

Special Edition

Thirteen years of competition at its best!



Gary Pearson, 2004 Spirit of the Games Recipient

By Jenny Shafer Tankersley
PAO/Exec. Asst. to Director
Hampton VAMC

Amid the patriotic red, white and blue decorations, the outpouring of dedication from the St. Louis VA Medical Center, PVA Gateway Chapter and the local community, and the generous support of the sponsors of this year's National Veterans Wheelchair Games, another sentiment surfaces. Some call it magic. Some call it luck. But for Gary Pearson, a 49-year-old Coast Guard veteran from Seattle, Wash., either term works for this year's Spirit of the Games Award recipient.

For many, the number 13 is considered unlucky, kind of like walking under a

ladder. Not so for Gary Pearson. He considers this, his thirteenth competition in the Wheelchair Games, one of his best years ever.

"It started off with a gold medal in 9-ball," said Pearson. For him, it was the most competitive 9-ball event since he began competing in the Games. When asked how he knew it was going to be a great year for his 9-ball game, he enthusiastically responded with a huge smile, "I could tell after the first few shots that my game was 'spot-on,'" a term used by his British competitor, Michael J. Marten.

Bob Crowe, a national softball official, nominated Pearson. "I had the pleasure of officiating (his) gold run to the 9-ball championship," Crowe said. "Not only did he possess knowledge of the rules, etiquette and command of the game, he was sincere and fair in sharing his knowledge with his fellow competitors. He has also shown interest in his fellow veterans' competition – even if he was not involved in the sport. I nominate him not only for his skill level, but for his perseverance and commitment to his fellow veterans."

"I'm competing in my favorite events this year, quad rugby, slalom and 9-ball," Pearson said. He competed in last night's slalom event and the quad

rugby finals earlier today. This type of competition, however, isn't entirely new to Pearson, whose first encounter with wheelchair competition was with the former National Wheelchair Athletic Association, where he won locally, regionally and then nationally. Later, he became involved with Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) and began his relationship with the Games. He is now a member of the PVA Northwest Chapter. "I look forward to coming to the Games each year," Pearson said. "I get to see old friends and meet new ones, and I've enjoyed the long lasting relationships that you make at the Games. It's good for the whole body, physically and mentally."

As he lauds the benefits of the Games, Pearson recalls the events that brought him to this point. A quadriplegic, he was injured in an automobile accident when the driver of a vehicle went to sleep at the wheel. "The Games' athletes all have something in common, and being in a chair isn't the most obvious factor – they love sports," he said. "Whether it's rugby, basketball, 9-ball or whatever, there is still the connection of sports. The other commonality is that whether you are newly injured or have been injured for decades, you're not alone. You don't stand out. It's a good way to get back into society and back into life."

Pearson, who receives health care services at the VA Puget Sound

See "Pearson," cont'd on page 2

Wheelchair Games 2004

“Pearson,” cont’d from page 1

Healthcare System in Seattle, reflects on what it was like when he was newly injured in the 1970s. “We were so limited back then. About the only opportunities for outings were to go to the mall or to a movie. It was difficult to find accommodations for those in wheelchairs. The bathrooms and sidewalks were not accessible for individuals in chairs,” Pearson said. “It’s great to see the progress that has been made.” He acknowledges that it hasn’t always been easy. “We’ve had to fight to become normal citizens again,” he said. Past and present efforts to make improvements in accessibility have paved the way for all Americans, but most particular, Pearson believes, for those who continue to face the ravages of combat – like our newest returning war veterans from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom.

This type of commitment and concern for others is yet another reason why

Gary Pearson was selected as the 19th recipient of this most prestigious award. As such, his name will be inscribed on a replica of the award that will be on display at the Department of Veterans Affairs Central Office in Washington, DC.

The Spirit of the Games Award is the most prestigious award given at the National Veterans Wheelchair Games. Created in 1987, the award recognizes the athlete who most epitomizes the qualities of a champion – athletic excellence, sportsmanship, and character. The Spirit of the Games Award is presented by Invacare Corporation, whose worldwide vision makes possible the design,



manufacturing and distribution of the best value in mobility products and medical equipment for people with disabilities and those requiring home health care.

It does look like the number 13 is a sign of luck for Gary Pearson – very good luck!



List of past Spirit of the Games Recipients

Year	Name	Hometown
2003*	Wayne Miller	Silver Spring, Md.
2002*	Ken Medieros	Taunton, Mass.
2001	Laura Schwanter	Elkins Park, Pa.
2000*	Larry Hughes	Columbia, Md.
1999	Ken Huber	Milan, Mich.
1998*	Gil Garcia	San Antonio, Texas
1997	Robert (“Pat”) Sapp	Rockwall, Texas
1996*	Holly Koester	Berea, Ohio
1995*	Penny Gillett	Fresno, Calif.
*	James Torres	Caguas, P.R.
1994*	Tim Davis	Paso Robles, Calif.
1993*	Hope Cooper	San Antonio, Texas
1992*	Kater Cornwell	Charlotte, N.C.
1991	Max Rhodes	Miami, Fla.
1990	Mike Trujillo	Huntington Beach, Calif.
1989	Jim Martinson	Puyallup, Wash.
1988	Ken Wright	Palo Alto, Calif.
1987	Russ Monroe	Davison, Mich.

* Present at the 2004 Games



We want to thank the following for sharing their stories with the Veterans History Project: Coleman Kearse, Bonnie Sampsell, Eudora Vincent, Enrique Lopez, Claudia Colleran, William White, Jim Benson, Enrique Cotto, Dwayne Bauer, Mark Arthur Lerman, Albert Reid, Jr., Kerry Conway, Terry Loggins, Wayne Muscato, Patricia Jaky Lovich and Claire E. Brou

Departure Information

Tomorrow, Games transportation resumes at all departure sites and ramps at 4 a.m.

Trans Express shuttles are available at the Renaissance Grand for \$15. They run every 25 minutes to the airport.

MetroLink is another option. MetroLink takes 35 minutes to get to the airport. Beginning at 5 a.m. it runs every thirty minutes until 9 a.m. After 9 a.m. it runs approximately every 15 minutes. The nearest pick-up location is 6th Street and Washington Avenue.



Plan on arriving at the airport two and a half hours prior to your flight.

Lost and Found

If you've lost anything this week, all remaining items will be taken to the airport where luggage is being picked up. If you have questions, ask a volunteer at the airport.

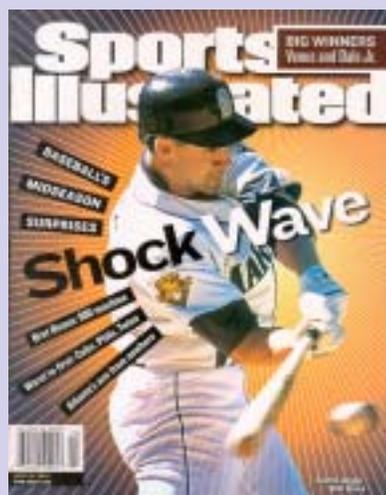
Catch the Spirit

25th National Veterans Wheelchair Games

Minneapolis, Minnesota

June 27 - July 1, 2005

The Minneapolis VA Medical Center and the Minnesota Chapter of the Paralyzed Veterans of America team are looking forward to seeing you next year in Minneapolis at the 25th National Veterans Wheelchair Games. The Minneapolis - St. Paul International Airport and the Mall of America are only minutes away from the Minneapolis Convention Center and the Hyatt and Hilton Hotels where you will be staying.



Sports Illustrated sent a photojournalist to cover the Games all this past week. Look for photo coverage of the 2004 National Veterans Wheelchair Games in an upcoming issue, in the next four to five weeks.

Thanks Sports Illustrated!

Thanks from Your Public Affairs Staff

Thank you for participating in this year's Games. The media center's goal has been to support you and highlight your stories throughout this week. We would like to thank you for your cooperation and teamwork.

Photography

As we scurried around the events, you allowed us to take your photo at all your competitive activities. As we edited and labeled these pictures, your patriotic clothing assisted with photo identification.

Newsletter

Thank you for giving your time, offering a quote, statement, or in some cases, an entire story. It was your input and support that made our newsletters something that we could be proud of as we delivered a fresh newsletter each morning.

Media Support

Media support had the privilege of connecting you with contacts here in St. Louis. Your achievements were highlighted on local and national television news, radio and newsprint, with more than 175 confirmed media placements to date.

Hometown News/Web

Our hometown news staff relayed stories to your local media contacts, and your news releases and photos should be on our Web site by Monday.

Your full-hearted dedication showed us all what can be



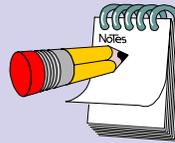
done when you stay focused, positive and live each day to its fullest.

We are excited about the 2005 National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Minnesota and we look forward to supporting you next year. This week's "Rolling on the River Review" newsletters and much more are available on our website www.wheelchairgames.org.

Good luck. We hope our paths cross again in the near future.

— Your Public Affairs Staff —

Attention Athletes!



Please check your hotel billing information tonight by viewing your charges on the menu on your television in your room. Ensuring your charges are accurate now will expedite your check-out process from the hotel.

Prepare Your Luggage for Airport Delivery

Use the Bright Yellow Tags!



To ensure your luggage arrives safely:

◆ Complete and attach a **yellow outgoing airport delivery tag** for *each* piece of luggage/equipment to be delivered to the **St. Louis Airport**. Luggage will be picked up outside your

hotel room door **beginning tonight at 9 p.m.** and concluding at **10:30 p.m.**

◆ Yellow delivery tags must include the **airline name, flight number and time of departure**. Once luggage has been delivered to the airport, volunteers will use this information to sort your luggage. Volunteers will be available at the airport to help locate your luggage and transfer it to the appropriate airline check-in counter.

◆ Your carry-on items and personal wheelchair will be transported with you to the airport.

◆ All handcycles and sports wheelchairs stored in the Convention Center

must also include a **yellow outgoing airline delivery tag**. UPS will deliver items directly to the airport. Cycles and chairs will be checked in on your flight after they clear airport security.

◆ Please remove and retain the **UPS number receipt** (located on the right side of the yellow delivery tag). You will use this receipt to identify your luggage at the St. Louis Airport.

◆ All **firearms**, including **air rifles**, must be carried in a **locked, hard-shelled carrying case**. These items must also be tagged with the **yellow outgoing airline delivery tag**.

Newsletter printing costs donated by Pfizer

