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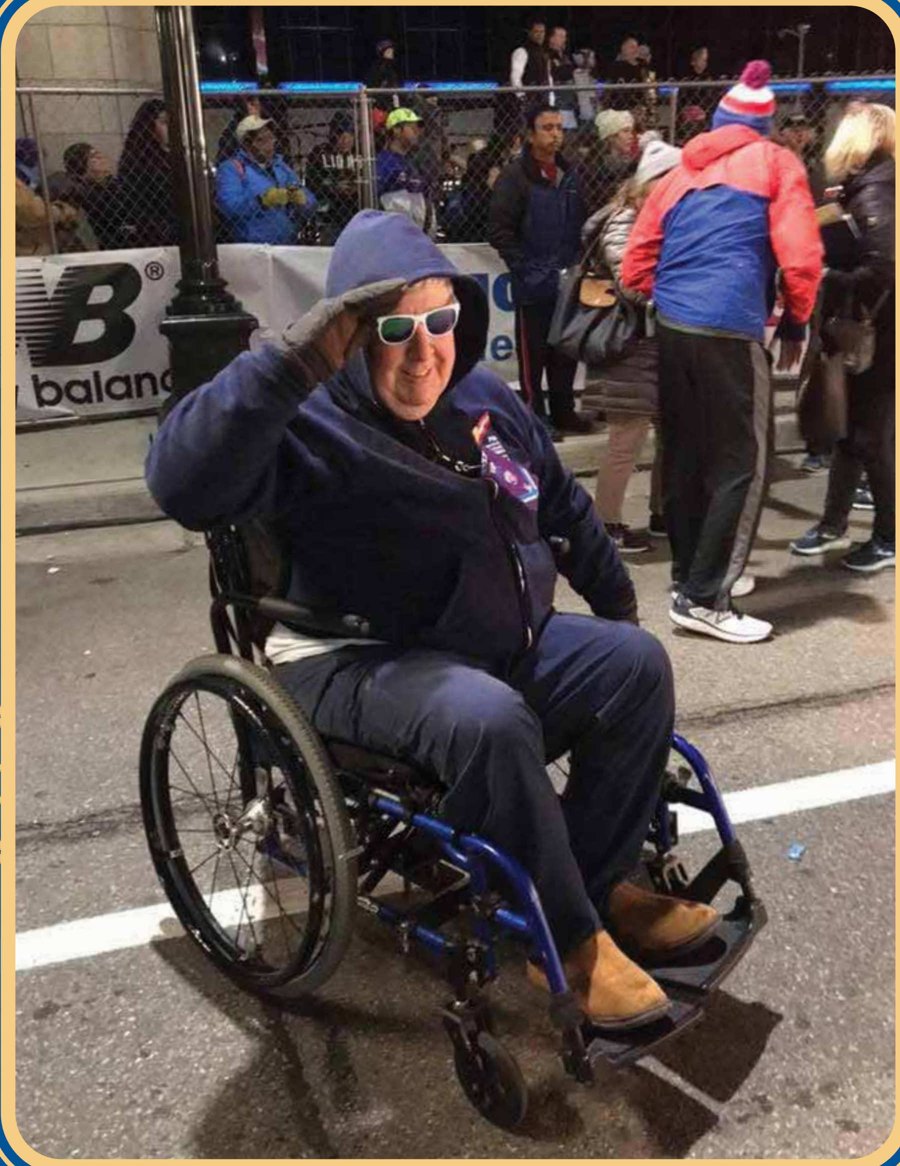
Rollin' Times from the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America



MPVA mourns the loss of our President and Friend, Micheal Harris.

Winter Edition 2025

About this Issue:

The MPVA lost President Micheal Harris this February. It is a tremendous loss to the Chapter and the disability community as a whole. Please be sure to see the Executive Directors article and read a dedication to our dear friend, Mike.

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Vice President................ Scot Severn
Secretary......................... Clark Shuler
Director............................. Ray Brown
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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.

Inside this Issue

Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America

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Plymouth, MI 48170
(248) 476-9000
Toll free: (800) 638-MPVA (6782)

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.

Attention Readers!!!

The MPVA would like to take The Rollin’ Times Newsletter to **exclusively electronic format**. This means that readers can receive their copies of the Rollin’ Times **via email.**

If you would like to help the Chapter cut costs of printing and mailing and receive your Rollin' Times newsletter electronically, please send Jaclyn Kochis at:

jkochis@michiganpva.org

Let us know that you’d like to “opt in to receiving the RT electronically”.

Paralyzed Veterans of America

Michigan Chapter

AWARENESS DAY

WHEN:

Thursday, April 10, 2025
1 PM EST to 3 PM EST

WHERE:

YMCA OF SAGINAW
1915 Fordney Street
Saginaw, MI 48601

FEATURING INFORMATION ON : Improving Quality of Life for people with Disabilities • VA Benefits • Home and Business Accessibility • Barrier Free Design • Adaptive Sports Education

CONTACT:

jkochis@michiganpva.org

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SOLD

- **$250 Vendor Table Sponsor: Includes a table at event** *(tables are approximately 6 ft. long. Availability for 10 vendor tables)*
- **Contact:** jkochis@michiganpva.org

for more information!

BENEFITING:

The Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America (MPVA) who's mission is to enhance the quality of life for veterans with spinal cord injury or disease throughout the state of Michigan. Visit: www.michiganpva.org

President's Report

By: **Bob Vance,** President, MPVA

Looking back at 2024

Reflecting back on this past year, I am pleased at the hard work the Chapter put in. We offered more support, unique events, and fellowship to our members and friends while continuing to expand our services. Our work to enhance the quality of life for veterans has been unwavering as we provide information, advocacy, education, recreation, fellowship, and above all—hope!

When I reflect on our yearly accomplishments, I am always reminded of the mission here at the MPVA—we are an organization whose members are, above all, resilient and tough! Our members constantly adapt and demonstrate that they can overcome any obstacle. We have seen our members and community supporters prove this through their desire to be more inclusive and active.

MPVA offered, and will continue to offer, informational lunch and learns. These events were a huge hit—including one on veterans benefits that allowed members and friends to learn and inquire about this complicated topic. We were also proud to host membership events like our annual picnic at the Miracle League of Plymouth, and we supported multiple sporting events through our support of Wheelin' Team 457.

The Chapter dialed up all of our communications: through our social media posts, newsletters, and membership calls. We truly love communicating more with our members who are so outgoing and deserving.

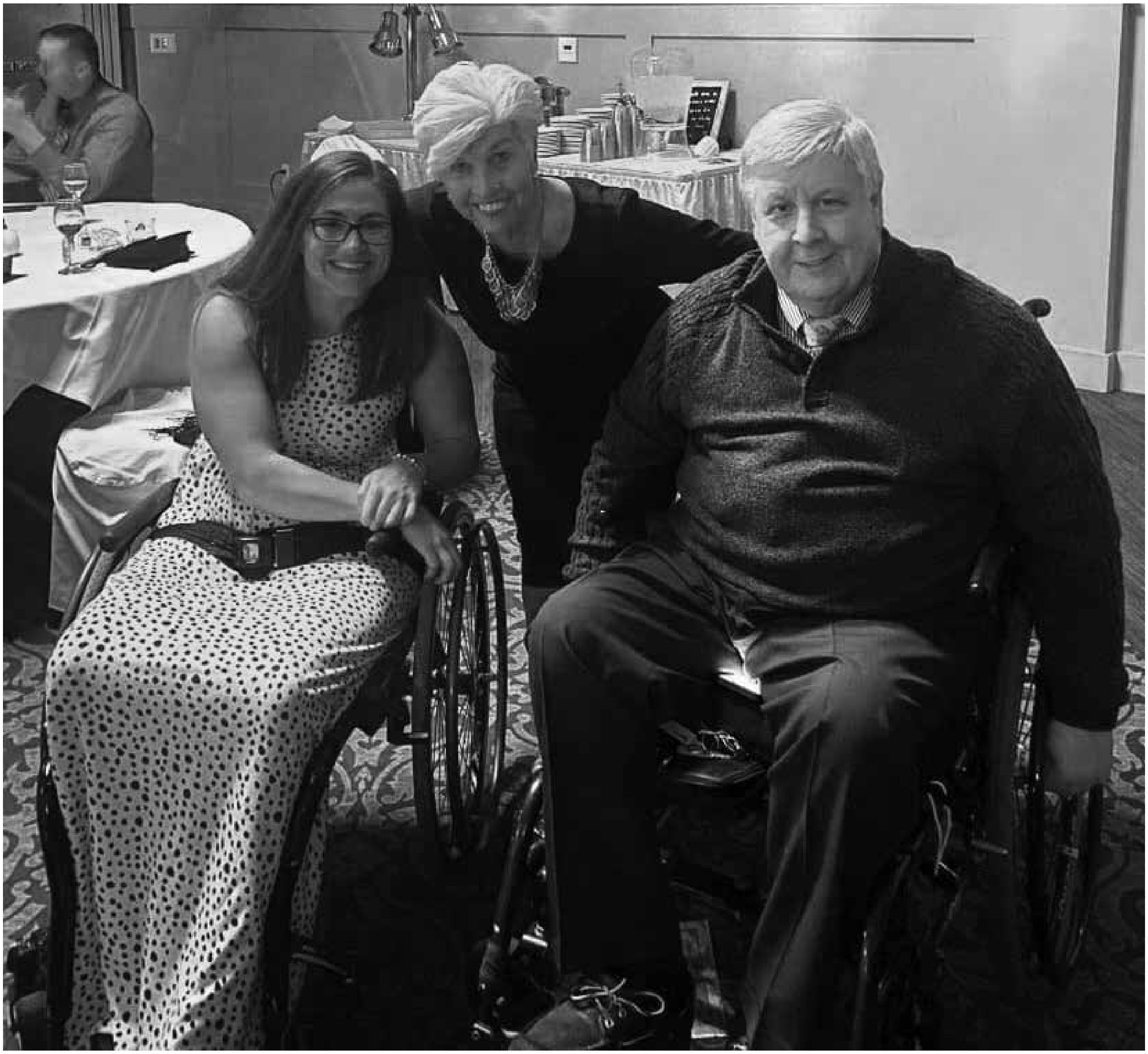
I know that our Chapter feels extraordinarily pleased that we were able honor our veterans this fall with a Veterans Day outing at the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) which proved a worthwhile endeavor, providing a delicious lunch at the DIA's café, free gift bag with goodies, and a chance to honor our brave service men and women. Our sponsors, who so generously supported, have ads featured throughout this edition of the Rollin' Times.

We will continue to provide you with the highest quality of service in 2025! Please stay tuned for our membership invites and mark your calendar for this year's Awareness Day taking place on April 10, 2025 at the YMCA of Saginaw! Check out the flyer for more details and contact me with any questions you may have at: jkochis@michganpva.org.

Executive Director's Report

By Jaclyn Kochis, Executive Director, MPVA

The Loss of a President & Friend



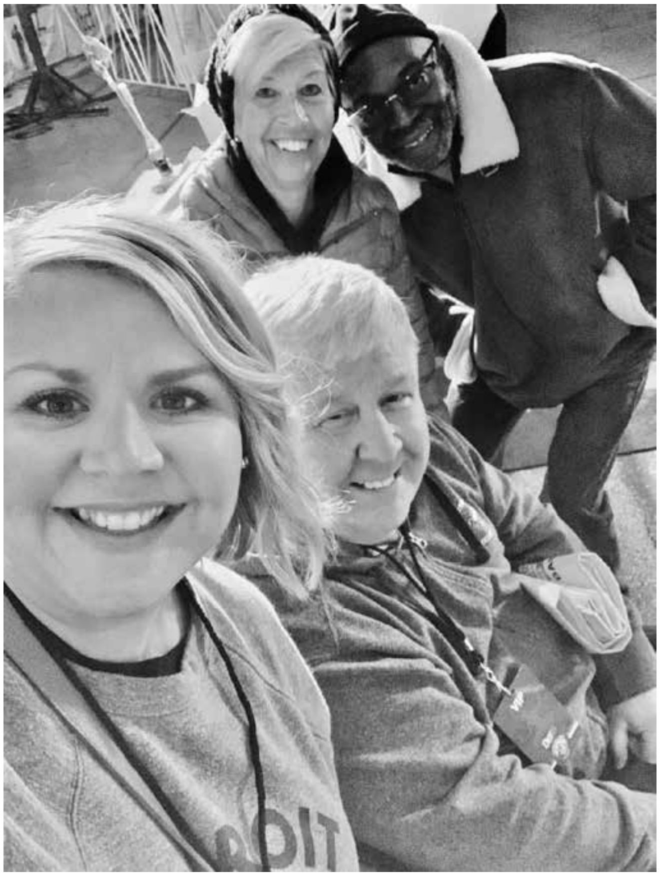
Robin Bennett (left) and Brenda Wheater (center) pose with Michael Harris.

It is with profound sadness that we share that our President and friend, Micheal Harris, has passed. This is a tremendous loss to our organization and to all those who personally knew Mike.

I would like to first share his professional biography, and then I would like to share some remarks I wrote about Mike:

Micheal Harris Biography:

In 1996, the Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America (MPVA) gained a new member. At that time, this new member would have never dreamed that their recent support of the organization would turn into 20 plus years of commitment, service, and inspiration to the disability community.



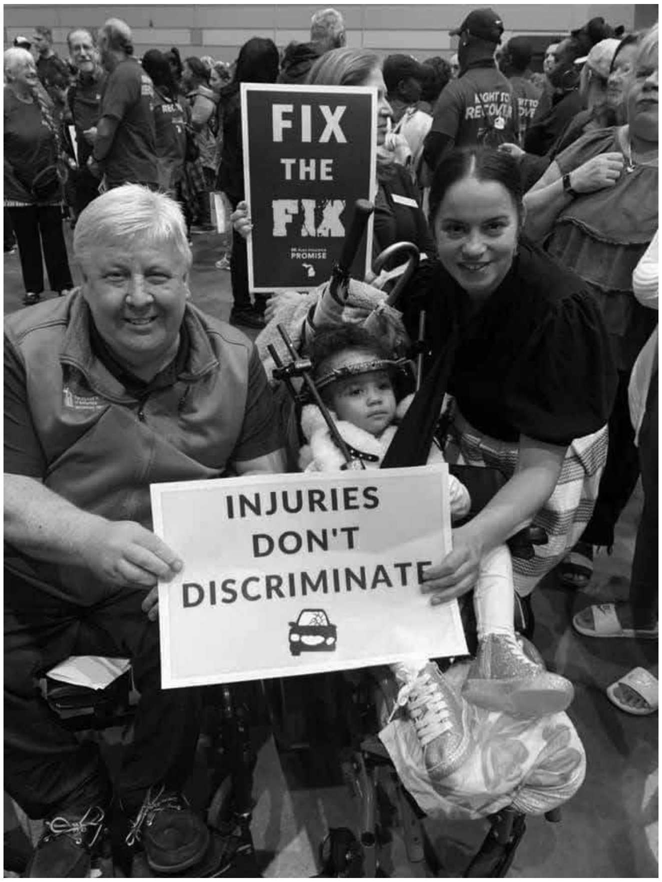
MPVA team poses with Mike Harris at the Detroit Free Press Marathon.

Michael Harris—or "Pooh Bear," a nickname coined during his military service because of his physical and wholesome likeness to the fictional teddy bear—was no shrinking violet. Michael served in the United States Marine Corps from 1975-1979. After honorably serving his country, Michael returned home from service and endured a devastating blow in 1986 when he was riding passenger in a vehicle that flipped, causing Michael to become spinal cord injured instantly.

While many people would have shrunk to the trauma, Michael learned a new way of life and thrived. After his spinal cord injury, Mike went on to serve as Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America's Government Relations Director, Executive Director, and President.

As a well-respected disability advocate, Mike worked on civil rights cases that have impacted lives, both locally and federally. He worked tirelessly to ensure that our communities are inclusive through his understanding and deep dedication to address the needs of those living with a disability.

There have been so many organizations that have tapped on Mike to serve on committees or boards and he rarely turned them down. To each, he brought enthusiasm and his unique expertise. It would be impossible to list all of his accomplishments and commitments, but here are a few:



Michael Harris poses with a young child who was injured in an auto accident at a Coalition to Protect Auto No Fault rally in Lansing.

- Advised the Michigan Department of Transportation to ensure that they are properly installing "public rights-of-way" under Michigan accessibly codes;

- Monitored settlement agreements on numerous civil rights complaints filed in federal court against municipalities through southeastern Michigan;

- Served on Delta Airlines Customer Advisory Board on Disabilities where he quarterly reviewed existing policies/procedures to see if they can be improved upon so people with disabilities can have an enjoyable flying experience;

- Oversaw the ADA Civil Rights complaints that were filed with the Department of Justice, including the landmark settlement against the University of Michigan's "Big House," which resulted in accessible seating being added at all sightlines;

- Appointed by the Governor to represent the Michigan Barrier Free Design Board where he reviewed Michigan barrier free design and the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Accessibility Advisory Board;

- In conjunction with the Detroit Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA), was tapped on to present an Architectural Accessibility Seminar for architects from the Detroit metropolitan area;

- Tapped on to provide feedback on accessibility at Comerica Park and Little Caesar's Arena;

- Appointed to The Senior Alliance (Area Agency on Aging) Board of Directors.

These are just a few of Micheal's accomplishments. Mike was also a dedicated brother, uncle, and dear friend. Anyone that came into contact with Michael left with a smile due to his cheery disposition. He was one of a kind and an absolute gift to us.

Personal remarks I want to share:

I knew Mike for nearly 17 years. In that time, I gained many "Mike-isms" and funny memories I am super grateful for.

Mike loved sports, music, history, and food.

When he was middle school, he called a radio station and asked them to play "Something" by the Beatles. He sat there and waited for them to play it. When the host finally said "this next song goes out to Michael," he said "I was pissed off because they played a Beatles song but not "Something"...it was only until later I realized they did play "something by the Beatles."

Michael poses with his sisters this past winter.

Mike realized in chow hall in the military that he had a funny quirk...eating with his eyes closed because it "made the food taste better." He said he was eating and realized it was super quiet and when he opened his eyes the entire chow hall was staring at him and everyone started to laugh. He didn't realize how often he ate with his eyes closed.

Michael and "Paws" pose together.

As a Catholic, Micheal looked forward to Lent so he could tell his favorite Lent joke which was to ask people "you know what I gave up for Lent this year?"…he'd then sit there and let this pregnant pause go by before snorting "walking".

He was passionate about history and politics. He had many opinions on the current state of things and I'd often remind him that we worked for a nonprofit and not to go too far publicly stating things as we didn't want to turn any donors away. In retrospect, I am grateful for his disposition. It taught me a lot about this subject and I hope I don't let him down when it comes to advocating for what is right.

Mike loved sports to the point that he didn't really want to play them after his spinal cord injury. I would often give him crap about this—that he needed to give adaptable sports a try. He never really did give them a try but he did tell me one day while being reflective that he didn't always look back fondly at the athlete he was prior to his injury. He expressed to me that while he was a good athlete when he was younger, he was a terrible loser. His injury taught him resilience and the power of losing gracefully. There was no shame in not being the best and there was way more to gain in putting forth a good effort and being a team player everyone enjoyed being around. He said he was "kind of a jerk" when he or his team lost and that now he learned to feel disappointment but keep a good attitude.

There's so much to say about Mike and I'm shocked I won't be able to call, text, or see him and "B.S." around. He'd often end conversations with us at work with "Peace, Love, Dove" doing his impression of how "everyone talked in the 70's".

At the office, I started to write his hilarious malapropisms on a dry erase board. It will be impossible to erase that now—figuratively and literally.

Mike was like family to all of us—the human equivalent of a golden retriever.

He had every reason to bitch about life but showed up and made everyone around him feel better. There are few people that make the world brighter in that way. Mike was one.

May he rest in eternal peace knowing that his life here on earth made a lasting, valuable, impression.

"And when the night is cloudy there is still a light that shines on me

Shine until tomorrow, let it be…"

-The Beatles

Government Relations & Advocacy

By Jaclyn Kochis, Executive Director, MPVA

Open Letter to PVA Members

It is no secret that the last few weeks have been bombarded with news impacting veterans and people living with disabilities. PVA Chapters are working to address these issues as quickly as they are coming at us. We are also diligently preparing for our Legislative and Advocacy week taking place this June where we will be meeting with our state legislators on Capitol Hill to discuss a variety of topics impacting our mission. PVA's President gave a powerful testimony before the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs GOP, House Committee on Veterans' Affairs Democrats, Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee Dems and Republicans, advocating for our members in early March. PVA's also released an open letter to our members and I encourage all to read it. Please see that letter below:

WASHINGTON, DC (Feb 26, 2025)

Dear PVA Members,

Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) is deeply troubled by actions being taken in Washington, D.C. that are already having a detrimental impact on the services that veterans with spinal cord injuries and diseases (SCI/D) like ALS and MS, rely upon. In recent weeks, you have likely heard many reports of widespread changes in federal government staffing and funding. While we understand and generally support the underlying desire for agencies, including the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), to streamline access to care and benefits, the arbitrary and haphazard way that these efforts are being approached is failing that mission and harming veterans.

Today, the Office of Personal Management and the Office of Management and Budget released joint guidance that is the next and most significant step in the plan to significantly reduce the federal government. While the memo does provide some exceptions (like national security or border security), it is unclear if VA is covered under any of those exempted areas. If VA is not exempted, it will be required to submit a mass reduction-in-force plan per the requirements of the memo.

Earlier efforts to reduce the federal workforce have already had an effect on veterans' care and benefits. We learned this week that Specially Adapted Housing (SAH) agents have been terminated around the country and others immediately retired as a direct result of the Administration's efforts. SAH was short staffed prior to these latest reductions, leading us to believe that veterans' efforts to adapt their homes will suffer.

Members of PVA around the country have reported that recreation therapists are being treated as non-exempt among health care professionals in the VA. Additionally, we have been made aware of recreation therapy activities being completely canceled because funding has been cut. Recreation therapists play a crucial role in teaching veterans with SCI/D how to enjoy life and reengage in the social part of community following a catastrophic disability. No position in the multi-faceted team approach to care for veterans with SCI/D should be treated as expendable. We call on the VA to clarify the status of these positions and provide the funding necessary to conduct recreation therapy activities to ensure that veterans with catastrophic injuries and diseases can continue to receive the care they need.

PVA also has grave concerns about the future of research that helps veterans and all Americans. Research is one of the four principal missions of the VA. It's also one of the fundamental tenets of our mission going back to our founding nearly 80 years ago. Research focused on veterans, particularly those with catastrophic disabilities like SCI/D, has changed the world for the better. It has improved and even saved the lives of countless veterans and other Americans.

Arbitrary reductions that remove key personnel from the research space discount the role that these individuals play in benefiting not only veterans, but society as a whole. Specifically, we recently learned that some VA researchers working on ALS research have lost funding and that research will stop. It is beyond comprehension that the federal government would not want to invest in research that could improve and even save the lives of veterans with ALS and other life-altering disabilities.

We are equally concerned about proposed rules that would substantially reduce the overhead rates for research advanced and supported by the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Drastically reducing the overhead rate for research projects will have serious consequences for research for veterans across the entire spectrum, including for PVA-supported research.

On March 4 at 10:00 a.m. ET, PVA National President Robert Thomas will testify before a joint hearing of the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs. He will discuss the crucial importance of restoring VA's specialized care services, which have been suffering from funding and staffing cuts in recent years. He will also speak to the important role that VA-provided SCI/D care and life-sustaining research has played in shaping his life. We urge you to watch his testimony (veterans.house.gov) and to sign PVA's petition (pva.org/research-resources/pva-action-force/) opposing any efforts to starve the SCI/D system of care of resources.

We also know that many of you have the best picture of what is happening in your local facilities. Some members of Congress are skeptical that cuts and force reductions across the system are having an impact on health care services and benefits. We encourage you to contact your members of Congress (Senators and Representative) and share with them exactly what you are seeing and how veterans' care and benefits are being impacted. If they do not hear from you, they will continue to believe that no harm is being done to veterans.

We said following his confirmation that we wanted to work collaboratively with VA Secretary Collins to improve access to care for veterans, particularly those with SCI/D who rely upon the VA SCI/D system of care almost exclusively. Instead we have been forced to the sideline while the Secretary makes only vague proclamations that staffing and other cuts will "be invested back in care and benefits." It is time for VA leadership to demonstrate exactly what that phrase means because we are tired of broken promises.

Robert L. Thomas, Jr Carl Blake

National President Chief Executive Officer

About Paralyzed Veterans of America

Paralyzed Veterans of America is a 501(c)(3) non-profit and the only congressionally chartered veterans service organization dedicated solely for the benefit and representation of veterans with spinal cord injury or diseases. The organization ensures veterans receive the benefits earned through service to our nation; monitors their care in VA spinal cord injury units; and funds research and education in the search for a cure and improved care for individuals with paralysis.

As a life-long partner and advocate for veterans and all people with disabilities, PVA also develops training and career services, works to ensure accessibility in public buildings and spaces, and provides health and rehabilitation opportunities through sports and recreation. With more than 70 offices and 33 chapters, Paralyzed Veterans of America serves veterans, their families, and their caregivers in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. Learn more at PVA.org.

Veterans' News

Photo: Stephanie Strickland, Senior National Service Officer

VA makes several cancers presumptive for service connection – lowering the burden of proof for Veterans to receive no-cost health care and earned benefits

WASHINGTON -Today, in a step that builds on the Biden-Harris Administration's focus to fulfill our nation's sacred obligation to our nation's Veterans, the Department of Veterans Affairs announced that it is making acute and chronic leukemias, multiple myelomas, myelodysplastic syndromes, myelofibrosis, urinary bladder, ureter, and related genitourinary cancers presumptive for service-connection for:

- Gulf War Veterans: Veterans who served in Somalia or the Southwest Asia theater of operations (which includes Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the neutral zone between Iraq and Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, the Gulf of Aden, the Gulf of Oman, the Persian Gulf, the Arabian Sea, the Red Sea, and the airspace above these locations) during the Persian Gulf War on or after August 2, 1990.

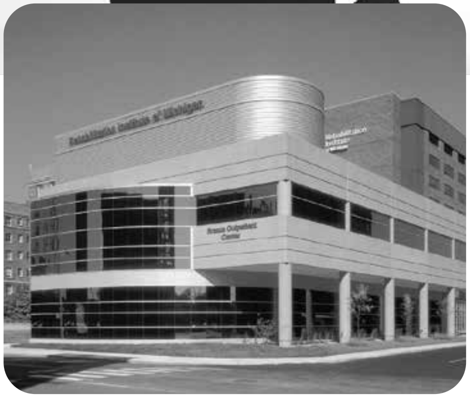
- Post-9/11 Veterans: Veterans who served in Afghanistan, Iraq, Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, or Uzbekistan and the airspace above these locations during the Gulf War on or after September 11, 2001. This includes Veterans who served at the Karshi-Khanabad (K2) base in Uzbekistan after September 11, 2001.

This step lowers the burden of proof for these Veterans, meaning that they do not need to prove that their service caused their condition to receive benefits for it. Instead, VA automatically assumes service connection for the condition and provides benefits accordingly. Additionally, when a Veteran becomes service connected for a health condition, it gives them access to free health care for that condition. The presumptions for urinary bladder, ureter, and related genitourinary cancers went into effect on January 2, 2025, and the presumptions for acute and chronic leukemias, multiple myelomas, and myelod ysplastic syndromes, myelofibrosis will be effective on January 10, 2025.

This expansion is part of a comprehensive, years long effort by VA and the entire Biden-Harris Administration to expand access to benefits for Veterans as part of President Biden's Unity Agenda for the nation. In 2022, President Biden signed the PACT Act into law -the largest expansion of Veteran benefits in generations. VA then made millions of Veterans eligible for health care and benefits years earlier than called for by the law and launched the largest outreach campaign in VA history to encourage Veterans to apply.

VA encourages Veterans with these conditions to apply for benefits today, and we encourage eligible Veterans with previously denied claims to reapply. VA will update publicly available information and conduct general outreach to Veterans and survivors to publicize this new eligibility and how to apply. To apply for benefits, Veterans and survivors may visit VA.gov or call l-800-MYVA411 or contact your local VSO.

Nationally ranked rehabilitation care close to home



Our experienced rehab team is proud to serve our veteran community by providing specialized care and programs. DMC Rehabilitation Institute of Michigan has been ranked by Newsweek, as one of America's Best Physical Rehab Centers. Our many programs include:

- Brain injury rehab
- Spinal cord injury rehab
- Amputee rehab
- Stroke rehab
- Adapted sports and recreation
- Peer support programs
- Neuropsychology

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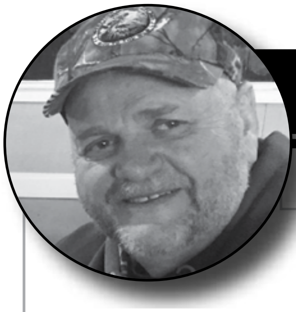
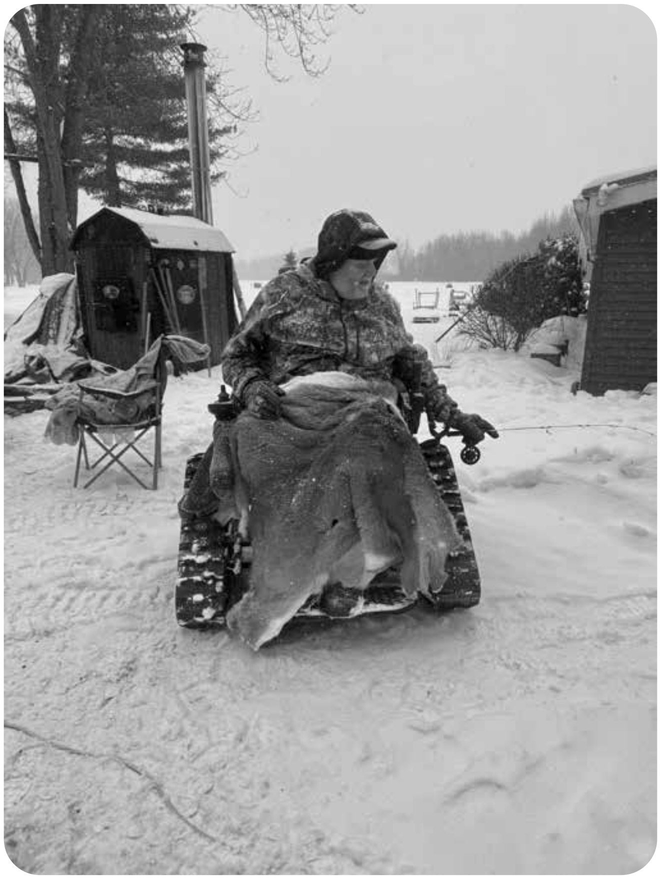


Sports & Recreation

By: Ray Brown

Free Fishing Weekend “Ice Baby Ice”

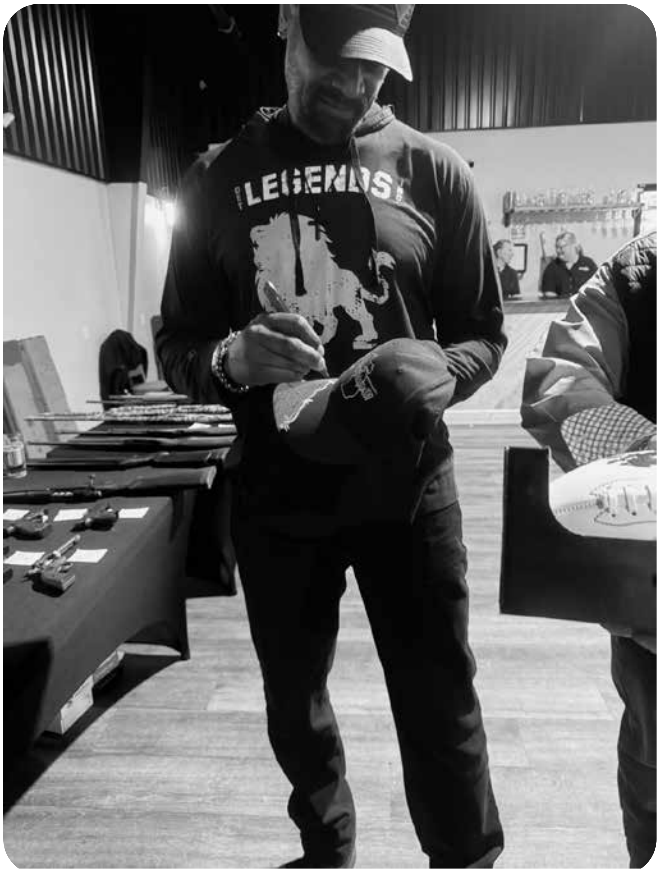


Ray Brown enjoying Ice Fishing.

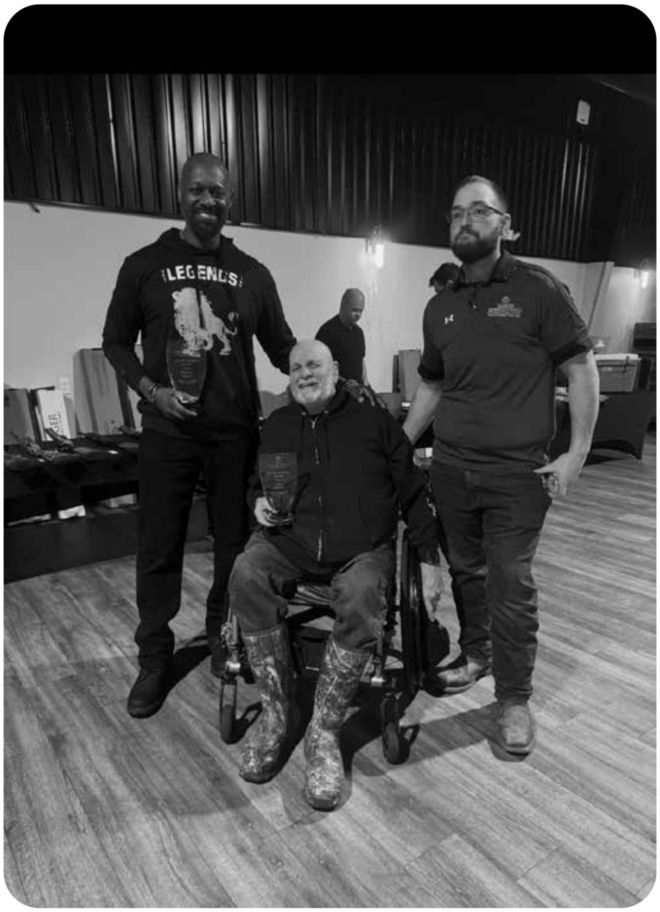
Wheelin’ Team 457 partners with MPVA on many events concerning sports and recreation and this year’s Free Fishing Weekend was no exception! The Michigan DNR schedules dates twice a year to try and entice folks into the world of ice-fishing in winter, and in the summer also.

Our ice fishing was held on a private lake in Mayville, MI called “Phelps Lake”. This is the first time in 3 years we had ice thick enough to host a tournament. Excitement filled the air with the year’s cold arctic blast. We arrived at 7:30 AM with warm doughnuts and hot coffee. Registration began and fishing started shortly thereafter and lasted until noon.

There were 28 individuals who showed up and began the morning of fun with wax worms in hand. It was cold so we set up a burn barrel for extra heat on shore. It was interesting to see the different shanties with quilted



Herman Moore signs swag for attendees.

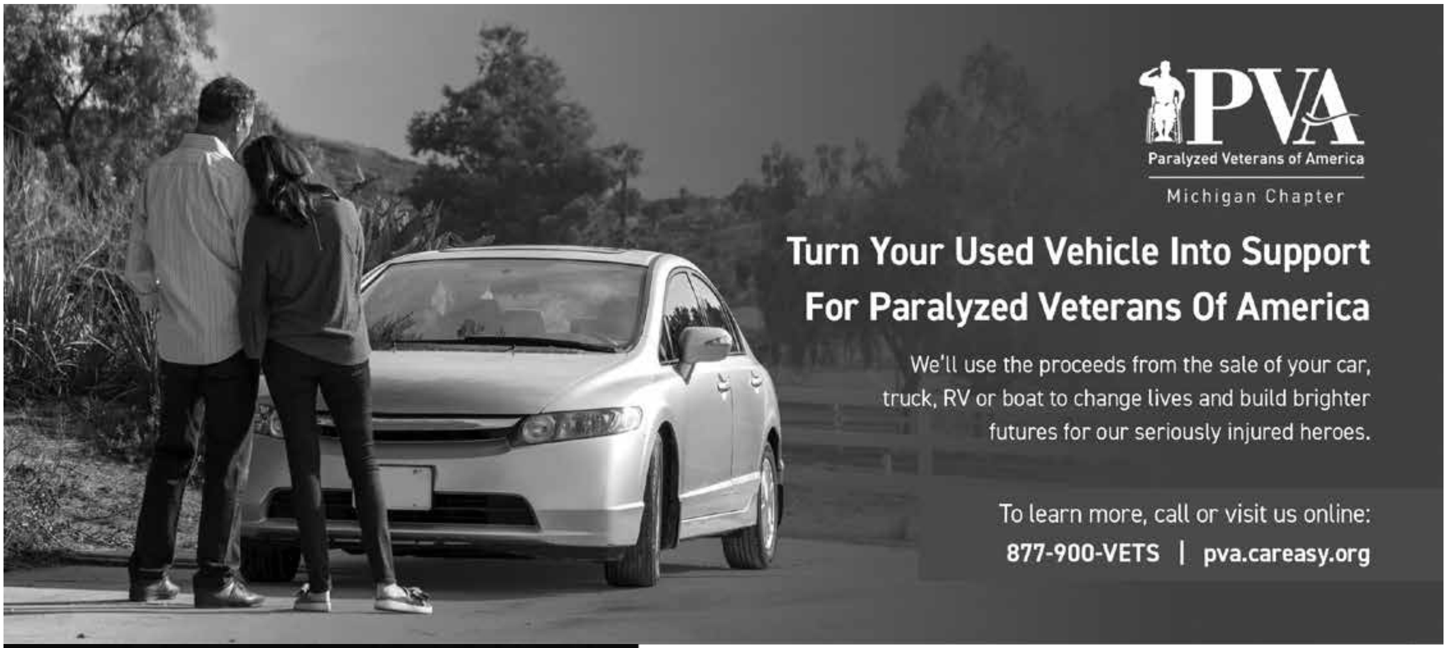


Honored to have won an award for "service to others."

walls and heaters for warmth. Three teams braved the day on buckets. Lunch on the shoreline was welcomed, and it was just in time for awards and prizes. There were good size crappies and bluegill harvested with some sharing dinner recipes.

Ole "Swaby," a Navy Veteran, and his sidekick took 1st place overall and won a couple custom ice fishing poles. First time ice fishermen were still shivering as they left for home, vowing to dress warmer next year.

It was great to be back out on the ice again and getting our lines wet and bait in front of fish was awesome.....'cause this is how we roll!



Paralyzed Veterans of America

Michigan Chapter

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We'll use the proceeds from the sale of your car, truck, RV or boat to change lives and build brighter futures for our seriously injured heroes.

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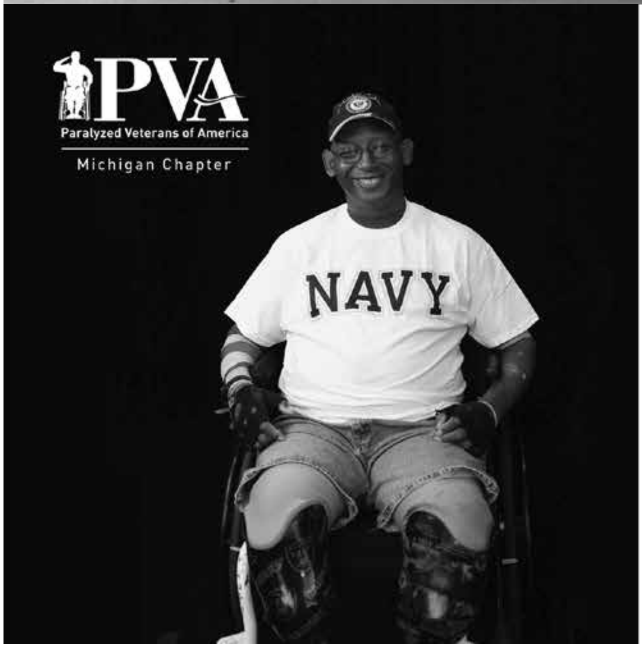

Paralyzed Veterans of America

Michigan Chapter

How it works!

☎ **1. Simply call or complete our form online.**

2. Schedule your free pick-up.

3. Receive a donation receipt.

Vehicle donations to PVA are tax-deductible! Most vehicles are sold through local used-car markets. Our Vehicle Donation Program works to get the highest return per vehicle and handles all the paperwork, too!

Call 877-900-VETS or donate online at pva.careasy.org

PVA

Paralyzed Veterans of America

Michigan Chapter

Interested in getting some business recognition?

Advertise with MPVA!

The Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America (MPVA) is a nonprofit service organization that works to address the needs and concerns of veterans who have sustained an injury or disease of the spinal cord. You may not know, but, the MPVA services the entire state of Michigan!

One of our largest resources is our quarterly newsletter:
"The Rollin' Times."
This magazine reaches out to over 2,000 individuals and businesses throughout Michigan and beyond.

CALL NOW and reserve your spot in MPVA's Rollin' Times Newsletter!
Contact, Jaclyn Kochis, Executive Director, at
(248) 476-9000 ext. 122 or email at: **jkochis@michiganpva.org**

Advertisement Size	**Specifications**	**Cost**
Business Card	3.5 x 2 in; size of a standard business card. Black and white ad that is featured on one of issue.	$50.00
1/2 Page	8.5 x 5.5 in. Black and white ad that is featured on one page of issue.	$150.00
Full Page Black and White	8.5 x 11 in. Full page, black and white ad	$200.00
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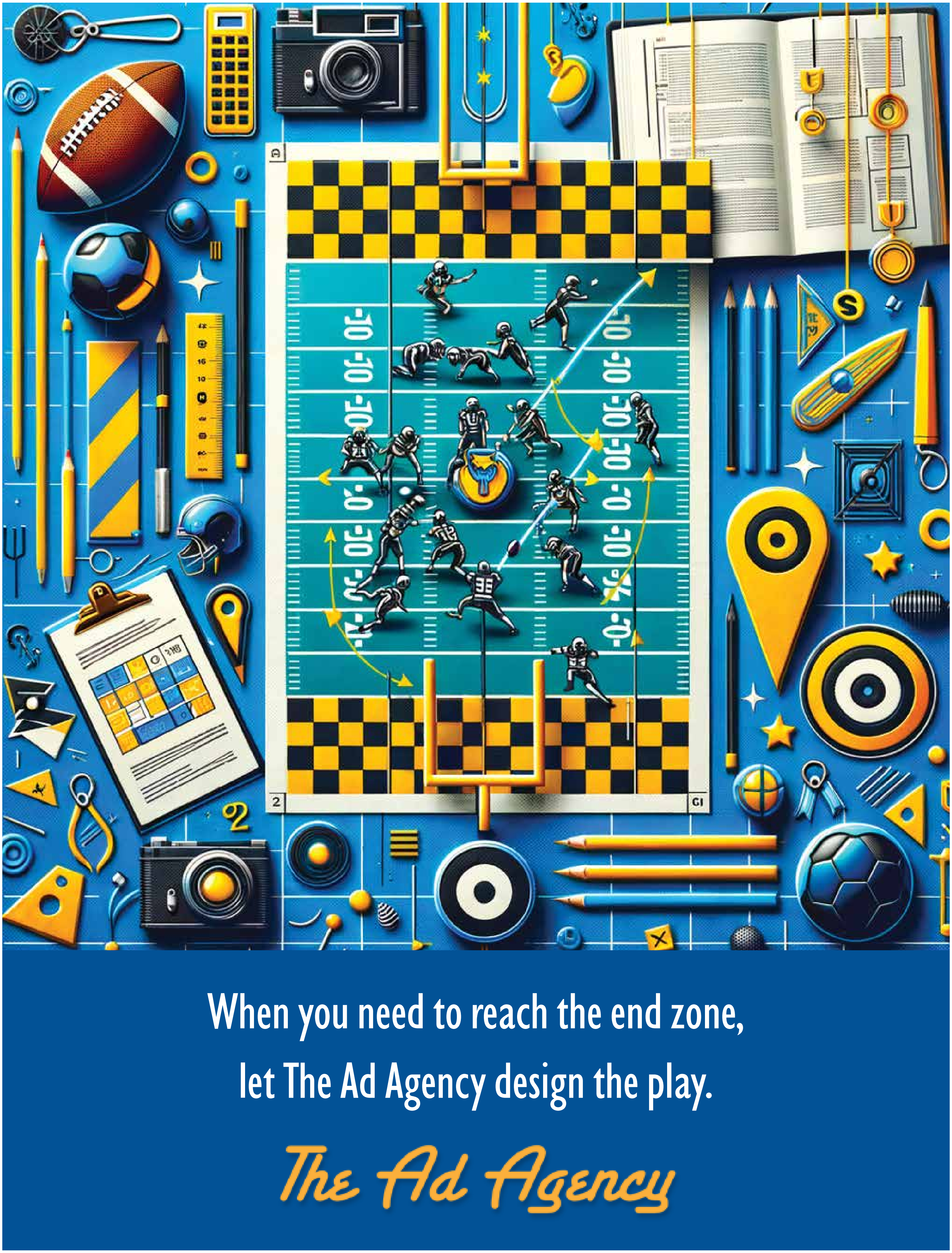
1/2 Page Back Cover/Color	5.5" x 8.5"; Full Color on the outside, back cover. (*This is a preferred ad spot as it is located right next to the mailing address!)*	$400.00



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let The Ad Agency design the play.

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2025 Winter Edition

PVA
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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 Wheater 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!

Michigan Paralyzed Veterans of America
46701 Commerce Center Drive
Plymouth, MI 48170
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