

Athlete Profile

Vern Bussing – An Inspiration to All

Vern Bussing, a 63-year-old Navy veteran from Anchorage, Alaska, served as an aviation electrician from 1959-1963. On February 13, 1999, the day before his wedding anniversary, Bussing's life changed forever when he flipped over in his snow machine. Although Bussing instantly became a quadriplegic as a result of the accident, his enthusiasm for life remains unchanged.

Now working as the employee safety advisor at Anchorage Chrysler, Bussing also attends the University of Alaska Anchorage, studying architectural technology. He stays involved with his community through membership in a number of veterans and civic organizations including the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Moose Lodge and the Loyal Order of the Eagles.

"It doesn't take anything to go out there and try," said Bussing, of competing in wheelchair sports. "It doesn't matter if you win or lose; the friends (you make at the Games) will be there for life." It is with this positive attitude that Bussing fondly remembers the first time he dared to try, and went to Fresno, California for the 2004 National Veterans Golden Age Games, where he bowled competitively as a quadriplegic for the first time.

According to Bussing, veterans should participate in these types of events in order to get out and challenge themselves. A big part of competition is meeting other people in the same condition. Bussing, like many veterans, says that the camaraderie at the events is unbelievable.

This year will be Bussing's first time competing in the National Veterans Wheelchair Games. He has chosen to compete in five sports, which include the motorized wheelchair rally, air guns, slalom, bowling and the power chair relay.

Anchorage is a great place to hold the Games, according to Bussing. "The entire outdoors is at your doorstep." He encourages spectators to come to the Games because "they'll see things they could not believe." This year, the event takes place over Independence Day and local organizers are including the veterans in the local parade. "This year, the Fourth of July in Anchorage," Bussing says, "will be like Anchorage has never seen before.

Vern Bussing credits the local VA healthcare center in Anchorage, a host of this year's Wheelchair Games, for the positive position he is today. "The VA has been tremendous," he says. An inspiration to others facing life's challenges, Bussing puts it this way, "If you put your mind to it, you can do most everything."