

RT '24

Rollin' Times from the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America



PVA representatives train and prepare for their Capitol Hill visits with legislators this past June at PVA's Advocacy and Legislative Seminar.



About this Issue:

PVA's Advocacy and Legislative Conference took place in June for the first time. See the Executive Directors 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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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.

The Ad Agency

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President's Report

By: Michael Harris, President, MPVA

Detroit VA Opening CBOC Health Care Clinic Downriver!

On June 3, 2024, the Detroit VA Healthcare system open the first ever VA Downriver clinic located at 1640 West Fort Street in Trenton, MI.

This is a part of the VA to lessen the drive times for veterans to their medical appointments. The clinic will offer a full scope of primary care services and be connected to a network of specialty care providers and services.

Veterans currently enrolled for VA healthcare who would like to receive care at the Downriver VA Clinic can easily do so by calling our secured line at (313) 576-1000, extension 63898 and leave a message with their first and last name, the last 4 of their social security number and a phone number where they can be reached for scheduling.

In the early 1990s, the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), one of the three administrations of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), began developing a strategy to expand its capacity to provide outpatient primary care, especially for veterans who had to travel long distances to receive care at VA facilities. To facilitate access to primary care closer to where veterans reside, VHA began implementing a system for approving and establishing Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOCs).

A CBOC is a fixed health care site that is geographically distinct or separate from its parent VA medical facility. A CBOC can be either VA-owned and VA-staffed or

contracted to Healthcare Management Organizations (HMO). Regardless of how it is administered, a CBOC must have the necessary professional medical staff, access to diagnostic testing and treatment capability, and the referral arrangements needed to ensure continuity of health care for current or eligible veteran patients. VA policies require all CBOCs to be operated in a manner that provides veterans with consistent, safe, high-quality health care.

The VA currently has over 800 Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC), 22 located throughout Michigan. The VA implemented these clinics to make access to health care easier. These clinics provide the most common outpatient services, including health and wellness visits, without the hassle of visiting medical centers. The VA continues to expand their network of CBOCs to include more rural locations, making access to care closer to home. To find a CBOC nearest to you please visit: <https://www.va.gov/directory/guide/division.asp?dnum=1&isFlash=0>

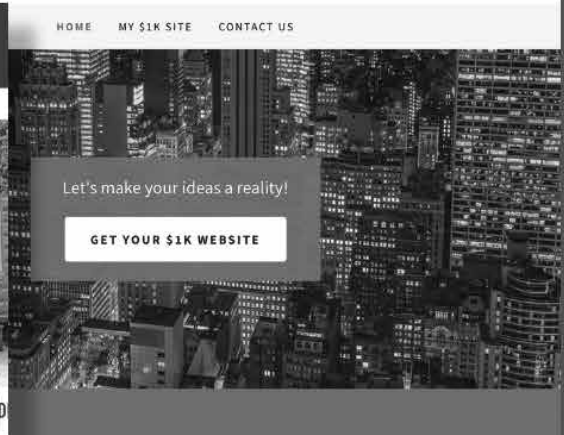
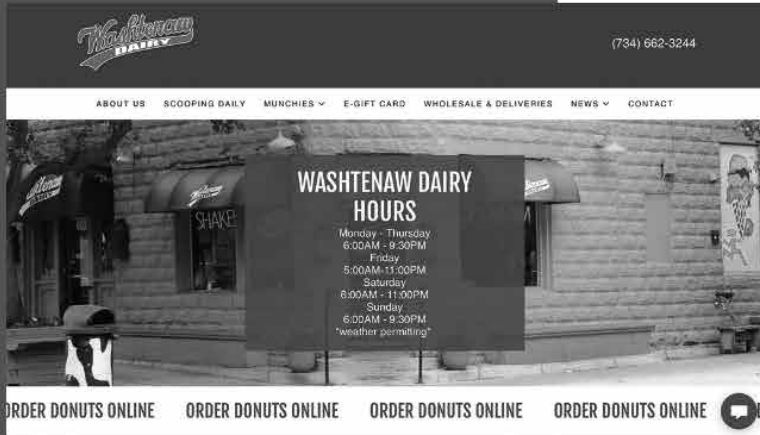


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Executive Director's Report

By Jaclyn Kochis, Executive Director, MPVA

VETS Safe Travel Act: H.R. 7365

You may recall that my column this past fall discussed Air Carrier Access and the obstacles our members, and all people with disabilities, face when traveling by plane. These issues are not new to you or PVA. There are many obstacles that a person with a disability may face during an air travel experience. One such obstacle begins with airport security.

After traveling to Washington D.C. this past month for PVA's Advocacy and Legislative Seminar, I was reminded of why we advocate so strongly to improve these issues. During the seminar, we heard horror stories from members about how dehumanizing the whole process of flying can be. Our veterans rely on mobility support and other assistive technology devices. They can experience difficulty during airport security screening because standard screening equipment is often inaccessible. As a result, wheelchair users are subject to an invasive pat-down process. These pat-down procedures are often humiliating and can cause delays as other passengers wait and witness as officers screen them.

Additionally, we have found that TSA agents are not always briefed or properly prepared on how to conduct these screenings for people with disabilities. For example, TSA agents have asked individuals with service dogs to unleash their animal during screenings. This would cause the person to lose control of their animal, could cause distress to the animal, and could lead to a whole host of confusion and danger to the passenger.

The *VETS Safe Travel Act (H.R. 7365)* works to help address these issues and is a key priority that was discussed with our legislators during our June Advocacy and Legislative Seminar. This legislation would provide free access to TSA's Pre✓® program to



Congressman Jack Bergman and MPVA Executive Director, Jaclyn Kochis, pose during their Capitol Hill visit in June.

eligible severely injured or ill veterans. Veterans would receive this benefit free of charge once they successfully pass all necessary background checks and interviews. Wheelchair users with TSA's Pre✓® can generally avoid the pat-down and inconvenient logistics that come with this. This legislation would open dialogue on how to engage with passengers with disabilities and help ensure they can travel with safety and dignity.

The *VETS Safe Travel Act (H.R. 7365)* was introduced to the House of Representatives this past February. It was referred to the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs in late February



Jaclyn Kochis (pictured left), MPVA Executive Director, and Brenda Wheeler, MPVA Administrative Assistant (pictured right) pose with Representatives Slotkin and Stevens at Reagan International Airport before their flights back home to Michigan.



Jaclyn Kochis and Brenda Wheeler pose with Representative Rashida Tlaib during their Capitol Hill visit in June.

where it still awaits further action. I hope to see this bill move swiftly and I am pleased to share that the 8 representatives' offices we met with while visiting Capitol Hill in June were receptive to this issue. To us, this legislation is "common sense", and I felt our Michigan Legislators were aligned with that sentiment. I can assure you that we will continue to fight for equality and Air Carrier Access for all PVA members and people living with disabilities. I will also keep you abreast of this legislation. In the interim, I encourage you to speak to your local legislators about this Act. You can also visit the following link to encourage the swift passage of this bill: <https://www.voterveice.net/iframes/PVA/Campaigns/113137/Respond>

As always, YOU can make a difference!





By: Mike Harris, President, MPVA

Airlines on the Verge of Accommodating People Travel Seated in a Personal Wheelchair

While serving on the Delta Airline Advisory Board on Disability for fifteen years I continuously advocated that planes be designed to allow passengers to stay in their personal wheelchair when they fly.

I have some good news to report!

At this year's Aircraft Interiors Expo in Hamburg, Germany, Delta Flight Products and Collins Aerospace (two major players in the aviation industry) both unveiled innovative wheelchair-securement solutions that aim to revolutionize the flying experience for disabled passengers.

The competition between Delta Flight Products and Collins Aerospace underscores a growing urgency to enhance air travel accessibility. Both companies are working toward finalizing their designs and securing Federal Aviation Administration certification, Delta's application is already submitted, with the goal of installing these systems on commercial aircraft as soon as possible.

The race is on to see which company's solution will first take flight and achieve a significant milestone in the pursuit of equal access in the skies. As both companies continue to refine their prototypes and navigate regulatory hurdles, the prospect of a more accessible future in air travel looks promising.

A National Academy of Sciences (NAS) report delivered last fall at the request of Congress concluded

that personal wheelchair securement is technically feasible on commercial narrowbody aircraft such as Boeing 737s and Airbus A320s, provided that two successive rows of seats are removed on one side of the aisle.

The report did not explore the financial impact to airlines of removing two rows of seats and replacing them with one row for wheelchair access. Costs, though, could be substantial, potentially totaling \$1 million per plane or more, even assuming all the wheelchair slots were purchased and that the seats removed were economy class.

The NAS study said the best place to create the wheelchair space would be in the two front left rows behind the door, an area often used by carriers for pricier first-class seats. The ability to fly with personal wheelchairs would be a game changer for many disabled travelers. It would also likely spur some wheelchair users who currently choose not to fly to take to the skies, the study says.

For others, the existing boarding process, which involves transferring into a narrow airline-owned chair in the boarding area and a second transfer over armrests and into the airplane seat, can put the flyer at risk of injury.

The NAS authors concluded that the most feasible place to accommodate personal wheelchairs would be on the left side of the plane, in the two rows directly behind the boarding door.

Clearing out two rows would provide adequate space for chairs to maneuver into the designated securement location and perform medically essential position functions without impinging on other flyers. Placing the wheelchairs behind the door would eliminate the problem of maneuvering them through the narrow airline aisle.

According to the Department of Transportation website, more than one in every 100 wheelchairs and scooters transported in the aircraft cargo compartment of domestic flights are damaged, delayed, or lost. Enabling passengers to stay in their personal wheelchairs on aircraft will increase the safety and dignity of air travel and increase access for travelers with disabilities.

Currently, airplane passengers cannot use their personal wheelchair as a seat in the same way they can on many trains, buses and vans. Equipping airplanes with wheelchair securement systems is an intuitively appealing solution to many of the hardships that people

with disabilities with mobility impairments face when flying,

Unfortunately, it might take legislation to force the airlines to do what is right!



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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

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Photo: Stephanie Strickland, Senior National Service Officer

Changes to VA Health Care Eligibility

On March 5, 2024, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) expanded VA health care to millions more Veterans, years earlier than called for by the PACT Act. Eligibility will apply to veterans who served in the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, Iraq, Afghanistan, or any other combat zone after 9/11, as well as veterans who never deployed but were also exposed to toxins or hazards during service. Veterans will be eligible to enroll directly in VA health care without first applying for VA benefits.

You may apply for VA health care if any of these descriptions are true for you:

- You served in the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, Iraq, Afghanistan, or any other combat zone after 9/11, or
- You deployed in support of the Global War on Terror, or
- You were exposed to toxins or other hazards during military service

“Veterans can qualify to enroll directly in VA care based on where they served, what activities they participated in here at home, income requirements or more. While this expansion of care does not expand access to all veterans, it is a massive expansion of VA care,” said VA Press Secretary Terrence Hayes.

The expansion means that certain individuals will qualify for VA health care up to 8 years earlier than called for by the PACT Act, Hayes said.

The VA has long forced vets to prove that a later-in-life illness was due to a specific toxic exposure they suffered while deployed, requiring vets to submit medical exams, tests, and expert opinions. Under the law, the VA now assumes that a vet’s claim for benefits is valid if they were present in a war zone where toxic chemicals were likely present – a reality of most U.S. bases during the Afghanistan and Iraq wars.

The expansion now includes veterans with active service assigned to a duty station in and the airspace above:

- On or after August 2, 1990, in Bahrain, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, or the United Arab Emirates.
- On or after September 11, 2001, in Afghanistan, Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, Uzbekistan.

Eligible veterans also include those who deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Freedom’s Sentinel, Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation New Dawn, Operation Inherent Resolve, or Resolute Support Mission.

The expansion also applies to veterans who never deployed as part of a conflict but participated in a toxic exposure risk activity while serving or training on active duty, or inactive duty training. The toxic exposures include:

- air pollutants (burn pits, sand, dust, particulates, oil well fires, sulfur fires)

- chemicals (pesticides, herbicides, depleted uranium with embedded shrapnel, contaminated water)
- occupational hazards (asbestos, industrial solvents, lead, paints including chemical agent resistant coating, firefighting foams)
- radiation (nuclear weapons handling, maintenance and detonation, radioactive material, calibration and measurement sources, X-rays, radiation from military occupational exposure)
- warfare agents (nerve agents, chemical and biological weapons)

The VA will use service records and all available information to determine if former troops participated in toxic exposure risk activities as part of its nationwide campaign to enroll as many veterans as possible. Since the PACT Act became law, more than half a million veterans have enrolled in VA health care.

All eligible Veterans can visit [VA.gov/PACT](https://www.va.gov/PACT) or call 1-800-MYVA411 to learn more and apply for VA health care beginning March 5. You can also contact your local PVA National Service Office with any questions on VA Health Care eligibility.



Fisher House is a home away from home for veterans and their loved ones.

If you're receiving care at the VA hospital or through VA Community Care, and your loved ones travel more than 50 miles to be with you, you might be eligible to stay at the Fisher House.

Ask a VA representative to help you start the referral process.

Scan here to learn more or visit fisherhousemichigan.org



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Sports & Recreation

By: Scot Severn

The Miller Family Open Track & Field Meet



Photo Courtesy of Conor Titsworth, University of Michigan

The University of Michigan held its first track and field meet for athletes with disabilities in late June. Athletes from the University of Alabama, University of Arizona, and San Diego State University made the trip to Ann Arbor to compete in the first annual *Miller Family Open Track and Field Meet*.

A total of 93 athletes competed in the inaugural event. Athletes with physical disabilities or intellectual disabilities all took to the University of Michigan Varsity Track and Field Stadium for a day of field and track events.



Photo Courtesy of Conor Titsworth, University of Michigan



Photo Courtesy of Conor Titsworth, University of Michigan



Photo Courtesy of Conor Titsworth, University of Michigan

“The 2024 Miller Family Open was an incredibly impactful event for the community here in Ann Arbor to demonstrate that this is sport, these are athletes,” Erik Robeznieks, Assistant Director of Adaptive Sports & Fitness, University of Michigan, said. “I think really, yesterday was our coming out party in some sense, especially within adaptive track and field.”



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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

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!

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