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PERFORMER PROFILE

James Sterrett-Bryant Living the 'Impossible Dream'

James Sterrett-Bryant, a 65-year-old Air Force veteran from Palmdale, Calif., is an award-winning vocalist who has overcome numerous challenges to attend the 2007 National Veterans Creative Arts Festival in St. Louis, Mo. With a melodic baritone voice that has serenaded audiences all over the country, including the Kennedy Center last October, Sterrett-Bryant remains humble about his impressive talents and appreciates the opportunity to share them with the communities hosting this annual national program for America's veterans.

Sterrett-Bryant has competed nationally in the Creative Arts Festival seven times, earning an invitation to attend each time. He believes that the Festival program helps him with his confidence and self-esteem and forces him to grow as an artist – all while meeting new friends in an enjoyable environment. "In addition to the challenge of improving myself each year, the Festival is a great way to reconnect with my fellow veterans," he said. "Vocal music is definitely therapeutic and eases stress."

This year, Sterrett-Bryant won first place in the national music competition, in the vocal solo (Broadway) and vocal solo (pop) categories. At the Festival, he will perform "Impossible Dream" from *Man of La Mancha*.

Joining the Air Force in his early twenties, Sterrett-Bryant served from 1964–1968, working in aircraft control and warning. A serious automobile accident in 1983 resulted in a number of physical challenges, including incomplete quadriplegia, the inability to walk or stand for long periods of time, partial paralysis to his stomach muscles and diaphragm, and partial paralysis to the left side of his larynx. Told that the injuries would leave him totally dependent for the rest of his life, he thought he had lost a life-long gift in vocal music. Singing was a significant and rewarding pursuit prior to his paralyzing accident, so the nature of his disability was especially discouraging.

With encouragement from his VA therapist at the medical facility in Sepulveda, Calif., as well as his vocal coach and the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, Sterrett-Bryant learned that returning to his musical roots was actually therapeutic. "The art of singing has a healing energy," he said. "In my case, singing has been cathartic." In a very real sense, singing became Sterrett-Bryant's therapy, bringing improved flexibility and function to his larynx and enabling him to control and regulate his breathing. For James Sterrett-Bryant, singing has proven to be a miracle, first as a therapy and second in restoring a musical gift he thought had been lost forever.