

# Competitor Profile

## Beverly Smith Inspires Us All

She trains, she competes, and she mows her own lawn. At age 86, she enjoys gardening and still keeps up the same Long Island home she's lived in since 1949. Attending the past fifteen National Veterans Golden Age Games, Beverly Smith, of North Babylon, N.Y. has collected an impressive array of winning medals, including the 2000 "George Gangi Most Inspirational Athlete" award. This year, she will compete in swimming (freestyle) bowling and shot put.



With a quick wit and a winning personality, the sound of Smith's frequent laughter rings out across crowded gymnasiums and swimming pools, where she is a glowing recipient of continuous hugs and handshakes. Her bright eyes shine with a genuine glimmer when she describes the Golden Age Games. "I think this is an excellent thing," Smith says. "I hope it continues forever, because lots of older veterans don't have anything to look forward to like this. But with the Games, they can practice all year, come with their teammates and really enjoy themselves. I think it's one of the best things VA has ever done."

A World War II Navy veteran, Smith was stationed stateside in Iowa from 1945-46, serving as an aviation machinist mate – an airplane mechanic – for pre-flight crews, accompanying them on long flights across the country. After leaving the service, she moved to North Babylon, on Long Island's south shore, and started working at the Northport VA Medical Center in 1950. Her VA job obviously suited her well – she retired after 47 years of government service at age 77.

Smith first attended the National Veterans Golden Age Games in St. Petersburg, Fla. in 1991, after a recreation therapist at the Northport VA told her about the event. There, she fell in love with the Games. For years, she would bring an autograph book along so she could collect as many signatures as possible. Smith still has it, and cherishes the memories it inspires.

Originally from Ohio, Smith has been active in sports since the eighth grade, playing softball and later basketball through high school. Still a member of the Northport Islanders Golden Age Team, she stays fit by swimming and bowling.

For Beverly Smith, enjoying life in one's "golden age" is really not about winning medals. For veterans who have never attended the event, her strong advice is to "get up off your duff and get out there and try! It's not a matter of winning each event you participate in, but the idea is to try. I think that everybody here is a winner. At my age, I hope I can bring some kind of incentive to help others get started." That, she does.