

# RT '24

Rollin' Times from the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America



Julie Howell, Associate Legislative Director, Paralyzed Veterans of America (pictured left), testifies in front of the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs on ensuring equity for women veterans at the VA on April 10, 2024.



Spring Edition 2024

## About this Issue:

PVA is at the forefront of women veterans healthcare and much more. See the Government Relations Column for more details.

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#### Disclaimer:

The Rollin' Times is a publication of the Michigan Chapter of Paralyzed Veterans of America. It is designed to inform the members of the PVA and other interested parties on veterans' issues, legislation, legal decisions, medical technology and other matters deemed to be relevant to the disability community.

The contents of this publication do not always reflect the views or policies of Michigan PVA, and no endorsement or approval is made or should be inferred with respect to products or services advertised herein. Consult an appropriate professional before making use of any product or service mentioned.

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## Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America

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The Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America (MPVA) is a chapter of the Washington, D.C.-based Paralyzed Veterans of America. A Congressionally chartered veterans service organization, MPVA has been assisting veterans with spinal cord injuries or diseases, including Multiple Sclerosis and ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, better known as Lou Gehrig's Disease), in Michigan since 1961.

MPVA programs include:

- Veterans' Benefits
- Wheelchair Sports and Recreation
- Spinal Cord Injury Research
- Equipment Donation
- Advocacy to eliminate architectural barriers and protect civil rights for persons with disabilities
- Referral Services for assistive devices, housing, employment and transportation
- Literature on a variety of topics including self-care, independent living, and disability rights.
- MPVA is a nonprofit organization and receives no federal funding. MPVA relies on grants, sponsorships, and private and corporate donations to support its programs.

The MPVA headquarters is in Plymouth, Michigan. Our service officers are based out of the McNamara Federal Building in Downtown Detroit.

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# President's Report

By: Michael Harris, President, MPVA

## Spotlight on Service: Meal Delivery

**A**s an Armed Forces Veteran, people have thanked me for my service and regretted the fact they did not serve. I always remind them that you do not have to wear a uniform to serve your country. People can honor veterans throughout the year by serving in the communities they reside in.

If someone asked me today, in Michigan, I would tell them about an easy way to make a difference in the lives of our older neighbors who need and deserve a thank you for building our communities. All one would have to do is step up and volunteer to be a part of a mission to make sure hot meals are in the homes of seniors. While I know of a specific organization in my community, there are senior agencies all over Michigan providing meal delivery services, so any member of a community can volunteer their time to give back.

### Zoom-In:

#### The Senior Alliance's Meals on Wheels program

Since 2010, I have had the honor of serving on the board of *The Senior Alliance*, a non-profit organization serving as 1 of 16 Area Agency on Aging nonprofit organizations in Michigan. Michigan's AAA organizations administer services funded by the Older Americans Act and the Older Michigianians Act. The Senior Alliance in Wayne County also functions as an agent of the MI Choice Waiver Program, arranging Medicaid-covered long-term residential care services for qualified older adults and individuals living with disabilities.

The Senior Alliance connects older adults and their caregivers in southern and western Wayne County, Michigan with resources, services, and programs. They

assist older adults, and their loved ones, social workers, nurses, and others access a wide range of programs including Meals on Wheels, transportation, adult day care, in-home care, and much more.

One of their great success stories is the "Meals on Wheels" program.

The Senior Alliance and Wayne County Department of Senior Services partner up to deliver about 2,800 meals every day to older adults in our community. They are currently trying to get 200 more volunteers so they can get back to 5-days-a-week meal delivery in their service area, which includes Western Wayne County and the Downriver community.

Let me share some important points about this opportunity:

- you can volunteer at any of the 34 sites throughout Wayne County by [visiting www.thesenioralliance.org](http://www.thesenioralliance.org)
- It generally takes about 60 to 90 minutes to do a full route, which includes 10 to 12 houses
- Meals on Wheels delivers hot meals as well as cold/frozen meals so seniors can stock up in case there is bad weather, or other reasons why they cannot leave their homes
- if you do not live in or near Wayne County, there are 15 other Area Agencies on Aging serving all 83 counties of Michigan, simply visit [www.4ami.org](http://www.4ami.org)

The Senior Alliance takes great pride in being a cornerstone of support for their service area through

the Meals on Wheels program. By partnering with local volunteers and community organizations, they ensure that older adults and adults with disabilities have access to nourishing meals delivered right to their doorstep, along with a friendly smile and a moment of companionship.

### Through A Different Lens: Aging

Millions of older adults are supported each year by Meals on Wheels, an initiative through which seniors and people with disabilities receive healthy and tasty meals, often for free, from a network of volunteers. These efforts are usually organized through local senior centers and other community organizations across the United States.

The United States population is aging. The number of Americans who are 65 and up grew by one-third over the past decade, to 54 million people. The meal delivery program, for which eligibility begins at age 60, is becoming more important than ever before.

A growing majority of American seniors wish to age in place. That is, regardless of how ill or frail they are, they want to stay in their own homes, instead of going to a nursing home or assisted living facility.

No matter where folks live as they age, ailments and physical challenges will almost surely crop up. Those health problems will make getting out and about more difficult, and it will be increasingly hard for them to shop for food, cook meals and even feed themselves.

The daily Meals on Wheels deliveries also make a difference in ways unrelated to nutrition. Seniors who get hot meals delivered become less concerned about being able to continue living in their own home. They also feel less isolated and lonely.

Volunteering and service are woven into the fabric of our country's history. We are a nation of people who care for and look out for each other. Community service is also a way to connect with our neighbors and use our skills for the common good. Helping people in your community makes that community stronger and healthier and makes you stronger and healthier in the process.



#### In Memory of James E. Spear

November 22, 1928-April 9, 2024



The MPVA would like to pay tribute to James Spear, United States Air Force Veteran and former Maintenance Officer for our Chapter. James passed away at the age of 95 this spring after a long, active, life. He was cherished by his late wife, Cynthia. Dear father of John and Linda Highland, MPVA Finance Director. Grandfather of Jason and Timothy Highland, and Melissa Booth. Great grandfather of Alicia and Ashley Highland, Rorey, Eien, Ella and Alice Booth. Uncle of Carl and Dorothy May, Thomas and Carolyn Cyrus.

We thank James for his dutiful service. May he rest in peace.



# Executive Director's Report

By Jaclyn Kochis, Executive Director, MPVA

## Gearing Up for PVA Advocacy & Legislative Seminar We want to hear from you!

Each year, PVA Chapters across the nation gear up for our “Advocacy & Legislative Seminar” in Washington, D.C. The seminar offers one day to brush up on our legislative priorities, followed by two days of meeting with legislators and their team members to discuss important key topics impacting our membership.

This year, the seminar will be held in June rather than February. The decision to change the date will provide PVA an advantage as we can avoid traveling during a potentially blustery, winter month. It will give us an opportunity to be on Capitol Hill when other Veteran Service Organizations (VSO's) have completed their meetings and the possibility of standing out while sharing our issues with our respective representatives.

Key topics to be discussed will include:

- Protecting Access to VA's Specialized Health Care Services;
- Expanding Access to VA Long-Term Services and Supports;
- Improving VA Benefits and Health Care Services for Paralyzed Veterans and their Survivors;
- Protecting the Civil Rights of People with Disabilities;
- Improving Access to Social Security Benefits;
- Increase Employment Prospects for Veterans with Disabilities.

While these are the key topics that we will cover, this is also the **time for YOUR stories to be heard**. This means that **we want to hear from YOU!** Please reach out to me at our Chapter and share any personal stories you have that congress needs to hear! Testimonials on



*Brenda Wheeler (left), MPVA Administrative Assistant, and Jaclyn Kochis (right), MPVA Executive Director, take a selfie on Capitol Hill at PVA's 2023 Legislative and Advocacy Conference before speaking in front of legislators on key PVA issues*

your experiences (these may include, but are not limited to, experiences with: VA healthcare, long-term care, aid and attendant care, vehicle adaptation allowances, social security, and employment) always make a lasting impression when we are advocating for our members.

Contact me today directly at: [jkochis@michiganpva.org](mailto:jkochis@michiganpva.org) or via phone at (248) 476-9000 ext.122.

*You can make a difference!*



## URGENT OR THREATENING LANGUAGE

# 01

Phishing attempts often create a sense of urgency or use threatening language to prompt immediate action. Phrases like "urgent action required," "account suspended," or "your account will be deleted" may indicate a phishing attempt.



## REQUESTS FOR PERSONAL INFO

Legitimate organizations do not request personal information, such as usernames, passwords, or credit card numbers, via email, social media, or other online means.

Be cautious of any request for personal information.

# 02

## TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE

# 03

Phishing attempts may lure individuals with enticing offers, such as winning a prize or getting a huge discount. If an offer seems too good to be true, it may be a phishing attempt.



## Keep an eye out for PHISHING SCAMS!

The MPVA wants you to be safe! Contact us if you see any suspicious emails using our name or likeness at: [jkochis@michiganpva.org](mailto:jkochis@michiganpva.org)





By: Mike Harris, President, MPVA

## PARALYZED VETERANS OF AMERICA (PVA) ENSURING EQUITY FOR WOMEN VETERANS AT VA

**A**s a brother to four sisters, I have often witnessed the lack of awareness and equality women face in our healthcare systems. I am very pleased to share that PVA is working hard to address issues surrounding women veterans' healthcare.

On April 10, 2024, Julie Howell, PVA Associate Legislative Director, spoke before the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs. An excerpt of her statement is provided below:

"Chairman Tester, Ranking Member Moran, and members of the committee, Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) would like to thank you for the opportunity to present our views on ensuring equitable access to care for women veterans. Few veterans understand the full scope of benefits offered by the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) better than PVA members – veterans who have incurred a spinal cord injury or disorder (SCI/D), including multiple sclerosis (MS) and amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS).

While the number of women PVA members is small compared to the rest of the women veteran population, they are an impressive group of individuals who do not allow their disabilities to hinder their efforts to improve access to equitable care for all veterans. Ensuring that women PVA members have timely access to quality care will only help VA to be better positioned to deliver care for all veterans, particularly those with complex injuries and illnesses. Women veterans are the fastest growing veteran cohort using VA benefits and services, accounting for nearly 30 percent of all new

VA enrollees. It is our obligation to ensure that women veterans encounter barrier-free access to health care and benefits equal to their male counterparts.

In recent years, women veterans have achieved several legislative wins that are worth celebrating. Bills like the Making Advances in Mammography and Medical Options (MAMMO) Act (P.L. 117-135); the Dr. Kate Hendricks Thomas Supporting Expanded Review for Veterans in Combat Environments Act or the SERVICE Act (P.L. 117-133); the MST Claims Coordination Act, which passed in the Cleland-Dole Act of 2022 (P.L. 117-328); and the Deborah Sampson Act passed in the Isakson-Roe Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020 (P.L. 116-315), which represented big investments in women veterans' health care. PVA remains grateful to Congress for passing these important bills, but our work is far from over.

We appreciate the opportunity to share our views on the current state of care for women veterans because we believe increased attention is necessary to ensure we are meeting their needs. However, women veterans are veterans, so almost every piece of veterans-related legislation that Congress passes will impact them. Women veterans are served by the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), and the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) just like their male counterparts. We do women veterans a disservice whenever we fail to consider how all legislation related to these administrations impacts them."

Julie's testimony went on to address:

- **PVA's Priorities for Women Veterans with SCI/D:** Due to the types of injuries and illnesses that our members live with, their needs are often unique compared to other veterans with disabilities. PVA is advocating for improvements to the Deborah Sampson Act (DSA)—a major achievement because it raised awareness of the deficiencies that women veterans encountered across the VA and forced the department to prioritize women veterans' health care. Three years following its passage, however, our women members report seeing little impact or improvement in their engagements with the VA.
- **Accessibility for Gender-Specific Care:** Women PVA members often report that it is difficult to access gender-specific care within the SCI/D VA system because it requires a high level of cooperation and coordination with the women's health clinics. With limited staff inside women's clinics, there is often difficulty in coordinating this care. It is left up to each facility to proactively establish integrated care for patients within the SCI/D system, and unfortunately, this has not been a priority for many locations.
- **Access to Long-Term Services and Supports:** The lack of adequate long-term care options is a nationwide problem, and if the VA is planning on relying on community care to help with the lack of facility-based beds, many veterans are going to be left behind, particularly veterans with catastrophic disabilities.
- **Research Focused on Women Veterans with SCI/D:** The increased focus on women's health research at the VA is essential in understanding the needs of our women veterans. However, research for veterans with SCI/D in general is lacking, and this is particularly true when it comes to women veterans with SCI/D. The VA's century-long history of improving the

lives of veterans and other Americans through medical and prosthetics research positions them well to conduct studies focusing on these vulnerable populations. The passage of the Honoring our PACT Act (P.L. 117-168) has been center stage for much of the marketing and focus coming from the VA and Congress in recent years. However, we need additional research into toxic exposures and how they may have uniquely impacted women veterans.

- **Cultural Competency on Women with SCI/D and Military Sexual Trauma (MST):** The national dialogue around sexual trauma and standards of behavior has changed drastically over the past twenty years. As more and more individuals come forward to share their experiences, veterans and servicemembers are also speaking out. The VA has made strides toward increasing the accuracy of MST claims in the past several years. Multiple VA Office of Inspector General (OIG) reports have underscored VBA's incremental improvements around the processing of these claims. However, a few percentage points in an OIG report still represents thousands of veterans. Due to the continued challenges with MST claims decisions, PVA recommends Congress pass S. 1028, the Servicemembers and Veterans Empowerment and Support Act of 2023, which aims to expand the evidentiary standard for survivors applying for disability benefits from the VA to ensure MST survivors are provided equal access to benefits and care.
- **IVF Efforts and Infertility:** PVA has long championed increasing access to ART, particularly access to IVF. Recently, the VA and the DOD, announced expanding access to IVF services for some servicemembers and covered veterans. We commend the agencies in removing the marriage requirement along with the previous prohibition on donated genetic material. VA's proposed changes went into effect on March 28, and while it is an important victory, they will only impact a small number



of veterans. PVA strongly supports S. 2801, the Veteran Families Health Services Act of 2023, which seeks to alleviate issues servicemembers and veterans face when trying to receive fertility treatment. The bill would expand VA and DOD fertility treatments and ensure they offer comprehensive family-building assistance for veterans and servicemembers. Also, it creates proactive fertility cryopreservation procedures which will help if a veteran or service member faces an illness or injury. If passed, the bill would also increase adoption assistance for a veteran that has a proven infertility diagnosis.

- **Collaboration with Other Stakeholders:** The committee expressed interest in learning more about the work of the VSO Women Veteran Working Group. PVA is fortunate to work with several coalitions focused on increasing awareness, equity, and resources for veterans and all people with disabilities. The working group creates an environment to facilitate discussion about the various needs of our

memberships, review legislation, and identify areas of concern and possible solutions. We also work with Congress and the VA to review data to gauge the effectiveness of policy and we invite subject matter experts to share with us, particularly in the areas of women veteran research.

You can support PVA's initiative to ensure equity for women veterans at the VA by visiting and signing the #PVActionForce letter at: <https://www.voterveoice.net/PVA/Home>.



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## GI SINGLE BILL PAYMENT ACCOUNT

**S**tarting April 20, 2024, VA will no longer send a Veteran's or family members' benefit payments to more than one bank account. We're making this change to help protect Veterans and families from fraud and ensure that VA is able to pay Veterans on time, every time, without error.

This will require all Veterans and beneficiaries who receive GI Bill payments and other benefit payments across multiple banking accounts to select one account by April 20, 2024. For example, if a Veteran receives GI Bill payments to one of their bank accounts and disability compensation payments to another, they will need to consolidate and select one account for all payments by April 20, 2024.

This shift will impact nearly 50,000 of 800,000 total GI Bill beneficiaries. Fortunately, VA has all of the contact information for these Veterans, and we have successfully managed many transitions like this in the past. In fact, we have already transitioned all other VA benefits payments to one account – education programs are the remaining outliers.

VA will be aggressively reaching out to these students through text message, phone, and email on a weekly basis through April 20. They will continue to receive

text messages and emails until they have updated their information in VA.gov. VA is also working with schools, Veterans Service Organizations, and other relevant parties to make sure that Veterans meet the deadline.

The easiest way for beneficiaries to make this change is to log on to [Change Your Direct Deposit Information/Veterans Affairs](#). When they get to the pay information, there will be a box for the bank account information of their education benefit and a box for the bank account information for the other benefit they receive. The beneficiary should then update the bank account information to use the same account for all benefits.

**Importantly, no Veteran will miss a benefits payment of any type.** For any students who do not consolidate their bank accounts for benefits by April 20, VA will consolidate them on their behalf, electing their non-education benefit pay account as their primary bank account.



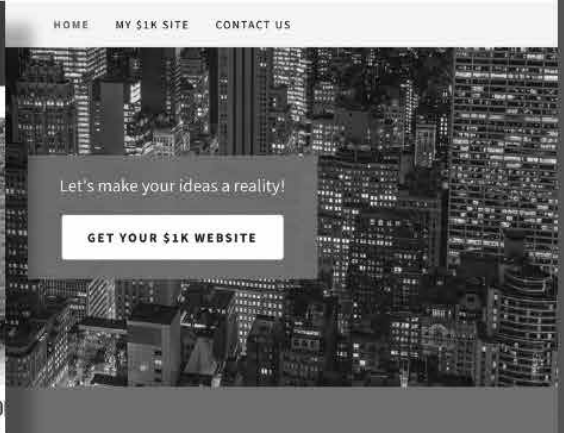
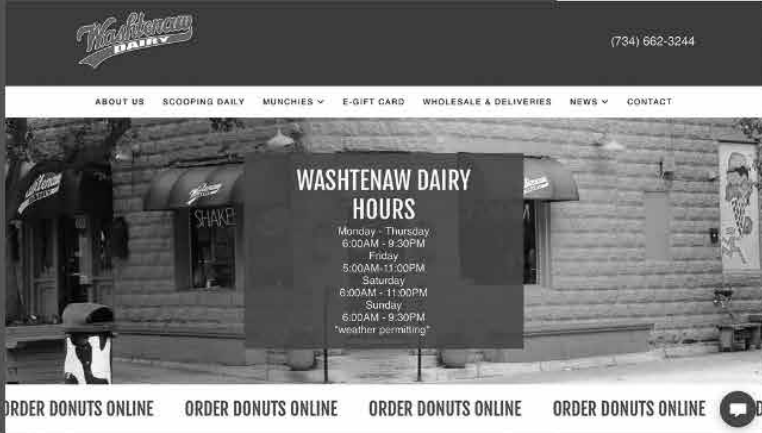


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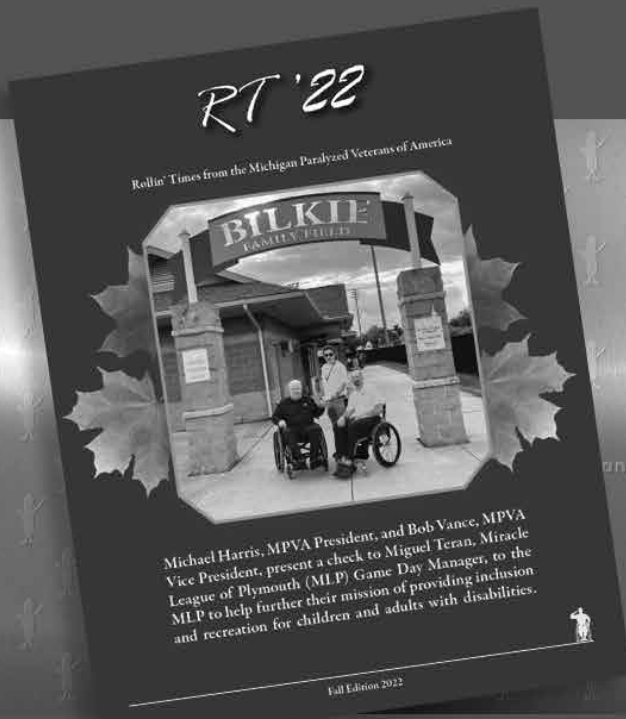
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## Social

Not getting enough love on social media?





# Sports & Recreation

By: Scot Severn



You can help make a difference by sponsoring the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America's (MPVA) National Veteran Wheelchair Games (NVWG) athletes. The NVWG is the world's largest annual wheelchair sports and rehabilitation event solely for military veterans. The event demonstrates the unstoppable character of veterans and seeks to foster wider respect and opportunities for all people with disabilities.

The National Veterans Wheelchair Games is open to all U.S. veterans with spinal cord injuries, amputations, multiple sclerosis, or other central neurological conditions who require a wheelchair for athletic competition. Every year, hundreds of American heroes from World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, and the post-9/11 era compete in this celebration of sport, courage and camaraderie. Your support will ensure that the Michigan Chapter's athletes can thrive in this years competition!

The MPVA is a nonprofit, 501 (c) 3, organization that services the entire state of Michigan by advocating for civil rights, assuring quality health care, exploring continuing research and education, and encouraging the healthy living of veterans with disabilities. Your gift can be made tax-deductible.



## Michigan Chapter NVWG Sponsorship Levels:

**"Bravo Zulu" Sponsor:** **\$750**

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**"Got Your Six" Sponsor (two available):** **\$1,500**

- Recognition on MPVA's social media page
- Logo featured on sleeves of athletes competition shirts
- Outside, back, cover ad in MPVA's Fall Rollin' Times Newsletter

Sponsor payments can be made by visiting: <https://www.michiganpva.org/support/online>. Upon entering your donation amount, please select "National Veterans Wheelchair Games" under "choose an event" dropdown option.

Questions? Contact Jaclyn Kochis, Executive Director, at: [jkochis@michiganpva.org](mailto:jkochis@michiganpva.org)



Did you know that Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) hosts an Annual Women Veterans Empowerment Retreat? Two lucky female members of our Chapter will be able to enjoy this experience in 2024! Don't miss your chance--contact the Chapter to learn more and see how you can get signed up for awesome experience that is free of charge! Learn more by emailing: [jkochis@michiganpva.org](mailto:jkochis@michiganpva.org)

Or call: (248) 476-9000 ext. 122.

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VA policy allows Ekso Indego to be issued at no cost for those who qualify.

### How to Get Qualified

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\*For full indications for use, visit: [www.eksobionics.com/indications-for-use/](http://www.eksobionics.com/indications-for-use/)





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Paralyzed Veterans of America

Michigan Chapter

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2024 Spring Edition

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Did you know that the MPVA has a Loan Closet Program? Our Loan Closet Program offers durable medical goods, free of charge, on a first come first served basis. The

MPVA qualifies “durable medical goods” as any device that may assist with mobility (wheelchairs, walkers, canes, commode seats, shower chairs, adult diapers, and more). These gently used, donated items, are donated to us and are available for those who may need them. **You do not have to be a veteran to utilize this program and there is no cost!**

To find out more about this program and the items that are available, contact or email Brenda Wheeler at:

**Phone: (800) 638-6782 or (248) 476-9000**

**Email: [chapterhq@michiganpva.org](mailto:chapterhq@michiganpva.org)**

Please keep in mind that these items change on a daily basis and are dependent on items that are donated. We also ask that you schedule an appointment to drop off or pick up items.

Please help in spreading the word about this program!

Thank you so much!

Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America  
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[www.michiganpva.org](http://www.michiganpva.org)