

# VISION

*for Excellence*

SPECIAL | 2011



**PITTSBURGH**  
where **HEROES** become **LEGENDS**



*A Look Back at the 2011 Wheelchair Games*

## Director's Vision



### Dear Veterans, fellow employees, volunteers and friends of VISION 4:

During the week of Aug. 1-6, 2011, 567 Veteran athletes, loved ones, coaches and staff from the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Paralyzed Veterans of America converged on Pittsburgh for a legendary event.

This fabulous occasion was the 31st National Veterans Wheelchair Games. The unbelievably high energy and enthusiasm was inspiring. The athletes truly became legends that will never be forgotten.

Thanks to the efforts of a group of dedicated people, the event was extremely well-organized and exciting.

Both the athletes and those who made the event possible made us very proud here in VISION 4. Together we all truly created a new chapter in the story of this national event.

I have never cheered harder or felt more proud to do so. Many of these athletes have fought in combat and all have fought through devastating injuries or diagnoses. They have endured exhausting, sometimes excruciating, rehabilitation and training. But during the Games, they had the same focus and physical capabilities that they've always had. They accomplished feats that they never thought they would be able to do again. And at all times, the depth of their sacrifices for our Nation were evident.

Every Veteran is a hero for their service to our country. Every athlete became a legend for the obstacles they overcame.

This was the best Games in the history of this event. And we wanted to make sure that no one missed a minute of it. So keep turning the pages of this issue to be inspired again and again.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael E. Moreland".

**MICHAEL E. MORELAND, FACHE  
NETWORK DIRECTOR**



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# AROUND the NETWORK

## MEET THE ATHLETES

Several members of the VISN 4 team gathered one evening for some entertainment, chow and camaraderie.



- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Steve Kave, Wilkes-Barre Athlete</li> <li>2. Michael Moreland, VISN 4 Director</li> <li>3. Rory Cooper, Pittsburgh Athlete and Local Organization Committee Chairperson</li> <li>4. Terry Gerigk Wolf, VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System Director</li> <li>5. Edward DesLauriers, Pittsburgh Athlete</li> <li>6. Chad Evans, Athlete Recruitment Vice-Chair and Keystone Coach</li> <li>7. Robert Morris, Pittsburgh Athlete</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>8. Joseph Allshouse, Pittsburgh Athlete</li> <li>9. Joseph Jarvis, Pittsburgh Athlete</li> <li>10. James Balfe, Pittsburgh Athlete</li> <li>11. Ken Walters, Lebanon Athlete</li> <li>12. Jerry Baylor, Pittsburgh Athlete and 2011 Spirit of the Games Winner</li> <li>13. Fred Tregaskes, Keystone PVA President</li> <li>14. Tom Strang, Pittsburgh Athlete</li> <li>15. Mike Michalek, Pittsburgh Athlete</li> <li>16. Robert Szoszorek, Pittsburgh Athlete</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>17. Joseph Kiren, Pittsburgh Athlete</li> <li>18. William Wheaton, Pittsburgh Athlete</li> <li>19. Gary Kirkendall, Pittsburgh Athlete</li> <li>20. Randall Moyer, Altoona Athlete</li> <li>21. Mark Rosensteel, Pittsburgh Athlete</li> <li>23. William Jakovac, Pittsburgh Athlete</li> <li>24. Gilbert Gutshall, Altoona Athlete</li> <li>25. Gary Orlando, Sr., Erie Athlete</li> <li>26. Chris Fidler, Lebanon Athlete</li> <li>27. Bruce Schaffer, Lebanon Athlete</li> </ul> |
|---|---|--|

## MEDAL COUNT

FACILITY	ATHLETES	MEDALS WON		
		GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE
ALTOONA	4	2	3	6
BUTLER	2	2	1	1
CLARKSBURG	2	4		
ERIE	4	5		2
LEBANON	3		4	
PHILADELPHIA	9	13	2	6
PITTSBURGH	28	32	17	13
WILKES-BARRE	2	1	1	1
WILMINGTON	4	3	1	4



**58** VISN 4 athletes brought home an astounding **124 medals!!!** Congratulations!



# TOTAL TEAM



“  
*It kind of found me... Now I'm hooked.*  
 — Paul Welty, Teacher



## JUST CALL HIM COACH

**Local volunteer was unexpectedly promoted to coach.**

Some things are just meant to be. While volunteering at the Games, Paul Welty, a teacher from Glenshaw, Pa., unexpectedly progressed to coaching wheelchair athletes. As he stood on the sidelines watching the first round of basketball, a ball rolled by him. Another one followed.

“No one was rebounding for the guys, so I decided to,” said Welty, who is also a Marine Veteran. After five minutes of silent rebounding, an official walked up and asked the players who their coach was.

“Him,” team member Willie Harvey said.

“I looked around and realized they were pointing at me,” said Welty, who happens to be a former college basketball coach. “I said, ‘sure, I’ll do it.’”

“They were looking to me for support,” he said. “I was extremely humbled.”

His first game as coach turned out to be a thrilling game that came down to the last shot. Welty’s team won.

“It kind of found me,” he said of being a coach. “Now I’m hooked.”

3,700 selfless volunteers worked tirelessly to make the event a smooth success.

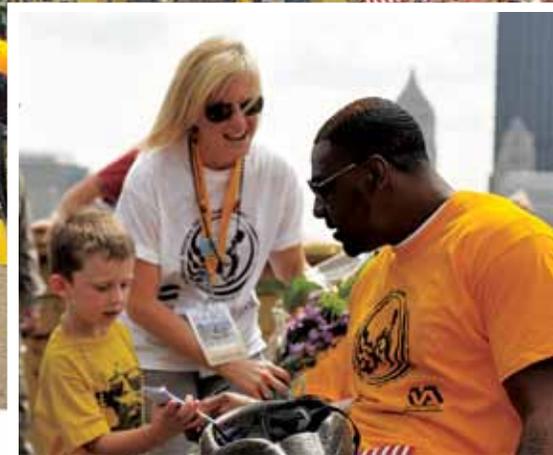


# TEAM EFFORT ★★★

## MEMORABLE KICK-OFF

Pittsburgh as a backdrop kicked the week off right.

Crowds gathered on the legendary Roberto Clemente Bridge to see a group of seasoned athletes tear through a one-of-a-kind slalom obstacle course! The event introduced the Games to the community and the athletes to Pittsburgh.



## A PARTY FOR LEGENDS

Heinz Field's Coca-Cola Great Hall set the stage for an unforgettable evening.

Heinz Field, home of the Pittsburgh Steelers, hosted an evening of music, magic, food and fun. Country singer Bryan Cole gave a performance worthy of legends, while the Gateway Clipper fleet, Pittsburgh's premier cruise line, provided transportation to the event.





## A STEELY WHEELER

In sports and in life, the 2011 Spirit of the Games winner doesn't stop.

Jerry "Bull" Baylor did everything right on the motorcycle that day in 1980. The Marine Veteran was wearing a helmet and looked both ways before the light turned green. He was only going five miles per hour when he was hit by a car with faulty brakes.

The motorcycle was replaced with a wheelchair, but Baylor, a native of Leechburg, Pa., has never stopped rolling, whether it's on the road, visiting VAs to inspire other disabled Veterans or encouraging them to participate in the National Veterans Wheelchair Games. It's that never-say-quit attitude that earned Baylor the Spirit of the Games Award, which was no surprise to those who know him or have seen him in action.

Navy Veteran Tom Strang, a fellow member of the Pennsylvania team, said Baylor pulled him back into the world after his own life-changing experience.

"He's a maniac athlete," Strang said. "When I first got hurt, I was very depressed Jerry got me out hunting and told me about fishing."

Baylor credits the Pittsburgh Steelwheelers, a local wheelchair sports organization, with getting him going in the first days after his accident. "I never stopped," he said. "I got up in the hospital, got in the wheelchair and kept going. Now I make it my mission to get other people to go to the Games. That's all I talk about. That's why they call me 'Bull.'"

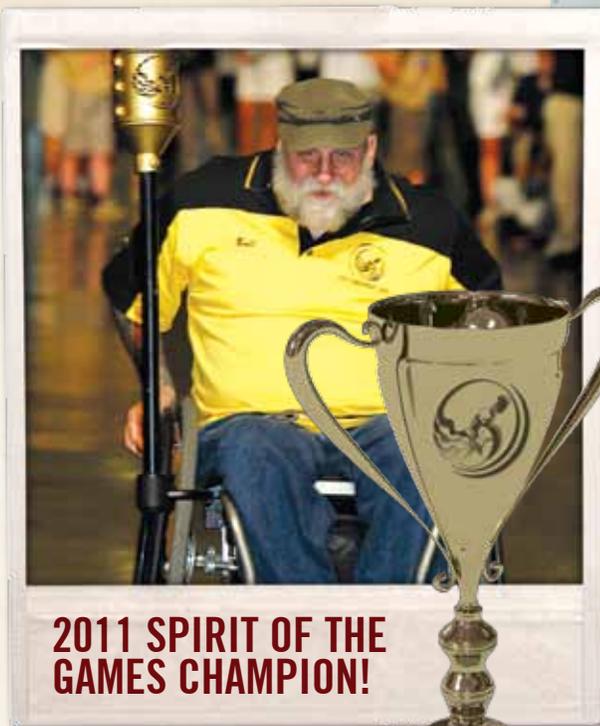
"I was going to local wheelchair competitions before there was a VA Wheelchair Games," said Baylor, who participated in the first Games in Richmond, Va., in 1981. This year, he won five gold medals, all in track events. But it is camaraderie, not medals, that is the most important part of the Games for him.

"I've talked 40 or 50 guys into joining me at the Games to show them what they can do. When you see their faces out here for the first time, man, that's what it's all about."

Baylor, who served from 1966 to 1970, believes his Marine mentality was a big help after his injury, and he tries to convey that to others. That mentality is one thing that attracted his girlfriend, Alicia Pastva, to him.

"He's just fantastic," she said. "He's so genuine and so giving. I fell in love with him because he has a good heart. He has it in him that he will never quit."

"I think certain people are just born with something that allows them to take anything," he said. "I tell people it's just a learning experience, but you can keep going."



**2011 SPIRIT OF THE GAMES CHAMPION!**

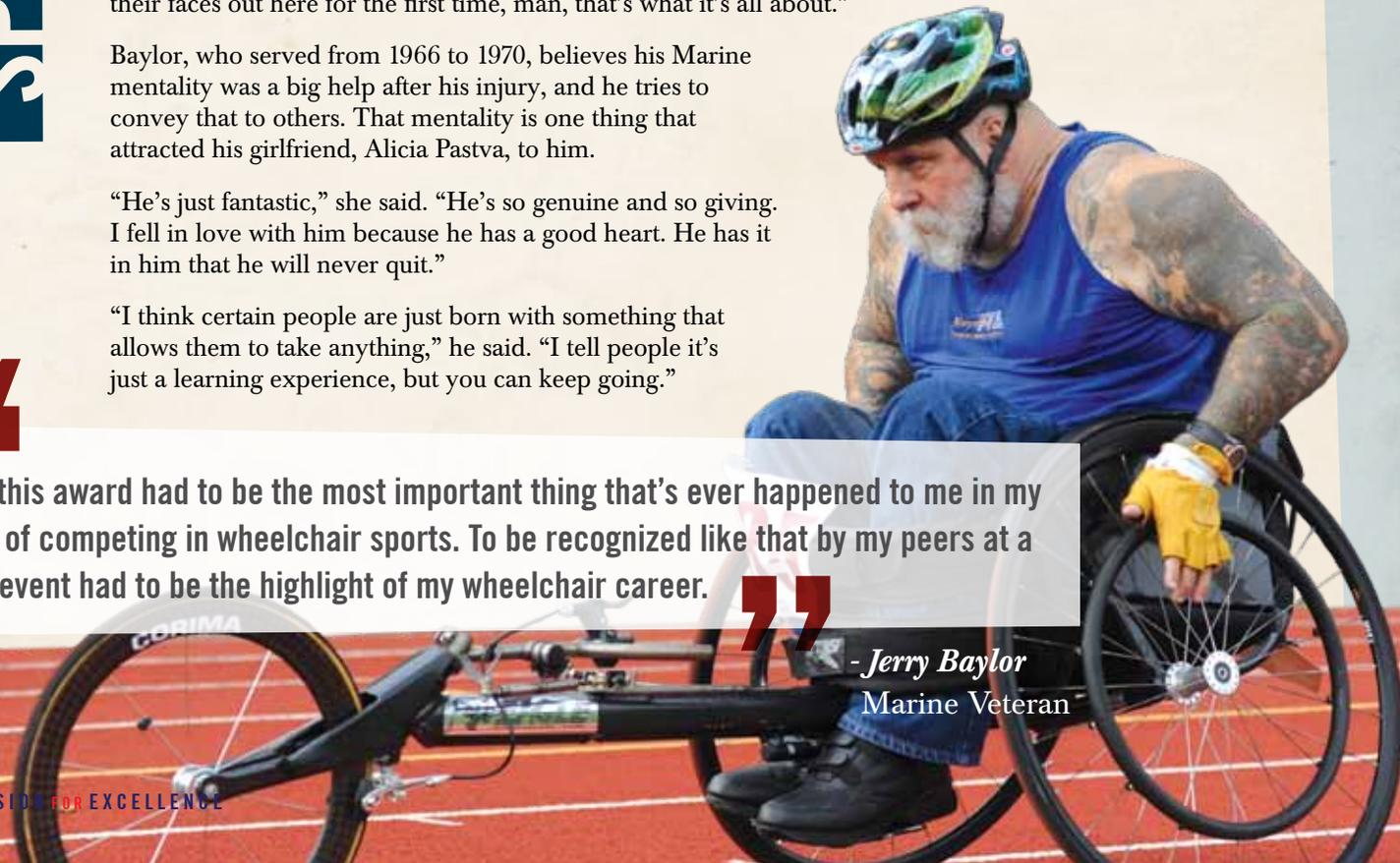


“

Winning this award had to be the most important thing that's ever happened to me in my 31 years of competing in wheelchair sports. To be recognized like that by my peers at a national event had to be the highlight of my wheelchair career.

”

- Jerry Baylor  
Marine Veteran



# MAN OF MANY HATS

Rory Cooper's vast experience served as pivotal asset for successful Games.

As a researcher and a Veteran, Rory A. Cooper, Ph.D., has dedicated his career to helping Veterans with spinal cord injuries live to their fullest potential.

As a paralyzed athlete, Cooper has forged new destinies and trail blazed new destinations.

Cooper suffered a spinal cord injury in 1980 in a bicycle accident in Germany, where he was serving in the Army. He went on to found research laboratories that seek to improve the mobility and function of people with disabilities, a successful joint venture between VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System, University of Pittsburgh, and UPMC. He also served as the local organizing committee chairperson for the 2011 National Veterans Wheelchair Games after playing a pivotal role in bringing the Games to Pittsburgh for the second time.

"The athletes, officials, and volunteers commented many times over the years how much they enjoyed the 1998 NVWG. VA Pittsburgh and the city of Pittsburgh have made so many important improvements since 1998 and my laboratories have conducted research at the NVWG since 1998," said Cooper. "Therefore, I thought it would be an opportunity to showcase Pittsburgh, to give back for all of the great experiences and opportunities afforded me and my work through the Games, and to make a contribution to our Nation's Veterans."

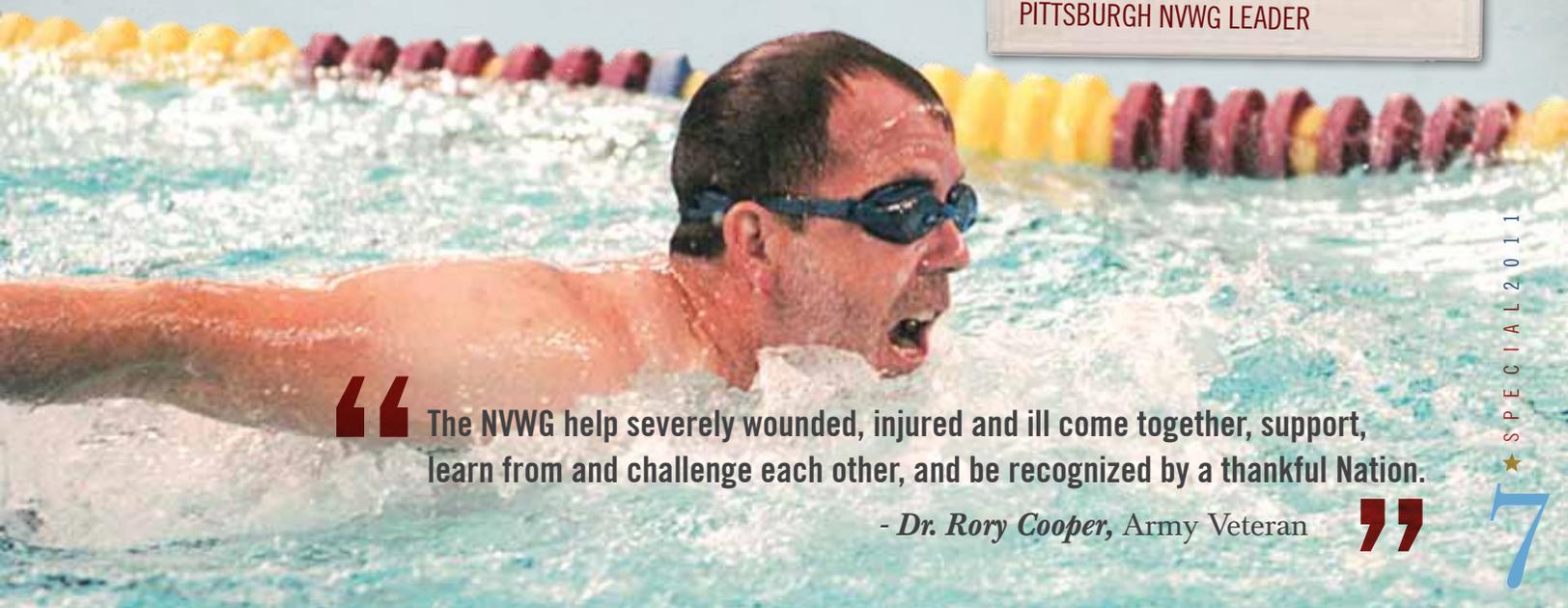
As the chairperson, he worked hand-in-hand with Bill Leuthold, the 31st NVWG chairperson, in all aspects of planning, fundraising, and selection of venue sites.

"Dr. Cooper was very helpful whenever we had difficult decisions to make, because he understood the views from all of the perspectives of an athlete, a member of the Paralyzed Veterans of America, and a VA employee," said Leuthold. "He's seen it all."

Cooper served as an advisor, an ambassador, and a promoter for a variety of aspects of the Games. He designed the Games coin (shown on page 12), designed and built a new Games torch (shown on the front cover), and starred in a 31st NVWG public service announcement. He was also instrumental in recruiting high-ranking military officials for awards presentations and appearances. Cooper is no stranger to competition, having competed in 28 National Veterans Wheelchair Games. He also won a bronze medal at the 1988 Paralympics in Seoul and served as a sports scientist for the Paralympics in 1992 in Barcelona, 1996 in Atlanta, and 2008 in Beijing.

After winning four gold medals for swimming and a silver in slalom during the 28th National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Omaha, Neb., Cooper was one of 12 medal winners selected to appear on a special edition Cheerios cereal box.

**He scored five gold medals this year, all in swimming events.**



“ The NVWG help severely wounded, injured and ill come together, support, learn from and challenge each other, and be recognized by a thankful Nation.

- Dr. Rory Cooper, Army Veteran ”



# NEVER GIVING UP

First-time competitor enjoys every second of 31st Games.

Barbara Williams, who served as a security clearance specialist for the Army, suffers from rheumatoid arthritis. "It messes with every bone in my body," she said.

But her therapists say that nothing really gets her down.

"Barbara is hilarious," Bethany Purdue, a recreational therapist at the Philadelphia VA says. "She's one of the happiest, most excited people I've ever met. She takes everything in stride with a smile on her face."

Williams participated in the National Veterans Wheelchair Games for the first time this summer, taking home gold medals in bowling, power chair and slalom. "I really surprised myself," said Williams. "I didn't know what I was in for and I didn't know I could do it."

"She was into every single piece of the Games," Purdue said. "I remember her coming back from watching weightlifting at 10:30 one night. She was there from the first event in the morning to the last one of the evening cheering people on."

Williams said she was moved by the never say die spirit of the Games, and believes her disability creates different opportunities in life.

"Your life is changed, but it's not over. You just do things differently but you still have fun and you don't ever give up."



**DORIS MERRILL, NAVY VETERAN**

# 87 YEARS YOUNG

The Games energize a World War II Veteran.

At age 87, Navy Veteran and athlete Doris Merrill doesn't feel old.

In fact, the Wheelchair Games medals she added to her collection this summer, one gold and one bronze, prove she's far from slowing down.

Merrill, who served in naval intelligence for the WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service) during World War II, was the oldest female athlete who competed in this year's Games.

"When I participate in the Games with everyone, I feel invigorated," said Merrill, who lives in Nanticoke, Pa., and has attended 11 Wheelchair Games all over the country and in Puerto Rico.

She's won many medals, an achievement she attributes to her coach and son, Paul. Better known by his nickname, Pepper, Paul brings her to all the Games and is her number one fan.

Merrill was most excited to see all the friends she's made over the years. Spending time with her comrades and cheering them on are two of her favorite things to do at the Games. "I feel joy watching others win."

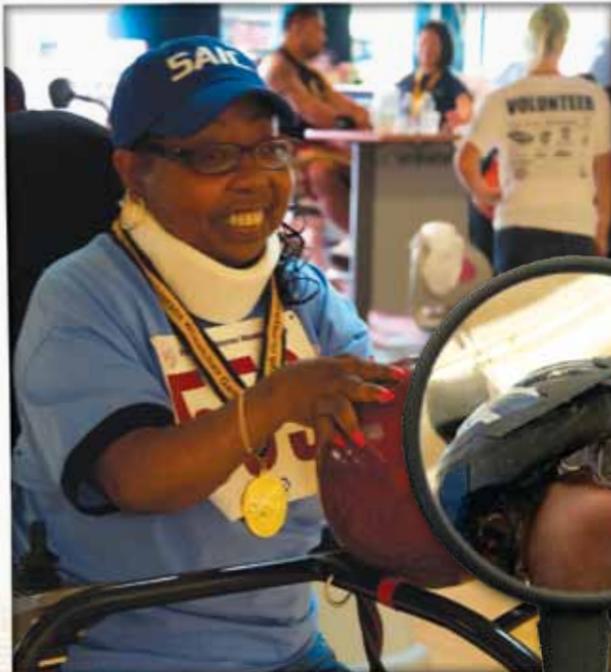


When I see everyone, my heart just jumps. Just being here, being with people like myself, is a bridge to the walking world.

I really love being here.



- Doris Merrill



**BARBARA WILLIAMS, ARMY VETERAN**

## POPPING WHEELIES

First-timer touched by cheers.

Bill Jackson, an Air Force Veteran who served in Desert Storm, has spinal cord injuries suffered in both service and non-service related incidents. This was his first time competing in the Games. He traveled to Pittsburgh from Erie.

Jackson brought home a gold medal in motorized slalom and bowling as well as a bronze in the power chair.

Jackson turned heads while ‘popping wheelies’ on the motorized slalom. “They said my front casters came right up off the ground when I hit the ramp so I really must have been moving,” said Jackson. “It was awesome! I wish I could have gone through that again and again.”

Jackson hopes even more people will attend future Games to see what Veterans like him are capable of accomplishing.

“If you ever get a chance to go, absolutely go and watch the athletes. They’re not just playing a game; they’re playing life,” said Jackson. “It really is so awesome having people there cheering us on. It can’t help but touch your heart.”

**BILL JACKSON,  
AIR FORCE VETERAN**



**KEVIN ALBRIGHT, ARMY VETERAN**

## REVELATIONS

Even VA staff learn from this event.

Kevin Albright, a paraplegic, works as an administrative officer of the day at the Altoona VA. His co-workers talked him into competing this year.

The Army Veteran was in an auto accident while on active duty in 1981, which eventually led to his leg amputations. But Albright has never let that be an excuse for not doing what he wants to do.

Albright, like many other first-time athletes, surprised himself by coming away with medals: bronze in track, trap shooting and weightlifting.

“I never expected any medals my first year,” Albright said. “I just wanted to do my best.”

The Games were also a revelation for Albright who saw everything that people in wheelchairs could do. “It’s amazing what some people can do when they put their minds to it,” he said. Albright left with even more respect for the Veteran athletes.

“Guys like these are why I work for the VA,” Albright said. “I’m there to help them any way I can and they’re not afraid to get up and do something.”

## ★★★ SPIRIT OF THE GAMES

### GIVING HIS ALL

Quadriplegic Vet catches up with friends.

For many Veterans, attending the Games is an opportunity for competition and camaraderie. For Albert Cortez, 56, the Games are one of the few times the Army Veteran gets out of the house all year.

Cortez, a quadriplegic, depends on his sister, Cecelia, to help him get to and from the Games. Once there, she rarely has to give him much help.

“The Games are so good for him,” she said. “He can get around the whole city because everyone there is helping out everyone else.”

Cortez won two medals: bronze in bowling and silver in slalom.

The big draw for Cortez is to see the friends he has made at previous Games. “I get to go catch up with the people I’ve seen over the years,” Cortez said. “That’s the best thing.” He says the sight of everyone giving their all are memories he’ll cherish.

“For me the most memorable things are to see everybody participating and at the same time not knowing what the results will be but just working to win,” Cortez said. “Just to be out there trying.”



**ALBERT CORTEZ, ARMY VETERAN**

# PICTURE perfect

*Capturing the memorable moments of the 2011 Wheelchair Games.*

## A NEW GENERATION OF HEROES

**Athletes leave a lasting legacy.**

On an especially inspirational day during the Games week, 20 children in wheelchairs connected with Games competitors. Under the guidance of experienced athlete mentors, these Pittsburgh-area children learned about teamwork, courage and perseverance. They participated in adaptive sports activities, including T-ball, basketball and slalom, an obstacle-course-style event.



*25 canine heroes traveled to Pittsburgh to provide a variety of services for their military heroes.*



## BATTLEFIELD TO BASEBALL FIELD

10 VISA athletes were honored on the field prior to a Pittsburgh Pirates game and one was even invited to compete in a scoreboard trivia game.

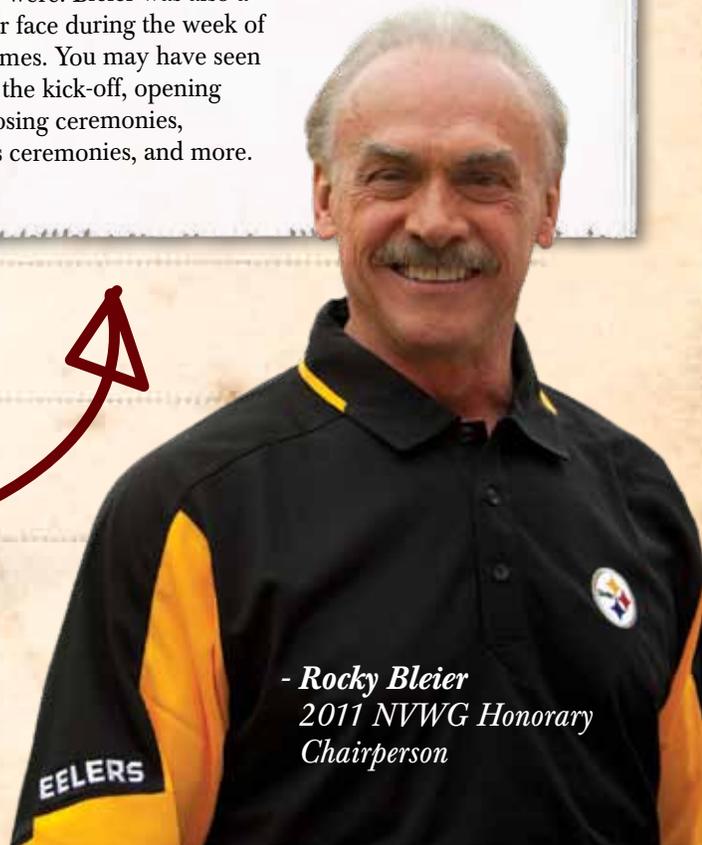
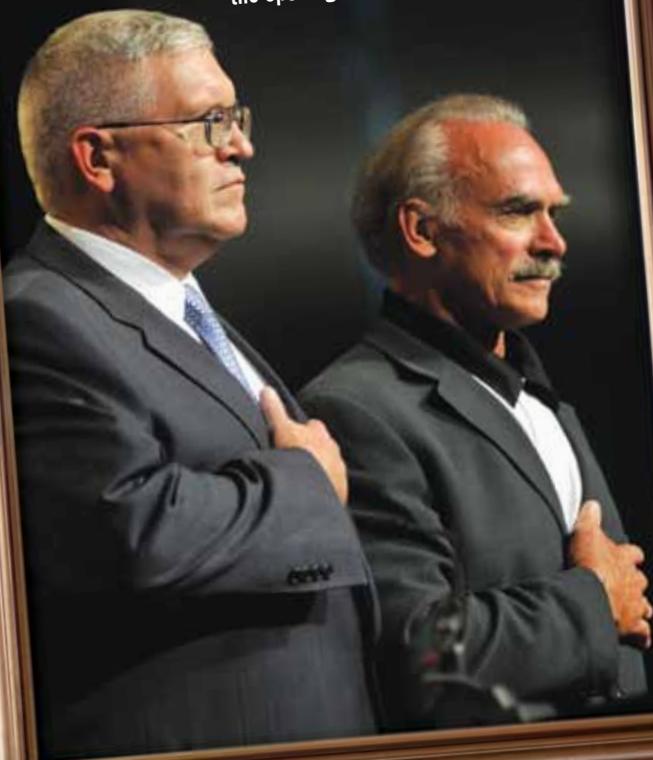


## MILITARY HERO, SPORTS LEGEND, GAMES CHAIRPERSON

Vietnam Veteran and four-time Steelers Super Bowl champion is inspired by wheelchair athletes.

Rocky Bleier served as the honorary chairperson for the 2011 National Veterans Wheelchair Games. He spent countless hours in the years leading up to the event promoting the Games and raising awareness. His participation was influential in recruiting volunteers and raising funds. Without his support, the Games would not have been as momentous as they were. Bleier was also a familiar face during the week of the Games. You may have seen him at the kick-off, opening and closing ceremonies, awards ceremonies, and more.

Brigadier General Michael G. Gould, left, and Rocky Bleier salute the flag during the opening ceremonies.



- Rocky Bleier  
2011 NVWG Honorary  
Chairperson

# PICTURE perfect

## CELEBRITY SIGHTINGS

Notable guests came to this year's Games to salute their legends.

Several celebrities stopped by the block party, including Dan Rooney, United States Ambassador to Ireland and chairman emeritus of the Pittsburgh Steelers (left), and James Shearer, VH1 Top 20 Countdown host (far right).

Shearer, who also announced play by play during power soccer, weightlifting and basketball, said, "I wanted to be part of the Games as a 'thank you' to all of our service men and women, but I also wanted to do it to help show off the city of Pittsburgh to all of the participants. I'm glad my announcing skills were put to good use."

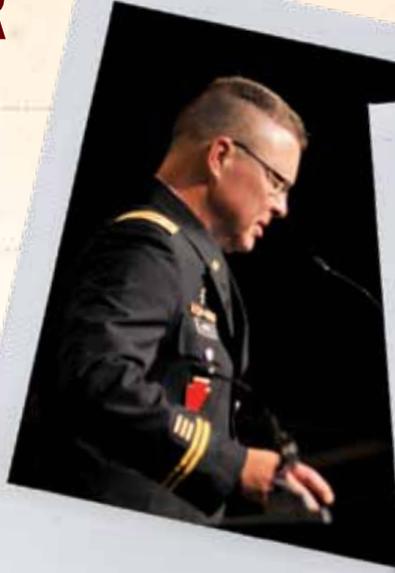


Actors Charlie Bewley (of the Twilight movie series), left, and Matt Dallas (a.k.a. Kyle from ABC Family's Kyle XY) spent many hours throughout the week emceeding awards ceremonies and spending time with Veterans. They were excited to spend a few days serving their heroes.

"Many of these guys were once warriors serving their country," said Bewley. "The courage it takes each to find the wonder in a new challenge cannot be underestimated. The looks on the faces of the Veterans we saw compete were those of warriors still. The spirit of these men and women not only lived on, but were fortified and strengthened by the adversity in their lives. Truly inspiring stuff."

# MILITARY CORNER

Lieutenant Colonel Doug Etter and Brigadier Generals Williams and Scott saluted their fellow soldier.



1.



2.



3.



4.

## OTHER SIGHTED CELEBRITIES INCLUDED:

### 1. The Fonz

Henry Winkler stopped by for a visit during Monday's Expo.

### 2. Pro Sports Legends

Pittsburgh Pirates Charlie Morton and Michael McKenry joined former Pittsburgh Steeler Franco Harris to present awards to winning athletes.

### 3. Local Celebrity

Sally Wiggin, an anchor for Pittsburgh's local ABC affiliate, was heard telling one Veteran athlete, "I learned a lot about courage from you today."

### 4. National VA Leadership

Dr. Robert A. Petzel, Under Secretary for Health for the Department of Veterans Affairs, left, and Brigadier General Michael G. Gould, Pennsylvania's Deputy Adjutant General of Veterans Affairs also presented awards to winning athletes.



*Ask the*

# STAFF & ATHLETES

*of Veterans Integrated Service Network 4*

## *What will you remember most about the 31st National Veterans Wheelchair Games?*



### **NICOLE TEUTEBERG**

(SHOWN WITH LARRY BINGER, DELAWARE ATHLETE)

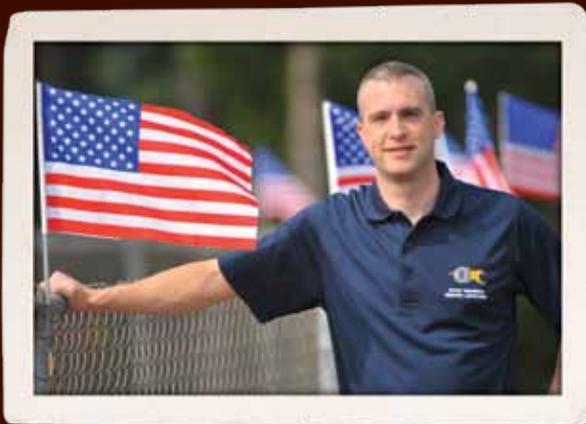
#### **Fans in the Stands Co-Chair**

“At first I was a little apprehensive about dressing up as the Statue of Liberty. The instant I walked out, I saw how it put a smile on Veterans’ faces and it was all worth it. Throughout the week I heard Veterans yell, ‘Lady Liberty! Lady Liberty!’ It was such an amazing experience and I truly feel touched by everything I observed. The Games really opened my eyes.”

### **BILL LEUTHOLD**

#### **31ST NVWG Chairperson**

“The overwhelming support that was received from our Pittsburgh staff, the surrounding community, and volunteers in general was inspirational and heartwarming.”



### **MICHAEL CLARK**

#### **31ST NVWG Program Specialist**

“Having an opportunity to spend a week with Veterans from multiple conflicts was rewarding and showed me what true friendship and camaraderie is all about.”

For the past few years, Leuthold and Clark ate, slept and breathed Wheelchair Games. They ironed out the plans, paid attention to even the most minute details, and ensured that this event was meaningful and fun for Veterans, employees, volunteers, and the community. We all thank you and salute your monumental efforts!



## JEANNE GOLDY-SANITATE



### Air Force Veteran | Delaware

"I think it's when I got in the pool and I looked two lanes down and saw Paralympian John Register and, as the only woman in the pool, I thought, 'I'm done.' But I came in third place and was so excited. I actually got the gold medal for women in the event with a time of 2:18."



## EUGENE TATOM

### Marine Veteran | Pennsylvania

"The hospitality in Pittsburgh was amazing. The weather was nice, the people were great, the hotel was great. Everything was set up so nice. I've been to eight Games before this and compared to the other ones it was much less confusing."

## MORE NVWG INFO

For more information about the Wheelchair Games, visit us online at [www.wheelchairgames.va.gov](http://www.wheelchairgames.va.gov). You can check out more photos or videos, and even read the daily newsletters from this year's Games.

 To zoom in on the photo mosaic on the back cover, visit [www.visn4.va.gov](http://www.visn4.va.gov).

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## WE'D LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU

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