



## Athlete Profile (Local)

### Russell Stippel – Just Doing What He Can

Russell Stippel, 55, of Spokane, Washington, may just be of the most easygoing people you could ever talk to. He's very humble about the time he spends volunteering at the Spokane VA Medical Center, where he receives ongoing care for the multiple sclerosis he was diagnosed with in 1983. "I pick up the outgoing mail from the main building and all the out buildings, like a mailman," he said. "In fact, that's what they call me, 'The Mailman.' But I just do what I can do."

An Army veteran, Stippel signed up in 1972 and went from the warmth of Phoenix to the frigid cold of Fairbanks, Alaska. He then moved on to Fort Bragg, located in Fayetteville, North Carolina, and finished his military service by spending six years in Germany before retiring in 1986.

It was through his travels around the medical center in Spokane, which is helping host the 2009 event, that Stippel first learned about the National Veterans Wheelchair Games. "We have posters all over the VA Medical Center," he said. "A couple of people asked if I was going to participate in the Games, so I figured I'd try it out." Stippel isn't completely settled on which five events he will enter during the week-long competition, but he knows swimming will be one of them. "I swim twice a week for about an hour each time," he said. "So I'm sure I will do that, and probably a track event as well."

Although he has used a wheelchair for some time, this will be Stippel's first time attending the National Veterans Wheelchair Games and he looks forward to the experience. "I've always been a little competitive," he says. Although he never played in organized sports, he remembers playing pickup games of football in the heat of the Arizona sun. "I used to play football when I lived in Phoenix," he said. "It would be 115 degrees and we were out playing football." Spokane should offer a much better climate for the July event, which will feature 17 different sports for veterans who use wheelchairs from across the country.

While it sometimes takes some encouragement from others for a person to enter the Games for the first time, that wasn't the case for Stippel. "I just thought it would be a lot of fun," he said. "As the saying goes, I thought it would be a 'kick in the pants.'" Also pleased with his decision to enter the Games was Stippel's recreation therapist at the VA Medical Center. As he recalls, "When I told my therapist I was entering the Wheelchair Games she said, 'Good. Now I won't have to talk you into it!'"

Stippel isn't quite sure what to expect from his first time participating the Games or whether he will continue to compete in future events. What he does know is that he'll follow one of his formulas for life and "just do what he can." After all, it has fared him well thus far.