local service officer to discuss their options.**

Zachary T. Nuetzel
National Service Officer
West Roxbury/ Brockton
1400 VFW Parkway
AG-60
West Roxbury, MA 02132
(O) 202-416-1075
(F) 212-807-4047



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ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP GATHERING

Awards, Food, Music, Dancing, Fun for All

Last year's event was such a success, we decided to do it again. Our 2024 Annual Membership Banquet will be a casual get together with great food and great friends enjoying a laid back Sunday afternoon. Chowder, steak, lobster, chicken, and all the accompaniments!

DJ, games, 50/50 raffle, cash bar, lots of fun!

SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 8

Noon to 4

Italian American
War Veteran Post 45
111 Neil St., Marlboro, MA

Free for Chapter members and one guest, VA Staff and Volunteers
Please sign up by Monday, August 26

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/2024-pva-new-england-annual-membership-gathering-tickets-932355890567>

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NEPVA's Veterans with MS Program

BUILDING COMMUNITY ← → **INFORMATION SHARING**

Get the information you need...Ask a social worker! New Date and Time!

All NEPVA members with MS and their caregivers are invited to an informational zoom on **September 24th at noon** with VA social workers Michelle Turcotte-Smail and Tina Birdsall. Co-hosted by NEPVA Director Chuck Houle, the zoom will include a brief presentation on benefits available to veterans with MS followed by an informational Q&A session.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/83650458384?pwd=bOi4V2A0LG0xJiBPU7lX7bhG9LWaKy.1>
Meeting ID: 836 5045 8384 Passcode: 857487

Presenters:

Chuck Houle

Member of the New England Chapter Board of Directors and Chapter MS lead to National PVA.

Michelle Turcotte-Smail, LICSW

Spinal Cord Injuries and Disorders Clinic and Polytrauma Clinic Social Work Coordinator at the White River Junction VA Medical Center. Michelle has worked for Veterans Health Administration for 14 years in the Spinal Cord Injury/Disorders Clinic, Polytrauma Clinic, Primary Care, and Geriatrics.

Cristina Birdsall, LICSW

Spinal Cord Injury/Disorders Clinical Coordinator at VA Connecticut Healthcare. Tina Birdsall, LSCW received her Bachelor's Degree in Psychology from University of Connecticut and her Master's Degree in Social Work from Southern Connecticut State University. She began her social work career at the West Haven VA in 2012 on the inpatient hospital units before transitioning to the Spinal Cord Coordinator position in 2016. Tina took over the role as ALS Coordinator in 2020.

Please contact Kristen McCone Gordon at kristen@pvanewengland.org with any questions on this event or NEPVA Veterans with MS program.



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800 660-1181
fax: 857 203-9685

Email: info@pvanewengland.org

Office Hours: Monday-Friday 9:00am-4:30pm



Paralyzed Veterans of America

New England Chapter

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Mass Department of Recreation



Mass Department of Recreation

KAYAKING & CANOEING

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Thursdays, 1–3 p.m.

- August 29

Tuesdays, 1–3 p.m.

- August 20
- August 27

**Kayaking at Hopkinton State Park,
164 Cedar St., Hopkinton**

Tuesdays, 10:00 a.m. - 3 pm

- August 20
- August 27

**Canoeing and Kayaking at DAR
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Wednesdays, 9:45 a.m.–3:15 p.m.

- August 21
- August 28