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#### **MSCPVA Impact**

(for the quarter)

- **554 active members**  
8 joined last quarter
- **305 volunteer hours**  
contributed by the chapter
- **\$11,258 in grants**  
awarded to 12 members

### Meet Our New Executive Director John Henderson



Dear Members,

I am honored to be writing to you as your new executive director. It is a privilege to have the opportunity to serve an organization that has not only helped me—a paralyzed veteran—but also thousands of others. Over the coming months, I look forward to meeting many of you face-to-face and hearing your stories.

As for me, I grew up just outside of Boston, where I played a lot of sports, especially soccer. I went on to earn a B.A. in Biochemistry from Ithaca College, but it was my passion for physical fitness—and deep desire to serve—that ultimately led me to the military. I attended Officer Candidate School and was commissioned with the same sword that my grandfather, Rear Admiral Bruce Henderson, was commissioned with. I completed Navy Dive School, became a Navy dive officer and served on the U.S. Coast Guard cutter Kukui, stationed in Honolulu. My love for fitness continued to shape my life, driving me to compete in marathons, adventure races and Ironmans.

Training for an Ironman was what eventually connected me to PVA. While cycling near my home on Oahu, a bus drifted into the shoulder and struck me from behind. After spending over a month in the ICU of a local hospital, I was flown to Craig Hospital in Denver. The days tumbled together into a blur—deep, throbbing pain, beeping machines, the constant flow of aides, nurses and doctors who kept me alive, and the soul-crushing inability to move my body. Many of you, unfortunately, have had similar experiences.

Even in the fog of those four long months, several moments stand out—especially the afternoon a man from the PVA visited me. I had never heard of the organization before, but the man patiently guided me through the process of becoming a PVA member and a VA patient—something for which I will always be grateful.



## John Henderson (continued)

In 2021, my wife, Laurel, and I moved to Utah and I joined the Mountain States Chapter, eventually serving as the Utah Representative. I worked with board members whose unwavering commitment to this organization amazed me. In my new role as ED, I hope to match—and amplify—that same enthusiasm. Together, I am confident we can take our chapter to the next level.

Of course, there's a lot of work to do, including process improvements, admin updates and system overhauls. But my guiding principle remains clear: to serve and meet the needs of PVA members in Colorado, Utah, Wyoming, Montana and New Mexico.

To do this, I'll focus on a few key areas, including increasing revenue, building partnerships with community organizations that serve our members, hosting more in-person events where we can connect, and improving the way we communicate with you. A big part of improving our communication hinges on our website, and we're already working to make it better. You'll soon see an updated event calendar and a new member portal to help you stay more connected.

I'm incredibly grateful for all the board members and volunteers who have dedicated countless hours supporting this organization. I want to especially thank our president, Eric Allen, whose tireless efforts have been crucial in moving us forward.

As we look ahead, I'm excited about our chapter's future. We will remain, first and foremost, a member-focused organization—one that listens to and prioritizes the needs of our community. With your continued support, I'm confident that we'll make great strides in building a stronger, more connected MSCPVA. Thank you for being a part of this journey.



*John finishing IM Canada in 2005*



*Monoskiing at Snowbasin, UT in 2024*



*John standing with his father at Navy Dive School in 1997*



*John and Laurel, Xterra finish line, Maui, 2018*



*John and Laurel, Chicago Marathon, 2024*



*John off-road hand biking in Moab in 2024*



Paralyzed Veterans of America

Mountain States Chapter

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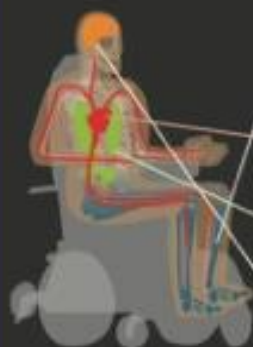
# MOVEMENT IS LIFE

When the human body is in motion,  
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- Bone Density**  
Maintained by the impact of your feet  
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- Blood Circulation**  
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the body's tissues and organs are fed.
- Lymphatic System**  
Drainage occurs.
- Bladder & Bowel**  
Stagnation is avoided.

Integrative therapies work to promote  
healing of the body post paralysis.



- Adaptive Exercise**  
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- Massage**  
Maintains blood circulation.
- Acupuncture**  
Maintains internal organ function.
- Adaptive Yoga**  
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# A Message From Our President

By Eric Allen

It's an exciting time for the Mountain States Chapter, and I am thrilled to introduce our new Executive Director, John Henderson. With his diverse background in healthcare, business and nonprofit leadership, I'm confident John will help take our organization to new heights. Based in Utah, he'll play a key role in growing our membership and expanding activities across the region—a top priority for our chapter. That said, our home office in Aurora remains open (with limited hours), our contact information hasn't changed, and our presence in Colorado will continue to be strong.

Since John joined us in March, we've been working hard to rebuild connections that faded during the pandemic. We've re-engaged with great partners, including Denver Adaptive Divers, Project Healing Waters, Adaptive Adventures, the Chanda Center for Health, and Craig Hospital—where many of our members, including John, received care.

March also marked our annual membership meeting, where 20 members and caregivers gathered for dinner in Aurora, Colorado. We were honored to be joined by our National Vice President, Josue Cordova, and our National Treasurer, Tom Wheaton.

The next day, more than 40 members gathered at the Reeve Summit, a two-day event in Denver hosted by the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation to connect individuals impacted by paralysis. I saw many new, young faces, and I was uplifted by the outflow of positivity watching people connect. Our very own David Ortiz gave a powerful keynote address. Later, Marco Rossi, Tom Wheaton, Scott Griffith and I gave a presentation on PVA's history and the resources we offer.

## A few quick updates:

- **Elections are coming up.** Are you interested in running for a position? See inside for details.
- **The National Veterans Wheelchair Games** will take place in Minneapolis in July. Thanks to the incredible fundraising work of our auxiliary team at November's bowl-a-thon, we're able to cover hotel rooms for 15 athletes.
- **Women's Retreat:** We're excited to host our second Women's Retreat this September in Granby, Colo. Learn more on the next page.

As we navigate this leadership transition, I want to thank you for your patience and support. We're now in a strong position to roll out some great improvements. A few things you can expect soon: a revamped website with a regularly updated calendar of events (as many of you have requested), and membership meetings hosted in every state. Dress code will be relaxed. Whether formal or casual, we just want you to come!

*"With the right team now in place, I truly believe the PVA Mountain States Chapter is ready to triple its membership, double its activity offerings and, most importantly, have a lot of fun along the way. As always, feel free to reach out to me with any questions, concerns or ideas."*

Eric Allen, Board President

Eric repairs a motorized chair for a member.





# The MSCPVA Women Veterans Retreat

## Escape to the Colorado Mountains

Are you or someone you know a female Veteran and a member of the Mountain States Chapter? If so, this event is for you.

**What:** Join us for an unforgettable four-day, three-night retreat in the Rocky Mountains. This retreat honors the incredible women who served in our armed forces. Come recharge, connect and enjoy activities including whitewater rafting, horseback riding, archery, yoga and more—each tailored to your comfort level.

**Where:** YMCA Camp of the Rockies, Granby, Colo.

**When:** Sept. 15-18, 2025

**Why:** To build connections, reflect and grow—all while surrounded by nature and your fellow female Veterans. Activities are led by the skilled team from the National Sports Center for the Disabled, and all abilities are welcome.

**Cost:** Free to MSCPVA members! All meals are included—just let us know if you have special dietary needs.

**Transportation:** Free transportation to and from the retreat is available from Jeffco Fairgrounds in Golden, Colorado (about 11 miles from downtown Denver). If you need transportation from the Denver International Airport, please let us know.

**Sign Up:** To register or for more details, please get in touch with Erin Cavit at [erin@mscpva.org](mailto:erin@mscpva.org). Space is limited to 20, so don't delay!

**Registration Deadline is June 1.**



*The chapter's inaugural Women Veterans Retreat in 2023*

# Event Recap

## National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic

**By Jonas Ely,** Recreational Therapist at Rocky Mountain Regional VA Medical Center SCI Unit

This was my second time attending the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic as a coach for Team Colorado. We had the privilege of bringing 22 veterans with various disabilities to this year's clinic, which ran from March 30 to April 5 in Aspen-Snowmass, Colorado.

Our preparation began in January, with weekly adaptive ski sessions at Eldora Mountain with the Ignite Adaptive Sports program. Every Wednesday, Veterans received individualized instruction in the specific adaptive skiing discipline they planned to pursue at the clinic—whether mono-skiing, bi-skiing, two-tracking or snowboarding. These personalized lessons helped Veterans discover which equipment worked best for them, giving them a chance to build skills and confidence before the clinic.

One unforgettable moment at the Winter Sports Clinic was skiing alongside a Veteran using a mono-ski. It had snowed 12 inches the night before, and as we rode the chairlift together, he mentioned he had never skied fresh powder. From the lift, we spotted a perfect, untouched run. I turned to him and said, "Today might be the perfect day to try powder for the first time." He agreed, and we went for it. The whole way down, he was laughing with joy, saying he felt like he was floating.

That ski run truly captured the spirit of the Winter Sports Clinic—Veterans challenging themselves, trying new things, and sharing moments of pure joy. For any Veteran who hasn't experienced the clinic, it's an incredible opportunity to step outside one's comfort zone while being supported by fellow Veterans and a caring team.

The Winter Sports Clinic is so impactful because it creates a safe, welcoming space for Veterans to be vulnerable, push their limits and connect with others. Every Veteran has a unique story and seeing adaptive snow sports bring so many diverse individuals together for a week of skiing is truly inspiring.

The Winter Sports Clinic provides nearly 400 Veterans each year with life-changing training and experiences. Veterans living with spinal cord injuries, traumatic brain injuries, visual impairments, amputations and other significant disabilities are empowered to push beyond perceived limitations and participate in adaptive skiing, sled hockey, scuba diving, rock wall climbing and more.



*Monoski participants, 2025*



*Winter Sports Clinic: Mountain States Chapter*



*Sled hockey participants, 2025*





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Boundless Cycles Initiative is a program of Kids Mobility Network, a non-profit organization serving the disability community for more than 20 years.



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# Make Your Voice Heard

## Call for Board Nominations

Nominations are now open for the MSCPVA's Board of Directors.

### Would you or someone you know like to run for a position?

This is a great opportunity to get involved, make an impact and work with a passionate team.

Board members play a crucial role in shaping the future of the MSCPVA. Whether you're nominating someone, running yourself, or casting a vote, this is your chance to influence the direction of our chapter. Thank you for being a part of the MSCPVA and helping our community thrive!

#### Positions Up for Election

- President (2-year term)
- Treasurer (2-year term)
- Two Board Members At-Large (2-year terms)

### Nomination Deadline May 31

To submit a nomination, please follow these steps:

1. Confirm the nominee is willing to serve.
2. Email the following to [info@mscpva.org](mailto:info@mscpva.org):
  - Nominee's full name
  - Position they are running for
  - A short biography (200-400 words)
  - A brief statement of goals or vision for the chapter

#### Important Eligibility Information

Nominees must be certified MSCPVA members in good standing. Not sure of your status? Reach out to us at [info@mscpva.org](mailto:info@mscpva.org).

#### Election Timeline

Nominations Close: May 31  
Voting Opens: June 8  
Voting Closes: June 21  
Election Results Announced: June 25  
New Board Members Sworn In: Late June

*This year, voting will take place electronically. We will email detailed instructions to all members in early June. Please email MSCPVA Executive Director John Henderson with questions at [info@mscpva.org](mailto:info@mscpva.org).*



# Legislative Updates

## PVA National President Robert Thomas, Jr. Testifies Before Congress

On March 4, PVA National President Robert Thomas, Jr. testified before a joint session of the Senate and House Veterans' Affairs Committees regarding PVA's public policy priorities. President Thomas stressed the importance of restoring the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) specialized care services, which are in dire need of adequate funding and staffing, and the vital role that VA-provided care and life-sustaining research play in the lives of PVA members. He also unveiled PVA's 2025 Policy Priorities, which will guide our advocacy efforts throughout the year. The two-panel hearing lasted nearly three hours.

While in Washington, D.C., President Thomas and other members of PVA's Executive Committee met with Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Jerry Moran (R-KS) and Ranking Member Richard Blumenthal (D-CT) and House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Mike Bost (R-IL) and Ranking Member Mark Takano (D-CA). During their visits, PVA leaders expressed concerns about the status of the VA's spinal cord injuries and disorders system of care and the effects of current efforts to reduce the size of the federal government. PVA leaders also discussed the importance of long-term services and supports for veterans with catastrophic disabilities and the need for Congress to ensure proper implementation of the Senator Elizabeth 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act (P.L. 118-210).

### PVA Comments Emphasize the Need for Air Travel Consumer Rights for Passengers with Disabilities

PVA submitted comments to the U.S. Department of Transportation's (DOT) advance notice of proposed rulemaking (ANPRM) on air travel consumer rights during delays and cancellations. An ANPRM is not a proposed rule. Instead, a federal agency may publish an ANPRM when it needs more information or data to determine whether a rule is needed, what the proposed regulations should include, or to gather ideas. PVA's comment reinforced the unique circumstances that affect passengers with disabilities, especially wheelchair and scooter users, during delays and cancellations that are not experienced by passengers without disabilities. Because of these additional burdens, PVA recommended DOT expand the requirements for support offered to passengers with disabilities and others in their travel party during delays and cancellations.

### **Related:** Delta Seeks Approval For Seats To Accommodate Wheelchairs In Flight



Plans are moving forward to allow people with disabilities to remain in their wheelchairs when they travel on commercial aircraft. The applications submitted to the FAA are a first step in what's likely to be a long process, officials said. *How cool would this be?*



## Regarding Proposed Staffing Cuts at the VA

On March 5, Paralyzed Veterans of America **Chief Executive Officer Carl Blake** released a statement following the leak of an internal memo revealing the Department of Veterans Affairs' plan to reduce its overall staffing of the department to FY 2019 levels – a decrease of more than 80,000 positions from the current staffing level.

“Although there is a great deal of context and detail not yet available, the VA’s plans to reduce its workforce by tens of thousands is a frightening proposition for catastrophically disabled veterans. While PVA believes that there is an opportunity to streamline some operations within the VA, it also feels it is vital to understand that the delivery of critical health care and earned benefits requires some degree of administrative support to function successfully. Staff cuts for the sake of cuts are unacceptable. We have already seen the consequences of previous arbitrary decisions across the VA and the dire impact they have on veterans.

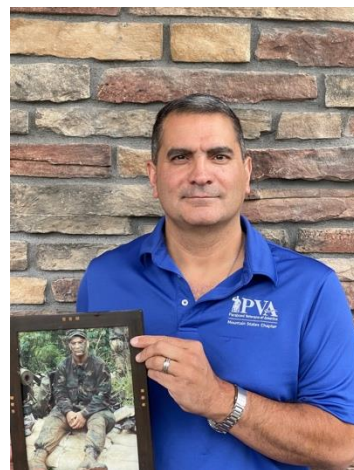
“PVA’s greatest concern is the impact that such a massive reduction could have on the timely delivery of life-saving, life-sustaining health care and benefits earned through honorable service, particularly for our members – veterans with spinal cord injuries or diseases, like ALS and MS. The VA’s SCI/D system of care is unique and specialized in a way unmatched in the private sector. This system must NOT be compromised by any further reduction efforts and all previous reductions impacting the system should be reversed – the lives and well-being of our nation’s veterans are at stake.”

## Update from National Director Izzy Abbass

Every May brings the National Convention, and I’m looking forward to attending with our new Executive Director, John, and introducing him to many of the great PVA folks throughout the country. We will be in Austin, Texas this year, and I’m certain this will be an excellent opportunity for John to learn from other chapters and see how our national organization operates.

This year I expect a lot of discussion regarding the changes on tap at our VA System of Care. For many of us, this is an important resource, allowing the Veteran community to live our best possible lives. For those of us with spinal cord injuries or disorders, this service is critical. As you are seeing from legislative updates, our senior staff and executive board have been testifying to support our SCI centers and the VA overall.

**But, we also need your help.** Please lend your voice to the effort and share your concerns with your elected representatives and senators. One thing we know, together our voices carry weight. Let our elected leaders know that we served our country and in return, we expect them to fulfill the promises they made to us for our sacrifices on their behalf.



*Izzy Abbass with picture from service*

# Denver Adaptive Divers

*Empowering Disabled Veterans  
Through the Healing Power of the Ocean*



Denver Adaptive Divers is a Colorado-based non-profit that provides scuba training and underwater experiences to individuals with disabilities. Come dive with us!

## What We Do

We help disabled Veterans experience the freedom, peace and joy that scuba diving offers.

## How We Do It

We partner with Denver Divers. Our certified instructors adapt diving techniques and equipment to ensure every participant (no matter the disability) has a safe and enjoyable experience. Our programs begin in the classroom and pool and culminate in ocean-diving certification, setting the course for a lifetime of marine adventures.

## Why We Do It

Scuba diving provides numerous therapeutic benefits. The calming, weightless environment of the ocean can help alleviate physical pain, reduce anxiety and promote emotional healing. Many Veterans tell us that the underwater experience is relaxing and invigorating and leaves them with a renewed sense of independence, empowerment and hope.

## What Do Veterans Say?

*"Diving has made my life better in more ways than I can express. The peace and stillness I feel when I am 60 feet down is nothing like I have ever felt before. Having an incomplete spinal cord injury and partial paralysis in all four limbs requires a lot of adaptation, but underneath the surface (of the water), that all disappears. Any problems or limitations I have above water don't exist below (it). I went on a diving trip with quadriplegics, paraplegics and individuals with other disabilities, and what I saw in the water was a sense of freedom and relief." Craig Vogtsberger*

*"Connecting with Denver Adaptive Divers was truly life-changing. Yes, the sights were amazing, the ocean was warm, the Denver Adaptive Divers staff and volunteers were top-notch, and the food was delicious. But even bigger than all of that was my experience with chronic pain. Nearly 20 years ago, I was shot four times during a rescue mission in Afghanistan. The first bullet, which is still lodged in my spine, instantly paralyzed me and resulted in chronic pain. After the dive trip, I reflected on the fact that I had, for the FIRST time in 18 years, experienced an entire week of 0 out of 10 pain while diving. The relief continued for 5 (consecutive) weeks... To experience this level of (pain) relief was life-changing."*

**Tyler Wilson**

## Get In Touch

303-399-2877

[scuba@denverdivers.com](mailto:scuba@denverdivers.com)

<https://www.denverdivers.com/denver-adaptive-divers.htm>



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# A Tale of Two ERs

## Private Hospital vs. VA Hospital

By Izzy Abbass

It was a rough week—I ended up in two different ERs due to a serious infection that caused massive fevers. But through this, I got a firsthand comparison of two healthcare systems.

### Monday: Private Sector Hospital

An ambulance rushed me to a private hospital, and I assumed that arriving via ambulance would put me on a fast track. But having worked in Search and Rescue (SAR), I knew triage prioritizes the most critical cases first. They did place me in a room immediately, but then I waited. And waited.



*Izzy Abbass and Terri Clinton, former commander of the American Legion Department of Colorado.*

An hour passed before a nurse came in. Over the next eight hours in the ER, I had minimal interactions with staff. Eventually, they confirmed I had an infection (shocker—I had a 103-degree fever) and administered saline and a single antibiotic. No continued antibiotic course was prescribed. After running four blood labs (twice, because the first set clotted from sitting too long), they admitted they didn't know what was wrong. I barely saw anyone for long stretches—it got so bad I started blasting *Comfortably Numb* by Pink Floyd on my phone, hoping someone might notice. No luck.

Finally, after the second round of labs, they discharged me. I went home, and after two days of slightly lower fevers, I woke up Thursday morning back at 103.

### Thursday: The VA ER

At that point, my wife had enough. She insisted on taking me to the VA ER, and the experience was night and day.

Despite a waiting room with about 12 others, triage happened quickly, and my initial exam didn't take long. From the start, the ER team—doctors and nurses—were engaged and attentive. I handed them the private hospital's summary from Monday, and the ER doc immediately responded: "Good, we can rule those out. But we have 15 more tests to run, especially with your MS and weakened immune system."

A few hours later, they identified the root cause, administered two IV antibiotics, and decided to keep me for observation for at least 24 hours. I stayed overnight, with frequent check-ins from nurses and multiple visits from doctors—including one where a physician was accompanied by a supervising doctor to review my case.

### A Stark Contrast

To be fair, I've had better experiences at that private hospital before, and I know two neighbors who credit them with saving their lives. This isn't about bashing them. But to anyone who constantly complains about the VA—go private and good luck.



## A Tale of Two ERs (continued)

I've always received excellent care at the VA, and in my opinion, it's some of the best available. Maybe I'm biased because of my MS and the incredible team at the Rocky Mountain SCI/D clinic. But if you're someone who wants to privatize the VA—screw you. Seriously. I am in Room K2-125 (I'm out now, but the sentiment remains), and I'd be happy to provide some "Wall-to-Wall Counseling" to help you pull your head out of your full point of contact.

Is the VA perfect? No. No large organization is. But before blaming everything on the VA, take a real look at wait times, misdiagnoses, and care in the private sector. The only reason I got my MS diagnosis was that a civilian hospital misdiagnosed me, recommended an invasive surgery, and then told me I'd have to wait six months to get it. That delay turned out to be a blessing—I sought a second opinion, avoided unnecessary surgery, and got the correct MS diagnosis.

### One Thing is Clear: Nurses Deserve More Respect

Across both hospitals, one truth remains: medical staff—especially nurses—don't get enough support or respect. In search and rescue, we had a saying: *"If I get hurt, don't find me a doctor—find me a nurse, because I want to live."*

That still holds true.

## Coach Spotlight

### Meet Jen Wright, Our Team Coach for the National Veterans Wheelchair Games

Jen brings a wealth of experience in recreation therapy and adaptive sports, making her a perfect fit to support members of the Mountain States Chapter in the upcoming 2025 National Veterans Wheelchair Games. Her career includes launching grassroots adaptive sports programs, serving as part of the 2004 U.S. track and field team in Greece, and most recently, developing the SCI/D recreational therapy program at the Denver VA.

Originally from Longmont, Colo., Jen was raised on her family's farm in Nebraska, where she learned the value of hard work, family and appreciating life's simple joys—principles that continue to guide her today. Outside of work, she enjoys traveling with her family and being a proud mom to three teenagers, including an 18-year-old son preparing to join the Army and 14-year-old twin daughters.

Jen is excited to support the Mountain States Chapter and looks forward to helping Veterans and their families participate in meaningful, engaging programs.



Jennifer Wright

# Upcoming Events

## National Veterans Wheelchair Games

July 17-22, Minneapolis

As of this writing, 40 Veterans from the Mountain States region are set to attend the National Veterans Wheelchair Games in July in Minneapolis. Seventeen are MSCPVA members from Colorado, Utah and New Mexico.

One of them is Renae Byrd McMinn, our chapter's board secretary who lives in Grand Junction. She'll be competing in her third Games. As in the past, she plans to compete in swimming (breaststroke, freestyle and the individual medley), and play pickleball and softball (which she learned at her first Games). But one event has her nervous: wheelchair slalom.



*Renae with her service dog, Oscar.*

The event involves navigating an obstacle course in a wheelchair—maneuvering around cones, going over ramps that tilt and traversing plyboards with holes, where if a wheel goes in, “it’s like a mousetrap,” McMinn says. If competitors tip over, spotters are there to help. She knows because she’s watched Veterans compete. “Some of them are so fast,” she says.

McMinn doesn’t use a wheelchair fulltime yet, though doctors say she eventually will. She sees the obstacle course as a test—and a learning experience. “That’s why I’m doing this event,” she says. “I’m scared, but I’ll do it.”

While she’s uncertain how the slalom will go, she’s fully confident about something else. From past experience, she knows the crowd is loud, enthusiastic and supportive. “You feel so good,” she says. “You don’t feel handicapped in anyway.”

The MSCPVA, in collaboration with recreational therapists in each state, has been coordinating athletes’ travel and providing training support to ensure that participants feel confident and prepared. Thanks to fundraising efforts, the chapter will cover hotel costs for 15 participants. Recreational therapist Jen Wright will accompany the MSCPVA team as coach.

## Veterans Welcome BBQ

Thursday, Aug. 21, 11:00 a.m. to 2 p.m. in Grand Junction, Colo.

Join the MSCPVA and the VA Western Colorado Health Care System for an inaugural Veterans Welcome BBQ. The free event is open to veterans with spinal cord injuries, multiple sclerosis, amyotrophic lateral sclerosis and amputations, and their caregivers.

Attendees can connect with fellow Veterans and local VA staff, including physical, occupational and recreational therapists, as well as social workers, who will be on-site to share information and answer questions about available resources Veterans may not know about. This is a unique opportunity to meet many VA health care professionals at once.

The event will take place at 618 Dike Road on Bryans Lake and will offer optional swimming and kayaking.

For more information or to RSVP, contact Renae Byrd McMinn at [renae@mscpva.org](mailto:renae@mscpva.org) or 970-201-1233.



## Other Important Dates

- PVA National Convention, May 12-17, Austin, Texas
- Grand Teton Outdoor Experience, June 23-27, Jackson Hole, Wyo.
- 44th Annual Wheelchair Games, July 17-22, Minneapolis, Minn.
- MSCPVA Women Veterans Retreat, Sept. 15-18, Granby, Colo.
- National Women Veterans Empowerment Retreat, Sept. 27-29, Minneapolis, Minn.
- MSCPVA Auxiliary Annual Bowling Tournament, TBD
- PVA Fall Directors Meeting, Nov. 15 -18, Orlando, Fla.

## The Co-Pilots Corner

### MSCPVA Mentoring Update

The VA Eastern Colorado Health Care System launched an inspiring peer mentorship initiative called **Co-Pilot**. This program pairs Veterans living with spinal cord injuries or disorders (SCI/D) together as mentors and mentees.

Co-Pilots are trained Veteran volunteers who share their lived experiences, offering insights into navigating daily life, accessing resources and fostering resilience. By building these peer connections, the program aims to enhance the quality of life and independence for Veterans adjusting to life with SCI/D.

In addition to one-on-one mentorship, the program offers community-based activities such as adaptive yoga sessions every Tuesday from 1 to 2:00 p.m. at the Bill Daniels Veterans of America building in Denver. These sessions are designed to promote physical well-being and social engagement among participants.

Veterans interested in becoming a Co-Pilot mentor or mentee can contact Dr. Darryl Etter in the SCI/D Center at 720-723-3360. This initiative exemplifies the power of peer support in fostering community and resilience among Veterans.



*MSCPVA members share stories at Reeve Summit.*



*Eric Allen and Mark Maloney at Reeve Summit.*

# Member Spotlight

## Mark Maloney

At 89 years old, Mark Maloney is a testament to resilience. A retired military officer with over 22 years of service, including Vietnam, he lived an active lifestyle—running, hiking, biking 20-30 miles daily, and tackling 14ers like Mt. Whitney. Retirement was filled with outdoor adventures until an accident in June 2020 changed everything.

While riding a paved trail in Colorado Springs, Mark lost consciousness and crashed into a group of rocks. Fortunately, a Fort Carson medical officer, biking to work for the first time, discovered him and provided life-saving aid. Mark was rushed to Memorial Main Hospital, where he underwent nine hours of surgery, receiving 16 screws in his neck. Battling pneumonia and facing immense rehabilitation, he was transferred to the VA Hospital in Aurora, where he relearned basic functions like swallowing and moving his limbs over a three-month stay.

Determined to regain independence, Mark made remarkable progress at home. With daily exercises, a stand-up machine, and an exercise bike, he tracked his miles just as he had before his accident—exceeding 2,000 miles last year. With the help of his VA physical therapy team and personal caregivers, he has even taken assisted steps.

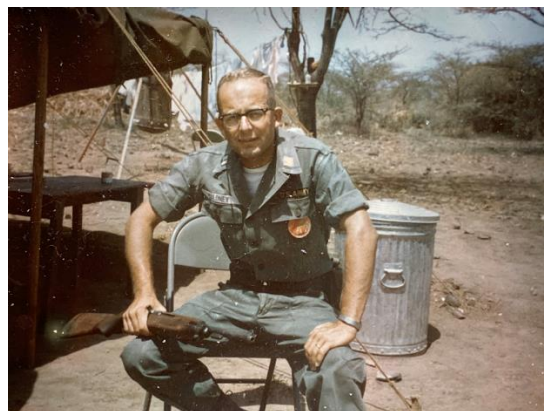
A major milestone came on Memorial Day when Mark walked the last kilometer of the Bolder Boulder into CU stadium using a Lite Run Walker, an achievement broadcast by ABC. His story of perseverance inspired many.

Today, Mark remains committed to his rehabilitation and encourages others to embrace a “CAN DO” spirit. Finding humor in daily life and replacing negativity with gratitude, he hopes his journey inspires others facing similar challenges. If he can achieve this at his age, he believes anyone can.



*Left: Mark sits atop Lincoln Mountain on a bench he and his wife, Margie, donated two years before his paralyzing accident. The inscription encourages hikers to rest, appreciate their journey, and reflect on those who cannot—words that now hold even deeper meaning in his own life. Mark was able to visit this bench courtesy of the Luke 5 Organization who supported his ascent in an adaptive chair-cycle.*

*Right: Mark sometime in the 1960s during his service in the U.S. Army*





# Volunteer Spotlight

## Meet Sarah Cramer, MSCPVA Member and Volunteer

You may soon hear from Sarah Cramer, an MSCPVA member and volunteer who has offered to help update member contact information and compile a list of regional events. Thank you, Sarah!

A Buffalo, New York native, Sarah joined the Army after high school, following in the footsteps of her grandfather, who was a master sergeant. She served five years before a severe training injury at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, changed her life and led to a medical discharge. Despite the setback, Sarah pushed forward and eventually moved to New York City where following a passion for music business she worked as a promoter for a nightclub. Frank Sinatra's words echoed in her ears: "If I can make it there, I'll make it anywhere."

And she made it. After four years in East Harlem, Sarah moved to Florida to attend Full Sail University, where she earned a B.A. in music business and an M.A. in digital marketing. She relocated to the Denver area last year. Eager to learn and connect, she attended the Reeve Summit in March, where she met many MSCPVA members for the first time.

Outside of her volunteer work, Sarah stays active with adaptive cross-fit twice a week and fencing at the Denver Fencing Center three times a week—training that's sure to help her compete in the upcoming Wheelchair Games. A lifelong fan of electronic music, she continues to do freelance work as a nightlife promoter and regularly attends local concerts, though she admits she doesn't stay out as late as she used to.



*Sarah Cramer and friend*



*Sarah Cramer, right, practices adaptive fencing three times a week in Denver.*



# Medical & Research Updates

## SCI, MS and ALS in the Mountain States

*As part of our commitment to keeping members informed, we're highlighting some of the latest medical advancements and research developments in spinal cord injury (SCI), multiple sclerosis (MS), and amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) across the Mountain States region. We are proud to see our region contributing to national momentum toward better outcomes and quality of life for all Veterans with these conditions.*

### Spinal Cord Injury (SCI)

In Colorado, researchers at the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus and Craig Hospital have made significant strides in identifying "spinal tissue bridges" near cervical SCI sites. These preserved tissue areas are powerful motor and sensory recovery indicators, helping refine rehabilitation strategies and clinical trials. Minnesota also continues to invest in SCI innovation through its statewide grant program, funding research to improve mobility and quality of life after injury.

### Multiple Sclerosis (MS)


The Rocky Mountain MS Center in Colorado remains a leader in exploring advanced treatment options, including CAR T-cell therapy and BTK inhibitors. These therapies offer promising new avenues for those living with progressive MS. Nationally, over 340 MS clinical trials are enrolling participants, exploring everything from immune therapies to lifestyle interventions, demonstrating an unwavering commitment to future breakthroughs.

### Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS)

ALS United Rocky Mountain collaborates with national research and advocacy groups to fast-track ALS treatment development and improve care access across Colorado, Utah, and Wyoming. These efforts are echoed in the ALS Association's 2024 Progress Report, which emphasizes transforming ALS from a terminal to a livable disease through better treatments, multidisciplinary clinics, and caregiver support.

At the Mountain States Chapter, we monitor these developments closely and support our members through advocacy, education, and access to regional care resources.






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- ✓ **CONNECTING VETERANS TO GROUPS**  
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- ✓ **HEALING THROUGH HELPING**  
Help our volunteers to learn the power of Healing through Helping



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# Scenic Overlook

## Views from around the chapter



*Karen and Scott Miller attend a fair for caregivers in Colorado Springs.*



*John and Shannon O'Rawe, recreational therapist at SLC VA*



*Izzy Abbass at the Gait and Balance Symposium in Multiple Sclerosis*



*Tom Wheaton & Josue Cordova at MSCPVA Membership Meeting*



*MSCPVA Membership Meeting, March 2025, Colo.*



*Rachel Ploeger and mom at the Reeve Summit*



*Mountain States Chapter members gather at 2025 Reeve Summit in Denver.*



*John Henderson and Eric Allen meet with Eva Gergely at Rocky Mountain VA.*



# Scenic Overlook

## Take 2



*Eric Allen traveled through a snowstorm to pick up a trailer-full of donated wheelchairs.*



*Pickleball clinic attracts over a dozen Veterans in Salt Lake City.*



*Working lunch in the office.*



*Eric Allen and John Henderson meet with Dr. David Coons and Tina Collins at the Rocky Mountain VA.*



*Katelynn Johnson, CTR from PVA, and John Henderson*



*Eric Allen, John Henderson and Sarah Cramer collaborate in the office.*



*Eric Allen and Karen Miller attended the VA Resource Fair for Veterans & Caregivers in Aurora, Colo.*





Thank  
you



Last issue we highlighted how Comcast (Xfinity) had donated 10 laptops to the chapter. We have distributed most of them to members in need including Paul Augsburg, who was an in-patient at the Rocky Mountain VA. In a conversation with President Eric Allen, Paul mentioned his old laptop had died and he couldn't access information in his My HealtheVet account or email his family. Thanks to Comcast's donation, we were able to provide Paul with a new laptop, definitely improving his stay at the VA.

*Paul with his laptop provided by Comcast (Xfinity) while he was an in-patient in Auora*

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