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Bay Reflections



A Daily Publication of the 20th National Veterans Golden Age Games

Special Edition

Charles Wynder – Winning the Greater Game of Life!

Ask any veteran competing about the spirit of the National Veterans Golden Age Games, and the word *camaraderie* is bound to come up. Time spent with fellow veterans may compel far more competitors to attend than the pursuit of golden medals. Few veterans exemplify the spirit of the 20th National Veterans Golden Age Games better than Charles A. Wynder of Williamsburg, Va., 2006 winner of the George Ganji Inspiration Award.

Wynder is leaving the event with several new medals, two won in swimming, a first-time event for this avid bicyclist. In his six years of Games competition, racking up medals is nothing new. For him, though, they are a nice complement to his greater achievements helping fellow veterans attend the annual event.

“Medals are important and I could talk about the number I’ve gotten,” Wynder said. “But when it comes to the Games, I realize the greatest benefit is to enhance the quality of my life and the lives of those I can help.”

Earlier this year, Wynder started a fund to raise money to cover Games participation costs for Gulf Coast veterans from areas ravaged by last year’s hurricanes. The 65-year-old retired Army colonel started the fund with \$500 of his own money, and then wrote letters to civic groups, individuals and veterans service organizations, eventually raising nearly \$3,000.

“He came to Voluntary Service and presented the idea. It was entirely his,” said Monica Adams, Team Hampton’s coach. “We thought it was an excellent idea. We are always so impressed with Mr. Wynder.”

Impressed, but not surprised. He set up a similar fund two years to help Team Hampton make the trip to the 2004 Games in Fresno.

“I truly admire him as someone who always looks beyond himself to help others,” said Sandi Dannenberg, co-coordinator for the 2006 Golden Age Games. “He has put the team as the priority in competing in these Games

for the past several years.”

For Wynder, trying to bring as many veterans as possible to the Games is as simple as anyone’s desire to gather the family. “The competition is only part of the experience,” he said. “You see people

you haven’t seen in a long time and it’s like seeing family. This is really one large family reunion each year for a lot of us, and I want as many of my family to make it as possible.”

Wynder knows personally how one veteran’s experience can lead to others finding their way to the Games as well. He was coaxed into the 2000 Golden Age Games by his friend and teammate, Clarence Braxton, after Braxton had been attending and winning at the event for three years. “I figured I had to try these Games out too, because I saw how happy Clarence was when he came back,” Wynder said. “I hope other veterans see my success and feel just as inspired to try.”

Of course, it wasn’t always easy, and Wynder maintains that it still never is. His first year in the bicycling competition, he decided to wing it and didn’t fare well at all. “I only managed to wear myself out that first year,” he chuckled. “I learned that I need to work at it and condition myself for these Games. I bought a bike and began riding, and I’ve been riding ever since.”

No matter how many medals he collects, Wynder’s true legacy is the way he inspires other veterans and extends



Charles Wynder, 2006 George Ganji Inspiration Award Recipient

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the Games’ spirit. “Whatever he does is for the whole team, not just himself,” Adams said. “He cheers everyone on, makes sure everybody has their shirts and schedules, even offering advice on how his teammates can do better. He has a nurturing spirit and he’s a real team leader.”

For Wynder, giving is a necessary ingredient, not just for competitive success but life as well. “In order to compete, you have to give something,” he said. “You give up your time to train for these events. You give up money to travel to each city. You give up some bad habits to stay in shape.

You give up a lot of things, but you get so much more in return in the form of new friends and ongoing relationships with old ones from all over the country. The quality of life these Games offer me is a real blessing, and I want to share that quality of life with many others. Hopefully, my performance can inspire them to take care of themselves and want to do better each year.”

What he hopes to pass on to other veterans as a life lesson stretches far beyond the field of competition. “My mes-

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VCS Challenge Award

Peter Vannucci, a 75-year-old Army veteran from Northport, N. Y., entered the National Veterans Golden Age Games knowing how to deal with competition. While the Korean War veteran is a rookie to the Golden Age Games, he has participated in the New York Senior Games before. His prowess and experience in athletics was demonstrated Tuesday when he took two golds in swimming, 25-meter backstroke and 50-meter freestyle. Earlier today, he took a silver in shot-put and a bronze in discus. However, Vannucci found much more than competition waiting for him at these Games. He found comfort and solidarity among his fellow veterans.

Vannucci is the winner of the 2006 VCS Challenge Spirit Award, presented each year to a first-time competitor

who best embodies the spirit of the Golden Age Games. While athletic accomplishment was certainly a factor that brought Vannucci the award, the medals are secondary this time to the exemplary example he sets as a competitor and veteran.



Peter Vannucci

“It is great to compete with other veterans because the fellowship I have felt here has added an entirely new dimension to competing for me,” Vannucci said. “I’ve made a lot of new friends at the Golden Age Games. I will definitely be back!”

Bill Givens Award



Tony Curling

This year, the Bill Givens Award is presented to two local VA employees who have demonstrated an exceptional commitment to the National Veterans Golden Age Games. Traditionally, this award goes to one person who embodies the qualities of dedication, a strong work ethic and an unquestionable dedication to the veterans who attend this event. Tony

Curling and Phyllis Anderson, co-chairs of the equipment/site set-up, and meet sub-committees, are such persons.

When the inventory was received, Curling made sure that Games’ equipment was sufficient and repairs made. Throughout the months that followed and all this week, he led the charge to ready all venue sites, working long hours to make certain events were set up and ready for the

competitions. Curling demonstrated his commitment to the program by also supporting transportation and other groups.

As co-chair of the meet sub-committee, Anderson worked tirelessly to ensure the competitive events run smoothly by training and assigning staff and volunteers to serve as event coordinators. Her commitment to the Games was evident from the manner in which the events were managed, providing venue site maps for each of the events and creating site maps for the ceremonies.



Phyllis Anderson

Their efforts have been critical to the success of the 2006 National Veterans Golden Age Games in Hampton, making their selections as this year’s recipients of the prestigious Givens Award extremely well-earned.

Coach of the Year Award

The Veterans of Foreign Wars has selected Kathy Kelley as top coach of the 2006 Golden Age Games.

Kelley, a recreation therapist at VA's Palo Alto Healthcare System in Livermore, Calif., was selected for her ability to lead, nurture, and exemplify the spirit of the Games.

"She's a sweetheart and a great coach," said teammate Bob Gilmore, a VFW member from Castro Valley, Calif., who's known Kelley for eight years. "She motivates everybody to do their very best and help each other."

Motivation is what kept her and her team going for the past 14 Golden Age Games. The VFW Department of California donates \$40,000 annu-

ally to help offset the transportation costs of the entire state contingent, regardless of whether they are VFW members. With 180 Californians participating in this year's Games, including 17 from Livermore, more money was still needed.

"Our fundraising efforts basically start as soon as the Games end," said Kelley, whose team raised more than \$35,000 this year through individual sponsorships and dinners.

With fundraising bonding the team toward a financial goal, she also melds ambulatory with wheelchair teammates to further their responsibility and allegiance to the team, even though everyone competes in individual events.

She finds it amazing to watch the veterans grow from being a team of individuals to a team that works as one toward a common goal.

"That's the carrot at the end of the stick," she said.



Top coach Kathy Kelley with team member Coert Breuker of Lodi, Calif.

Outstanding Volunteer Award



Top volunteer Cliff Gregory, right, with transportation supervisor Steve Blackwell.

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driver, one who has been so dependable that his supervisor just can't praise him enough.

"He's just an unbelievable workhorse," said Games transportation supervisor Steve Blackwell, the information security officer for the Hampton VA Medical Center in his daily life. "I know he must have worked 20 hours last weekend

Taking the Veterans of Foreign Wars top volunteer award for the 2006 Golden Age Games is Cliff Gregory of Bonham, Texas.

Mentioned in Thursday's **Bay Reflections** newsletter, Gregory is a retired truck driver and former employee of the VA North Texas Healthcare System, who lost a lung to cancer surgery last year and had a heart attack two years ago.

That hasn't stopped him from volunteering at his fourth Golden Age Games as a wheelchair bus

when everyone was arriving in town, but no matter the time or location, Cliff was there, ready for duty. He's been an absolute gift."

Gregory's wife, Kathy, is the assistant chief of voluntary service for the Bonham VA facility and also a VFW Ladies Auxiliary member. Here in Hampton as a national official, she said her husband has wanted to help other people throughout their 31 years of marriage.

Her husband is still shy from the attention Thursday's photo and write-up brought, but he did say that everyone is working hard to help make these Games a success.

"It's very gratifying to help our veterans," he said, "because where would this country be without them?"

2007 Games Ride into Houston

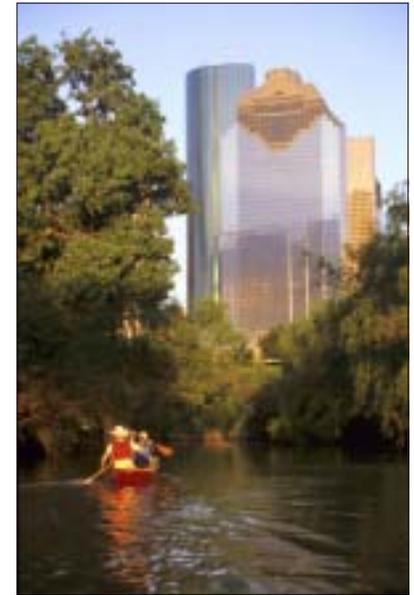
The 21st National Veterans Golden Age Games will be held next year in Houston, Texas, August 27 - 31. The staff of the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center are already busy preparing to give you a memorable experience as host of next year's Games.

"Houston is a unique and special place to host the Games because it captures the spirit of Texas with its exciting blend of vibrant cultures, wide variety of popular sports activities, and many great local restaurants and attractions," said Edgar L. Tucker, medical center director.

While you are in Houston, take a tour of NASA at Space Center Houston or explore the world's oceans from inside Moody Gardens' 12-story Aquarium Pyramid. Watch the sailboats and enjoy the rides and games at Kemah Boardwalk. Visit the San Jacinto Battleground Complex, where Texas won its independence from Mexico, stroll the beaches of Galveston, challenge yourself on one of the many golf courses or indulge in one of more than 11,000 restaurants.

While Houston's warm climate encourages year-round recreation participants in next year's Games will enjoy competing in indoor, air-conditioned venues such as the George R. Brown Convention Center.

The hotel is located near the downtown entertainment district, a few blocks from Minute Maid Park (where the 2005 National League champion Houston Astros play) and the downtown aquarium, an underwater dining and entertainment adventure. Other downtown features are a white tiger exhibit, a Ferris wheel, boardwalk and beautiful dancing fountains.



Canoeing down Buffalo Bayou in downtown Houston.

"The opportunity to provide a forum for veterans to compete and enjoy the camaraderie gained throughout the week is what we're looking forward to most," said Tucker. "This is just another chance for us to give back to our Nation's veterans for all that they have given."

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sage is you *can* if you think you can," he said. "It's not whether we win or lose, but how we play the game, or more important, that we came to play the game. Everybody is a winner the moment they decide to compete. That decision alone sets each of us apart as people with purpose. I often like to say that living is a constant process of deciding what you are going to do. The choices lie between laying back and fading away or getting up and doing something to improve. At the Games, each of us

chose that second path. We're all winning the greater game of life because of it."

Charles Wynder has already turned his attention to next year's Games in Houston, noting that the portion of the Katrina fund that was not used this year will go toward helping his teammates travel to Texas in 2007. "It's a tremendous experience being around all of these veterans that are still making something of themselves after years out of the military," he said. "Why wouldn't I want to do that and help as many of them as I can to do the same?"



Transportation Departure Information

On behalf of the Transportation Team, we hope your stay with us has been enjoyable and you will return home with many lasting memories. We appreciate your patience with the delays we encountered along the way.

There will be six large buses running continuously to and from the airports. You must be at the bus staging area at the Holiday Inn three hours before your flight departs, and at the airport two hours before you plane leaves. The first buses start loading at 3:30 a.m. and will leave the bus staging area in front of the Holiday Inn at 4 a.m.

If you are staying at any hotel other than the Holiday Inn and still need to make arrangements to get to the airport, call (757) 838-0200, ext. 6600 immediately.

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