

# Athlete Profile (Alaska)

## Don Peters — Finding Family at the Wheelchair Games

An athlete, small business owner, linguist, community leader, martial artist, father and friend. Those are just a few of the hats worn by Don Peters, 37, of Anchorage, Alaska. In all roles, Peters, a U.S. Army veteran, has a unique perspective.

“For us to be better humans, it is our responsibility to create a sense of family,” said Peters. “It’s one thing to be born into a family, but it is just as important to create those bonds and emotions with those who aren’t united by blood.”

In 2003, Peters brought this perspective to the National Veterans Wheelchair Games. “On the first night of the Games I arrived in a rental car only knowing six people, but within two hours I’d made life-long friends.”

Although Peters has won a series of gold and silver medals (in archery, swimming and 9-ball) over the past three years, he considers the camaraderie among the athletes, staff and volunteers his most memorable experience. “It was wonderful to see a group of people come together like family,” Peters said. “Friendship and loyalty are built in a very short period of time.”

Peters believes that the Wheelchair Games allow veterans to see that their athletic skills can remain in tact, in spite of their injuries. “I’ve learned to modify how I participate in athletics. I’m still as good as I used to be, I just had to modify. The injury didn’t change me as an individual.”

Even at a young age, Peters’ ability to excel in athletics was evident. In his late teens he traveled across Asia to study several different forms of martial arts, which he still practices. He was first introduced to wheelchair sports with sled hockey, an adaptive form of hockey for disabled athletes.

Peters looks forward to the Games coming to Alaska in 2006. “It’s a chance for veterans from across the country to experience a state they have probably never visited.” Peters serves as president of the Alaska Disabled Veterans Sports Program, and resides on the Americans with Disabilities Act Commission for the Municipality of Anchorage. He also owns and manages a fine jewelry business and is a government contractor – a major career leap from his days in the Army as a Spanish linguist.



A paraplegic, Peters uses a wheelchair because of neurological damage. Exuding confidence and eloquence in a humble and giving manner, he has no immediate plans to slow down. At the 2006 National Veterans Wheelchair Games, he plans to again compete in the archery and swimming events.

Don Peters firmly believes the Wheelchair Games rebuild self-esteem. "I've seen a lot of depression with individuals in wheelchairs because they aren't living up to their potential. The Games are a means to stay in a positive state of mind and see that, with modification, every goal is achievable." Don Peters is living proof.