

⊗ THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE 2008 NATIONAL VETERANS GOLDEN AGE GAMES ⊗

2008 George Gangi Award Winner

You can't help but notice Ira Walton when he walks into a room. He isn't tall, and he isn't all that muscular. What you see is the look of a man who has been around – a man who has seen and experienced many things in his life. His gait is slow and purposeful, but it is most definitely not to be underestimated. His black baseball cap is decorated with ribbons and pins and it casts a slight shadow over his pale blue eyes. In those eyes you can see a million stories waiting to be told.

Walton, 85, of Waco, Texas, is the 2008 National Veterans Golden Age Games George Gangi Inspiration Award winner. Each year, this special award is given to one veteran who clearly demonstrates physical fitness, sportsmanship and competitive skill. Carlos Merrell, one of Walton's coaches, clearly understands why Walton is the perfect choice as this year's winner. "Ira is a great competitor," said Merrell. "Since I met him four years ago, he has been one of the most constant participants I've seen, and one of the highest functioning 85 year olds I know." Of course, Walton gives back kudos to his coaches, too, Merrell and Jessica Dawson. "My coach-



Ira Walton of Waco, Texas makes his move during the checkers event. "Ira is a great competitor" says his coach, Carlos Merrell.

es are number one," he said with a thumbs-up sign.

In 1990, Walton attended his first Golden Age Games and has not missed one yet. "I thought the first time was going to be some fly-by-night operation, but it was very impressive," Walton remembers. The Opening Ceremony was much more than I thought it would be." Now, in his 19th year of competition,

Walton has done very well. "I have 45 gold medals for sure," he said. This week, he added three more to his collection, in checkers, horseshoes and table tennis.

Drafted into the Army in 1943, Walton served in World War II, Korea, and two tours of Vietnam. He was awarded an Army Accommodation Medal and a Bronze Star for Meritorious Achievement in Ground

...continued on back page



Marine Volunteer of the Year Knows How to Make It Happen

Volunteers and sponsors are vital to the National Veterans Golden Age Games, and when one merges with the other, there can be fantastic results. Diana Ward, the VA Voluntary Services (VAVS) representative of the Marine Corps League at the Indianapolis VA Medical Center, is proof positive. With more than 15 years of volunteering and over 10,200 hours of service, this Marine Corps veteran knows plenty about what it takes to make good things happen. Ward, along with co-volunteers Treva Blair, Mildred Oberhardt, Barbara Letts, Jesus Quintanna and others, raised funds for the 2008 Golden Age Games for two years, bringing nearly \$21,000 to the table and putting the Richard L. Roudebush VA Medical Center's VAVS on the list of national sponsors.

It takes a lot of bake sales to raise that kind of money. Actually, the volunteers set up shop on a weekly basis (sometimes more frequently) and sold many things, including apparel, jewelry, blankets, cards, flowers and other items.

Ward didn't stop there, though. She took her efforts even further, spearheading fundraisers for the event with her Marine Corps League (#089). Through that organization, she was able to raise another \$10,000 for the Games, which put them on the list of national sponsors as well. She also took on the responsibility of raising

...continued on back page



Diana Ward, a retired Marine, raised nearly \$21,000 over the course of two years for the 2008 National Veterans Golden Age Games.

Veterans Canteen Service Challenge Award Winner - Donna Edwards



Donna Edwards exhibits the sportsmanship and quality of character that makes the Games so special and unique.

Since 2004, the Veterans Canteen Service Challenge Award has been given to one National Veterans Golden Age Games competitor who is a first-time participant and exhibits the qualities of sportsmanship and strength of character, clearly demonstrating the overall spirit of these Games. This year's winner is Donna Edwards, 57, from right here in Indianapolis.

Edwards, 57, is an Air Force veteran who has been very excited about attending her first National Veterans Golden Age Games, competing this week in both the croquet and bowling events. "My favorite event is bowling," she said. "It's something I can do with my grandchildren." That special practice time with her grandchildren has clearly paid off, earning Edwards a bronze medal in bowling.

"The Veterans Canteen Service is pleased and honored to present our VCS Challenge Award to Donna Edwards," said Marilyn Iverson, Director of VCS. "This award is given to a first-time participant who displays drive, determination and is inspirational to others in the Games." Donna Edwards is one veteran who makes the grade.

...continued on back page

2008 Bill Givens Award Winner - Linda Sparks

Each year, the Bill Givens Award is given to a member of the local organizing committee who has demonstrated an exceptional commitment to the National Veterans Golden Age Games, who embodies the qualities of dedication, a strong work ethic and an unquestionable commitment to the veteran competitors. Unfailingly, Linda Sparks has met these criteria.

She has been involved with the 22nd National Veterans Golden Age Games since last year when it was still in its early planning stages, and she quickly became an indispensable member of the local committee. Although she carries a heavy workload at a budget analyst at the medical center, she will always give our veterans a helping hand whenever one is needed.

“Linda has spent relentless hours keeping all the fine details in line, from ensuring that the Games’ financial house is in order to shepherding all the contracts for the event,” said Paul Pesagno, this year’s chair of the committee for finances and meal cards. “The last few weeks she has worked until 10 and 11 p.m., as well as on weekends, just to make sure we get everything done right for the competitors.”

In addition to her role in the administration sector at the Games, she has also volunteered with the ceremonies committee, using her excellent organization skills to pull off some very impressive activities at these “events within an event.” The efforts of Linda Sparks have been critical to the successful accomplishment of these impressive activities.



Linda Sparks is the 2008 Bill Givens Award winner.

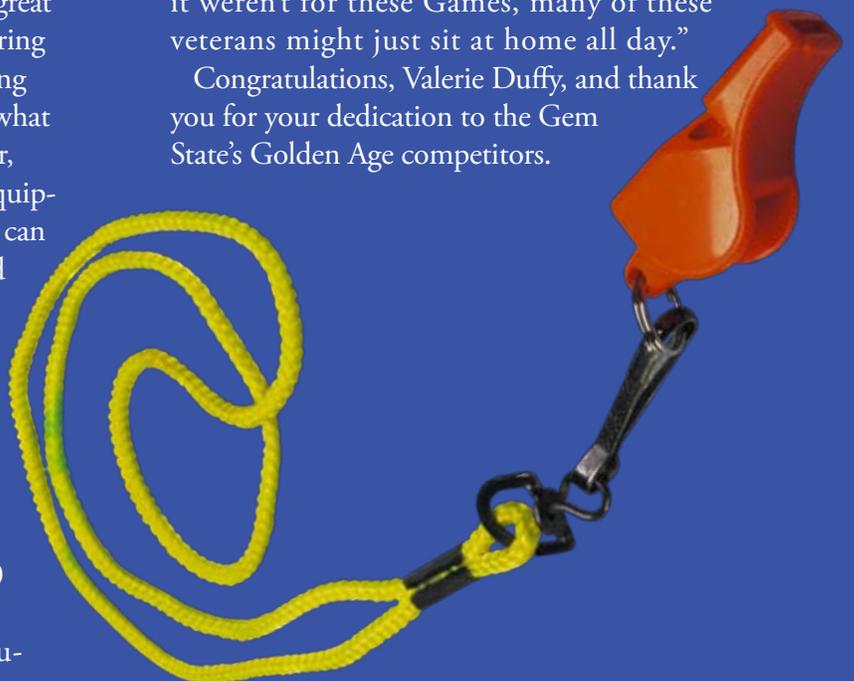
Congratulations Valerie Duffy - Coach of the Year

Valerie Duffy of Boise, Idaho, is the 2008 National Veterans Golden Age Games’ Coach of the Year. Duffy was nominated by Dewayne Vaughan, Director of the Games. Vaughan said that Duffy has attended the Games for many years and describes her as “a truly great coach with a positive attitude. She is very caring and supportive of her veterans, always keeping up with all of them to make sure they have what they need.” He went on to note that last year, Duffy even went so far as to loan her own equipment to the event. “Her veterans know they can always count on her to go above and beyond for them,” he added.

This year, Duffy, a Visual Impairment Service Coordinator at the Boise VA Medical Center, is the coach for thirteen veterans from Idaho who call themselves “the Spudinator.” They work together every year to raise funds to attend the Games, collecting \$16,000 among them for this year’s event. Because eight of her team members are visu-

ally impaired, Duffy works tirelessly during the Games to make sure that everything is in place for her team members to compete. “Visual impairment can present so many challenges on a daily basis,” Duffy said. “If it weren’t for these Games, many of these veterans might just sit at home all day.”

Congratulations, Valerie Duffy, and thank you for your dedication to the Gem State’s Golden Age competitors.



Gangi Award Winner ...continued from front page

Operations. During World War II, Walton was station in Vienna, Austria, for over three years. The time spent in Vienna would leave an indelible mark on Walton. After retiring from the Army in, 1974, Walton began working at the VA Regional Office in Waco, Texas, for 14 years as a unit chief and development officer.

His days back home are filled with his two favorite sports: table tennis and checkers. His prowess at both is undoubtedly attributed to his daily routine. "I play table tennis five days a week and checkers every Wednesday," Walton said. "It keeps me sharp." When he isn't playing one or the other, he's driving his truck to go play and encourage his fellow veterans. "He always practices with the other guys," said Merrell. "He goes that extra mile to help them get better."

Like most participates in the Games, winning medals isn't the most important thing to Walton. Like many competitors, Walton finds the camaraderie one of his favorite aspects of the Golden Age Games. "It's the excitement of see-



Drafted into the Army in 1943, Walton served in World War II, Korea, and two tours of Vietnam. He retired in 1974 and then worked for VA for 14 years.

ing new places every time and meeting up with friends you met the year before," he said. "We keep in touch throughout the year and when we compete, we're battling to win – but we're friends when it's over."

One thing Ira Walton knows for sure is that the Games are good for person and he promotes the benefits whenever he possibly can. "The Games encourage a person to improve their health. Participate only

one time and you are caught – hook, line and sinker."

Since 1990, one participant has been chosen each year for being the "Most Inspirational" person to compete in the Games. In 1995, the name of this award was changed to the "George Gangi Inspiration Award," in honor of the late George Gangi, a participant at the Games in Dallas that year.

Volunteer of the Year ...continued from page 2

funds for the Games through the Women Marines Association and raised another \$5,000, making the gold sponsors list.

Ward is not the only person in her family with a giving spirit. Her husband, Hazen, another Marine Corps veteran, also volunteers regularly. With over 20 years of volunteer service, he has logged more than 5,000 hours.

"Volunteering is the best job you'll never get paid to do," said Sandi Lyle, chairman of volunteers at the American Red Cross who has spent much of the week in the Games Volunteer office. "A good volunteer is some-

one who is willing to come in, be flexible, and do what needs to be done." Those are just the qualities required to be honored as the Help Hospitalized Veterans Volunteer of the Year.

This year, because of her undying dedication, relentless fundraising efforts and leadership, this special award goes to Diana Ward. "We had so many great people to choose from," said Michael Wright, Volunteer Chairman for the 2008 Games. "Diana just put in so much time and effort in leading these fundraisers. It really made her stand out and she truly deserves the award this year."

VCS Award

...continued from page 2

Edwards was a communications specialist in the Air Force from 1972-74. She signed up to compete this week with her husband Freddie, who also participated.

This year, with more than 250 first-time participants, the competition was especially fierce. With so many eligible, it's truly an honor to be chosen. Donna Edwards was one of 54 women veterans competing in Indianapolis this week.