

National Veterans Wheelchair Games



Athlete Profile (National)

Wayne Miller – Always There for His Fellow Athletes!

Participants and spectators at the National Veterans Wheelchair Games can easily identify Wayne Miller's leadership, drive and competitive spirit. As the 2003 Spirit of the Games winner, Miller, now 55, personifies the best qualities of a wheelchair athlete. A combat-wounded Marine Corps veteran of Vietnam from Silver Spring, Md., Miller has competed in the annual event nearly every year since 1995.

The son of a combat-injured WWII veteran, Miller enlisted in the Marines when he was only 17. He turned 18 in boot camp, and was in a military hospital by his 19th birthday, after losing his left leg above the knee in Vietnam. The date was July 4, 1969.

On Independence Day these days, Miller displays his patriotic spirit by sporting red, white and blue from head to toe, often while competing at the National Veterans Wheelchair Games. "The Games give me the opportunity to meet my mentors and become one myself," he said. "It gives me strength and perseverance in life knowing others like me can have self-respect for our abilities. At the Games, we do not have to worry about impressing everyone else."

A supervisory social worker at VA's Vet Center in Silver Spring, Miller serves as a team leader and counsels returning war veterans, helping them deal with substance abuse, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, marital, family and employment problems. In addition to job-related service, Miller also spends considerable time in his community, teaching school children about Vietnam and disability issues. An excellent athlete, Miller competes in basketball, softball, swimming and field events, and returns from the Games with new medals each year. "He is a great competitor and an outstanding team player, always cheering on his teammates and offering encouragement," said one fellow athlete at the Games. "He helps the newer athletes with advice and tips, and his spirit and enthusiasm are always there."

Miller, a talented singer, has won several gold medals at the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, often performing for residents in area nursing homes and fellow veterans at the Wheelchair Games. He is especially proud of his rendition of "God Bless the USA," where he stands one-legged and salutes during the final stanza. An avid skier, he is also a frequent participant at the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic, and credits several fellow veterans who served as personal mentors and motivated him to compete and to ski. "So many top-class athletes serve as mentors at these events," Miller said. "I am motivated by these people and I want to do that for other participants. I don't know what I'd do without the ability to participate and to compete." This year, Miller rounded out his participation in VA's national events, competing in the National Veterans Golden Age Games in May. "I said when I reached 55 I would begin my senior years on a healthy note and hopefully continue until I can't compete any more," he said.

On July 4th and every other day, Wayne Miller displays his independence and his spirit, and is a constant inspiration to every American. "Participating in these events has taught me to overcome limitations and continue to challenge myself. It helps me cope with life's ups and downs. Competing promotes exercise, freedom, self-esteem and a 'can do' attitude. I have shared my personal experiences with other disabled veterans in the hopes of getting them involved with these events as well."