

NEPVA Celebrates Veteran's Day

As we celebrated Veterans Day during this month, we are reminded that despite the many challenges and divisions we currently have in this country one thing often that unites Americans is our respect and gratitude for the heroes who serve to protect our freedom and democracy. That is why on Veterans Day we come together to honor veterans – particularly paralyzed and disabled veterans and those who have made the ultimate sacrifice. On Veterans Day weekend many of us found ways to honor all the men and women who have proudly served in our nation's military. As we paused to remember our past, I think we as a premier Veterans Service Organization also need to remember our present, where at this very moment our servicemen and women are putting themselves in harm's way for the cause of freedom and democracy. We salute their courage, strength, and dedication to these highest ideals. We pledge our gratitude for the sacrifices they will make, and we renew once again our vow to never forget them.

With that, on November 11-12 we were honored to host our Second Annual Boccia Tournament at the Marriot Boston Quincy in Quincy, MA. It was a wonderful weekend, and it was nice to welcome many of our friends from the Brockton

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Wally the Green Monster and his little sister Tessie helped celebrate Veteran's Day at the VA. They even brought a World Series trophy.



Many thanks to the Red Sox Foundation for their support of Veterans and our Chapter.



The Quicy Elks held a Veteran's Day event. A number of Vets were there including three WWII Veterans.



THANKS TO ALL THOSE WHO MADE VOLUNTEER CONTRIBUTIONS TO THIS ISSUE

Holly Warshaw, Boccia and Veteran's Day photos
Lori Chase, Bass Trail photos and story



NEPVA member Mike Guilbault and boat Captain Steve Estes took third place at the Winnie Bass Trail Tournament held on the weekend of September 8th. Story and photos on page 8.

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Togus, ME VAMC, Neal Williams

CHAPTER VOLUNTEERS

Jim Clark Denise Pease
Denise Harvey Holly Warshaw
Maureen Morrison-Bohnwagner

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Executive Director's Report

By Mark Murphy

Executive Director NEPVA

Veteran's Day

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VA Building 8 who participated. I even got to play some non-tournament games, which were fun! A very special thank you to Chapter volunteers Holly Warshaw, Denise Pease, Jim Clark, and many other VA volunteers and employees who helped make the weekend such a success. Next Fall we look forward to hosting the tournament once again.

We pledge our gratitude for the sacrifices they will make, and we renew once again our vow to never forget them.



On October 21-23 I attended PVA's Fall Board of Directors meeting in Orlando, Florida with Chapter President and National Director Brad Carlson and his wife Kathy. It was a great opportunity to connect with other Chapter Executive Directors from throughout the country and to hear and learn from PVA National leaders as well. The days included meetings on various issues of importance both for PVA National and at the Chapter level, and I was happy to attend.

which will be broadcast live on WCVB Channel 5. The parade steps off at Plymouth Rock at 10:00am on its historic waterfront, followed by an opening ceremony that features a variety of entertainment. The parade is ranked as the #1 Thanksgiving parade in the nation, and we are delighted to be a part of it this year.

Finally, as we begin to enter the holiday season, I wish you and all those you hold dear health, happiness, and peace.

Sincerely,

Mark Murphy
Executive Director

Looking ahead, on Saturday, November 18th our Chapter is participating in America's Hometown Thanksgiving Parade (https://usathanksgiving.com/) in Plymouth, MA. We have a strong Chapter delegation excited to walk/roll during the parade



Participants and volunteers at our Second Annual Boccia Tournament at the Marriot Boston, Quincy.

Washington News

Joint Senate Hearing Examines Transition Process

On October 18, the Senate Armed Services and Veterans' Affairs Committees held a joint hearing to examine military to civilian transition processes. Much of the three-hour hearing focused on the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) which is run jointly by the VA, the Department of Defense, and the Department of Labor. Witnesses included representatives from all three agencies, the Government Accountability Office, and a small group of veterans' advocates.

A broad range of subjects were touched on during the question and answer portion of the hearing such as the availability of mental health care during the transition process, the interoperability of electronic health records between DOD and VA, and ways to get service members to start thinking about their civilian life earlier in their military careers. There was also discussion around DOD ensuring that transitioning service members are able to enroll in TAP courses at least a year out from the date of their separation.

One subject that came up during both witness panels was the need to fully integrate accredited veterans service organization representatives into the TAP process. The importance of veterans having assistance from an accredited representation cannot be overstated. PVA's accredited Service Officers specialize in providing services for veterans and service members who are severely injured or suffer disabling diseases. These services are free of charge and are offered from the time of disability to end of life.

Improving the transitioning of families, with emphasis on taking better care of spouses, is another area that drew considerable attention. DOD has a number of programs to help military spouses with employment while the service member is actively serving, but offers little assistance to them when the military member transitions back to civilian life. The hearing was recorded and you can watch a video of it [here](#).

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Search for New Speaker Delays Veteran-Related Hearings

On October 25, the House ended a three-week long period of legislative inactivity with the election of Rep. Mike Johnson (R-LA) as the chamber's 56th Speaker. Prior to the vote, the chamber was essentially paralyzed because existing rules prevented lawmakers from acting on legislation until a new leader was chosen. The lapse in leadership also delayed a pair of House Veteran's Affairs Committee (HVAC) hearings looking at pending legislation.

The HVAC, Economic Opportunity Subcommittee legislative hearing has been rescheduled for November 2. The HVAC, Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs (DAMA) Subcommittee legislative hearing has been rescheduled for November 8. PVA provided a statement for the record for the DAMA hearing. We will provide an overview of both hearings in the next Washington Update.



Brad & Gary at the Boccia Tournament.

www.pvanewengland.org

From the President's Desk

by Brad Carlson
NEPVA President

Dear Friends,

I would like to begin by welcoming two new members to our Chapter Board of Directors – Ericka Haddad and Bernice DeBlois. They are welcome additions to the Board, and we are very happy to have them. As a reminder, we are fortunate to also have board members Mike Moran who is serving as Vice-President, Chuck Houle as Treasurer, Directors Gary Jezierski, Jim Wallack and Mark Sanders, and I of course serve as Chapter President. Each position and member of our Chapter Board of Directors is a volunteer, and we are extremely grateful for everyone's time, dedication, and service on our Board as it is an important responsibility. Welcome to the team Ericka and Bernice!



On Veterans Day weekend we hosted our Chapter Boccia Tournament at the Marriott in Quincy, MA. I played throughout the day on Saturday, and the spirit of the weekend was fantastic. Thank you to everyone who joined us and a very special thank you to all Chapter and VA volunteers and staff who supported the tournament. I was unable to attend on Sunday as I was at the Cape Cod Curling Club for their annual Winter Tony Colacchio Wheelchair Spiel. I presented them with a \$500 sponsorship check on behalf of our Chapter, and they were incredibly grateful for our support.

On October 21-23rd I was in Orlando, Florida for the 2023 Fall Board of Directors Meeting in Orlando, Florida, along with my wife Kathy and Chapter Executive Director Mark Murphy. The days were full of meetings, and highlights included the following:

- Welcome Remarks by PVA National President Thomas
- Multiple Sclerosis (MS) Committee report and update
- Spouses/Caregivers Committee report
- Report of the Development Staff to brief the National Directors on current PVA fundraising strategies and also a full PVA marketing report
- A sexual harassment prevention training
- Various proposed resolutions (7 in total)

It was a productive week!

We have several upcoming events and gatherings over the next several weeks, such as America's Hometown Thanksgiving Parade on November 18th, various Chapter sponsored holiday parties at Brockton and West Roxbury VA facilities, and our annual Chapter Christmas party for our Board, staff, and high-level volunteers in December. These gatherings provide opportunities to thank and appreciate all those who make our Chapter so strong. We could not continue to do what we do without such dedicated Chapter members, staff, and volunteers!

Sincerely,

Brad Carlson, Chapter President and National Director

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Government Relations Report

*Kristen McCone Gordon
Director of Government and Community Affairs*

Dear Members,

I hope you all had a meaningful Veterans Day this month. It is such an honor to work for an organization that serves the men and women who served this nation. I admire and deeply respect your service to our country.

This month I am highlighting a bill that would support veterans with ALS and their survivors. Please read more about this legislation and consider sending a quick email in support of the issue to your Representatives in Congress. As you know, every email from a veteran helps move these bills forward.

To enter your contact information and send an email to your Representatives, please click here: <https://pva.org/research-resources/pva-action-force/> and follow the prompts.

Our NEPVA members with ALS and their families need our help now more than ever.

With gratitude for your service,

Kristen McCone Gordon



Justice for ALS Veterans Act (S. 1590/H.R. 3790)

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) to qualified survivors of service members and veterans. Eligible surviving spouses can also receive an additional \$331.84 per month in DIC when a veteran who, at the time of death, was in receipt of or was entitled to receive compensation for a service-connected disability that was rated totally disabling for a continuous period of at least eight years. This extra payment is commonly referred to as the “DIC kicker.”

Currently, VA regulations recognize amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) as a presumptive service-connected disease and, due to its aggressive nature, veterans diagnosed with ALS are automatically rated at 100 percent once service-connected. Unfortunately, many veterans with ALS are unable to meet the eight-year DIC kicker requirement because the average life expectancy for a person with ALS is three to five years. Rarely do ALS veterans’ surviving spouses qualify for the additional DIC benefit given the eight-year requirement.

PVA Position:

ALS is an aggressive disease that leaves many veterans totally incapacitated and reliant on family members and caregivers. DIC kicker payments should be provided to the surviving spouses of veterans who die from ALS regardless of how long they were service-connected for ALS prior to death.

Please contact your elected officials and urge them to cosponsor S. 1590/H.R. 3790 , the Justice for ALS Veterans Act of 2023, which would allow the surviving spouses of veterans who died of service-connected ALS to receive the DIC kicker. H.R 3790 would also require a study about the feasibility of including other conditions beyond ALS in the future.



NEPVA’s Veterans with MS Program

BUILDING COMMUNITY INFORMATION SHARING

Thursday-December 7th @ noon

Veterans with MS Informational Zoom:
*Understanding SSDI Benefits and Eligibility
with National Service Officer Michael Snape*



All NEPVA members with MS and/or their caregivers are invited to an informational zoom on December 7th at noon. Mr. Michael Snape is highly skilled at securing benefits and VA assistance for veterans with MS. Co-hosted by Director Chuck Houle, the zoom will include a brief presentation by Mr. Snape followed by an informal Q & A session for members.

Contact Kristen
kristen@pvanewengland.org
with any questions!

Zoom Link:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/88911735514?pwd=qow0HawMafaPEeBxci8vXRFBLEzpZf.1>

Scan this Zoom Link QR



MS News You Need:

Our National PVA organization is a significant resource for veterans with MS. Beyond connecting veterans to the resources they need, PVA offers Veterans with

MS a warm welcome to a community of Veterans, caregivers, and families going through similar struggles. Through community support and pertinent information, Veterans can get back to living their lives to the fullest. Please read the latest newsletters from National and let us know what you found most helpful. Make sure you follow the prompts to have these delivered straight to your inbox!

Scan this QR to
Sign Up for the
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More Than Fishing

Article and pictures submitted by Lori Chase

On a beautiful Indian summer day, the NEPVA Bass Trail began our 25th annual bass fishing tournament. On September 8th we rolled into picturesque Camp Rondel, Moultonborough, NH on the shores of Lake Winnepesaukee. It doesn't get any better than this, plentiful with volunteers at your service, camp staff rolling out the red carpet for us, made from scratch meals, snacks, rustic waterfront cabins and a porch to relax regroup, visit and listen to the loons. As the day began; a few boat captains were "pre fishing" to find those "secret spots." New & old friends met, shared stories, triumphs, challenges and enjoyed camaraderie. Meanwhile a team from the Portsmouth, NH Active-duty Navy arrived to volunteer, assisting with meal prep, clean up and preparing the camp for departure, as well as any additional task requested. Arrivals began from afternoon to late evening with participants as far away as CT. and Cape Cod. Registration, all you can eat buffet, camp fire, and info provided for the following day concluded Friday night. Many dreaming of catching the Winnepesaukee "monster."

On tournament day all present were provided with a hot all you can eat breakfast, which no one passed up, included a wide variety of foods and donations from Stonyfield Yogurt. Participants were provided tournament t-shirts, hats, fishing towels, bag lunches, drinks and assisted by a host of volunteers on the docks. The Nam Knights Merrimack Valley Chapter, nurses Stephanie Kealey and Sony Fernandez were also on board to assist. There were laughs, reassurance, and a lot of whispering going on about



1st Place; Mark Fournier, Jr. & Todd Olafson total weight 17.00 lbs.

finding the "lunker," AKA the biggest fish. Once again 15-year-old Zoe Nagle and her family came over an hour away to sing the National Anthem prior to "blast off." While our teams were fishing, Jim Halpin was on the water with drone coverage, capturing photos, while volunteers set up raffles, silent auction items and the weigh in station. For the 3rd year, for those not fishing and tiring of looking at water and trees for 6 hours, were treated by Veteran Tim O'Connor to pontoon boat rides, taking over 5 groups on the lake, what a special treat.

Upon return volunteers Olivia Gelinis, Nik & Lilly Foster ran fish back to the lake promptly after weigh in to conserve the bass population. Needless to say, they aren't having to fight off competition for this role. Now the fun begins, and things get fishy. At the scales, Mark Fournier is provided with many fish stories of what fish were caught on, where and tales of; you guessed it, (the ones that got away).

Congratulations to our winning teams;

1st Place

Mark Fournier, Jr. & Todd Olafson total weight 17.00 lbs.

2nd Place

John Foster & Jon Worrall total weight 11.80 lbs.

3rd Place

Steve Estes & Mike Guilbault total weight 11.75lbs

Lunker was won by Todd Olafson total weight 5.11lbs

After a 3-hour break of visiting and resting we had another all you can eat feast with fresh farm sweets donated by

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2nd Place; John Foster & Jon Worrall total weight 11.80 lbs.



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Service Officers Report

by Pete Demarkis - Senior Benefits Advocate

Hello again New England PVA! It is always a pleasure to be able to bring you helpful information. As the Holiday season is ramping up, I want to give best wishes to all who do participate and celebrate over the next few months.

The wonderful folks over here in the VA Boston Healthcare wants us all to be safe and contribute to the reduction of respiratory viruses this holiday season – as such, as the holidays are ramping up, as are the masking policies. Of course, transmission rates are being monitored, and any changes will be made accordingly. You can find your local hospital's policies by looking them up online, or by following the link posted here (Find VA Locations | Veterans Affairs).

Regarding the Boston area, which includes Brockton, Jamaica Plain and West Roxbury, the following has been issued:

Masking will be required in all Spinal Cord Injury units, clinics and in Long-Term Care. Masking is also required in all Community Living (CLC), outpatient hematology/

oncology, dialysis, and other designated “high-risk” areas, and in units with “outbreak status.” Masking is “Strongly Encouraged” when engaging in direct patient care on the in-patient units, Emergency Departments and residential units. And lastly, in areas of the hospitals where patient care is not being delivered masking is optional.

Masking will be required in all Spinal Cord Injury units, clinics and in Long-Term Care... and other designated “high-risk” areas...

For your/our safety, staff who test negative for COVID are still required to wear masks when experiencing any upper respiratory symptoms, as are staff who've not received flu vaccinations. Staff

experiencing symptoms of COVID and/or testing positive for COVID, are to isolate at home, and can their first day of experiencing symptoms or positive testing. Veterans/patients experiencing symptoms are also required to wear masks, as are their providers.

As always, should you have any questions regarding the above, or any other VA healthcare or benefits related inquires, feel free to reach out to your local PVA National Service Officer. And again, best wishes to all for a safe, happy and healthy holiday season.

PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA – REGIONAL NATIONAL SERVICE OFFICERS

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fishing

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Picnic Rock Farm. Followed was our awards ceremony, raffles, silent auction, campfire, and entertainment. A lucky boat captain Bill Church won a lottery for a Lowrance fish finder donated by Steve Estes of Bass Fishin Electronics as well as enough BFE swag for all. Bill Church also annually donates one of a kind custom built rod to be won in a lotter to a lucky boat captain.

Sunday morning, we enjoyed our last great all you can eat meal ,and the thoughts of going home and having to cook for ourselves loomed. Phone numbers and emails were exchanged as well as future plans to meet and of course, "go fish." Fortunately, it was not good bye for the season as most will meet again at our next tournament in Jefferson, ME at Wavus Camp on the shores of Lake Damariscotta.

These tournaments would not be possible without support of the NEPVA, Camp Robindel, our

sponsors, volunteers and NEPVA Bass Trail team. We would like to sincerely thank our boat captains who selflessly incur costs to provide our anglers a memorable day on the water. Our volunteer registered nurses traveling from MA are Sony Fernandez and Navy veteran Stephanie Kealey. The Nam Knights M/C and active-duty Navy, Joel Mudgett & camp staff who were all on board for no task too small. National Anthem singer Zoe Nagle, pontoon boat captain Tim O'connor. Jim Halpin, Teresa Fournier, Linda Rinaldi, Olivia & Sandy Gelinas, Sarah, Lilly & Nik Foster, Liz Tocce, Avis Wade, Ernie Brown, Dave Bertocchi,, Jim Bateman, Jerica Washington. Our team; Mark Fournier, Ray Brunelle, Captain Shawn Tibbetts, Tom Blanchard & myself.



Nurses Sony Fernandez,RN, and Stephanie Kealey, RN and assistant Jerrica

These events would not be possible without our sponsors, listed here on page 13, however our gold sponsors are NEPVA, Fairview Machine, Dalton Manufacturing Group, Bass Fishin' Electronics, America Legion SAL Post 33, AL Riders Area 51, AEGIS Container & Michael Zachodny & Warriors at 45N.

Please register early and on line at PVANEWENGLAND.org and or call 603-387-9913

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2023 Federal EHR Annual Summit

On October 24, the Federal Electronic Health Record Modernization (FEHRM) office hosted the 2023 Federal EHR Annual Summit. The theme for the Summit was EHR Excellence: People, Progress and Pathways Forward. The Summit included participants from the Department of Defense (DOD) and VA end users; congressional staffers; and auditing agencies, with over 700 participants during the three-day virtual summit.

One of the presenters was Mr. Bill Tinston, Director, who oversees the FEHRM's efforts to implement a single, common federal EHR. Another presenter was Mr. Chris Ruefer, Deputy Program Executive Officer, Defense Healthcare Management Systems, who provides direct support to the Program Executive Officer and oversees multiple program offices, including the DOD Healthcare Management System Modernization. Each of these presenters, along with several others, briefed attendees on their agency's EHR deployment.

Additionally, PVA's Roscoe Butler, Senior Health Policy Advisor, served on a panel with representatives from other veterans service organizations to discuss the benefits and improved outcomes of the federal EHR to service members and veterans. In his remarks, Mr. Butler stated that a functioning EHR serves as a lifeline for our members in accessing care at the VA. The VA's Spinal Cord Injury/Disorder (SCI/D) System of Care is comprised of a hub and spoke system that spans the United States to meet the needs of SCI/D veterans. It is important that the EHR is interoperable and can share veteran's clinical information between each facility to ensure their medical information is readily accessible for VA providers, regardless of where they are seen. This sharing of information is crucial to ensure continuity of care.

Mr. Butler also noted that the problems resulting from implementation of the Oracle/Cerner EHR have raised serious concerns. He encouraged patience during the current reset on implementation to ensure that problems are addressed before the system is rolled out in other locations. PVA and other veterans organizations, as well as Congress, will be closely watching VA's efforts to modernize its EHR to ensure that veterans' care is not compromised by the effort.

Bipartisan Senate Bill Focused on Reducing Caregiver Burden Introduced

On October 24, Sen. Edward Markey (D-MA) and Sen. Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV) introduced the [Alleviating Barriers for Caregivers \(ABC\) Act \(S. 3109\)](#). This bipartisan legislation would require the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), Social Security Administration (SSA), and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) to review their eligibility, processes, procedures, forms, and communications to reduce the administrative burden on family caregivers. The ABC Act would then annually require CMS, SSA, and CHIP to report to Congress about any issues they are facing and any next steps they are taking to support family caregivers.

PVA supports this legislation which was introduced ahead of November's recognition of family caregivers. There are 5.5 million caregivers providing support for veterans, many of whom are family members. According to a [2020 report from AARP and the National Alliance for Caregiving](#), one in four caregivers expressed the need for help with completing paperwork and other requirements for benefits and services. PVA recently expressed similar concerns about family caregivers who serve as their veterans' fiduciary in VA's Fiduciary Program in a hearing before the House Veterans' Affairs Committee.

New Bill Introduced to Improve Access to Home and Community-Based Services

On October 24, Sen. Bob Casey (D-PA) and 20 cosponsors introduced the PVA-supported Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) Relief Act of 2023 (S. 3118). The HCBS Relief Act would provide dedicated Medicaid funds to states for two years to stabilize their HCBS service delivery networks, recruit and retain HCBS direct care workers, and meet the long-term service and support needs of people eligible for Medicaid HCBS. The main reason for this legislation is the lack of a sufficient direct care workforce to provide HCBS. The inability to recruit direct care workers has a direct effect on whether people with disabilities are able to receive needed services, even if funding for HCBS is available.

Under the legislation, states would receive a 10-point increase in the federal match for Medicaid for two fiscal years to enhance HCBS. Funds could be used to increase direct care worker pay, provide benefits such as paid family leave or sick leave, and pay for transportation expenses to and from the homes of those being served. The additional funds also can be used to support family caregivers, pay for recruitment and training of additional direct care workers, and pay for technology to facilitate services.

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Paralyzed Veterans of America

New England Chapter

HAPPY HOLIDAYS



**The Officers, Board Members
and Staff of NEPVA wish all
our Members, Volunteers and
Friends a Merry Christmas and
a Happy Holiday season.**

