



SOONER SPIRIT



A Daily Publication of the 2005 19th National Veterans Golden Age Games

Special Edition

George Ganji Inspiration Award

Since 1990, one veteran has been selected each year as the “most inspirational” competitor at the National Veterans Golden Age Games. That veteran exhibits the qualities of sportsmanship, fitness and competitive skill. The selection is never an easy one, but this year’s recipient fits the mold just perfectly.

“I feel pretty good for being 85,” said Chester Golembiewski, competitor #105 from Largo, Fla. “I don’t feel like I’m 85 and I don’t think I look like I’m 85. I feel like I’m really only around 62!”

A member of the Bay Pines VA Medical Center’s Golden Age Team, this competitor does have a wry sense of humor, but he is also a true inspiration to us all. Competing in the National Veterans Golden Age Games for the third time, Golembiewski clearly loves it. “I’ve met a lot of people and I’ve had so much fun,” he said. “I can’t wait for the Games to come around every year, and I hope I can keep on competing until I’m 150 years old! Then, maybe I’ll come away with all of the medals,” he laughed.

He may be 85, but this veteran has not let age or physical challenges stop him in any way. Competing this week in golf, bowling and shuffleboard, Golembiewski added two new gold medals to his growing collection from the Games. That brings his grand total to seven medals from the three Games in which he has competed. But winning medals is really not the reason this veteran comes to the Games. “I’m here because I want to be here,” he said. “I look forward to competing, but you don’t have to win to have fun. It’s important just to be here, win or lose.”

A veteran of the U.S. Army, Golembiewski served from 1941-1945 as a gunner in the field artillery in both Australia and New Guinea during WWII. Later, he worked for 41 years as a mailer for the Chicago Tribune until his retirement in 1982. In 1985, macular degeneration was detected, leaving him with no central vision.



Drew Delmore, Bay Pine coach, and Chester Golembiewski, 2005 George Ganji Award winner

“I was watching him on the golf course at the beginning of the week,” said Dewayne Vaughan, Director of the Golden Age Games. “Despite the fact that he’s playing a game that is usually reserved for sighted people, he took the initiative to tee up the ball, he did not waver, he got down on his hands and knees to check the yard markers, and then he hit the ball 83 yards right onto the green – even though he could only really see in its general direction.” Vaughn was moved by what he saw. “I watched him play and interact with others. We all have

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Golembiewski shows off his swing during the golf competition this week.

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bad days sometimes, but this veteran demonstrates how they can always get better and then turn into good days. His ability to overcome challenges is amazing.”

Golembiewski’s coach, Drew Delmore, agrees. “Chester is very independent and has a really positive outlook. “He knows a lot of people at the Games, and a lot of people also know him,” he said. “He is very much an inspiration to everyone.”

Sports are nothing new to this spry and very fit competitor, who played golf, baseball, tennis and touch football in his younger years. Now, he continues to play golf every week, competes in VA’s annual Tee Tournament for visually impaired golfers, and has also participated at the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic several times. “I skied there and also managed to reach the top of the rock climbing wall in 35 seconds,” he says proudly.

“Coming to the Golden Age Games is like going to a picnic,” Golembiewski says. “You can really enjoy yourself, eat all the food you want and have all the fun you want. It’s really a great thing, and I applaud everyone who is here.” To everyone else, he says, “Don’t sit at home and watch TV. Come to the Golden Age Games!” – Come to Chester Golembiewski’s picnic!

Volunteer of the Year Award

The recipient of the Volunteer of the Year distinction came by way of “transportation!” Freida Moreland began her week in support of the 2005 Games by helping load competitors and luggage, and traveling approximately 180 miles from Bonham, Texas.

Her work didn’t end there. She has been seen throughout the week working for transportation where her work ethic and positive attitude made an early impression on Leroy Rex, Games transportation coordinator. “She hauled luggage when she didn’t have to and transported people to places long after her shifts ended,” said Rex. “We simply wouldn’t have made it without her.”



Freida Moreland, 2005 Volunteer of the Year



The Volunteer of the Year selection is a difficult one to make. Selecting one volunteer to honor from the more than 900 supporting this year’s Games was a tough task. However, Freida’s personality touched virtually every Games competitor and her willingness to begin and end each work day in service to others is a true inspiration.

Exceptional Coach of the Year

Each year, the VFW recognizes the efforts of one coach who goes above and beyond in support of participating veterans. This award is given to the coach who best exemplifies commitment and dedication to the veterans at the Games. This year’s award winner for the VFW’s Exceptional Coach is Christine Drake from the West Palm Beach VA Medical Center. Drake has been with VA for ten years, five years as a



Drake is pictured with her team from West Palm Beach VAMC.

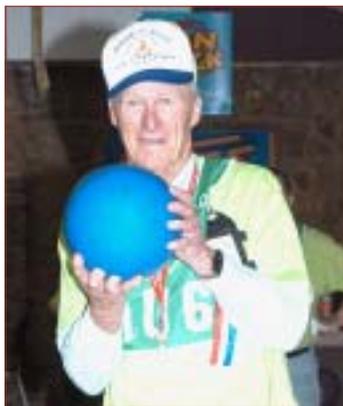
coach at the National Veterans Golden Age Games. Drake is an Air Force veteran who firmly believes that staying active and exercising is integral to good health. Drake is coaching for the “Warrior” Team. Her team believes she plays an important role in their physical health. “She’s unbelievable... always helpful, knowledgeable, and looking out for our best interests,” said Theodore Brown, a WWII Army veteran. “The Golden Age Games are an awesome form of therapy and they are a great time for all of us — coaches *and* competitors,” said Drake. “I’m motivated by watching my team’s happiness and joy, which helps keep health and wellness at the core of my life.”



Christine Drake the 2005 Exceptional Coach of the Year

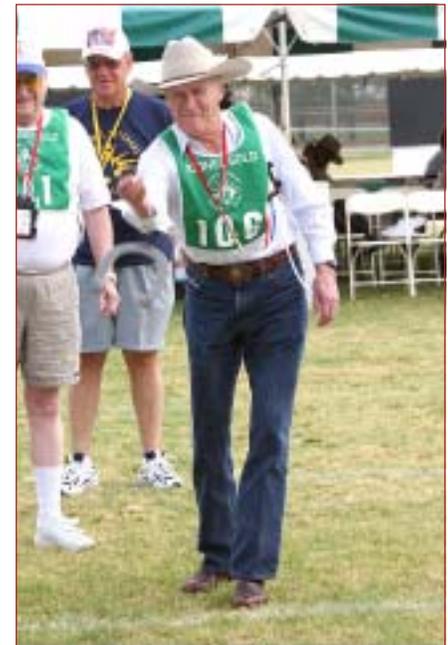
VCS Challenge Award

The VCS Challenge Award is presented to a first-time competitor who embodies the spirit of the National Veterans Golden Age Games. Marvin Hitchcock, 79, of Napa, Idaho, is a U.S. Navy veteran who learned about the event at local meetings of the Blinded Veterans Association. Although he says he was never that active in sports before, he competed this week in bowling, horseshoes, and shuffleboard, earning one bronze and two gold medals. Hitchcock said, “The Golden Age Games have been wonderful, and have allowed me to try some things I never thought of doing. I’ve talked to so many



Anticipating that strike.

nice people and met a lot of other veterans here – I’ve enjoyed everything!” He wants other veterans to come to the event, saying, “They need to make up their minds and just get out there and do it.” For Hitchcock, that the experience has been a very positive one. Now, he plans to start using his new bowling shoes more often when he gets back home to Idaho, so he can practice more often. Hitchcock receives care at the VA Medical Center in Boise, and is a member of the facility’s Golden Age team.



Marvin Hitchcock, the VCS Challenge Award winner

Bill Givens Award

The Bill Givens Award is presented each year to one local VA employee from the hosting VA Medical Center who has demonstrated an exceptional commitment to the National Veterans Golden Age Games. It goes to a person who embodies the qualities of dedication, a strong work ethic and an unquestionable dedication to the veterans who attend this event. Frank James, AC Mechanic at the Oklahoma City VA Medical Center, is just that person. As Chair of the Equipment/Site Set-up Committee, James worked from early morning until very late at night all week long, sometimes putting in 20-hour days to make sure that the venues were ready for competition. He and his team have been at



Frank James of the Oklahoma City VAMC, recipient of the 2005 Bill Givens Award



James and his equipment team

every event and venue, making sure that lanes or pits are marked, equipment is there, tents are set up and all is in place for the day's competitions. Before the Games even began, James worked tirelessly to be ready – working out details, preparing venue layouts, and making sure all of the equipment was in top shape. Despite sometimes unforeseen challenges such as quick weather changes, James was able to quickly make last minute adjustments to get the job done for our competitors. His efforts have been critical to the success of the 2005 National Veterans Golden Age Games in Norman.

Departure Information

On behalf of the transportation team, we hope that your stay with us has been enjoyable and filled with many memories to carry home with you. We appreciate your patience with the few delays that we encountered along the way.

We would like to give you a some general instructions to aid in your departure. Oklahoma City (OKC) Airport has only one security checkpoint due to construction. We are required to have you at the airport two hours before your plane is to leave. (Yes, that does mean a really early time for those leaving on early morning flights.)

The first two buses will start loading at 3:45 a.m., and will leave Walker Tower at 4:30 a.m. These buses are

for anyone with a flight that departs before 8:10 a.m. We need your help – please take your luggage out to the bus staging area (curbside)



before your scheduled bus departure time from Walker Tower.

Remember, we do need to factor in loading time and drive time so no one misses a flight. **Please check at the Transportation Table in Walker Tower for your scheduled bus departure for the airport.** Thank you for your help in making sure everyone leaves on time.

We have been honored to have served. you Have a safe journey home.