

2024 Veterans Day Reflection

by Mark Murphy, Executive Director NEPVA

On November 11th, we paused to reflect on the service and sacrifice of the men and women who have answered the call to protect our country, uphold our freedoms, and defend the values we hold dear. For the members of our New England Chapter, Veterans Day holds particular significance, as it honors not only those who have served, but also those who have faced life-changing injuries in the line of duty.

The path of service is one marked by courage, commitment, and resilience - qualities that are embodied by each member of our community. Many of our veterans have experienced the physical and emotional toll of war, yet their strength is unwavering. While they may have been injured, they have not been defeated. Their perseverance, their will to overcome obstacles, and their desire to lead full lives in the face of adversity are sources of inspiration to all of us.

For those who are living with disabilities, Veterans Day is also a reminder of the challenges that persist long after the uniforms are put away. But it is not just a day to remember the difficulties; it is also a day to celebrate the achievements. From advocacy and community service to sports and recreation, the members of the New England PVA and PVA members across the nation continue to redefine what is possible.

We also remember the families and loved ones who stand beside our veterans, offering unwavering support and care. Their sacrifices, too, are integral to the strength and resilience of our community. One of my military mentors used to say that people often ask veterans what their story of their service is, family members also have their story of

support and service as well. As we honor our veterans, let us also express our gratitude to those who walk alongside them, ensuring that their journey continues with dignity, respect, and love.

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For Veterans Day 2024, we extend our deepest thanks to all those who have served in the armed forces - especially our fellow veterans with spinal cord injuries and diseases. Your bravery, strength, and determination remind us that service is not just about what we give during our time in uniform, but about the lasting impact we continue to make on the lives of others.

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PVA layed a wreath at the Vietnam Memorial in DC.

Accessible Air Travel: Survey

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

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



2024 PVA Priorities

Protect Access to VA's Specialized Health Care Services

Expand Access to VA Long-Term Services and Supports and their Survivors

Improve VA Benefits and Health Care Services for Paralyzed Veterans and their Survivors

Protect the Civil Rights of People with Disabilities

Improve Access to Social Security Benefits

Increase Employment Prospects for Veterans with Disabilities

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NEPVA ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE

1208 VFW Parkway, Ste 301,
West Roxbury, MA 02132
Telephone: (617) 942-8678, 1-(800) 660-1181
FAX: (857) 203-9685;
Office Hours: Monday-Friday 9:00am-4:30pm

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Executive Director's Report

By Mark Murphy
Executive Director NEPVA



Dear Friends,

This past November 11th we of course celebrated Veterans Day. As a premier Veterans Service Organization in this nation as we continue to serve our members throughout the New England community, it is always a very special day for us. Please see my Veterans Day reflection in this November edition, and I hope you all had a wonderful day on November 11th.

As I write this article, we are gearing up for our Annual Bocchia Tournament on November 16-17th, hosted by the Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) in partnership with our New England Chapter. This event will be held at the Brockton VAMC and has been open to all participants who qualify to play bocchia under the USA Bocchia classification system, and beginners are welcome. If participants do not have a classification, a temporary class will be assigned for this tournament. A brief Bocchia 101 clinic will be held before the start of the event to ensure everyone has the same understanding of the gameplay and rules. The competition includes a double-elimination singles tournament, followed by a double-elimination pairs or teams tournament. Based on the number of participants and event schedule, competition details may be modified as we move along. We were proud to offer this event for free for Chapter members, with lunch provided. While I am unable to attend the event as I will be at the PVA Fall Board of Directors meeting in Orlando, Florida, we will be sure to share pictures and updates on how the tournament went in the December CordWord edition. We are thankful to the staff at the Brockton VA and our amazing Chapter volunteers who are helping to make this tournament a success once again.

As we prepare to head into the holiday season and the end of the calendar year, we are beginning to plan for 2025, especially on the program level. There are new goals to set, new programs to launch, and new relationships to

build. We are committed to pushing the boundaries of what we can achieve and deepening our impact. If you have ideas on any new or existing Chapter programs, please feel free to get in contact with me. We are always looking to be innovative in how we reach more and more veterans throughout the New England region, and we stand ready to receive any feedback that may be helpful. So many of us

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have been deeply and positively impacted by the good work of our Chapter, and it truly takes a village for us to continue developing and growing to the next level.

I want to take this opportunity to thank you once again for being a part of our journey together as a Chapter. We are building something truly special here, and I am confident that, with your continued support, we will achieve even greater success in the months and years to come.

Wishing you all a peaceful and joyful November and a happy Thanksgiving!

Sincerely,

Mark Murphy
Executive Director

Washington Update

DOT Levies \$50 Million Fine Against American Airlines for ACAA Violations

On October 23, the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) levied a \$50 million fine against American Airlines for systemic violations of the Air Carrier Access Act (ACAA). The ACAA prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in commercial air travel. The fine was one of the largest ever levied against an airline for ACAA violations. PVA filed three formal DOT complaints alleging violations of the ACAA starting in 2022. DOT cited PVA's complaints as one of the primary reasons for the enforcement action against American.

As a result of the settlement agreement, American will be forced to pay a penalty of \$25 million to the U.S. Treasury. Separately, American must also invest in efforts to improve the safety and dignity of wheelchair users in air travel. Specifically, the airline must: (1) invest in equipment to reduce incidents of wheelchair damage, including wheelchair lifts at 24 or more airports and wheelchair movers at 43 or more airports; (2) invest in a systemwide wheelchair tagging system to reduce incidents of wheelchair delay; and (3) deploy hub control center employees in 2024, 2025, and 2026, to coordinate wheelchair handling on a centralized, systemwide basis at large airports.

In its news release announcing the settlement, DOT stated that it was also reviewing disability-related complaints alleged against other airlines. DOT's actions are a significant victory for passengers with disabilities. We hope that these enforcement efforts will lead to safer and more dignified air travel for passengers with disabilities in the near future.

PVA Participates in NOVA Conference Panel on VA Health Care and Benefits

Recently, National Legislative Director Morgan Brown joined representatives from fellow veterans organizations and key congressional staffers in a panel discussion on legislative priorities and critical issues affecting VA health care and benefits for veterans, their families, and caregivers. The event, which was part of the Nurses Organization of Veterans Affairs' (NOVA) 44th annual conference, focused on many of the same concerns PVA has raised in recent years about the status of VA's health care system. These include funding shortfalls, staffing shortages, VA's aging infrastructure, dwindling training opportunities, and the need for competitive salaries for the department's nursing corps. Attendees and panel members alike agreed that insufficient funding for the system must be a principal advocacy focus moving forward, because funding deficiencies adversely affect the department's ability to provide effective care.

2025 COLA Announced for Veterans and Social Security Benefits

The Social Security Administration announced on October 10 that Social Security beneficiaries will receive a 2.5 percent cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) increase starting in 2025. The increase is reflective of the effects of inflation. Prior to departing for the current congressional recess, House and Senate lawmakers approved legislation to ensure certain VA compensation programs will receive the same COLA.

From the President's Desk

by Brad Carlson
NEPVA President



Dear Friends,

As I am writing this note I am getting ready to head out to Orlando, Florida for the Fall PVA Board of Directors annual meeting held in Orlando, Florida. This gathering will bring together veterans, caregivers, healthcare professionals, and advocates from across the country for a weekend of collaboration, learning, and inspiration. I attend this meeting in my capacity as National Director to PVA on behalf of our

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...the Fall meeting is also a forum for education and advocacy on issues of critical importance to our community.
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New England Chapter, and I am delighted to have my wife Kathy and Chapter Executive Director Mark Murphy joining me on this trip.

The Fall meeting provides a unique opportunity for members of the PVA community and other Chapter leaders to come together and share experiences, insights, and expertise on issues impacting paralyzed veterans and their families. From informative workshops and panel discussions to networking opportunities and social events, the meetings offer something for everyone, regardless of anyone's background or experience level. One of the typical highlights of the meetings is the opportunity to hear directly from PVA and Chapter leaders about their personal journeys and the challenges they face daily. Their stories of resilience, courage, and determination serve as powerful reminders of the strength of the human spirit and the importance of supporting one another through life's challenges.

In addition to providing a platform for veterans to connect and support each other, the Fall meeting is also a forum

for education and advocacy on issues of critical importance to our community. Attendees will have the opportunity to learn about the latest advances in healthcare, accessibility, and adaptive technology, as well as to engage in discussions about policy priorities and legislative initiatives aimed at improving the lives of paralyzed veterans. We also will conduct a lot of business by taking a deep dive and look at the state of PVA's finances and its fundraising and marketing priorities. But perhaps the most impactful aspect of the Fall meeting is the sense of camaraderie and solidarity that permeates the gathering. For many of the attendees, the meetings provide a sense of belonging and connection that they may not have experienced elsewhere, and it serves as a reminder that we are not alone in our journey. Events like this serve as a powerful reminder of the impact we can achieve when we come together in unity and purpose and in collaboration with other Chapters and PVA National. Next month I look forward to sharing highlights of this year's Fall meeting.

May we continue to make a meaningful difference in the lives of paralyzed veterans and their families throughout our Chapter and beyond.

Sincerely,

Brad Carlson
Chapter President and National Director

Washington Update

PVA Holds Fifth Annual Women Veteran Empowerment Retreat

Early in October, PVA hosted the fifth Women Veteran Empowerment Retreat (WVER). This year's theme focused on grassroots efforts, building local community, and resiliency in advocacy. Thirty-five women representing 24 chapters attended the event. Participants learned about leveraging digital resources to spread messages and awareness, the history of PVA, and several other areas all highlighting skills and resources to help our women members find their voices as veterans.

Lisa Elijah, Grassroots Advocacy Manager, and Julie Howell, Associate Legislative Director, combined forces to teach a session on advocacy and strategic thinking around local concerns. The presentation touched on many of the themes presented in the Government Relations webinar series held last summer around the fundamentals of government. The women thought of several concerns that they could each relate to despite being located in different areas of the country and presented their ideas and solutions to address them. The session was well-received by attendees.



NEPVA Board Member Bernice DeBlois attended this years WVER

NEWS OF NOTE

Progress Report Released on Federal Implementation of Strategy to Support Family Caregivers

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services through its Administration for Community Living delivered a 2024 progress report to Congress on federal actions that have taken place since its 2022 National Strategy to Support Family Caregivers. The 2022 strategy presented commitments from 15 federal agencies to approximately 350 actions to implement recommendations made to ensure family caregivers receive the support and resources they need.

The report states that nearly all of the 350 federal actions have been completed or are in progress. Additionally, agencies have added 40 new actions. It is reported that the VA has completed 15 of its 21 actions. The remaining six are in process. The report details some of the specific actions the VA is taking, including conducting training programs directed to the caregiver community and expanding telehealth mental health services to caregivers of veterans.

New Report on Military and Veteran Caregivers Released

More than 14 million Americans now provide daily care to wounded, ill, or injured military servicemembers or veterans, with the heaviest burden falling on the 26 percent who assist people aged 60 and under, according to a new report commissioned by the Elizabeth Dole Foundation. That's one of many findings in the RAND Corporation's report titled, "America's Military and Veteran Caregivers: Hidden Heroes Emerging from the Shadows." It builds upon the impactful findings of their original 2014 caregiver study and spotlights some of the most pressing needs of the military and veteran caregiver communities. Not surprisingly, that includes financial concerns.

Military and veteran caregivers reported spending nearly \$8,600 of their own money each year towards the care of their veteran while forgoing another \$4,500 in annual income. Roughly one-third of them reported incomes below 130 percent of the federal poverty level while upwards of 70 percent of caregivers said they faced difficulty paying bills. Between 22 to 40 percent reported food insecurity. Each of these problems are clear indicators that additional resources are needed.

The study also found that more than 40 percent of caregivers for those 60 and under met criteria for probable depression. About one-third of them thought they needed mental health care but don't receive it, primarily because they don't have the time. In addition to increased financial support and access to mental health and substance use treatment for caregivers and their children, the report also made the following recommendations:

In addition to increased financial support and access to mental health and substance use treatment for caregivers and their children, the report also made the following recommendations:

- Tailor caregiver support programs to reflect care givers' diverse preferences and needs.
- Expand and promote home health care considering how caregivers will be affected.
- Focus programmatic and social support within the context of local conditions in which military and veteran caregivers live.
- Encourage health care systems to better integrate caregivers into health care teams.
- Promote work environments that are supportive of caregivers.
- Continue to conduct rigorous evaluations of those initiatives designed to support military and veteran caregivers.
- Continue to conduct research that fully captures the breadth of caregiving and those who serve as caregivers.

Sports & Recreation

PVA

Sports and Recreation programs offers over 60 free year-round adaptive sporting and recreational opportunities, benefiting thousands of Veterans and athletes with disabilities nationwide. From bass fishing to wheelchair rugby, our diverse activities promote a healthy and active lifestyle, fostering community and independence.

Join Our PVA Online Fitness Classes: Fitness for Everyone, Anywhere!

Experience the benefits of online fitness from the comfort of your home. Maximize your time and effort to achieve the best results from your workouts. Workouts are adapted to your ability. All experience levels are welcome and can benefit.

Adaptive Strength Training with Jerod Warf

Join instructor Jerod Warf on Mondays at 12:30 PM EST for strength training. This program will focus on developing strong and healthy shoulders to benefit your daily life and longevity.

Adaptive Boxing with Pierre Fallot

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



Scan the QR code to register for online fitness classes

Benefits of Online Fitness:

- Enhanced Cardiovascular Health
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- Increased Strength and Endurance
- Greater Range of Motion, Stress Relief

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

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

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

Vickie Lincks
Program Manager, Sports and Recreation
Paralyzed Veterans of America
202-416-7654
VickieL@pva.org

Northeast Passage Veteran Recreation

We strive to create an open and welcoming environment for Veterans in all of our programs. Veterans and Active Duty Service Members from all eras and of all ability levels are encouraged to participate in this program. Most options are provided at no cost to Veterans & Members of the Armed Forces through funding from the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, a partnership with Project Healing Waters Fly Fishing, Operation Hat Trick and local organizations.

Join Northeast Passage for any of our regularly scheduled Adaptive Sports & Recreation events or check out one of our competitive teams in sled hockey, wheelchair rugby, wheelchair lacrosse or power soccer.

We also have a consistent offering of Veteran specific recreation events throughout the year. Join us, and other local Veterans, for group outings that shift with the seasons.

PICKLEBALL – Exeter, NH

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There is no cost for these events.

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

This is a sampling of the programs Northeast Passage offers to Veterans:

- Cycling
- Saltwater and freshwater fishing
- Fly Fishing/Tying
- Indoor rock climbing
- Wood carving and art
- Water skiing
- Kayaking & Paddleboarding
- Archery
- Bowling
- Air Riflery

Find out more at nepassage.org/veteran-recreation or scan the QR code below



INDOOR ARCHERY – Rochester, NH

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

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

Due to high demand and limited space, interested participants can register for three dates and waitlist the remaining dates. Fee: \$20.00 per session

Service Officers Report

by Michael Snape,
Senior National Service Officer

Hello NEPVA, I hope everyone is enjoying this shift towards colder weather as the holiday season is quickly arriving. I wanted to write an article to discuss recent changes to the way that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) will be processing Automobile Adaptive Equipment(AAE). This article will be the first in a series regarding the new interpretation for AAE.

For the last 23 years, VHA handbook 1173.4 provided the guidelines for Automobile Adaptive Equipment (AAE). On July 17, 2024, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) implemented title 38 part 17 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Automotive Equipment and Adaptive Driver Training.

Specifically, the VA implemented of 38 CFR 17.156-17.158. With the implementation of the new AAE rule, the VHA handbook has been rescinded and the rule was placed into effect October 1st, 2024. The AAE rule made some changes which may impact eligible veterans.

Some of the major changes of the AAE rule are;

- 1.) A change to the 2 vehicles in a 4-year period [limitations of Assistance],
- 2.) establishment of the VA Adaptive Equipment Schedule for Automobile and other Conveyances, and
- 3.) a change in the amount of depreciation of used adaptive equipment.

In this first article, I would like to discuss the change implemented to the 2 vehicles in a 4-year period. This change can be found in 38 CFR 17.158 "Limitations of Assistance"

38 CFR 17.158 regulates the limitations of assistance to the VA. Many of our eligible veterans are familiar with the historic interpretation from the VHA handbook. However,

the new rule changes the interpretation of the 2 vehicles in a 4-year period. Previously, veterans were allowed to have 2 vehicles with adaptations on their record. If they were no longer in possession of the vehicle, and they were eligible for an additional adaptation, they were able to adapt another vehicle, as long as they met the 2-vehicles in a 4-year period. So, what is the new interpretation? Now, unless there is a circumstance that is "beyond the control

It is our intention to provide as much information as possible regarding these new changes. Since, this has only recently been implemented, it is our hope that this article provides some of the necessary information to prevent future issues with processing Automobile Adaptive Equipment(AAE).

of the veteran", vehicles with VA provided adaptive equipment must stay on the veteran's record for the entirety of the 4-year period. The VA defines "beyond the control of the veteran" as: "where the automobile other conveyance was lost due to fire, theft, accident, or court action; when repairs are so costly as to be prohibitive; or a different automobile or other conveyance is required due to a change in the eligible person's physical condition".

What does this new interpretation mean for veteran's?

Unless an extenuating circumstance occurs such as the above listed circumstances, the vehicle MUST remain on the veteran's record the entirety of that 4-year period. For example, if a vehicle with adaptive equipment is approved on 11/10/2024 and added to the veteran's record, that vehicle will remain on the record until 11/10/2028. **The VA will NOT approve trade-ins and dispositions for vehicles of record unless there is a circumstance beyond the veteran's control.** This means that If you have two vehicles on record with adaptive equipment, the vehicles cannot be traded in or otherwise disposed of in order to obtain additional adaptive equipment, if the 4-year period is not met.

I know that this may be a change for many chapter members accustomed to the previous interpretation. It is our intention to provide as much information as possible re-

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garding these new changes. Since, this has only recently been implemented, it is our hope that this article provides some of the necessary information to prevent future issues with AAE. Although this article discusses some changes regarding the limitations of assistance, there are other changes implemented that we plan to discuss in future articles.

If you or someone you know have questions regarding the new rule for adaptive equipment, please contact your local PVA service officer.

Sincerely,

Zachary T. Nuetzel
National Service Officer
Paralyzed Veterans of America
West Roxbury/ Brockton
1400 VFW Parkway
Rm. AG-60
West Roxbury, MA 02132
(O) 202-416-1075
(F) 212-807-4047

...get to know your PVA service officer as they can help you navigate through the questions you may have on disability ratings and navigating the VA system.

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PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA – REGIONAL NATIONAL SERVICE OFFICERS

BOSTON VA REGIONAL OFFICE

Joseph E. Badzmierowski
Director of Field Services
J.F.K. Federal Building - Room - 1575 C
BOSTON, MA 02203
phone: (617) 303-1395
fax: (617) 303-1396

WEST ROXBURY/BROCKTON VAMC

Zachary T. Nuetzel
1400 VFW Parkway, Room AG 60
West Roxbury, MA 02132
West Roxbury phone: (857) 203-6091
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TOGAS, VARO, I VA CENTER

Michael Snape, National Service Officer III
Bldg. 248, Room 112
Augusta, ME 04330
phone: (207) 621-7394
fax: (207) 621-4829
Serving Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont

BRONX SCI

Amauris Polanco, National Service Officer III
Paralyzed Veterans of America
James J. Peters VAMC
130 West Kingsbridge Rd., Room 1D-52A
Bronx, NY 10468
phone: (718) 584-9000 ext. 6272

MANHATTAN

Daisy Lozada, Senior Administrative Assistant
Paralyzed Veterans of America
201 Varick St., Room 4W59.50
New York, NY 10014
phone: (212) 807-3114.
Serving New York, New Jersey and Connecticut

SYRACUSE VAMC

Charlie Tocci, East-North Area Manager
800 Irving Ave., Room C419
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FY25 EVENT SCHEDULE

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



December 2024

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

January 2025

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

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

March 2025

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

April 2025

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

May 2025

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

June 2025

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

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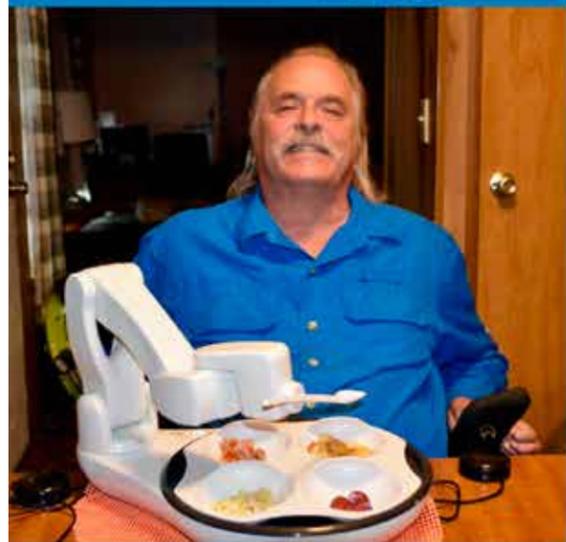


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Veterans Day

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As we look to the future, let us rededicate ourselves to advocating for the rights, care, and opportunities that all veterans deserve. Together, we can ensure that every veteran, no matter their circumstance, can live with the dignity, respect, and independence they have earned.

Thank you for your service. We are grateful for your sacrifice and commitment, and we will continue to support you today and every day.



Indego® Gets Paralyzed Veterans Walking Again

NEW VA Program offers eligible veterans an Indego® exoskeleton at NO COST!



What's the Indego exoskeleton?

It's an FDA-approved robotic device that enables spinal cord injury patients (level T3-L5) to walk again.

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Contact us today to find out if you are eligible to receive an Indego exoskeleton at no cost.

Phone: 844-846-3346
Email: support.indego@parker.com



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

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

Email: info@pvanewengland.org

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



Paralyzed Veterans of America

New England Chapter

*Happy Thanksgiving
to all or Members, Volunteers
and Friends*

