



National Disabled Veterans

# Winter Sports Clinic

## Skier Profile

### Buddy Hayes - Reigning Miss Wheelchair Virginia

Buddy Hayes, a 49-year-old Army veteran from Chesapeake, Va., is not fond of the word *disabled*. "What positive word do you know in the English language that begins with 'dis'?" asks Hayes. "I consider myself differently-abled, not disabled; nobody is going to dis me!" Despite being diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS) six years ago, Hayes has an infectiously enthusiastic spirit and has made it her mission to help those less fortunate.



Having come from a military family, Hayes and her twin sister joined the Army in 1977 when they were just 18 years old. Hayes served from 1977-1979 as a heavy equipment operator in Fort Leonard Wood, Mo. She graduated from her heavy equipment training class among 600 men as the first woman to complete this type of program.

Upon discharge from the Army, Hayes worked as a Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist (CTRS) for 15 years, a position she says, that prepared her for her own future special needs. When the demands of her position as a CTRS became too great, Hayes began working as a preschool special education teacher. Then in 2002, Hayes became ill and was diagnosed a few months later with MS. "I went from fully functioning to not functioning at all," she said.

Hayes spent the next few months in hospitals and nursing homes. Eventually, she recovered enough to leave the nursing home and just one month later was dared by her recreation therapist to try a one-mile wheelchair race. "When I showed up for my first race I thought I could never make it," said Hayes. "I was the only wheelchair racer in the entire competition, but once I finished, I was hooked on the thrill of competition."

Although her wheelchair racing days are now behind her due to some recent chronic shoulder pain, Hayes is now trying out new sports. It was at last year's Winter Sports Clinic that she tried scuba diving and she loved it. Now, she is only a few steps away from attaining her scuba diving certification. "In the ocean, everyone is the same; there are no wheelchairs under the water," she said.

Last April, Hayes was crowned Miss Wheelchair Virginia where her platform was "sports and recreation for everybody." She says most people don't equate being in a wheelchair with anything athletic. With this crowning achievement, she became a spokesperson for persons with disabilities and makes it her mission to educate the public across the state of Virginia about how "differently-abled" people can remain active. "Winning was worth putting on the makeup, dresses and tiara," she laughed. "I am really not the tiara type, but if it means getting the word out then I'm all about it!"

This year will mark Hayes' third trip to the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic. "I love this event. I have such a connection with the people who attend," she said. "The Clinic lets me know that I'm not the only one who is differently-abled and is interested in sports. Back home, I don't know anyone in a wheelchair so it's cool to be in the majority for a week. The emotional high I get from the Winter Sports Clinic lasts all year."

*Miracles on a Mountainside!*



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