

Empowering Women Veterans: The Paralyzed Veterans of America Annual Women Veterans Empowerment Retreat

by Mark Murphy, Executive Director NEPVA

The Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) has long been a steadfast advocate for veterans, particularly those with disabilities. Each year, PVA hosts the Annual Women Veterans Empowerment Retreat, which is a transformative event aimed at uplifting and empowering female veterans. This retreat is not just an event; it is a vital space for connection, education, and healing. This year's 6th annual retreat was held in Long Beach, California from October 5-8th, and our own New England PVA Chapter member and Board of Director Bernice DeBlois happily attended along with over 30 other women veterans from across the nation.

Purpose and Goals

The primary objective of the Women Veterans Empowerment Retreat is to provide a supportive environment where women veterans can gather, share experiences, and learn from one another. Many female veterans face unique challenges, including navigating a male-dominated military culture and dealing with the physical and emotional scars of service. The retreat addresses these issues head-on, focusing on empowerment, resilience, and community building.

Activities and Workshops

The retreat in Long Beach this year featured a variety of workshops and activities tailored to the needs and interests of women veterans. Topics included:

- **Mental Health and Wellness:** Sessions on stress management, mindfulness, and coping strategies helped attendees prioritize their mental health.
- **Career Development:** Workshops focused on resume building, job search strategies, and interview preparation, empowering women to advance in their professional lives.
- **Physical Fitness:** Adaptive sports and fitness activities that promote physical well-being and encourage a healthy lifestyle.
- **Networking Opportunities:** Attendees had the chance to connect with other veterans, community organizations, and potential employers, fostering a sense of camaraderie and support.

Inspirational Speakers

A highlight of the retreat was the lineup of inspiring speakers, including successful female veterans and leaders in various fields. These speakers shared their personal stories of overcoming adversity and achieving success, providing motivation and encouragement to attendees.



Board of Director Bernice DeBlois at the Empowerment Retreat

Community and Connection

Perhaps one of the most significant aspects of the retreat is the sense of community it fosters. Many women veterans report feeling isolated after their service, and this year's

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Accessible Air Travel: Survey

The Human Engineering Research Laboratories in Pittsburgh is conducting a national survey about accessible air travel. The study aims to estimate the pent-up demand for air travel among mobility device users and identify the specific needs and pain points experienced during their travel. Your participation will provide valuable insights that can help improve the accessibility and overall travel experience for mobility device users. The survey should take no more than 20 minutes to complete.

To take the survey, please [click here](https://www.herl.pitt.edu/node/1151)
<https://www.herl.pitt.edu/node/1151>



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

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Executive Director's Report

By Mark Murphy

Executive Director NEPVA

Dear Friends,

While we had a wonderful and busy Summer, we are now progressing along nicely in this Fall season. There are a few things I would like to point out as we look back with gratitude for past events and look ahead to several things coming up on the horizon.

On September 24th we had a fantastic Zoom meeting with VA social workers as part of our NEPVA Veterans with MS Program. All Chapter members with MS and their caregivers were invited to this informational meeting with VA social workers Michelle Turcotte-Smail and Tina Birdsall. The event was also co-hosted by Chapter Treasurer Chuck Houle, and the meeting included a brief presentation on benefits available to veterans with MS followed by an engaging and informational question and answer session. The attendance was strong, and the conversation was spirited. We look forward to offering many more opportunities such as these moving forward with this program. A special thank you to Chuck Houle for all his help in organizing the meeting and facilitating the robust discussion.

Next month we will be holding our annual Bocchia Tournament at the Brockton VA building 23 on the weekend of November 16-17. All Chapter members are invited to attend, and we will soon be sending out information on how you can register. I am helping to plan for the tournament, although unfortunately I will be unable to attend as that same weekend Chapter President and National Director Brad Carlson and I will be attending the PVA Fall Board of Directors meeting in Orlando, Florida.



As you may be aware, each year every Chapter is required by PVA to undergo an annual audit. Ours is just about complete, and it has taken up much of my time over the last several weeks to get our auditor all the information he has been seeking. While we are awaiting the final results, the preliminary findings are that FY24 was one of our most successful years in recent history in terms of the state of our Chapter finances, accounting, and fundraising. This

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of course did not happen by accident, and we are incredibly thankful to our incredible bookkeeper, our supportive partners at PVA National, our Board of Directors, vol-

unteers, and dedicated staff who have helped us grow so exponentially over the last couple of years. Let's hope we can keep the positive momentum going!

I hope you have a wonderful Veterans Day on November 12th, and as always thank you for your many sacrifices and service.

Sincerely,

Mark Murphy
Executive Director

Washington Update

Important VA Funding Updates for Veterans and Their Families

Earlier this year, the VA informed Congress that the department needed an additional \$2.9 billion in funding to pay veterans' pension and disability benefits for fiscal year (FY) 2024, which ends on September 30. VA also requested an extra \$12 billion in order to provide medical care for veterans and support their caregivers in FY 2025.

In light of significant advocacy from the veterans community, including from our own PVAAction Force advocates, Congress approved, and the President has signed, H.R. 9468.

In light of significant advocacy from the veterans community, including from our own PVAAction Force advocates, Congress approved, and the President has signed, H.R. 9468, the Veterans Benefits Continuity and Accountability Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2024. This legislation provides the additional funding needed for VA to pay critical benefits for an estimated seven million veterans, their families, and survivors on October 1.

Before leaving town last week, Congress also approved a continuing resolution (CR) which, with just a couple of exceptions, maintains the government's current spending levels through December 20. Despite the Administration's request, the CR offers no additional cash for the Veterans Health Administration. Lawmakers wanted more time to determine the cause of the deficit, as well as where the needed funds would come from due to caps on federal spending. However, it does allow the department to spend the \$142 billion it received through advanced appropriations faster, to ensure it can meet veteran's healthcare needs.

SVAC Holds Hearing on VA Budget Shortfall

On September 18, the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee (SVAC) held a hearing addressing current and future VA budget challenges. This hearing followed a similar hearing in the House Veterans' Affairs Committee earlier in the month. As in the House hearing, the Under Secretary for Health (USH) Dr. Shereef Elnahal and Under Secretary for Benefits (USB) Josh Jacobs testified on behalf of the VA.

Senators on the committee pushed for answers as to why the VA is experiencing such a drastic budget shortfall, especially in light of significant pressure from Senate appropriators encouraging the VA to request more funding. The department defended their initial budget requests claiming they were accurate but that rising enrollment and benefits authorized by the PACT Act were the culprit for increased costs. Both the USB and USH stood by VA's decision to eliminate the additional eligibility cohorts, which were spaced out in two-year windows over the next 10 years and authorized in the PACT Act, instead allowing those eligible veterans to enroll in VA this year.

Another topic discussed by multiple senators were the improper authorizations of critical skills incentive (CSI) payments, which the Office of Inspector General published a report on in May of this year. Senators from both sides of the aisle fired off aggressive questions for VA leadership about the CSI payments, the budget shortfall, and budget mismanagement by the VA.

From the President's Desk

by Brad Carlson
NEPVA President

Dear Friends,

As Fall is upon us, I hope everyone is enjoying the season, especially those up North! There are several important pieces of Chapter business that I would like to address. Each time a Chapter member puts in for reimbursement, it must be previously approved by our Board of Directors. Once you submit a request for approval, you need to submit a reimbursement request form (furnished upon request) along with receipts to receive payment. All these materials should be submitted to Chapter Executive Director Mark Murphy, who will then forward them to the Board ahead of our next meeting. The chain of command begins with Mark, who handles these matters. Reimbursement requests should not be sent to me, as Mark oversees the day-to-day operations of the Chapter office and all accounting matters. Please reach out to Mark at mmurphy@pvanewengland.org for more information about the reimbursement request process.

As it regards our Chapter individual allotment program, the same process outlined above applies. You need to submit your request to the Board of Directors in writing ahead of time, who will then discuss and approve or deny your request. Reimbursement only occurs after completion of your activity/event and once you have then submitted a reimbursement request form along with your receipts. A reminder that each Chapter member receives an individual allotment once per fiscal year, which runs from July 1-June 30th each year. Thank you for your attention to these matters to ensure we are all in full compliance with our Chapter policies and procedures.

Each of you plays a vital role in fostering a supportive environment where we can all thrive. Whether through volunteering, attending events, or simply reaching out to fellow members, your involvement makes a difference.

With that, this past quarter has been filled with meaningful activities, advocacy efforts, and opportunities for camaraderie in our Chapter. Our recent events, including the Annual Chapter Membership Gathering (formerly the Chapter Banquet) and NEPVA Veterans with MS informational Zoom have not only brought our community together but have also highlighted the resilience and spirit of our veterans and friends at the VA. Thank you to everyone who attended and contributed - your support is crucial in making our many initiatives possible.



Looking ahead, we are excited to announce some upcoming events, including our Annual Boccia Tournament at the Brockton VA on November 16-17th. Keep an eye on your email and our Chapter Facebook page for upcoming information on the tournament.

As we celebrate the contributions of our veterans this season, let us also remember the importance of community. Each of you plays a vital role in fostering a supportive environment where we can all thrive. Whether through volunteering, attending events, or simply reaching out to fellow members, your involvement makes a difference.

Wishing you all a wonderful Fall filled with good health and happiness.

Sincerely,

Brad Carlson
Chapter President and National Director

Washington Update

Supporting the Veteran Caregiver Community

On September 25, the House Veterans' Affairs Committee (HVAC) held a hearing to examine support of veterans and their caregivers through programs like VA's Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC). Much of the conversation focused on PCAFC, the unavailability of respite care, the Veterans Health Administration's budget shortfall, and the urgent need for Congress to pass the Elizabeth Dole Home Care Act.

During the hearing, it was apparent that VA's assessment of the availability of respite care differed greatly from the committee members and other witnesses. The department said the use of respite has increased exponentially in the past couple of years. According

to them, it's risen 222 percent since fiscal year 2022. Normally, veterans with spinal cord injuries and disorders (SCI/D) are placed in one of VA's acute or long-term care SCI/D centers for respite. But in many parts of the country, insufficient funding coupled with the elimination of staff positions and unfilled vacancies has severely limited the availability of respite care.

HVAC Chairman Mike Bost (IL-R) also noted that for the past 18 months or so, VA has been working on changes to the current PCAFC regulation. An announcement about the proposed regulatory reform was expected months ago. The chairman discussed this in his opening comments and urged the Administration to release

its proposed changes as quickly as possible.

Finally, RAND, a research organization, briefed the committee about the results of their new study on caregiving. The study was released the previous day. One of their key findings was that military and veteran caregivers incur an estimated \$8,583 in annual out-of-pocket costs associated with their caregiving responsibilities. Others demonstrated the urgent need for Congress and the VA to increase access to mental health and substance use treatment for caregivers and their children. The video recording and relevant documents which include a statement for the record that PVA submitted can be viewed [here](#).

PVA Legislative Priority Clears the House

On September 17, several pieces of veteran-focused legislation were passed out of the House. A few of the bills are of direct interest to PVA members. One of the bills, H.R. 777, the Veterans' Compensation Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) Act of 2024, would increase compensation rates for veterans with service-connected disabilities, the rates of dependency and indemnity compensation for survivors, and other related benefits. The COLA would match any increase in Social Security benefits.

Another bill, H.R. 6324, the Fiscal Year (FY) 2024, Veterans Affairs Major Medical Facility Authorization Act, would authorize the VA to carry out major medical facility projects during FY 2024 and the maximum amounts that can be spent on each project. \$3.3 billion was already appropriated to fund major construction across VA, including \$3.12 million for the new SCI/D building in San Diego and other facility improvements such as seismic corrections. However, the funding has to be authorized before it can be expended.

Finally, H.R. 7342, the Veterans Accessibility Advisory Committee Act of 2024, was also voted out of the House. This bill would create a Federal Advisory Committee dedicated to accessibility across the VA system and would ensure that several veterans service organizations have a seat at the table when analyzing the disparities and barriers faced by disabled veterans. This bill was a top priority during PVA's Advocacy Legislation Seminar in June. The bill is now in the Senate and we encourage folks to reach out to their senators and urge them to support it on PVAction Force.

Empowerment retreat

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retreat offered a much-needed opportunity for attendees to connect with peers who understand their experiences. The bonds formed during the retreat lead to lasting friendships and support networks.

Impact and Testimonials

The impact of the 6th Annual Women Veterans Empowerment Retreat was profound. Attendees left feeling revitalized, equipped with new skills, and more connected to their fellow veterans. New England Chapter member and Board of Director Bernice DeBlois recently shared with our Board, how a highlight of the retreat is its role in helping women veterans regain confidence, pursue new opportunities, and find a supportive community.

I asked Bernice to share more about her experience at this year's retreat,

and she shared the following: *"Only 2% of all women in the United States have served in the military, so myself and the other 34 women at this retreat are an elite group! We all have a very strong bond with one another. Throughout the retreat there was a constant focus on the good and not any negativity, which I really appreciated. This year they offered chair meditative yoga each morning and I even got a makeover from a professional makeup artist! I never had one of those before. The food was magnificent, and the wait staff went out of their way to make us feel special and cared for. On the last night of the retreat, they had a big dinner with a 1940's theme, where many women did their hair and wore clothes with a 40's style. It was wonderful! The whole week made me deeply grateful to be a member of PVA and a Board of Director here in New England."*

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Conclusion

The PVA Women Veterans Empowerment Retreat is more than just a gathering; it is a powerful movement towards empowerment, healing, and connection for female veterans. As these women continue to navigate their post-service lives, the skills, friendships, and support gained at the retreat serve as invaluable resources, helping them thrive in every aspect of their lives. PVA's commitment to uplifting women veterans is a testament to the organization's dedication to ensuring that all veterans receive the respect, recognition, and support they deserve. We are so proud of our own Chapter member Bernice who represented our New England Chapter so well at the retreat and who had an incredible experience there herself.

Next year's 7th Annual Retreat is expected to be held in Tampa, Florida.



Sports & Recreation

PVA New England Boccia Tournament

November 16-17, 2024

Brockton, Massachusetts

Hosted By
Paralyzed Veterans of
America

Tournament Details

This event is open to all participants who qualify to play Boccia under the USA Boccia classification system. Beginners are welcome. If you do not have a classification, a temporary class will be assigned for this tournament. A brief Boccia 101 clinic will be held before the start of the event to ensure everyone has the same understanding of gameplay and rules.

The competition will include a double-elimination singles tournament, followed by a double-elimination pairs or teams tournament. Based on the number of participants and event schedule, competition details may be modified.



Boccia action at the 2024 National Veterans Games

Location

Brockton VAMC
940 Belmont Street
Brockton, MA 02301

Entry Fees

There are no entry fees for this tournament

Tournament Contact

New England Chapter
Paralyzed Veterans of America
617-942-8678

The PVA Boccia Tournament Series

John Arbino
Program Manager, Sports and Recreation
Paralyzed Veterans of America
(202)416-6463
JohnAr@PVA.org



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Adaptive Boxing with Pierre Fallot

Join Pierre Fallot on Thursdays at 1:30 PM EST throughout 2024 for a fun and effective workout that combines strength and cardio training.

PICKLEBALL – Exeter, NH

Northeast Passage has partnered with the Exeter Area YMCA to run Indoor Pickleball (Para-Pickleball)!

Northeast Passage staff and volunteers will teach participants the rules and strategies of the game, as well as provide all equipment--paddles, balls, grip modifications, sport wheelchairs, etc.

Starts Tuesday, November 5 and continues: 11/12, 11/19, 11/26, 12/3, 12/10, 12/17, 1/7, 1/14, 1/21, 1/28, 2/4, 2/11, 2/18, 3/4, 3/11, 3/18, 3/25.

WE WILL RUN TWO SESSIONS FOR EACH DATE. PLEASE CHOOSE THE APPROPRIATE SESSION WHEN REGISTERING:

BEGINNER 9:30AM-10:30AM: Are you new to pickleball or looking to learn to play? Whether you are planning to play standing or pushing a chair, this session will allow individuals time to develop game skills, such as hand-eye coordination, mobility on the court, volleying over the net, and learning to keep score.

READY TO PLAY 10:30-12:00PM: Whether you are planning to play standing or pushing a chair, this session will focus on advancing competitive game skills.

If you are unsure of your level of play, please reach out to NEP to discuss which session would be appropriate for you.

There is no cost for these events.

To learn more about pickleball and rule variations, visit the USA Pickleball Website <https://usapickleball.org/play/wheelchair-pickleball/>.

Benefits of Online Fitness:

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Following registration and on the morning of class, you will receive a confirmation email with a link to class. Join with a smart phone, tablet or computer that is connected to the internet.

If you do not have a Fitness Waiver and Release signed in the past 12 months, you will receive a release to sign digitally.

We look forward to seeing you in class! If you have any questions or issues with registration or log-on, please contact:

Vickie Lincks

Program Manager, Sports and Recreation

Paralyzed Veterans of America

202-416-7654

VickieL@pva.org

INDOOR ARCHERY – Rochester, NH

Join Northeast Passage for some archery range shooting. All levels of experience and ability are welcomed! Shooting distances vary from 9-26 yards. There is also the opportunity to shoot on the range's TechnoHunt center--a virtual shooting range, with games and over 700 hunting scenarios, using your own bow and arrows.

USA Archery certified staff from Northeast Passage will provide instructions and tips to participants as well as equipment needs. If you have your own equipment, you are welcome to bring it.

Due to high demand and limited space, interested participants can register for three dates and waitlist the remaining dates.

Fee: \$20.00 per session

Service Officers Report

by Michael Snape,
Senior National Service Officer

Hello, NEPVA Chapter Members. Fall is upon us in New England, and hope that all chapter members have had a chance to enjoy the change of colors. The below information is an update to a previous article on presumptive conditions covered under the PACT Act.

Recently, in June 2024, the Department of Veterans advised that it was including three new presumptive conditions under the PACT Act.

The following three cancer types have been included in the list of presumptive diseases:

- Male breast cancer
- Urethral cancer
- Cancer of the paraurethral glands

As a reminder, designation of presumption for service connection means VA automatically concedes exposure for the disease based on service during a particular time and/or location, and provides benefits to eligible Veterans who have submitted claims with evidence of a diagnosis.

Veterans covered for these new presumptive conditions include veterans with service noted in areas and times below:

Southwest Asia theater of military operations at any time from August 2, 1990 to present in areas noted in the next column. This includes Veterans who served in Operation Iraqi Freedom (2003-2010) and Operation New Dawn (2010-2011).

Iraq
Kuwait
Saudi Arabia
The neutral zone between Iraq and Saudi Arabia
Bahrain
Qatar
The United Arab Emirates (U.A.E.)
Oman
Afghanistan
Israel
Egypt
Turkey
Syria
Jordan
Gulf of Aden
Gulf of Oman
Waters of the Persian Gulf, the Arabian Sea, and the Red Sea
The airspace above these locations

Veterans who served on or after September 11, 2001, on active duty in any of the following locations (including the airspace above those locations):

Afghanistan
Djibouti
Egypt
Jordan
Lebanon
Syria
Yemen
Uzbekistan

Any chapter member who believes that they may qualify for service connection for the new presumptive conditions noted above based on a current diagnosis, location, and time served as noted in the article should contact their local PVA office for assistance in filing the necessary claim for the condition.

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FY25 EVENT SCHEDULE



Note: ** means this is not a PVA-sponsored event.

December 2024

Nevada Bowling Tournament	December 5-8, 2024	Las Vegas, NV
Winter Air Gun National Tournament **	December 13-15, 2024	Colorado Springs, CO

January 2025

PVA Racing High Performance Racing Camp	Jan 25-Feb 2, 2025	Tampa, FL
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February 2025

Bayou Gulf States Boccia Tournament	February 1-2, 2025	Gulfport, MS
Central Florida Air Gun Tournament	February 8-9, 2025	Orlando, FL
PVA Rugby Invitational	Feb 14-16, 2025	Louisville, KY
Florida Gulf Coast Bowling Tournament	February 16-19, 2025	Tampa, FL

March 2025

Mid-Atlantic Billiards Tournament	March 14-16, 2025	Midlothian, VA
Wisconsin Air Gun Tournament	March 21-22, 2025	Racine, WI
Long Beach Boccia Tournament	March 29-30, 2025	Long Beach, CA

April 2025

Wheelchair Football Camp	April 3-6, 2025	Birmingham, AL
Citrus Slam Bass Fishing Tournament	April 4-6, 2025	Kissimmee, FL
Pocahontas Off-Road Spring Camp	April 9-13, 2025	Chesterfield, VA
PVA Off-Road Classic Paracycling Race	April 12, 2025	Chesterfield, VA
Mid-America Billiards Tournament	April 10-12, 2025	Oklahoma City, OK
Bluegrass Bash Bass Tournament	April 11-13, 2025	Kuttawa, KY
Texas Bowling Tournament	April 30-May 2, 2025	San Antonio, TX

May 2025

Puerto Rico Year-end Boccia Tournament	May 3-4, 2025	San Juan, PR
Vaughan Trapshoot Tournament	May 23-25, 2025	Elburn, IL
Texas Air Gun Tournament	May 31-Jun 1, 2025	San Antonio, TX

June 2025

Capital Clash Bass Tournament (Year-end event)	June 13-15, 2025	La Plata, MD
PVA Colonial Pickleball Tournament	June 14-15, 2025	Perry Point, MD

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House Holds Oversight Hearing on 988 Line

In July 2022, the Veterans Crisis Line (VCL) partnered with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to create the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, a national emergency response line intended to be a critical resource for people experiencing a mental health crisis. When a veteran caller presses “1,” they are connected to the VCL.

On September 18, the House Veterans’ Affairs Committee (HVAC), Subcommittee on Health held an oversight hearing examining the operations and effectiveness of the VCL. Testifying on behalf of the VA was Dr. Matthew Miller, Executive Director of Suicide Prevention. The panel also included Dr. Julie Kroviak, Principal Deputy Assistant Inspector General for Healthcare Inspections on behalf of the Office of Inspector General (OIG).

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline

Recent data shared by Dr. Miller in his testimony illustrated the demand for well-trained VCL staff and for robust mental health services offered by the VA. In the two years since standing up the 988 line, the VCL has seen an increase of 22.7 percent in calls per day, a 76.7 percent increase in texts per day, and a 27.5 percent increase in the chat feature offered through the platform. The higher utilization of the VCL has led to increased demand for staffing. Currently, the VCL has 1,078 full time employees. Additionally, the number of Crisis Responders has increased from 542 in February 2021 to 1,084 in August 2024.

If you or someone you know is in crisis, the VCL is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and 356 days a year by call, text, or chat features. You can press 1 to be connected to the VCL or stay on the line to be connected to a counselor.

Indego® Gets Paralyzed Veterans Walking Again

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Email: support.indego@parker.com



Paralyzed Veterans of America
New England Chapter
1208 VFW Parkway, Suite 301
West Roxbury, MA 02132

tel: 617 942-8678
800 660-1181
fax: 857 203-9685

Email: info@pvanewengland.org

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



New England Chapter

PVA New England Boccia Tournament

November 16-17, 2024

Brockton, Massachusetts

*Scan the QR code
to register with
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Northeast Passage

Competitive Sports Season ~ Go Wildcats!

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**Northeast Passage
121 Technology Drive
Suite 161
Durham, NH 03824
603.862.0070**