



NATIONAL VETERANS GOLDEN AGE GAMES

Competitor Profile (National)

Carole Atkinson – You Never Know What You Can Do Until You Try!

As a Navy corpsman during the Korean War, Carole Atkinson performed many duties. “Sometimes they had us dress as nurses so people would be more comfortable, but other times we just did the job as military corpsmen. They were crazy times,” she remembers. Serving from 1952-1955, Atkinson says that she “flew in and out” of Korea, but was primarily stationed stateside. Now 73, this Woodbury, N.J. resident has held onto her spirit of adventure.



After military service and a brief marriage, Atkinson returned to her native New Jersey where she attended an engineering design school and later became a draftsman. From 1985-1998, she opened and managed several halfway houses serving individuals with drug and alcohol addictions, both in St. Petersburg, Fla., and Indianapolis, Ind. She performed those duties from her wheelchair, which she started using full time some 30 years ago, the result of a childhood bout with polio.

In 1997, Atkinson first learned about the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) national rehabilitation special event programs and competed in the National Veterans Wheelchair Games. “It was a wonderful experience,” she says. “I wish I had known about these events when I was younger!” A few years later, she signed up for a second VA-sponsored program, the National Veterans Golden Age Games. “Since I was a ‘golden ager’ myself by then, I figured I’d better accept it,” she laughs. She is glad she did. “It is so much fun. There is even more competition at this event for those of us who are older.”

Although three years ago Atkinson’s health required that she start using an oxygen pump, she isn’t ready to stop competing. “I had to miss the a few Golden Age Games and I really missed it,” she says. Interested in sports her whole live, she will compete this year in checkers, bowling and shuffleboard. “I really like swimming but I can’t do that now because of the oxygen,” she said. At the events, Atkinson sets her own goals and tries to improve her results each time. “I compete against myself,” she says. “Attending the Games keeps your mind younger – even when you are older. It’s very therapeutic to get out there and see what you are able to do. You never really know until you try.”

