



**Department of
Veterans Affairs**

Office of Public Affairs
Media Relations

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News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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National Veterans Golden Age Games Coming to Fresno Area

WASHINGTON – More than 500 "golden age" veterans are registered to participate in the nation's largest sporting event for senior military veterans.

The 18th National Veterans Golden Age Games, a national sports and recreational competition sponsored by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), will take place July 18-23 in Fresno, Calif.

Events at the games are open to all U.S. military veterans age 55 or older who are receiving care at any VA medical facility. Hosted by VA's Central California Health Care System, the games have competition in swimming, bicycling, horseshoes, bowling, croquet and a pentathlon (softball hit, discus, shot put, basketball free throw and air guns).

"Like other Americans working to improve their quality of life through increased physical activity, these men and women have their own fountain of youth," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi. "The National Veterans Golden Age Games bring together veterans who landed at Normandy, POWs from Korea and Purple Heart recipients from Vietnam. Anyone who has ever attended the games and seen the esprit de corps among the veterans knows this event is an important part of their lives."

The athletes compete in ambulatory, wheelchair and visually-impaired divisions in specific age groups. Although most are veterans of World War II and the Korean War, increasing numbers of Vietnam-era veterans are participating in this annual nationwide competition.

Joining long-term co-sponsors VA and the Veterans of Foreign Wars for the first time as a co-sponsor is Veterans Canteen Service (VCS).

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"Veterans Canteen Service is proud to be one of the sponsors of the National Veterans Golden Age Games. These competitors reflect the courage, commitment and determination they demonstrated during their military service," said Jim Donahoe, VCS national director.

"The veterans who participate in the games send a clear message that exercise, fitness and a competitive spirit can help to defy the negative effects of age, injury or illness," said Edward S. Banas Sr., commander-in-chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. "These games provide inspiration to countless Americans who seek to live a healthy and active life."

The event begins with a gala opening ceremony at 7 p.m. on Sunday, July 18, in the exhibit hall of the Fresno Convention Center. Festivities include a musical salute to veterans by singer Lee Greenwood, a color guard, a parade of flags from each participating state and a ceremonial lighting of the torch.

The first events – golf and shuffleboard – begin on Monday, July 19, at 8 a.m.

For the first time this year, the National Veterans Golden Age Games will serve as a qualifier for the National Senior Olympics, to be held June 3-8, 2005, in Pittsburgh. The National Senior Olympics is a community-based member of the United States Olympic Committee and recognizes senior U.S. athletes in several age-groups.

Ken Peterson, a 62-year-old Army veteran and multi-year competitor in the games from Toledo, Ohio, has overcome three bouts with cancer, undergoing both radiation and chemotherapy treatments. Peterson believes that staying active and involved with sports helped his recovery. "It saved my life," he said. "Being active helps you both physically and emotionally."

A leader in geriatric care, VA offers a spectrum of health care services to veterans. Nearly 65,000 veterans will receive long-term care this year through inpatient VA or state veterans home programs. More than 90 percent of VA's medical centers also provide non-institutional long-term care.

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Beginning July 23, news releases on individual competitors, photos and event results listed by name and state will be available on the Golden Age Games' Web site under "Athlete Information." For this and other information about the National Veterans Golden Age Games, visit VA's Web site at www.va.gov/vetevent/gag/2004/default.cfm.

Media Inquiries:

During the games from July 18-23 -- the National Veterans Golden Age Games media center at (559) 498-5503.

Before July 18 or after July 23 -- :

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