

National Veterans Wheelchair Games



Athlete Profile (Local)

Roy Heathcoat – Finding the *Able* in *Disabled*



The life of Army veteran Roy Heathcoat changed forever in June 1990. Injured in a motor vehicle accident that left him a paraplegic at the age of 25, he struggled with losing the use of legs to do all the things he was used to. Prior to his injury, he worked a job that put him on call 24/7. He had little in the way of a family life, struggled with unemployment and ended up divorced. Ironically, his accident changed all that.

Heathcoat, who is now 41, finds that his world today revolves around his family. He learned that to him, the important thing in life isn't working a 24/7 job, but having a 24/7 family. After reuniting with his wife and son, he made the choice to re-establish himself as a person. Although Heathcoat and his wife did later divorce, he raised his son by himself as a single parent.

He first entered the VA system while he was taking a family member to a VA medical center in Alabama, where he was living at the time. While there, a clinic worker asked if he was enrolled in VA's spinal cord injury program. She insisted that he do so and now Heathcoat says, "The VA medical system is unreal in what they do for me. They've cared for most of my wants and all of my needs." According to Heathcoat, most of the times he has asked for something, VA has come through with what he needs, sometimes as quickly as the same day. He finds this remarkable.

Heathcoat first participated in the National Veterans Wheelchair Games in 2005, when the event was held in Minneapolis, Minnesota. While there, he won two gold medals in weightlifting and the wheelchair slalom, and met some very nice people from Milwaukee. In fact, he liked them so much he decided to move to Franklin, Wisconsin, a Milwaukee suburb, just to be closer to them and the 27th National Veterans Wheelchair Games, which are taking place June 19-23, 2007. This year, he is planning to compete once again in weightlifting and the slalom, and will also test his mettle in the exhibition event in wheelchair curling.

Roy Heathcoat describes his previous experience at the Wheelchair Games like this. "It showed me I was more able – and capable – than even I imagined." Now, he feels strongly that every veteran in a wheelchair who can do it, should come to the Games. For him, it is the relationships he's made there that made him decide to come back. "They are what make it so good," he said. "Once you do it, you'll never want to miss it again. It's like eating potato chips – you just can't stop at one!"