



National Disabled Veterans

Winter Sports Clinic

Skier Profile

Russell Worth – Meeting the Challenge of the Mountain

Russell Worth, an 84-year-old Navy veteran from Brown Deer, Wis., has more zest for life than most people half his age. Worth's mettle was first tested in 1943 as a young student at the University of Wisconsin when he was drafted into the Navy. At that time, he was transferred to the coast of Washington because an invasion by the Japanese was expected off the Pacific. After captaining planes for more than a year, he was sent to Burbank, Calif. Although he longed to be on the front lines like his two brothers, Worth never saw combat, serving most of his tour as a flight instructor before he was honorably discharged in April 1946.



Returning home to Wisconsin, Worth owned and operated a construction business for nearly 30 years. When the cold weather finally got the best of him in 1985, Worth decided to move to St. Louis, Missouri. On February 6, 1991, while driving home from his job as a building inspector in University City, the suspension unit on the rear of Worth's car snapped. After losing control of the vehicle, he was tossed from the driver's seat over a ten-foot embankment. Landing on the frozen ground, he broke all of his ribs as well as his back. His spinal cord injuries were so extensive that he was left a paraplegic.

After six weeks of rehabilitation in St. Luke's Hospital in St. Louis, Worth moved back to Milwaukee with his son, and entered the Clement J. Zablocki Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center for continuing treatment. While there, he first learned about the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic when his VA recreation therapist suggested getting out on the slopes, ignoring the fact that Worth had never skied before. "My therapist said, 'Hey, you're going to ski,'" Worth remembers. "I thought he was joking!" And so, at age 70, Russell Worth received the Clinic's "Kamikaze Award" that year, an award given to the participant who has the most spectacular wipeout on the slopes. Worth remembers, "I guess I thought I was 18 years old again!"

For Worth, who also competes in wheelchair sports at the National Veterans Wheelchair Games each year, the benefits of these events reach much more than the body. "I just love being out there knowing that I am doing something truly physical, using my whole body and giving it all I've got," he said. "You feel yourself gliding over that snow and it is so therapeutic, both mentally and physically."

Worth's courageous spirit has outlasted not only paralysis, but more recent injuries as well. He came to his first Clinic nearly 15 years ago and has attended almost every year since. In 2008, he is back once again and ready to hit the slopes. "I'm looking forward to improving my techniques this year," he said. "I gain so much confidence from skiing out there on the majestic mountain. You can't be afraid – just take the chance and get out there. You'll be rewarded when you meet the challenge of the mountain."

[Above information provided by veteran.]