



PVA

Paralyzed Veterans of America

Northwest Chapter

NORTHWEST OUTPOST

Volume XLVI Issue 1 November/December 2023



NWPVA Members Philip Gigstad (front) and Matthew Mickunas (back) prepare for a 30-meter dive with SCUBILITY Dive Master, Ashley Arnold at Homestead Crater, Utah!

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Paralyzed Veterans of America

Northwest Chapter

Our Mission

The Paralyzed Veterans of America, a congressionally chartered Veterans service organization founded in 1946, has developed a unique expertise on a wide variety of issues involving the special needs of our members, Veterans of the armed forces who have experienced spinal cord injury or dysfunction.

PVA will use that expertise to be the leading advocate for:

- *Quality health care for our members,*
- *Research and education addressing spinal cord injury and dysfunction,*
- *Benefits available as a result of our members' military service,*
- *Civil rights and opportunities which maximize the independence of our members.*

To enable PVA to continue to honor this commitment, we must recruit and retain members who have the experience, energy, dedication, and passion necessary to manage the organization and ensure adequate resources to sustain the programs essential for PVA to achieve its mission.

The Northwest Chapter Paralyzed Veterans of America (NWPVA) a member chapter of Paralyzed Veterans of America accomplishes its mission by coordinated efforts through programs that:

- *Provide opportunities for health promotion, employment, sports, recreation, service, and camaraderie for paralyzed Veterans;*
- *Elevate society's information level about the attitudinal, physical and legal barriers that confront persons with disabilities in order to influence the removal of those barriers;*
- *Advocate for and monitor the delivery of high quality and appropriate health care benefits and service;*
- *Cooperate with and seek the support of other groups and individuals that share NWPVA's objective;*
- *Educate the public with the current and ongoing needs and current and past contributions of America's Veterans.*

Northwest Chapter Paralyzed Veterans of America

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NORTHWEST OUTPOST

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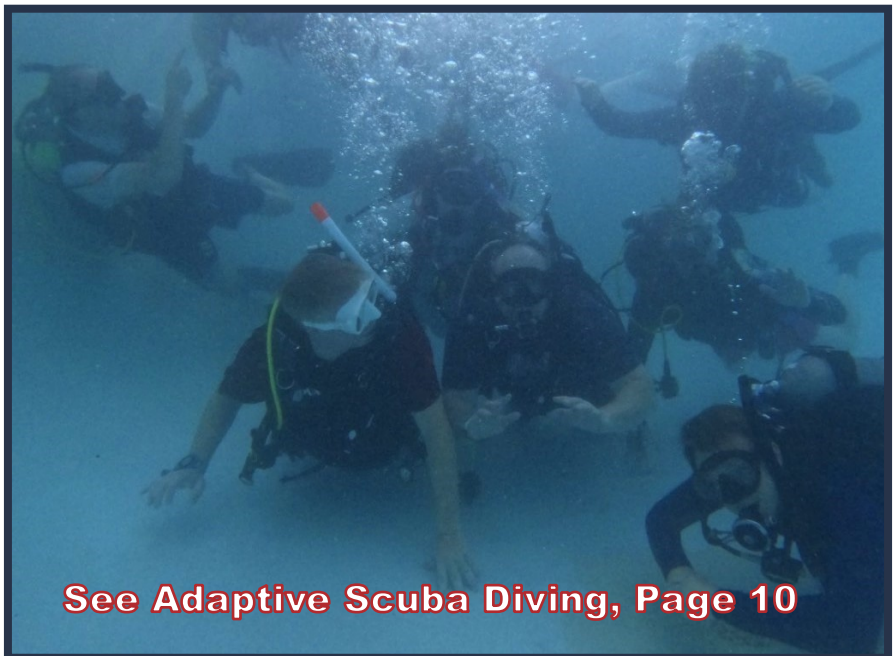


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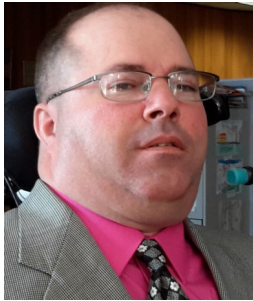
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See Adaptive Scuba Diving, Page 10

Thomas Bungert

Acting President's Message



Hello Everyone,

I personally would like to say thank you for entrusting me to serve my fellow members with the highest

standards according to the PVA by-laws. In order for me to achieve this, the Northwest PVA needs help from all our members by contacting us and letting us know what kind of activities and other events that interest you. This helps us better serve our fellow members.

When I did my rehab over thirty plus years ago, fellow Veterans helped me out by informing me about the PVA National Service Officers could help with benefits, and

vital information about grants and other resources in the community helped me have a better quality of life. What I have learned is Veterans learn more from each other by learning from others what works.

When I asked how I could repay them, they simply said, "just helping a fellow Veteran is the way of paying us back."

Since then, I made it my mission by helping my fellow Veterans to the best of my ability. We would like for more members getting involved in their communities and with Northwest PVA. It's now easier than ever to attend Northwest PVA meetings. As you can easily join the meetings through zoom. You can easily earn points for your service helping others. It's easy to fill out the monthly volunteer sheet each month to record your volunteer time. Your points

could go towards attending the National Veteran Wheelchair Games which will be July 25-30, 2024 in New Orleans, LA, remember this is your Chapter.

The goal is to provide our members to the fullest extent. With your help we can make this happen. Also, if members are interested in learning how to do the volunteer sheets or any other questions are free to contact the Northwest PVA or by emailing me at quadonline2000@yahoo.com. Let's make this year be a special year for all our members with your help.

Take care and God bless,

Thomas Bungert
Acting President

Help the **NORTHWEST OUTPOST** staff help you

You may have noticed big changes in store at the NWPVA for the coming year. We have new active members and newly appointed staff that are all pleading with you to help us help you to get involved.

We share member information with no one other than the national office. This is to ensure that you are signed up and remain eligible for PVA Membership benefits, like this newsletter.

We also want to entice members to be more involved in National and Chapter events, like the Wheel Chair Games in New Orleans this year or the NWPVA's next scuba diving adventure. Funding for these events including the transportation and lodging that is sometimes required is funded through your involvement.

In the coming months we'll be reaching out more often to ensure we have proper mailing addresses and other contact information. We will be encouraging more volunteer involvement to improve membership and enhance advocacy in your area, even you folks in Alaska.

Every contributing writer in this issue is pleading with you to keep your contact information up-to-date.

Again, we won't share your information, and you will not be contacted by anyone outside the PVA without your permission. We want to customize volunteer opportunities and recreational programs to your interests. What should you do to get started?

Call us. Leave your updated contact information and the best way to reach you. Leave a message for an NWPVA Appointee listed on Page 2. Tell us what you are interested in and how you want to get involved.

[See the information below to get started.](#)

- **Call the NWPVA at 1(800)336-9782, or**
- **Email the NWPVA at pvachnw@mindspring.com**
- **Leave your updated contact information**
- **Include a brief message about your interest**
- **An NWPVA appointee or committee member will call or email you back promptly**

Get involved TODAY!

Eastern Washington Fires

Brent King

Mid-summer in Eastern Washington to the West and North of Spokane there were two separate big fires fueled by hot temps, high winds and poorly managed dry forests. There was one death and over 200 structures burned. You hear about the losses and you feel bad for the individuals that lost everything.

Then I personally was contacted to try and find a powerchair and a racing chair for two of our local disabled civilians. Teghen is in high school and has cerebral palsy. He is relatively independent with the proper powerchair. The fire came so fast that he and his family were evacuated and could not gather any of their belongings. He lost his only powerchair. I made a few

phone calls to local St Lukes and a retired nurse I know. The retired nurse found a one-month-old powerchair that was being given away by a local man that had just lost his wife very recently. Luckily this chair was the proper size and fits him well!



Within two days Teghen was in a new powerchair and I had a mom thanking me while shedding tears. Teghen loves the chair so much, he asked if he could sleep in it. The other civilian that lost his racing chair is a longtime acquaintance of mine. Louis and his dad's home burned to the ground in Medical Lake, WA. Louis lives to push a racing chair daily. Louis was born with no legs below the knee.



I called St Lukes Rehab and asked if my old racing chair that I donated a long time ago was still sitting around. It was available and was given to Louis. I stopped by the temporary apartment he's living in and helped him fine tune the chair and put a new battery in the computer/odometer.

I could not begin to fathom the loss of suffered by these families. As a representative of the NWPVA I was happy to help impact two lives positively during a time of need.



Got an NWPVA focused story to tell?

Need help with your story idea?

E-mail your submissions or ideas to Scott Trapman at strappinglad2023@gmail.com.

Tracy Reddick Women Veterans Empowerment Retreat



The Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) hosted a Women Veterans Empowerment Retreat in Orlando, Florida from September 30 to October 3, 2023. The retreat was designed to engage and support female Veterans with spinal cord-related injuries and diseases.

Nearly 50 female Veterans from across the United States attended the three-day empowerment retreat, which included advocacy and leadership sessions, group exercises customized specifically for women Veterans, and morning yoga and meditation classes. The retreat was sponsored by Amazon, First Nation Group, Siebert Williams Shank Foundation, and TriWest Healthcare Alliance.

The event was focused on honing leadership skills, resiliency and advocacy. Attendees enjoyed morning

yoga and meditation classes, emphasizing the importance of physical and emotional well-being. The retreat was a great opportunity for female Veterans to get acquainted with each other, bond over navigating situations unique to women Veterans, and create lasting relationships that will support them in the years to come.

By hosting this event, PVA is fulfilling its mission to ensure that Veterans receive the benefits earned through service to our nation, to monitor the care in VA Spinal Cord Injury units, and fund research and education in the search for a cure and improved care for individuals with paralysis.

*Would you like to get involved with the Women's Liaison committee?
Leave a message with the NWPVA
at 1(800)336-9782.*



Welcome our new Sports & Rec Director

Scott Smith

Hi I'm Scott Smith,

I was recently elected as the Sports and Recreation Director for the NWPVA. As the new Sports Director it is my goal to help fulfill the needs of our members and provide opportunities to participate in events throughout the year.

Some of the events on my radar include an annual trap shooting competition, which would be open to all PVA members; a black powder muzzleloader learning camp; an ongoing Open Water Scuba program called Scubility with JADE Scuba Adventures and Lifewaters; the Annual Veterans Wheelchair Games held during the summer months, and the Winter Sports Clinic which introduces individuals to skiing and other winter time activities, usually held during the end of March every year.

One of the local resources that I would like to make our members aware of is Outdoors For All, here in Seattle. This organization has many resources and hosts events throughout the summer and winter, to include biking, canoeing, skiing and others. I have participated in the winter program at Stevens Pass and it is excellent. Their skiing program is seven weekends and about three to four hours in duration for each day. The program has equipment as well as helper/skiers that are top notch and can't be undone. Skiing is conducted at Snoqualmie Pass too.

Please put on your calendar if you haven't already, an event which starts this November 4th, (through the recreation outreach with the Seattle VA) called the Vet Learn to Curl Program, They have an ongoing program and have been reaching out to disabled Veterans since 2018. I help teach new curlers during this event.

Seattle and Tacoma are fortunate to host wheelchair basketball teams that compete on the national level and have for decades. We are also fortunate to have sled hockey, which competes on the national level. If you

play volleyball, there is a great team, very high caliber, that competes internationally and is always looking for players. Table Tennis, held at Green lake facility, with Green Lake Table Tennis, is held a couple times and is free. There is a local Archery club.

My goal is to help facilitate, where I can, and open doors that might not have previously been possible. I know where I started in my venture as an athlete, needing someone to help point me in a direction and at the same time not knowing who to ask. I might not know all the answers but I will help to find them with you and point you in the right direction.



Scott Smith demonstrates adaptive Curling techniques at the Granite Curling Club of Seattle.



Washington Update

Improve Access to Air Travel for Passengers with Disabilities

Nearly 40 years ago, President Ronald Reagan signed the Air Carrier Access Act (ACAA) into law. The ACAA prohibits disability-based discrimination in air travel.

The major problem with commercial air travel continues to be that airplanes have very few accessibility features to accommodate passengers with disabilities. Unlike other forms of mass transportation which allow wheelchair users to travel while seated in their wheelchairs, commercial air travel requires power wheelchair users to have their highly customized, expensive devices stowed in the cargo hold for the flight. This leaves baggage handlers to figure out how to fit these devices into cargo holds not designed to receive or stow them.

On July 20, the House passed H.R. 3935, the Securing Growth and Robust Leadership in American Aviation Act. This legislation would reauthorize the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) for five years. We are pleased that the legislation includes several important provisions that would improve the air travel experience for people with disabilities. Some of these provisions include training requirements for assisting passengers with limited mobility and properly stowing

assistive devices; improving the Department of Transportation's (DOT) complaint process; and addressing the need for more access standards. The bill also requires continued study into safe and secure in-cabin wheelchair restraint systems; and for DOT to perform a more in-depth analysis of mishandled wheelchairs. Additionally, the legislation reauthorizes the Air Carrier Access Act Advisory Committee and includes a focus on the needs of passengers with disabilities in evacuations. The bill includes elements of the PVA-supported Air Carrier Access Amendments Act (ACAAA) (H.R. 1267) and the MOBILE Act (H.R. 3082).

The Senate's version of the FAA Reauthorization Act, S. 1939, also includes several disability-related provisions, including elements of the MOBILE Act (S. 1459). We support adding amendments based on the ACAA (S. 545) that would improve the disability-related complaint process and improve disability access standards. Committee action on the bill has been delayed.

PVA Position:

Congress must ensure that the final version of this year's FAA Reauthorization includes provisions that will meaningfully improve the air travel experience of passengers with disabilities. Such provisions include, at a minimum, increased training for workers, better data collection and analysis, improved complaint processing, continued study into the ability of passengers to fly while seated in their wheelchairs, and improved disability access standards.



Improvement a must for VA Housing Adaptation Assistance

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Home Improvements and Structural Alterations (HISA) grants help Veterans and Service Members make medically necessary improvements and structural alterations to their primary residence. This includes improving the entrance or exit from their homes, restoring their access to the kitchen or bathroom, and making necessary repairs or upgrades to plumbing or electrical systems due to the installation of home medical equipment like a dialysis machine.

A lifetime HISA benefit is worth up to \$6,800 for Veterans who need a housing modification due to a service-connected condition. Veterans who rate 50 percent service-connected may receive the same

amount even if a modification is needed due to a non-service-connected disability. Veterans who are not service-connected but are enrolled in the VA healthcare system can receive up to \$2,000.

HISA rates have not changed since Congress last adjusted them in 2010. Meanwhile, the cost of home modifications and labor has risen nearly 50 percent during the same timeframe.

PVA Position:

Congress must pass the Autonomy for Disabled Veterans Act (H.R. 2818), which would raise HISA rates to appropriate levels and tie them to a formula that raises rates annually to help keep them that way.

Increase Access to VA Home Care Services

Veterans with significant disabilities, like spinal cord injuries and disorders (SCI/D), require specialized and long-term services and supports throughout their lives. Most SCI/D Veterans would prefer to receive non-institutional care or home and community based-services (HCBS).

VA HCBS must be more accessible to Veterans with catastrophic disabilities. The Veteran Directed Care (VDC) program, which allows Veterans to receive HCBS in a consumer-directed way, is not currently available at all VA medical centers. In addition, VA's Homemaker and Home Health Aid program does not always provide the level of support required to help paralyzed Veterans live whole, productive lives, particularly during times of direct care worker (caregiver) shortages. Also, the VA is limited in how much the Department can spend on each Veteran's home care. When VA reaches this cap, the only alternatives are to place the Veteran in a facility or rely on the Veteran's caregivers, often family, to bear the extra burden.

PVA Position:

Congress should pass the Elizabeth Dole Home and Community Based Services for Veterans and Caregivers Act (H.R. 542/S. 141), which would make urgently needed improvements to VA HCBS, such as:

expanding access to HCBS programs, including for Veterans living in US territories and to Native Veterans enrolled in IHS or Tribal Health Program. Raising the cap on how much VA can pay for the cost of home care should be raised from 65 percent of the cost of nursing home care to 100 percent.

Coordination should occur between the expanded VA home care programs and other VA programs, like the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers.

Social Security Credits for Caregivers

The Social Security Caregiver Credit Act would provide much-needed retirement protection in the form of a credit under Social Security for individuals who leave the workforce to care for a loved one. The bill would allow caregivers who engage in at least 80 hours or more a month caring for a dependent relative under the age of 12 or a chronically dependent individual the ability to receive this credit.

Providing credits under Social Security will offer some retirement security for the 53 million caregivers in the nation, 10 percent of whom have had to give up work entirely or retire early to fulfill their caregiving responsibilities.

PVA Position:

Congress must pass the Social Security Caregiver Credit Act (H.R. 3729/S. 1211), which would provide credits under Social Security to ensure that caregivers are not penalized in retirement for taking time out of the workforce to perform caregiving duties.



Dee Anne Cooper prepares to try out her new prosthetic designed by the team at the VA Puget Sound Health Care System.



George Vermeij ready to dive with help from Adventures team.



Philip Gigstad descends for a 30 ft descent at the Jade Scuba



Philip Gigstad performs a controlled descent to 50 ft at Homestead Crater, Utah.

Diving into a New World

Scubility Helps NWPVA Explore Underwater Realm

For many people, scuba diving is a thrilling and rewarding activity that opens up a whole new world of adventure and discovery. But for people with disabilities, scuba diving can also be a way of overcoming challenges, gaining confidence, and finding joy in life.

That's why the Northwest Paralyzed Veterans of America (NWPVA) partnered with Lifewaters and Jade Scuba Adventures to participate in a program called Scubility, which teaches people with any disability how to scuba dive with the appropriate accommodations. The program is designed to cater to individuals with most types of physical, sensory, or learning disabilities, and provides skilled and compassionate trainers and facilitators who can adapt to each person's needs and abilities.

The program was a five-day experience that took place in October, 2023. The first two days were in a swimming pool in the greater Salt Lake City area, where the participants learned the basics of scuba diving, such as how to use the equipment, how to breathe underwater, and how to communicate with hand signals. The pool sessions were also a chance for the participants to bond with each other and with the instructors, and to overcome any fears or doubts they might have had.

The next three days of training were conducted in the awe-inspiring Homestead Crater, a natural wonder that is located in Midway, Utah. The crater is a very deep hole in the ground that was formed by a volcanic eruption thousands of years ago. The crater is filled halfway by a hot, mineral-rich spring that maintains a constant temperature of about 96 degrees Fahrenheit. The water depth of the crater has been measured to past 60 feet, and it is home to various aquatic life forms, such as algae, and snails. The crater is accessible by a hand-carved tunnel through the bedrock that leads to a man-made deck placed at the water surface.

The crater was the perfect setting for the participants to practice their scuba diving skills and to explore the underwater realm. The warm and clear water made the diving comfortable and enjoyable, and the crater offered a unique environment to observe

Wanna get involved? Give us a call at (206) 241-1843.



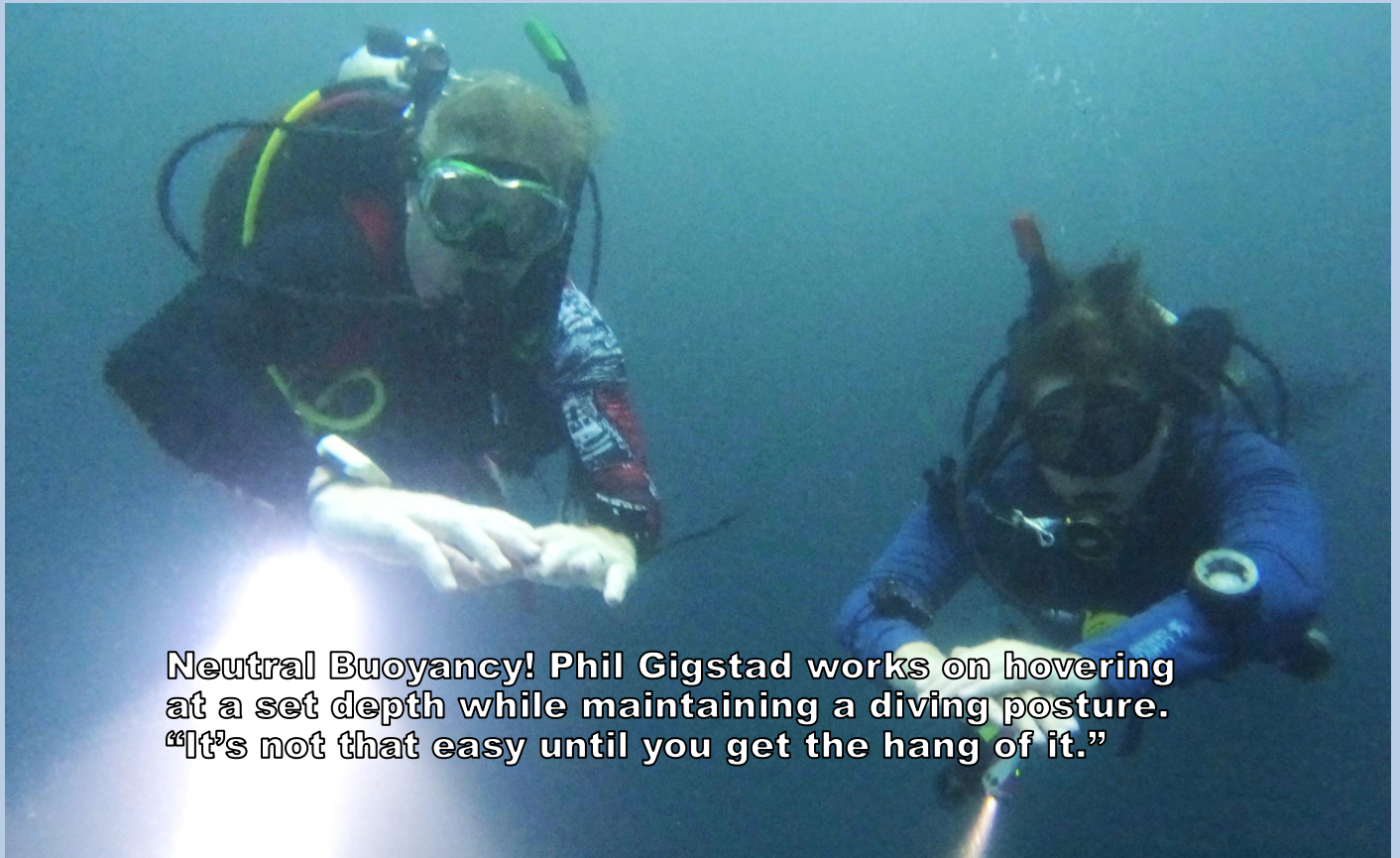
George Vermeff descends to a 50 foot depth at Homestead Crater, Utah.

and appreciate. They were able to dive to different depths and see the features of the crater, such as the ropy lava rock walls, small crevasses, and the bubbles that rose from the spring. They also had the opportunity to explore the wreckage of a pirate that lost his way

and to take pictures and videos of their experience. The participants described the scuba diving program as challenging, fun, exciting, and a bucket-list dream come true. They said that they felt a sense of accomplishment, freedom and empowerment from being able



Members of the NWPVA celebrate a successful week of diving with the team from Jade Scuba Adventures and Life Waters.



Neutral Buoyancy! Phil Gigstad works on hovering at a set depth while maintaining a diving posture. "It's not that easy until you get the hang of it."



Matt Mickunas checks out pirate wreckage "found" deep in the crater.




to dive and to discover a new world. They also said that they felt a sense of camaraderie, friendship, and support from their fellow divers and instructors. They expressed their gratitude to Lifewaters, and Jade Scuba Adventures for making the program possible and for providing


them with an unforgettable experience.

The scuba diving program was so successful that the NWPVA hopes to get more of their chapter members involved and to continue to develop their scuba diving skills. Scuba diving is not only a recrea-

tional activity, but also a therapeutic and educational one that can benefit people with disabilities in many ways. By diving into a new world, the participants were able to learn more about themselves, about nature, and about life.

Spookiness abounds in Burien Towne

Every year Discover Burien and the Burien business community host Boo Burien, an annual Halloween event that takes place in downtown Burien, Washington in late  October every year. The event is always free  and open to the public. This year it featured a  variety of activities for all ages, including a dog costume parade, haunted business handing out handfuls of candy, and a pub crawl for late-night revelers.

This year the event was held in downtown Burien, Saturday, October 28th from Noon until the wee hours of the morning. Boo Burien is organized by Discover Burien to promote local businesses and community events in the city, and to provide a fun and safe environment for families to celebrate Halloween. 

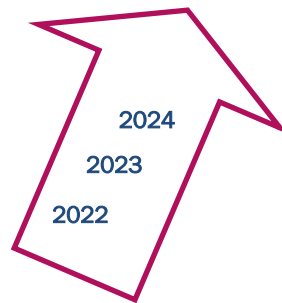
Overall, Boo Burien is a fun and exciting event that brings the community together to celebrate Halloween in a safe and festive environment.





We Salute You!

A special thank you to all our donors who continue to make the programs at the Paralyzed Veterans of America, Northwest Chapter thrive and grow stronger.



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NWPVA 2023 Annual Banquet attended by members, families

The Annual NWPVA Awards Banquet was held September 17th, 2023 at the NWPVA in downtown. The banquet was a business casual event

starting with a mixer at 5:00 pm and dinner at 6:00 was catered offering prime rib and salmon.

The NWPVA member recognized for her contributions during the last year was Tracy Reddick for her contributions as Chapter Vice President and as the Women Veterans Outreach Liaison.

This year's Speedy Award for non-member contributors went to the team at Homefront Home Quilters.

This year's President Award was presented by Matthew Mickunas to Dee Anne Cooper, associate member and Manager of Corporate Partnership, for her consistent and ongoing efforts to support the Chapter.



Tracy Reddick Receives the 2023 Member Recognition Award from National Director, Matt Mickunas.



Michael Killen, Senior Benefits Advocate presents the Speedy to the ladies at Homefront Home Quilters.



Attendees of the 2023 Annual NWPVA Banquet.

Thunder Mountain Farms Equine Rescue *Horse Lovers Haven Needs Your Help!*

Are you a horse whisperer? Do you have that special bond with the beasts that few understand? Well there is a place that needs your help.

Thunder Mountain Farms Equine Rescue is a non-profit organization that provides shelter, care, rehabilitation, and adoption services for abandoned, abused, neglected, slaughter-bound, or unwanted horses.

The organization's mission is to provide life-enriching experiences for youth and adults through volunteering, community service, education, mentorship, networking, and collaborations. They also have a variety of horses available for adoption.

What the organization really needs is volunteers. The horses need care and the ranch is supported through grants and volunteer hours.

Thunder Mountain Farms has a great web site at www.thundermountainfarms.org. They are located at 29609 SE 408th St, Enumclaw, WA, 98022. You may leave a message for Marla at (206)300-3732 or by leaving a message thru her website.



Join PVAction Force Today and Make a Difference

What is PVAction Force? It is a national grassroots advocacy network, led by PVA, that actively takes action on vital issues affecting Veterans with spinal cord injuries and disorders, and diseases, like MS and ALS, as well as people with disabilities. Free and open to all Americans, the group takes part in petitions, receives important legislative alerts, and more!

Join PVAction Force today!

Type this link into your browser:

<https://www.votervoice.net/PVA/home>



Holiday Events

Come One and All to the
Annual NWPVA and MVP Holiday Blast
WHO: MVP and PVA members and family

WHAT: Ugly Sweaters! White Elephant Raffle!
Prizes, Holiday Pot Luck, Games!

WHEN: Saturday, December 9th, 11am—2pm

WHERE: NWPVA & MVP HQ, Burien, WA

616 152nd Street, Burien WA, 98166
RSVP by Calling 206-241-1843 or email
strappinglad2023@gmail.com

Annual Barbeque kicks off new fiscal year

The Annual NWPVA Barbeque was held this year at the VA Puget Sound Health Care System grounds,



1660 S Columbian Way, Seattle, from noon to 3:00 pm, August 26th, 2023. More than 50 inpatients, their families and NWPVA members attended the event for fun, food, and games. The event is held annually as a way to introduce potential PVA members and their family to the PVA community.

The food was catered by Black Sheep Catering and included barbequed meats, sides, and cornbread. The catering was a hit among the attendees, who enjoyed the delicious food while mingling with other members of the community. The event also featured outdoor games for kids and adults alike, which added to the festive atmosphere.

The Annual NWPVA Barbeque is an important event that brings together members of our community to celebrate and have fun. It's a great opportunity for inpatients, their families, and NWPVA members to connect with each other and enjoy a day of food, games, and



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