

National Veterans Wheelchair Games



Athlete Profile (National)

Holly Koester – It's been a long, good road.

Holly Koester is a 47-year-old Army veteran from Walton Hills, Ohio, returning once again to the National Veterans Wheelchair Games, to be held this year in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. "When I was injured, I thought my active life was over," Koester says. "However, after discovering wheelchair sports, I have clearly realized that this is about as far from the truth as can be imagined." Koester mustered the courage to participate in her first wheelchair sports event at the 1991 National Veterans Wheelchair Games, and this year marks her 17th consecutive year as a wheelchair athlete.



Koester was injured in August 1990 while on alert at the Redstone Arsenal in northern Alabama. She was on the post, driving a military vehicle that overturned and severely injured her. Discharged several months later, Koester faced returning to civilian life, with all of the challenges, as a paraplegic.

Quickly facing these challenges, Koester discovered she could adapt and regain her self-esteem. She attributes her positive attitude and active lifestyle to the benefits of wheelchair sports. "Racing in my chair helps keeps me motivated and focused to staying healthy and happy," she says. Healthy and happy she is – Koester took home five gold medals at the 2006 National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Anchorage, Alaska. This year, she hopes to bring home a few more, to add to the large array she has already collected over the years.

Koester's enthusiasm for wheelchair sports and the National Veterans Wheelchair Games is unbridled. "This event has literally changed my life and my family's life," she says. "Being a part of 500 people in wheelchairs, competing during the day and dancing late into the night, is an absolutely great time. I am so grateful I can be a part of this." One of her favorite events is the slalom event, a challenging obstacle course that tests the athletes' agility, speed and strength. Koester explains, "There are obstacles on the course that people in wheelchairs face every day. I love the challenge of this timed event, and being able to cheer on the other participants."

Koester has also recently joined "The 50 States Marathon Club," an international organization for athletes who work toward completing a 26.2-mile marathon in each of the 50 states. Koester plans to participate in at least two of them before the 2007 National Veterans Wheelchair Games in June. In addition to her strong athletic drive, Koester also is very active in her community, both as the sports director for the Paralyzed Veterans of America Buckeye Chapter and also as a substitute teacher in her local public school system. "It is important for me to give back to my community in a way that will educate others about the challenges and opportunities that those of us in wheelchairs experience."