

2024 Winter Sports Clinic was Snow Good

by Mark Murphy

The 2024 Winter Sports Clinic for Veterans with Disabilities in New Hampshire was once again a mountain of success for everyone involved. The VA Boston Healthcare System and White River Junction VA Healthcare System co-host the New England Winter Sports Clinic each year, and it has grown into the second largest adaptive Winter Sports Clinic offered to veterans throughout the entire country. The opening ceremonies were held on Monday afternoon, January 8th at the James W. Campion III Ice Rink in West Lebanon, NH, where veterans from across New England gathered to participate in adaptive sled hockey and skating. Some were returning participants and for others this was their very first time. Tuesday through Thursday was spent with the New England Healing Sports Association (NEHSA) at Mount Sunapee in Newbury, NH where veterans and caregivers learned adaptive skiing and snowboarding. Pickleball, rhythmic drumming, and arts and crafts were offered as an alternative to adaptive sports activities. By all accounts the week was enormously well received by those in attendance, with many commenting that this year's Clinic was one of the best that has ever been hosted. So, I guess in the future it's all downhill from here!

Chapter Board of Director and Vice-President Mike Moran participated in the Clinic throughout the entire week, where he was able to connect with many friends, both new

and old. Mike shared the following: "The weather conditions were in our favor with the snow and the temperatures, and over 150 registered volunteers made the planning for the Clinic go off without a hitch. The week would not have been such a smashing success without the support of so many of these incredible volunteers.

Of the 43 registered participants, 14 were totally new to the Winter Sports Clinic, which was amazing. As always, the week did not disappoint as it is one of the events that we look forward to most every year."

"As always, the week did not disappoint as it is one of the events that we look forward to most every year."

Chapter Vice-President Mike Moran

Chapter President and PVA National Director Brad Carlson and I attended the closing ceremonies and dinner on Thursday, January 11th. I spoke at the dinner where I offered my gratitude to everyone for supporting the Clinic and I put in a plug in for the great work and programs of our Chapter. I also presented NEHSA with a generous donation on behalf of the New England PVA. The feeling in the room for the closing ceremonies was electric, and you could sense the joy, accomplishment, friendship, and goodwill of all who were there. We are already looking forward to the 2025 Winter Sports Clinic, where I am sure we will be up to snow good once again!





THANKS TO ALL THOSE WHO MADE VOLUNTEER CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE WSC.



Chapter Vice President, Mike Moran mono-skiing at the Winter Sports Clinic.

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Executive Director's Report

By Mark Murphy
Executive Director NEPVA

Dear Friends,

Happy New Year! I am happy to report that we have really hit the ground running as a Chapter in these first days and weeks of 2024, which I am sure you will see throughout this January edition. We concluded the 2023 calendar year in a very strong position financially, thanks to several generous year-end donations. We continue to remain grateful to all our friends and supporters who believe so much in our service to veterans that they would contribute to our critical work.

Our strong growth in fundraising as a Chapter, particularly in the last 6 months, is the direct result of the support of our Board and the time and dedication of our Chapter President Brad Carlson. Brad has been my right-hand person in implementing our strategic fundraising plan by going on donor visits with me and implementing new marketing ideas. Brad's dedication has helped our development work get to the next level in so many ways, so I wanted to be sure to thank him for his support.

As we continue to move along early in this New Year, we have had several things happening while also keeping an eye on what is coming up on the horizon. On Thursday, January 11th I was honored to attend the banquet and closing ceremonies for the 2024 New England Winter Sports Clinic in New Hampshire. I spoke at the dinner and was able to offer my gratitude to everyone there on behalf of our Chapter.

I also presented a sponsorship check to the New England Healing Support Association (NEHSA), and they were incredibly grateful for the support. Throughout the banquet and closing ceremonies Brad and I ran into so many Chapter members, VA staff, and fellow VSO friends. In every conversation we heard how this year's Clinic was one of the best they have ever hosted. I was pleased that the week was impactful for so many. I would love to attend the 2024 New England Summer Sports Clinic, but it happens to be during the same week as the National Veterans Wheelchair Games in New Orleans in July! See my article in this newsletter to learn more about how the Winter Clinic went this year.

Believe it or not, we are already beginning to plan for the National Veterans Wheelchair Games, as well as several other annual events and programs that require an incredible amount of planning and work to pull off successfully, like our Annual Chapter Golf Tournament, Annual Chapter Banquet, and the Annual PVA Ad/Leg Seminar in Washington, D.C. Our golf tournament committee has been meeting regularly over the past several weeks, and I hope to provide you with an official "Save the Date" in my column next month.

Finally, we learned the sad news at the end of 2023 of the passing of Kristen McCone Gordon's father, James McCone. Brad and I attended the wake to



offer our condolences to Kristen and her family on behalf of ourselves and the Chapter. Please see the obituary of James included in this newsletter, and may he Rest in Peace.

Sincerely,

Mark Murphy
Executive Director

Throughout the banquet and closing ceremonies Brad and I ran into so many Chapter members, VA staff, and fellow VSO friends. In every conversation we heard how this year's Winter Sports Clinic was one of the best they have ever hosted.

Washington Update

PVA Releases 2024 Policy Priorities

The second session of the 118th Congress is officially underway. This year, we will continue to work with our champions on pushing forward legislation and regulations that support our priorities. Congress will be in session fewer days this year than last year because of the pending November elections. Regardless, we will work to push access forward this year and believe we will see some of our key priorities over the finish line.

Our priorities for this year are as follows:

- Protect Access to VA's Specialized Health Care Services
- Expand Access to VA Long-Term Services and Supports
- 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

For more details on each of the priorities, scan the QR code or click [here](#).



HVAC Holds Full Committee Markup

On December 5, the House Veterans' Affairs Committee (HVAC) held a full committee markup discussing bills that advanced from the Economic Opportunity (EO) and Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs (DAMA) Subcommittees.

All of the bills discussed, several of which are being tracked by PVA, successfully advanced through the markup. PVA priority, H.R. 3790, the Justice for ALS Veterans Act, was among those bills that is now ready for the House floor. As a reminder, surviving spouses of a service-connected veteran may be eligible for dependency and indemnity (DIC) benefits. The current rate for DIC is \$1,562. For veterans that lived for at least eight-years with their service-connected injury, spouses may be eligible for the DIC "kicker," an additional \$331 each month. The Justice for ALS Veterans Act would authorize the surviving spouse of a veteran who dies from ALS to receive the DIC "kicker" in the event their spouse died before the eight-year requirement.

Other DAMA-related bills addressed in the markup include one that would address disparities for women veterans who served in combat when seeking VA benefits, one that seeks to improve transparency at the Board of Veterans' Appeals, a fraud reimbursement bill, and also a bill that ensures a veteran's claims cannot be denied simply because they miss a compensation and pension (C&P) exam.

From the EO Subcommittee there were bills that would improve several aspects of VA education benefits, including increasing transparency around institutions of higher learning, expanding the housing allowance during summer sessions, and decreasing barriers for women veterans applying to the Edith Nourse Rogers STEM Scholarship. There were also other bills that would improve the transition process, address portability of some licenses for medical providers who offer C&P exams, and allow veterans to use the Auto Grant to cover the cost of shipping their adaptive vehicle.

You can see the full list of bills and view the markup [here](#).

www.pvanewengland.org

From the President's Desk

by Brad Carlson
NEPVA President

Dear Friends,

As we begin 2024, we as a Chapter have so much to be grateful for as we look back on many successes from 2023, which was my first full year as President of the Chapter. For my article this month I would like to do a year-in-review where I highlight the many ways our Chapter has grown and continues to make a positive impact for veterans and persons with disabilities throughout New England:

With a minimal Board in previous years, we now have a full Board including two new women in Bernice DeBlois and Ericka Haddad. We are fortunate to have a very solid Board also now in Mike Moran as Vice-President, Chuck Houle as Treasurer, and Directors Gary Jezierski, Mark Sanders, Dustin Soroka and Jim Wallack who are all very much invested in the Chapter's work.

We have a solid staff in Executive Director Mark Murphy and Director of Government Relations and Community Affairs Kristen McCone Gordon who ensure that the day-to-day management and operations of our Chapter are successfully carried out. Our Chapter would not be what it is without Mark and Kristen's strong leadership.

Our volunteers have continued to make our Chapter shine throughout the past year. Denise Pease, Denise Harvey, Holly Warshaw, Kathy Carlson and Jim Clark are among our

most active volunteers, and our Chapter could not move forward without the selfless service and sacrifice of our volunteers.

Continuing to have a very successful sports program with the Winter and Summer Sports Clinics, a Chapter sponsored basketball tournament in Connecticut, Annual Boccia Tournament, disc golf events, among others. Our sports programs continue to grow and flourish, and in 2024 we are looking forward to the National Veteran Wheelchair Games in New Orleans, and the PVA Bass Tournament Spring Series and Annual Boccia Tournament held here in New England. With Mark Murphy I attended the 2024 Winter Sports Clinic in New Hampshire on January 11th, where we presented NEHSA with a check on behalf of our Chapter.

Our 2023 Annual Chapter Golf Tournament was a sellout event and helped raise significant funds for the Chapter. We had over 60 sponsors, and our 2024 Golf Tournament is already poised to have a very large presenting sponsor as well. The Golf Tournament Committee is comprised of myself, Holly Warshaw, Mitch Fishman, Jim Clark, and Mark Murphy, and we all work year-round to make this seminal event a growing success.

Throughout 2023 we continued building solid relationships with VA administrators, doctors, nurses, and staff throughout New England VA facili-

ties. These crucial partnerships have helped our members in innumerable ways.

We concluded 2023 in a very strong position financially. This is in large part because of Mark Murphy who is overseeing our fundraising efforts and who has worked closely with me in connecting with new donors. We are also grateful to Charlene Raikany from Booked and Balanced who has been amazing in keeping our books balanced and squared away.

Because of all these triumphs and successes, we are encouraged as we continue along in this New Year. We could not do our critical work without our staff and Board, and I

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Chapter volunteer Marliyn Kendall (in the cheerleading outfit) and retired VA nurse Maura Nee with Brad at WSC banquet.

Government Relations Report

*Kristen McCone Gordon
Director of Government and Community Affairs*

Dear NEPVA Members,

As we enter a Presidential election year, I'm excited to announce two interesting opportunities available to our members.

The National Disability Rights Network is producing a documentary focusing on the unique needs and priorities of voters with disabilities. If you are interested in participating in this, please review the information from the National Disability Rights Network below and reach out to me at kristen@pvanewengland.org with any questions. While the film-makers are specifically looking for individuals in Massachusetts and New Hampshire, there may be more opportunities for those from other states to get involved.



Additionally, The Department of Justice's Disability Rights Section, Civil Rights Division is hosting listening sessions in advance of the upcoming election. The objective is to identify barriers that veterans with disabilities face when voting. If interested in participating, please read their notice below and contact Jane.Andersen2@usdoj.gov to RSVP at your earliest convenience.

With gratitude for your service,

Kristen McCone Gordon

NEPVA Members invited to participate in a documentary on the 2024 election

The National Disability Rights Network, a leading national disability rights organization, is working on a documentary short that will tell the stories of voters with disabilities in the lead up to the 2024 presidential election. We will be doing interviews in Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, South Carolina, Virginia and the District of Columbia. We want to capture the issues that motivate voters with disabilities and paint a rich picture of their lives, because our community, despite being over 25% of the American population it's often ignored by politicians.

We are seeking to get a look at the home life and day-to-day of voters with disabilities so we can connect the political issues that matter to their daily life. Interviews would take approximately two to three hours. We want to conduct the interview and film footage to complement it. For example: navigating to work, arranging paratransit, going over how much their healthcare costs or showing any durable medical equipment they use, explaining how a home health aide would enable them to experience greater independence.

The goal of this project is to highlight the biggest minority group that often gets ignored by the candidates of all parties. The project is strictly nonpartisan. We are seeking to ensure we have a diverse range of perspectives included in terms of the issues that matter and the life experience those voters come with.

We are looking to speak to first time and longtime voters, we want to interview those fresh out of school (and even graduating seniors) as well as people who have spent a long time in the workforce or even found themselves excluded from the workforce. We want to speak to voters with disabilities of all stripes and capture the diversity of our community.

If you are interested, please contact us at storytelling@ndrm.org. We look forward to working with you to help politicians understand that our community cannot be ignored any longer. Please note that, following documentary film making best practices, we are unable to pay interview participants.

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!

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



Department of Justice Hosts Listening Sessions on Barriers to Voting

Please join the Department of Justice's Disability Rights Section, Civil Rights Division, for a listening session on January 30, 2024, from 3:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. (eastern time) via Zoom. We are interested in hearing from advocates and veterans about any barriers that veterans with disabilities face in the voting process, including in registering to vote, obtaining voting or election information, voting absentee, voting in person, polling place accessibility, or receiving assistance in voting. So that we can reserve enough time for speakers, please email us by Tuesday, January 23, 2024, if you would like to secure some time to speak. We will save time in the session

for audience questions and additional sharing of experiences.

Please email Jane.Andersen2@usdoj.gov with any questions and to RSVP. Feel free to share this invitation with other interested disability rights advocates or veterans with disabilities. The event will be held via Zoom at the link below. ASL interpretation and closed captioning will be provided. If you need a reasonable accommodation to attend this presentation, please contact Diane Turner at crt.reasonableaccommodations@usdoj.gov by Tuesday, January 16, 2024.

January 30, 2024, from 3:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. (eastern time) via Zoom.

Join the Zoom Meeting:
<https://www.zoomgov.com/j/1608580843>



Meeting ID: 160 858 0843

Winter Sports Clinic 2024



From the top; David tries cardio drumming. Mike Moran returns a pickleball volley. Joan Lynch showing some love to hard working volunteer Michelle Bergeron.



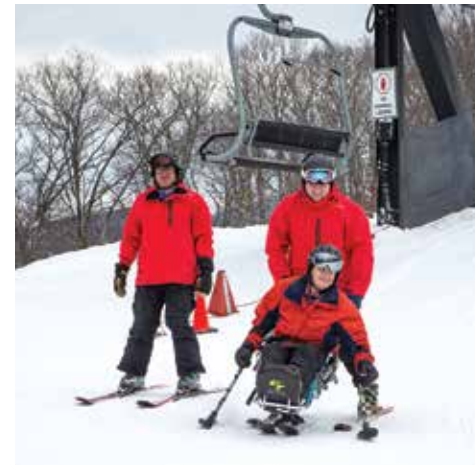
Top; Joanie, Roland Fillion, Kelly, Curtis, Krista McDonagh and VP Mike Moran after their pickleball match.

Joanie pushes Roland into position to make a return shot.

Rich pushes Ed Dusick back to the lodge for lunch Tuesday followed by their fellow ski buddy Rob Harrington.

Tom Kersey pushes Jody S. Back to the lodge.

Photographer credits on page 2.



Top left; Member John Bacon getting off the chairlift with Instructors. Middle; Luc and Roland Fillion on the move. Right; Meghan Mc Herrick brings Mark Kline through the new lighthouse. Left; A busy South Peak. Mike Moran enjoying some hero snow Tuesday. Bottom Left; CDCE Chief Matt Edwards presents the medal to Harry C with brother Marine NEPVA participant turned Instructor Dustin Soroka beside Jenny Vulpis. Below; Mike Shepard rides the chair between Instructor and WSC Co-Founder Ralph Marche. The crew at the rink for Sled Hockey on Monday.



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Service Officers Report

by Zachary T. Nuetzel
National Service Officer

As we return back from the holiday season and have officially entered the new year, I sincerely hope that everyone had a safe and happy holiday.

Many of our veterans have dependents. Whether that be their spouses or their school aged children. One of the most common questions we receive from our veterans is “Will my family get anything after I die?”. I wanted to do a brief rundown of one of the most commonly sought benefits for survivors, which is Dependency Indemnity Compensation (DIC).

DIC is a tax-free monetary benefit paid to surviving spouses, children, and in some cases surviving parents on a monthly basis. There are certain eligibility requirements that will be described in the following paragraphs.

Eligibility for DIC requires the veteran to have met certain requirements. They must have either:

- 1.) Died while on active duty, active duty for training, or inactive duty for training. Or;
- 2.) Died as a result of a service connected disease or injury. Or;
- 3.) If the death is not due to the above criteria, they were rated permanent and totally disabled for purposes of VA compensation for one of the following lengths of time:

- 1.) Rated totally disabled for at least 10 years prior to death. Or;
- 2.) Since the release from active duty and 5 years until death. Or;
- 3.) For 1 year prior to death if a former prisoner of war.

For surviving spouses to be eligible, the veteran must meet one of the above noted criteria and also must have:

- 1.) Lived with the veteran without break until death. Or;
- 2.) If separated, they were not at fault for separation

And must also meet one of the below criteria:

- 1.) Married the Veteran or service member within 15 years of their discharge from the period of military service during which the qualifying illness or injury started or got worse. Or;
- 2.) Were married to the veteran for at least one year. Or;
- 3.) Had a child with the veteran.

Please note: that if the surviving spouse remarries after January of 2021, they will only be allowed to continue receiving DIC if they are over the age of 55. The eligibility criteria for surviving children to receive DIC is the same however they have some different eligibility requirements.

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President's Report

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am hopeful for an even stronger 2024. I am confident that with the ongoing support of our members, invested Board of Directors, dedicated staff, and incredible volunteers that the sky is the limit in terms of what we can accomplish together. I look forward to embracing the challenges ahead and forging new memories as we continue to work tirelessly to make the lives of every New England PVA member better each day.

Sincerely,

Brad Carlson

Veterans Career Program

Paralyzed Veterans of America's Veterans Career Program, formerly known as PAVE, provides FREE employment support and vocational counseling assistance to ALL veterans, transitioning service members, spouses, and caregivers.

Leveraging a high-touch approach, our Employment Analysts and Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors will work with you on your path toward a meaningful career. Our team has expertise to help Veterans overcome employment barriers and other obstacles at all stages.

Whether you need help with job search and networking strategies or with obtaining necessary accommodations at work, the Veterans Career Program is always a click or a phone call away. We are a partner for life.

Find out more by scanning the QR code.

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



Service Officer Report

continued from page 11

For children: They must be:

- 1.) unmarried, and
- 2.) not on the surviving spouse's award, and
- 3.) must be under 18 (23 if in school).

Surviving parents may be eligible to receive DIC as well. However, there are different requirements. In order for a parent to be eligible, they must be:

- 1.) The biological, adoptive, or foster parent of the veteran, and they must have income below a certain threshold. (Note: income limits for 2024 can be found at the link below;

<https://www.va.gov/disability/parent-dic-rates/>

Applying for DIC is done on a 21p-534 EZ; APPLICATION FOR DIC, SURVIVORS PENSION, AND/OR ACCRUED BENEFITS. If you are not receiving DIC, and believe that you may be entitled, please reach out to your nearest National Service Officer for assistance.

Sincerely,

Zachary T. Nuetzel
 National Service Officer
 Paralyzed Veterans of America
 201 Varick Street
 Room 4W59.50
 New York, NY 10014
 ZacharyN@pva.org
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Improvements Made to Total and Permanent Disability Student Loan Discharge

The U.S. Department of Education has been making improvements to the Total and Permanent Disability (TPD) Discharge of people with student loans and they want to get the word out to all eligible veterans. Several steps in the forgiveness process have now been streamlined to increase engagement. There are three ways student loans can be discharged by the Department of Education due to TPD: through the VA, the Social Security Administration, or by a medical professional. For more information on eligibility for TPD forgiveness, you can review the criteria here.

The Department of Education and VA have systems that communicate with one another so veterans rated 100 percent service connected should have seen an automatic discharge of their loans already. If you are rated at 100 percent and have not seen your federal student loans forgiven, or if you are a veteran that has seen your loans discharged, please reach out to Julie Howell, PVA's Associate Legislative Director, at JulieH@PVA.org.


The New England PVA was saddened to learn of the recent passing of Mr. James McCone, the father of our Chapter staff member Kristen McCone Gordon. Here is James's obituary, and may he Rest in Peace:



James McCone of Hingham and Edgartown, formerly of Brookline and Walpole, passed away peacefully and unexpectedly in his sleep on December 28, 2023. Devoted husband of 49 years to Margaret "Peggy" McCone of Hingham and Brookline. Cherished and loving father to Alissa McCone Siedlecki of Medway and Kristen McCone Gordon of Medfield. Revered father-in-law to Michael Siedlecki and Christopher J. Gordon. James leaves behind his four grandchildren, whom he deeply loved and cherished: Ruby Noelle Siedlecki (10), Luke James Siedlecki (7), Margaret Elizabeth Gordon (9), and James McCone Gordon (6). James McCone was predeceased by his parents, Mary and James McCone of Brookline, MA. He also leaves behind an aunt, siblings, nieces, nephews, cousins and friends. James honorably served in the United States National Guard from 1968 to 1971. He graduated from Bentley University with a degree in business. He worked at Motorola Solutions, Inc. for 39 years, where he was elected to the Galvin Masters and CEO Circle. Following his retirement in 2015, he established his own business as an independent consultant. His greatest achievement and passion were his family. James McCone leaves a legacy of devotion to family, kindness, and integrity within the hearts of all who loved him.

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



Paralyzed Veterans of America

New England Chapter

**Visit Us on the internet at
pvanewengland.org
for all the latest event info**

Join Us at Our Upcoming Events

dates to be announced soon.

The PVA Bass Tournament Spring Series

National Veteran Wheelchair Games in New Orleans

Summer Sports Clinic

NEPVA Chapter Golf Tournament

Annual Shooting Events

Annual Boccia Tournament