

Plymouth Thanksgiving Day Parade

by Gary Jeziarski

It started out as a chilly, cloudy morning. As everyone prepared for the journey, the wind picked up, and the clouds darkened. Groups of marchers gathered in their ranks, bands were positioned, various clubs, scouts, school, and community groups formed. The floats were brought to the scene and readied for their place in the line-up. Then the rain started! Luckily as the actual marching/rolling commenced, it passed rather quickly. The route for the Parade started at the bottom of Water Street, passed the Mayflower replica ship, then onward to Plymouth Rock historic site. There, the TV crews had set up a camera to film for the viewers at home.



The crowd was much bigger than I had anticipated considering the dismal weather. A hardy lot they were though, for we were met with plenty of waves, clapping, cheers, and many “fist bumps” from the excited Parade goers. It was without a doubt a very high energy affair!

There were folks dressed up for the Holiday aplenty! Turkey hats, flags, banners and quite a few folks in complete Turkey costumes! Amongst the crowd of revelers were many, many Veterans in attendance, all of whom gave us their waves, cheers, and especially salutes. An extremely heartfelt and warm welcome, thank you all for making us all feel so very special that day.

Then the big turn at the end of Water Street and up onto Main Street. In case some of you

are not familiar with downtown Plymouth, like myself, I had no idea that such a small route (1 1/4 mile) could cram so many hills into such a small area. We all made it okay, although I wouldn't want to have to push up those hills every day. It was a good workout, and we had the luxury of a couple of Veterans with power chairs help as ski-lift operators just in case.

We finally reached the end of the route and by then I felt rather let down....all that excitement from the crowd, and the added workout made me hungry for more!!! I was CERTAINLY ready for a return trip....in the opposite direction of course. Down hill is always much more fun. We returned to the Plymouth Memorial Hall (from where we staged the gathering) to a nice lunch enjoyed by all. I think I can safely speak for all who were in attendance and say I'd be there next year if we are invited. So if you like a day of thanking the public for keeping us in their hearts, then this is the event for you. It was truly a humbling experience.

Thank you very, very much citizens of Plymouth.



**THANKS TO ALL
THOSE WHO MADE
VOLUNTEER
CONTRIBUTIONS
TO THIS ISSUE**

Gary Jezierski, Cover Story



Representing NEPVA at the Thanksgiving Parade in Plymouth, Massachusetts on November 18th. L to R; Holding flag, volunteer Jim Clark and Executive Director Mark Murphy. Front row; John Melvin, Debra Freed, Mike Moran, Brad Carlson and Gary Jezierski. Back row; Becca Melvin. Marylin Kendall, Denise Harvey, Kristen McCone Gordon, Denise Pease and Holly Warshaw.

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Executive Director's Report

By Mark Murphy
Executive Director NEPVA

Dear Friends,

We have been very busy throughout the Chapter with several programs, parties, and gatherings as we progress along in this holiday season. We were honored to have participated in America's Hometown Thanksgiving Parade in Plymouth, Massachusetts on November 18th. We had about a dozen of us marching in this nationally televised parade, including Chapter staff, board members, volunteers, and a handful of other Chapter members. It was a fantastic day, and although it was rainy and cold, we all had a great time. It provided solid exposure for the Chapter too, and we look forward to participating again next year.

The Thursday before Thanksgiving I attended the VA Brockton Building 8's Annual Thanksgiving lunch, sponsored by our Chapter. It is always a nice opportunity to connect with veterans and our members who live there as well as VA staff and volunteers. The residents and staff were grateful to our Chapter for sponsoring and supporting the gathering.

On Friday, December 8th we hosted our annual Christmas party for Chapter staff, Board of Directors, and high-level volunteers at Waterford's in Dedham, Massachusetts (right near the West Roxbury VA). This was a time for us to offer our deep appreciation for everyone's contributions in helping our Chapter continue to make positive impacts in the lives of so many. The conversation, music, dinner, and setting certainly helped get everyone in the holiday spirit.



Gary Jezierski being greeted by a local child at the parade.
www.pvanewengland.org



Looking ahead, we have upcoming Chapter sponsored holiday parties at the West Roxbury VA and Brockton VA Building 8, which I also look forward to attending. As I said previously, these annual gatherings help us continue to foster good in-person relationships with our members, VA staff, and volunteers. May you and your families have a happy holiday season.

Sincerely,

Mark Murphy
Executive Director

Our NEPVA Veterans with MS Program continues to be a well-received and flagship program throughout our Chapter. I was happy to sit in on an informational Zoom meeting on December 7th where PVA National Service Officer Michael Snape made a presentation and answered questions, many of which were benefits related. We will continue to offer webinars and Zoom informational meetings like this moving forward as they are quite impactful.

Holiday Cheer at Our Annual Christmas Party

Our annual Christmas party... a time for us to offer our deep appreciation for everyone's contributions in helping our Chapter continue to make positive impacts in the lives of so many.



From the President's Desk

*by Brad Carlson
NEPVA President*

Dear Friends,

I am very happy to share that our Chapter delegation had a fantastic time at America's Hometown Thanksgiving Parade in Plymouth on the Saturday before Thanksgiving. This was the first time that our Chapter has ever participated in this parade, and we were so glad that we did! The streets were lined with thousands of people, all of whom were joyfully cheering on each group that passed by in the parade. It was a very moving experience, and I would like to thank Kristen McCone Gordon for all her hard work in helping to organize the parade. We even got on national television, which was amazing!

On December 8th we were pleased to host our annual Christmas party for our Chapter Board and staff members, as well as our most involved volunteers. I had the opportunity to offer my thanks to each person who contributes so selflessly to the work of our Chapter. A magnificent time was had by all.

On December 14th and 15th I attended holiday parties at both the West Roxbury and Brockton VA facilities, respectively. I know that so many of us have a very special place in our hearts for each of these VA facilities and the community members within each of them, which includes Chapter members, VA staff, volunteers, and extended family and friends. When I was newly injured, I was an inpatient for a time at the West Roxbury VA, and I will always be grateful for the many ways in which they assisted me during what

was the most challenging moment of my entire life up until that point. These annual holiday VA gatherings sponsored by our Chapter allow us to give thanks to all those who serve veterans and to see and talk with many of our members in person.



As we think about entering the New Year, we have many Chapter related events to look forward to, including our Winter and Summer Sports Clinics, the National Veteran Wheelchair Games in New Orleans, our Chapter golf tournament, Chapter banquet, as well as pursuing many new fundraising opportunities in support of the Chapter's mission. We also have several new and exciting programs in the works for 2024, so continue to stay tuned!

Finally, Kathy and I wish you and yours a happy, healthy, and peace-filled upcoming holiday and a wonderful New Year. I look forward to reconnecting with you in 2024, if not before!

Sincerely,

Brad Carlson
Chapter President and National Director



Government Relations Report

Dear NEPVA Members,

Last month our Chapter participated in America's Hometown Parade in Plymouth, MA. This parade is nationally celebrated and televised, and it was a wonderful opportunity for the Chapter to gain exposure with a large audience as part of our community affairs efforts. More importantly, it was an incredible way for our members to get the recognition and praise that they deserve for their service and sacrifice. Watching our participating members receive standing ovations and cheers for miles was incredibly moving. I was proud to represent our Chapter and walk/roll with the veterans and volunteers that do so much to raise awareness for paralyzed veterans throughout New England every day. We look forward to continuing to foster and grow the positive energy and excitement for our mission that we all felt that day.

Our government relations efforts are ongoing, and we aim to finish this year strong. In 2023, our Chapter has held 27 briefings with New England congressional offices.

Many of those meetings have been with the members of congress themselves. I recently met with Senator Markey's staff and advocated for the Senator to

cosponsor the Elizabeth Dole Act as well as the Justice for ALS Act. Senator Markey is a dedicated supporter of veteran issues, and his staff is consistently



responsive to our needs and requests. We are hopeful that the Senator will cosponsor these bills, but we need your help to ensure he knows how important these issues are to our members. If you are a Massachusetts resident, please take a moment to join PVA Action Force (formerly known as VoterVOICE)

If there are specific issues or questions you have about living with MS, or if there are certain events you would like offered, please don't hesitate to reach out to me...

Kristen McCone Gordon
Director of Government and Community Affairs



to send a message to the Senator asking him to cosponsor the Elizabeth Dole Act and the Justice for ALS Act.

Finally, our NEPVA Veterans with MS program is wrapping up its inaugural year. Director Chuck Houle and I are so pleased with the feedback we have received and the interest in this new program. Focusing on community building and information sharing, through this program we have offered a "Learn to Curl" lesson at the Cape Cod Curling Club, a "MS and Service Connection: What You Need to Know" session with PVA service officer Pete DeMarkis, and an informational zoom on SSDI benefits with PVA service officer Michael Snape. Both Chuck and I have met so many NEPVA members through these events and we hope you continue to join us as we ramp up our efforts in the new year. If there are specific issues or questions you have about living with MS,

continued on page 7

NEPVA's Veterans with MS Program

BUILDING COMMUNITY INFORMATION SHARING

MS News

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!

or if there are certain events you would like offered, please don't hesitate to reach out to me at kristen@pvanewengland.org. We are committed to serving your needs.

As we approach the end of the year, I wish you and your loved ones a happy and healthy holiday season. I look forward to all we will accomplish together in 2024.

With gratitude for your service,

Kristen McCone Gordon
Director of Government and Community Affairs

Scan this QR to Sign Up for the Multiple Sclerosis Newsletter!



Justice for ALS Veterans Act Marked Up

On November 29, the House Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs marked up several pieces of legislation, including the Justice for ALS Veterans Act (H.R. 3790). This legislation would provide eligible survivors of veterans who died of service-connected ALS the additional monthly Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) benefit typically known as the DIC kicker. The next step is for the full committee to consider the legislation. To ask your member of Congress to support this legislation, please click [here](#).



Scan this QR to ask your member of Congress to support ALS legislation

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Service Officers Report

by Michael Snape,
Senior National Service Officer

Annual Clothing Allowance

For NEPVA chapters members who are rated by the VA for a service-connected disability for which they use a prosthetic or orthopedic appliance, and who have not yet applied, they may be eligible to receive an annual clothing allowance. This allowance is also available to those veterans whose service-connected skin condition requires prescribed skin medication that irreparably damages the Veteran's outer garments.

The VHA (Veterans Health Administration) will determine whether the veteran is eligible for the benefit as outlined in 38 CFR (Code of Federal Regulations) 3.810, whether the prosthetic/orthopedic appliance impact the veteran's outer clothing, and whether the skin medication causes irreversible damage to the veteran's outer clothing. Due to the passage of the PL 117-328, Section 201, Improvements to the

Process of the Department of Veterans Affairs for Clothing Allowance in late 2022/early 2023, the VA has now eased the requirements for the previously required annual reapplication for this allowance.

If a veteran's clothing allowance status is static/recurring (no changes), and they already receive an annual clothing allowance; they will now continue to receive a recurring automatic payment without having to reapply each year.

A veteran who applies for a single clothing allowance for the first time

must apply initially, also, if a veteran currently receives one clothing allowance, but meets the criteria for a second, and wants to receive the additional allowance, they must apply for the additional allowance. If approved for those applications, their allowance will become continuous payments in subsequent years without the need to reapply. For those individuals who must apply, you have until the end of the VA's fiscal year (September 30) to submit your applications.

As always, if you have questions regarding the VA clothing allowance, and the recent changes to applying for the clothing allowance, please contact your local PVA national Service officer.

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<https://pva.org/find-support/veterans-career-program/>

HISA Bill Introduced in the Senate

Senators Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV) and John Boozman (R-AR) recently introduced legislation in the Senate that would help disabled veterans and their families make accessibility and safety improvements to their homes. S. 3290, the Autonomy for Disabled Veterans Act, seeks to establish a single grant rate of \$9,000 for VA's Home Improvements and Structural Alterations (HISA) grant program, and then tie that rate to the same index the department's other home modification programs use to calculate annual inflation-related increases. The new rate would be provided to future grant applicants, and be payable regardless of the disability status (service connected or not).

Currently, the lifetime HISA grant benefit is worth up to \$6,800 for veterans who need a housing modification due to a service-connected condition. Veterans who rate 50 percent service-connected may receive the same amount even if a modification is needed due to a non-service-connected disability. Veterans who are not service-connected but are enrolled in the VA health care system can receive up to \$2,000. These rates have not changed since Congress last adjusted them in 2010, even though the cost of home modifications has risen nearly 50 percent since that time. Years of inattention have diminished the effectiveness of this program, and it is long past time to update grant rates to realistic levels. We appreciate the efforts of Senators Cortez Masto and Boozman to correct that by increasing grant rates and tying them to a formula, so they remain current for years to come.

HVAC Chairman Honored with Mansfield Award

On November 15, PVA National President Robert Thomas and Chief Executive Officer Carl Blake awarded the 2023 Gordon H. Mansfield Congressional Leadership Award to House Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Mike Bost (R-IL). PVA established this award to recognize strong leadership and support of our legislative priorities in the areas of veterans' health care, benefits, and disability civil rights. Chairman Bost's support was instrumental in the passage of several pieces of legislation important to PVA members, like the Veterans Auto and Education Improvement Act of 2022, which provides additional automobile allowances to eligible veterans. He also played a key role in ending the requirement for disabled veterans to unnecessarily reapply for VA clothing allowances year over year, thereby demonstrating his commitment to ensuring veterans get the benefits they earned.

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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.**

