

# National Veterans Wheelchair Games



## Athlete Profile (Local)

### Kyle Kienitz – Climbing High – A *Semper Fi* Kind of Guy!

At the age of only 26, you'd think that someone who experiences a life-altering incident would become down about the things he can no longer easily do. Not so for Kyle Kienitz of Chilton, Wisconsin. A Marine Corps veteran, Kienitz who was stationed in Pensacola, Florida, from 2002-2004, sustained a spinal cord injury in a motor vehicle accident while he was home on leave in 2003. When asked how he felt about his injury, which resulted in paraplegia, he said, "Physically it made me feel that I can overcome anything. I already had this feeling (as a Marine), but this just made me realize it even more."

Kienitz sets high goals for himself. An avionics technician in the service, he is now completing a marketing degree and an entrepreneur program in pursuit of someday owning a real estate business. He doesn't want to have just any real estate business, though. He wants one that caters to the special needs of buyers looking for existing homes.

Kienitz first heard about the National Veterans Wheelchair Games from a therapist at the Clement J. Zablocki VA Medical Center in Milwaukee, the facility hosting the Games this year in Milwaukee, taking place June 19-23. He went to the 2006 Games in Anchorage, Alaska, where he brought home one gold medal in weightlifting and two in track. He also participated in handcycling, which has now become a special passion. Like other local veterans, Kienitz is excited about the Games being closer to home this year. "I really like being able to have family and friends come see me," he said.

When he arrived in Alaska for the event last year, Kienitz was surprised at the large number of veterans participating, more than 500. He loved the fact that they were all very open and spoke together so positively. Competing in the Games did a lot for him, he says now. "The first year was both an eye opener and a confidence booster. Not only did I learn from the others about competing, but also how the other athletes adapted. With special vehicles and equipment, they were able to overcome many obstacles." He also found the tremendous camaraderie of the experience to be inspiring.

According to Kyle Kienitz, the early years of having a spinal cord injury are difficult and the Games can be a big stepping stone. This year, he is encouraging other newly injured veterans to participate. "I should have gone to the Games sooner," he says. "It helped me find out that almost nothing is impossible."

When not in class, Kienitz likes rock climbing, handcycling, hunting and fishing. He's also part of DEX, a business marketing organization at school. He enjoys the extracurricular activities and is anxious for the 2007 National Veterans Wheelchair Games to begin so he can enjoy them as well.