



**Department of
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News Release

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‘Determination, Grace’ On Display as Disabled Veterans Take to the Slopes at Winter Sports Clinic

WASHINGTON – More than 350 disabled veterans from across the country, including 50 veterans from Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom, will ski the Rocky Mountains at the 20th National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic in Snowmass Village, Colo., near Aspen, April 2-7, 2006.

Coming two months after the world's top athletes compete in the Winter Olympics, the clinic is an annual rehabilitation program open to all U.S. military veterans with spinal cord injuries or disease, visual impairments, certain neurological conditions, orthopedic amputations or other disabilities, who receive care at any Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) health care facility.

Jointly sponsored by VA and the Disabled American Veterans (DAV), the clinic is hosted each year by the Grand Junction (Colo.) VA Medical Center and VA's Rocky Mountain Network.

"For 20 years, the Winter Sports Clinic has been a shining example of VA's commitment to help disabled veterans recover from their serious injuries and illnesses," said the Honorable R. James Nicholson, Secretary of Veterans Affairs. "The determination, courage and grace displayed by hundreds of veterans who participate in this exciting event are a true testament to their character and the resolve of the human spirit."

During the six-day program, the veterans will learn adaptive Alpine and Nordic skiing and be introduced to a variety of other adaptive activities and sports, such as rock climbing, scuba diving, trap-shooting and sled hockey. The U.S. Secret Service will also teach a course on self-defense for people with disabilities.

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Winter Clinic 2/2/2/2

“There is a true sense of community and a deep bond among veterans,” said DAV National Commander Paul W. Jackson. “You feel it very strongly at the Clinic. During this week, those brave men and women who have shared sacrifices in battle forge an even stronger bond through teamwork and competition. The DAV is proud to join VA in staging this 20th Winter Sports Clinic. Having participated in the Clinic myself, it’s an honor to return as DAV’s National Commander to support such an incredible event.”

For the first time at the clinic, these veteran athletes can set their sights higher, thanks to an agreement between the United States Olympic Committee and VA signed Nov. 17, 2005. Under the terms of the agreement, clinic participants will be introduced to racing techniques and paralympic sports such as wheelchair fencing.

Instructors will include official U.S. Olympic coaches. The winter clinic is the first VA event to benefit from this new agreement.

“The agreement between VA and the U.S. Olympic Committee will further inspire disabled veteran athletes to reach their fullest potential in sports competition and continue to prove that it is ability, not disability, that counts,” Secretary Nicholson said.

VA continues to be a recognized leader in rehabilitation, with recreational therapy programs at each of its 154 hospitals allowing disabled veterans to challenge themselves both physically and emotionally. DAV, which has co-sponsored the event since 1991, is a nonprofit, congressionally chartered veterans service organization, with a membership of more than one million wartime disabled veterans.

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For further information, contact:

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