



National Disabled Veterans

# Winter Sports Clinic



## Skier Profile

### William White – Improvise, Adapt and Overcome

William White is not only a U.S. Marine Corps veteran but also a veteran of the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic, participating this year for the seventh consecutive time. “I can’t hide my anticipation for this year’s Clinic,” he said. “This event encourages such positive rehabilitative changes in participants. It allows them to explore other obstacles that may have been personal barriers before – it teaches them to improvise, adapt and overcome!”

Growing up in Roselle, Ill., White, 43, felt a calling to serve his country after high school. Joining the Marines, he served for nearly 12 years as a communications chief. He served in the Gulf War and various other global conflicts in Somalia, Kuwait and Nicaragua. “It was an honor to be among those who answered their country’s call to arms in battle,” he recalled. He was discharged in late 1995, moving back to Illinois in 1997 to help his father who was also a veteran.

White attended night school and later was admitted to an elite electricians union. Once accepted, he excelled in the union, which led to him eventually instruct classes. Then, in March 2000 while working on an electrical high line, White was electrocuted by 75,000 volts of electricity. “There was a bright orange flash and a loud hum, then silence,” he said. “I was still belted in, and my right hand was burnt and mummified. I knew then it was the end of my right hand. I couldn’t feel my right foot either.” White was air lifted to the Loyola burn center. Because of the severity of the burns, doctors amputated his right leg below the knee and his right arm above the elbow.

White has asked many questions and read lots of magazines about prosthetic devices. He was determined to build dexterity in his left hand and strengthen the rest of his body. Watching videos, he learned to operate his prosthetic arm and leg with ease. Only nine months after his accident, he took on the challenge of the Rocky Mountains. Although he was always athletic, skiing was a new sport for White. Some members of a physically challenged sports team that White had met at the VA medical center in Hines, prodded him to attend the Clinic. “The next thing I knew, they gave me a plane ticket and there I was, on the slopes, ready to learn.”

Since then, White has progressed. “My first year, I couldn’t get off the bunny slope. “The following year, I only fell twice when I skied on the beginner runs. Now, I ski mostly all blue runs and a short black run once in a while.” Skiing at the Clinic prompted White to try new things, and he has since set ten world records as the first upright para-athlete to compete in a National North American Scottish Highland Heavy Athletics Decathlon. “I compete regularly as a regular upright athlete, in the Master’s category, and I attend about four competitions a year,” said White proudly.

White’s expectations are high for this year. His goal is to work on reading the newly changed slopes to his advantage, allowing him a longer ski run. “I’m also excited to meet new people and see several old friends,” he said. “The Clinic provides me with a defined area to improve on for next year. Of course I can always gain some knowledge from the new veterans and make some self-improvements along the way.” William White believes it is those self improvements that make the Winter Sports Clinic’s mental and physical therapy so unique. “Skiing helps develop balance, muscle tone, endurance and personal confidence. It teaches people mobility skills that can be used anywhere in life.”

*Miracles on a Mountainside!*