

History of the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic

The National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic evolved from the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) pioneering efforts in rehabilitation and adaptive sports. The Clinic provides disabled veterans with opportunities for self-development and challenge through sports and leisure activities, which they may have felt were no longer available to them because of their disabilities. At the Clinic, participants have a chance to develop winter sports skills and take part in a variety of adaptive workshops, which demonstrate that having a disability need not be an obstacle to an active, rewarding life.

The origins of the Clinic date back to the early 1980s when Sandy Trombetta, founder and director of the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic, began bringing VA patients to a nearby mountain resort to participate in disabled ski programs. As a recreation therapist in Grand Junction, Colorado, he recognized the physical and mental healing that skiing and other winter sports provided to disabled veterans.

The first Winter Sports Clinic was held in 1987 at Powderhorn Resort on the Grand Mesa outside of Grand Junction. During this first year, 20 staff members gave roughly 90 disabled veterans the opportunity to learn to ski using adaptive ski equipment and helped them participate in a variety of adaptive activities and workshops. It became apparent over the next few years that because of the popularity and therapeutic benefits of the Clinic, more support was needed. In 1991, the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) became a co-sponsor of the event.

Over the past 19 years, the Clinic grew tremendously. In 2004, more than 320 participants attended from across the country, along with 150 certified disabled ski instructors and several members of the U.S. Disabled Ski Team. Several participants who learned to ski at the Clinic are now members of the U.S. Disabled Ski Team. Other Colorado sites to host the Clinic have included Crested Butte Mountain Resort, and currently Snowmass Resort outside of Aspen.

The adaptive ski equipment has been modified and updated each year, and the event now integrates skiing with exploratory activities. Veterans learn Alpine and Nordic skiing and are introduced to a variety of other activities and sports such as rock climbing, scuba diving, trap shooting, horseback riding, snowmobiling and sled hockey. The U.S. Secret Service also teaches a self-defense course to participants who are in wheelchairs or are visually impaired. Participation is open to male and female U.S. military service veterans with spinal cord injuries, orthopedic amputations, visual impairments, certain neurological problems and other disabilities.

The National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic is the largest annual disabled learn-to-ski clinic in the world. VA and DAV are committed to the rehabilitation of disabled veterans through this annual event and to providing world-class health care at VA facilities. The Clinic truly reflects VA's mission – to provide quality programs and health care to America's veterans.

**Number of Veterans Participating in the
National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic
1987- 2004**

Year	Location	Number of Participants
1987	Powderhorn Mountain, Colo.	90
1988	Powderhorn Mountain, Colo.	106
1989	Powderhorn Mountain, Colo.	151
1990	Powderhorn Mountain, Colo.	171
1991	Powderhorn Mountain, Colo.	186
1992	Snowmass Village -- Aspen, Colo.	226
1993	Crested Butte, Colo.	238
1994	Crested Butte, Colo.	256
1995	Crested Butte, Colo.	279
1996	Crested Butte, Colo.	287
1997	Crested Butte, Colo.	294
1998	Crested Butte, Colo.	313
1999	Crested Butte, Colo.	303
2000	Crested Butte, Colo.	331
2001	Snowmass Village -- Aspen, Colo.	351
2002	Snowmass Village -- Aspen, Colo.	350
2003	Snowmass Village -- Aspen, Colo.	305
2004	Snowmass Village -- Aspen, Colo.	325

DAV Freedom Award

Every year, one participant is chosen for The Disabled American Veterans (DAV) Freedom Award for Outstanding Courage and Achievement. This award is given to the veteran who makes the most progress during the week, and who shows outstanding courage and accomplishment in taking a giant step forward in his or her rehabilitation process. This is the veteran who proves to the world that physical disability does not bar the doors to freedom.

The award is inscribed:

“We salute your desire to excel so that others may follow.”

Previous recipients of this award are:

1992	Eric Tate
1993	Kevin Moellenberndt
1994	Christopher Reid
1995	Darol Kubacz
1996	Martin Begosh
1997	Karoline Martin
1998	Butch Cooke
1999	James Milliken
2000	Timothy Doyle
2001	Jim Sursley
2002	Ryan Etier
2003	David Owens
2004	Eric Castro