

National Veterans Wheelchair Games



Athlete Profile (Local)

Steve Golden—Motivated by the Games

Steve Golden first competed in the National Veterans Wheelchair Games in 2005, when the event was held in Minneapolis. Thinking back, he remembers entering the competition without much training. That won't be the case this year.

This time, Golden, a 28-year-old Navy veteran who lives in Menasha, Wisconsin, is working hard to get ready. "I am in training and getting myself in shape for the Games," he said. Although he came away with one gold medal and two silvers as a novice two years ago, now he is leaving nothing up to chance. He recently joined a fitness club where he uses indoor equipment to train for handcycling, a favorite event. "I could hardly wait for the weather to warm up so I could go outdoors and practice," he said. This year, he also plans to compete in bowling and table tennis. "Competing in the Wheelchair Games is a great motivator. It encourages me to set goals for myself and work out."

After receiving his bachelor's degree and being accepted to dental school at Marquette University, Golden entered the Navy's Health Professions Scholarship Program in 2000. Shortly thereafter, he sustained a spinal cord injury as a result of a fall while attending Officer Indoctrination School. Although Golden is now classified as a paraplegic, he does not let his injury slow him down. "I enjoy life so much that I often forget I have a disability," he said. "I try to live my life as I did before my spinal cord injury."

Golden first learned about the National Veterans Wheelchair Games from a physical therapist at the VA Medical Center in Milwaukee, where he receives care. According to Golden, he wants the newly injured veterans at the event to know it is a real eye-opening experience. "My wife and I enjoy watching the competitions, especially quad rugby...it's such a blast. I think it is really important for all of us to spend some time having fun with other veterans with disabilities. It's also an opportunity to demonstrate our determination to really use what we've got." In his view, moving the Games to a different city every year keeps the event fresh and exciting. "I enjoy being a part of something where people come together from all parts of the country to celebrate the independence we work so hard to achieve," he said.

In addition to his fitness goals, Golden is working toward his dream of creating, marketing and selling his own original artwork. He specializes in marquetry, creating two-dimensional images using wood veneers from all over the world. With the help of his father, he has set up a totally accessible workshop in his home and plans to eventually add an art studio.

For Steve Golden, life is much fuller these days. "I've actually traveled more after my injury than I did before. I've wheeled all over New York, Chicago, Honolulu and Paris. I went back to school at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, where I met my wife. Because my life has led me down this interesting path, I have been to many new places, met lots of amazing people and developed skills that I probably would not have discovered otherwise."