

Great Games GAZETTE



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Special Edition

Rollin' On To Victory: 2007 Spirit of the Games Winner *“Rollin’ Joe” Velasquez*

If you've been to the slalom events this week, you probably heard the encouraging shouts of Joe Velasquez echoing through the halls of the Midwest Airlines Center. His words motivate. His words give strength. His words show love. They nurture and inspire. Velasquez believes in encouraging as many competitors as possible to finish the course, whether it is the slalom course or the course of life.

For 21 years, Velasquez has been the epitome of sportsmanship at the Games. Respected by his teammates, fellow competitors and all the staff who know him, Joe Velasquez is a true advocate for all veterans attending these Games.

Velasquez, 58, affectionately known as “Rollin’ Joe,” is from Turlock, Calif., and a member of the Palo Alto Pacific Coasters wheelchair team. He has been married to his wife, Teresa, for 31 years and is the father of four. This week, he competed in table tennis, slalom, bowling, swimming and nine-ball, once again taking home at least four gold medals.

Known to be a true gentleman and advocate of the Games, Velasquez touches the heart of everyone he meets. “Joe is always encouraging others to excel and to do their best,” read one of several ballots calling for his nomination. “He has an amazing spirit. He mentors novice athletes and he assists in fundraising throughout the year to help fund veterans and get them to the Games. Joe exemplifies the spirit of the Games.”

Community involvement is a top priority for Velasquez, a member of nine veterans service organizations. Currently, he is the California VFW Wheelchair Games Chairman, a position he has held for 13 years. In recent years, he was a Supreme Commander of the Military Order of the Cooties, and for seven years he served as the VFW National Chairman of the National Veterans Golden Age Games. (Incidentally, Velasquez has collected several medals at the two Golden Age Games he has competed in as well.)



2007 Spirit of the Games winner and Navy veteran, Joe Velasquez, from Turlock, Calif.

A U.S. Navy veteran, Velasquez was a senior chief electrician in the submarine service as well as a nuclear reactor supervisor and instructor for nuclear safety. He joined the Navy in 1970 when he was 21 years old and served the military with dedication and vigor for almost 14 years before he was medically discharged. He was injured in an automobile accident in December 1983.

Over the course of his life, Velasquez has found himself in a teaching role. For a time, he was an English as a second language support teacher, where he not only strengthened the language skills of little ones but taught them about living with a disability. “I used to have an extra wheelchair and the kids would take turns using it all day at school,” Velasquez recalled affectionately.

A frequent medal winner at the Games, Velasquez stopped counting his many athletic accomplishments. For him, the Games aren't about the medals he has won but the people

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Joe Velasquez poses with UPS volunteer Krischan Woehrer from Slinger, Wis. Velasquez demonstrates his winning spirit on a daily basis.

he has met at the event, people he considers family. “The Games saved me,” he recalls. “At my first Games, it was testimonial time. I was depressed from my injury and I left those first Games a new person with a new extended family. I accepted my injury then. This was my new life – there was nothing negative about it anymore.”

When asked about the National Veterans Wheelchair Games, Velasquez says he will be here year after year supporting his friends and looking to make new ones. “The Games are the best form of rehabilitation for everyone involved, whether that’s the athletes, volunteers, or the fans in the stands because with these Games, everybody wins.”

A coach who observed Velasquez this week had these thoughts to share about Rollin’ Joe. “Joe always demonstrates excellent sportsmanship, and knows the Games are not about winning medals, but developing lifelong friendships and learning from each other. Joe competes with his heart and gives 110 percent during all of his events. He’s a great role model for all of the athletes at the Games.”

Those who know Joe Velasquez feel lucky they do and are genuinely thrilled for him this evening. He is an inspiration to not only his fellow athletes, but to volunteers, staff and the coaches who have known him over the years. We can all learn from his life’s mantra: “Every day is a good day, but some days are better than others.” Today is a great day for Rollin’ Joe Velasquez.



Past Spirit of the Games Recipients:

Year	Name	Hometown	Year	Name	Hometown
2006	Charles Allen*	Cedar Hill, Texas	1995	Penny Gillett*	Fresno, Calif.
2005	Orlando Perez*	Orlando, Fla.		James Torres	Caguas, P.R.
2004	Gary Pearson*	Seattle, Wash.	1994	Tim Davis	Paso Robles, Calif.
2003	Wayne Miller*	Silver Spring, Md.	1993	Hope Cooper	San Antonio, Texas
2002	Ken Medieros	Taunton, Mass.	1992	Kater Cornwell	Charlotte, N.C.
2001	Laura Schwanger	Elkins Park, Pa.	1991	†Max Rhodes	Miami, Fla.
2000	Larry Hughes	Columbia, Md.	1990	Mike Trujillo*	Huntington Beach, Calif.
1999	Ken Huber*	Milan, Mich.	1989	Jim Martinson	Puyallup, Wash.
1998	Gil Garcia	San Antonio, Texas	1988	†Ken Wright	Palo Alto, Calif.
1997	Robert (“Pat”) Sapp	Rockwall, Texas	1987	Russ Monroe	Davison, Mich.
1996	Holly Koester*	Berea, Ohio			

* Present at the 2007 Games

† Veteran has passed away

Thank you from the Public Affairs Team

These have truly been some *Great Games on a Great Lake*, haven't they? From the very start of this incredible week, when we first met during Games Registration, through the final preparations for the Closing Ceremonies this evening, you have all continued to amaze us. We watched you impress the Milwaukee community during the Games Kick-off Tuesday morning. We saw you enter the Midwest Airlines Center in order of your state (country, district, or commonwealth) history. We heard the air guns go off, the pool cues hit nine-balls, and the table tennis balls bouncing all across the exhibit hall floor. We were there when you struggled up the ramps of the slalom course, when the basketballs rimmed the hoops and those rugby chairs got rammed, again and again. We saw the race chairs and handcycles go flying by on the track and the course, and heard that hard crack of the ball against the bats at the softball games on Friday at the Milwaukee County Zoo. While there, we watched in awe as our athletes touchingly mentored local children with disabilities at Kids Day. We had fun with you at the Block Party, and today we witnessed the arrows go flying straight into bulls-eyes, tough questions get answered at the motorized rally and athletes test their mettle on the ice at wheelchair curling. You have, as always, inspired and dazzled us all.



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As we say our good byes, the members of the Public Affairs Team of the 27th National Veterans Wheelchair Games wish to thank all of the athletes and their family members for letting us tell their stories this week – to news media outlets in Milwaukee and back at home, in our daily *Great Games Gazette*, through our writers and photographers, on our Web site and through media interviews yet to take place. We have been truly honored to tell your wonderful stories to others, knowing you cannot help but inspire other veterans to continue doing everything they can despite the challenges placed before them. By doing that, you have demonstrated all week, to everyone here, that success is imminent.

We wish you safe travels home and look forward to meeting you again next July in Omaha – so we can join in our *Quest for the Best* – together!



Doin' the Block Party boogie!

Games participants are ridin' in style.



Ernie Butler from Arlington, Wash., shows his spirit in the Super G on Saturday.





“Quest for the Best”

28th National Veterans Wheelchair Games
Omaha, Nebraska
July 25 – 29, 2008

Omaha... What better place for the 28th National Veterans Wheelchair Games! Omaha is a playground for all fans of sports and recreation. Whether it’s professional or college sports, or recreational sports that are just for fun, you will find something for everyone, and every season of the year in Omaha.

“Omaha has a fantastic convention center, the best steaks in the world, and our local athletes can’t wait to welcome all their fellow veterans with open arms,” said Mark Linquist, president of Great Plains PVA and Games athlete.

The VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System and the Great Plains Chapter of the Paralyzed Veterans of America invite you to “*Quest for the Best*” as you compete in the 28th National Veterans Wheelchair Games, taking place July 25-29, 2008 in Omaha.

Omaha is centrally located in the heartland of America, and travel is easy from anywhere in the country. As you fly into the city, one of the first things you will see is Omaha’s new downtown riverfront area alongside the shore of the Missouri River. Downtown Omaha has excellent places to stay, many areas of visitor interest and is close to the airport. The Qwest Center Omaha, where many of the events will take place (and the name behind the 2008 theme, *Quest for the Best*), is just a few blocks from the historic Old Market, as are the downtown hotels. The Old Market offers a wide range of restaurants, entertainment, arts and shopping, and is a wonderful area to visit while you are in town for the Games.

“You will find that Nebraskans and the Omaha community are true ambassadors of Midwest hospitality,” said Al Washko, director VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System. “Our local organizing committee is already working hard to get ready for the 2008 Games.”

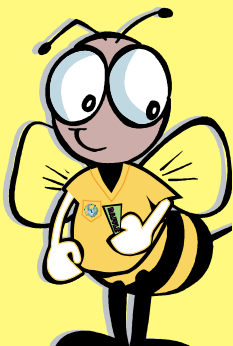
Omaha is home to the Strategic Air & Space Museum, Village of Boys Town, a world-class zoo, art and railroad museums, and so much more. Omaha will surprise you as you leave these *Great Games on a Great Lake* and prepare to enjoy some other great Games — with a great steak!

Transportation to the Airport

The shuttles transporting veterans to the airport start running at 3 a.m. tomorrow until 12:30 a.m. on Monday. Please be ready to depart from your hotel at least three hours before your flight time. Also read the detailed luggage instructions available at the hospitality table.



Thanks to Milwaukee Local Organizing Committee



Our sincere thanks to the local organizing committee in Milwaukee for all of their hard work planning and carrying out such a wonderful week! After more than two years getting ready, the Milwaukee VA Medical Center and Wisconsin PVA employees and members have truly made this year’s National Veterans Wheelchair Games an unforgettable event. From block parties to fierce competition, from posh parties and birthday bags (and don’t forget the doggie bags for our canine friends), to the new family zone and great evening entertainment, the Wisconsin hospitality you have extended to us all has been truly amazing. From the athletes and their families, staff, sponsors and special guests – our sincere gratitude for hosting what can truly be called, “*Great Games on a Great Lake.*” We thank you for welcoming us with open arms and helping us enjoy all that your wonderful city has to offer.