

National Veterans Wheelchair Games



Athlete Profile (National)

Wayne Miller – Camaraderie and Competition Keep Him Coming Back!



When you hear a hoarse voice yelling words of support to fellow veterans at the 2007 National Veterans Wheelchair Games, it will most likely belong to Wayne Miller. As the 2003 Spirit of the Games winner, Miller, now 56, continues to personify the best qualities of a wheelchair athlete, and his popularity is a strong motivator. As one of the more “seasoned,” athletes, Miller’s leadership, drive and competitive spirit always endear him to the other competitors at the annual event.

The son of a combat-injured WWII veteran, Miller enlisted in the Marines when he was only 17. He turned 18 in boot camp, was assigned to combat duty and was in a military hospital by his 19th birthday, severely wounded, resulting in the amputation of his left leg above the knee and multiple shrapnel wounds to his body. The date was July 4, 1969. Since then, Independence Day has held a special meaning to Miller.

These days, Miller displays his patriotic spirit by sporting red, white and blue from head to toe, often while he is competing at the Games. “I know there is more than one person out there who has not yet attempted new things after an injury and a lot more will follow. I come back year after year and offer myself as a mentor to someone who was like me at one time,” he said.

A supervisory social worker at VA’s Vet Center in Silver Springs, Maryland, Miller serves as a team leader and counsels returning war veterans, helping them deal with substance abuse, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, bereavement, and martial, family and employment problems. He also works to raise money to help defray the costs for other disabled veterans to compete in the Games. “Competing is secondary to the camaraderie one gets from belonging to a group who believes, thinks and lives to be able to participate in anything after being injured. Each of us has something to give to someone else. I know I have something to give and if I can have just one person take what I have and use it to benefit themselves, then I’ve done my job,” he said.

Miller, a talented vocalist, has won several gold medals at the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival, often performing for veterans in such venues as the American Veterans Awards, USO functions and other events in the Washington, D.C. and Maryland areas. He is especially proud of his crowd-moving rendition of “God Bless the USA,” where he stands one-legged and salutes during the final stanza. Rounding out his participation in VA’s national events, Miller competed in the National Veterans Golden Age Games in 2006. “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.

When you hear a strong but horse voice cheering above the others at the 2007 Games, it will be the voice of someone whose passion is not only the competition but also the words of encouragement – Wayne Miller’s.