

The  
**ALPSGRAM**

NATIONAL VETERANS CREATIVE ARTS FESTIVAL



**Veteran Cecil Moreno**  
unpacks gold medal winning  
pastel "Megan".

Photo by Mark Nasser

**OCTOBER 10, 2012**



# life after RETIREMENT

**“I soon realized adjusting to life after military retirement was more difficult than I thought,” said Kevin Dougherty.**

“I missed my fellow brothers and sisters from the Navy and the camaraderie we shared.” Dougherty retired from the Navy after 22 years as a Navy Seabee – referred to as Mobile Construction Battalions. His last tour was aboard the U.S.S. Constitution docked in Boston, Mass. Now employed by VA’s Voluntary Service at the Edith Nourse Rogers Memorial Veterans Hospital located in Bedford, Mass., Dougherty has found a new bond and enjoyment of life as he shares his songs and music with Veterans through Bedford’s Recreation Therapy Program.

Dougherty will be performing one of his original songs “Veteran of Yesteryear” at Cutler Majestic Theater on October 14. His inspiration for writing the song came from emotionally connecting with one of the Veterans during therapy. This WWII Veteran had been shot down over Germany and held prisoner of war for 18 months. Healing has its own time frame, and for these Veterans the timing was perfect in helping each other through song.

The day before Dougherty retired from the military, he was given the opportunity to sing the national anthem and “God Bless America,” at Fenway Park in his dress whites at a Boston Red Sox’s game. It was a day he will never forget.



However, he looks forward to singing at the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival before his fellow Veterans. Life after retirement...is good.

*By Angela Taylor  
Visual Information Specialist  
Indianapolis VA Medical Center*



**“It intrigues me to create things. I love the sense of accomplishment when I finish a project.”**

A project like the 50x30 latch hook Alpine Scene that Frieda Williams created and won first place in the division at this year’s Creative Arts Festival. The piece took six full weeks to finish. Williams retired from the U.S. Army and holds an Associate degree in art and photography. When she is doing arts and crafts she is focusing on the project itself, not all of the stresses of life. Williams attended the Creative Arts Festival in Fayetteville, Ark. last year and said that the Veterans were treated like kings and queens for the week. “We were exposed to so many different forms of art and seeing all the amazing pieces the Veterans create was exciting.”

*By Lisa Olney  
Public Affairs Officer  
Detroit VA Medical Center*

## Artists and Performers

Please check with your team leader and/or the posted schedule in the Ballroom Foyer for any changes or updates to your daily schedule.



## Performers

- 6:30 - 8 a.m. **BREAKFAST:** Salon 4
- 8 a.m. **TEAM LEADER AND TEAM SUPPORT MEETING**  
with Amy Kimbler: Blue Hills
- 8 a.m. **TEAM LEADER AND TEAM SUPPORT MEETING**  
with performers
- 9 - 10 a.m. **CHORUS MEMBER PHOTOS**  
(wear white shirts and vests): Location TBD
- 9 - 11 a.m. **CHORUS REHEARSAL WITH CHORUS LEADERS**  
(& sectional assistants if necessary)  
Dorothy Quincy Ballroom C
- 9 a.m. - 12 p.m. **REHEARSAL OF SOLO AND GROUP ACTS**  
with directors as scheduled: Salons 5-8
- 12 - 1 p.m. **LUNCH:** Salons 1 - 4
- 1 - 5:30 p.m. **COMPLETE RUNTHROUGH IN SHOW ORDER:**  
ALL VETERANS NEEDED  
Salons 5-8 & Dorothy Quincy Ballroom C
- 1 - 5:30 p.m. **CHORUS VESTS/COSTUME FITTINGS:**  
Wollaston Room
- 5:30 - 6:45 p.m. **DINNER:** Salons 1 - 4
- 6:30 - 8:30 p.m. **CARICATURIST:** Foyer
- 7 - 8 p.m. **CHORUS NUMBER REHEARSAL WITH MUSIC DIRECTOR**  
(All show participants): Salons 5-8
- 8 - 9 p.m. **INDIVIDUAL WORK WITH PRODUCTION NUMBER SOLOISTS:** Salons 5-8
- 8 - 9 p.m. **CHORUS REHEARSAL WITH CHORUS LEADERS**  
(& sectional assistants if necessary):  
Dorothy Quincy Ballroom C
- 9p.m. **CREATIVE WRITING INTERACTION SESSION:**  
Dorothy Quincy Ballroom A & B
- 9 - 11 p.m. **KARAOKE:** Slaons 1 & 2  
**ICREAM SOCIAL**  
Hospitality Room

## Artists

- 6:30 - 8:30 a.m. **BREAKFAST:** Salon 4
- 8:30 - 9 a.m. **ARTISTS LOAD BUSES:** Depart for Quincy Elks Lodge  
**ART WORKSHOP #1:** Domino Pins
- 12 - 1 p.m. **LUNCH:** at Quincy Elks
- 1 - 4 p.m. **ART WORKSHOP #2:** Altered Book Pages
- 3:30 p.m. **ARTISTS RETURNS TO HOTEL**  
1st trip back to hotel for those who are ready
- 4:15 p.m. **ARTISTS RETURNS TO HOTEL**  
2nd trip back to hotel
- 5:30 - 6:45 p.m. **DINNER:** Salons 1 - 4
- 6:30 - 8:30 p.m. **CARICATURIST:** Foyer
- 8 p.m. **ICREAM SOCIAL**  
Hospitality Room
- 9p.m. **CREATIVE WRITING INTERACTION SESSION:**  
Dorothy Quincy Ballroom A & B
- 9 - 11 p.m. **KARAOKE:** Slaons 1 & 2













# POETRY in Motion

George Knauer isn't the type of person to let the world pass him by. He also is a bit of an enigma. A plumber by trade, he works with his hands to fix things; a job he loves and readily agrees is not for everyone. Prior to losing his sight, George was also an avid photographer; he captured the world with his camera. When he lost his sight, with the help of the VA, he found a new passion. Poetry. George is a poet and now he captures the world with words.



**"It is such a vindication of what I have been doing and what I am doing right in my life. How I have moved from dark to the light. It has given me the confidence to know I am doing the right thing."**

**"Poetry allows me to express myself whether I am happy or sad. It is therapeutic,"**

George replied when asked why he likes to write poetry. He stated that the ability to share his emotions with others in a safe way, whether it is funny, romantic or uplifting is very helpful to him.

**He said, "When I first went blind I didn't have any time for pity. The VA got me a computer and I just started writing. Poetry is the best therapy I could have gotten; it allows me to speak to things that everybody can relate."**

George also credits his love of writing and storytelling to his childhood. He was placed in foster care at the age of two when his mother died. Eleanor Roosevelt, a principal sponsor of the home, would come and read to a group of the boys on weekends.

"Before I went blind I used to ride a Harley and take photographs—they were two of my loves. Blindness helped me find a new love—poetry," George commented when asked about other hobbies.

He is particularly proud of one of the photographs he took as the city photographer of his hometown. It was of then senatorial candidate Hillary Clinton. When she returned to Coxsackie as Senator Clinton, George, his sister and the mayor were able to meet with her for a few minutes and get the pictures

signed. She also spoke several words of kindness to him. George said, "Those words meant a lot to me. One of the best things people can do for each other is just be there for someone. Let people know you care."

George does not see himself as disabled. He is "capable but unable to see." He still runs his plumbing business; he just changed the name from Knauer Plumbing to Blind Mice Plumbing. He has been in the same community, Coxsackie, N.Y., since he left the Army where he served with the 97th Engineers in Europe from 1966-1969. George loves his community where he likes to refer to his customers as friends. Which is a true enough statement because when he returned home after his blindness they threw a "little" party for him and over 400 friends from the community showed up. George has a very positive outlook on life. He stated he does not look at the glass as half empty or half full, he is just grateful to have a glass!

This year George is recipient of a Therapeutic Arts Scholarship for his poetry. He competed locally, and won several awards for his poetry, but was never selected to attend the Creative Arts Festival—until this year. George said, "Every year I would get a call telling me to unpack my bags, that I was not selected. This year when I got the call they said to leave those bags packed; I was going to Boston! It brought a tear to my eye."

When asked how he felt about being selected for the scholarship this year George said,

## Excerpt from Victorious

*I shall not be a victim,  
but "victorious"  
Death battled me almost to a  
draw.  
It left my life but took my sight,  
Leaving me as a knight to do  
battle  
With life's uncertainties and  
fears.*

*Above my bed is a four foot steel  
sword.  
As I rise each morning with the  
crack of dawn,  
And the sun creep above the  
horizon,  
The sun with its brightness  
Refuses to penetrate my  
darkened eyes  
I grab my sword and put on  
armor  
To do battle each day*

*By Christopher Alexander  
Public Affairs Officer  
Tennessee Valley Healthcare System*

# INSIDE THE LINES

## “Water Wheel” began as a simple pen and ink drawing that slowly unveiled into a dynamic piece full of color, depth and texture.

It's not just the beautiful, calming view of mountains, avocado and citrus groves near home that gives Debra Rankin inspiration.

**“It's other Veterans who motivate me,” she said.**

Rankin often meets other Vets with disabilities and she's amazed by not only their warm spirits, but also their ability to create beautiful objects in arts and crafts.



The news came while she was caring for her ill mother, who was on her way into surgery when she told Rankin to go be seen by a doctor. Rankin had been suffering with bouts of bronchitis and pneumonia. Rankin's mom was being treated at a VA hospital. Rankin didn't know whether or not she was eligible for VA health care, but she gave it a shot, and found out she was.

Rankin hasn't been a part of VA's Recreation Therapy program for more than two years, but as a proud VA supporter, she still participates in as many VA-sponsored activities as she can, including the Creative Arts Festival.

Between 2010 and 2012, Rankin submitted numerous entries in VA's Creative Arts Competition. Sometimes she placed locally, sometimes she placed nationally and there were times she didn't place at all. By far, 2012 has been her best year. For the 2012 competition, Rankin submitted 13 entries, won five local 1st place awards, two local 2nd place awards, three local 3rd place awards, and one craft, "Water Wheel," placed 1st nationally in the category of colored craft kits.

"Water Wheel" began as a simple pen and ink drawing that slowly unveiled into a dynamic piece full of color, depth and texture. Rankin used colored pens, pencils, markers and crayons to create the final 3D appearance. The foreground is much more textured with dimension and shadows, than the background. Rankin is extremely proud of the final product. She recalls many hours working on the drawing during the day and at night. Sometimes she would work while watching TV. Then one

day, "Water Wheel" came off the easel in the living room. It took four months to complete.

The common technique Rankin uses to create depth, light and shadows, has no name as far as she knows. It's a practice she has been using for many years.

Like most children Rankin enjoyed crayons, watercolors and coloring books as a child. In high school, Rankin discovered photography, and carried that hobby with her to the Army and still practices it today. She creates from scratch, but often prints photos and adds to their appearance by none other than coloring in to show more depth and texture.

Why this desire to add more to already finished works? "Because anything and anyone can always use more color," Rankin said.

There were times in her life when she couldn't color. She couldn't create. She was sick.

The threat of a lung transplant beset Rankin five years ago. It's been an upward battle since then.

After a doctor's evaluation, Rankin realized the lung condition she acquired in Korea was much worse than she imagined. After dealing with pneumonia, sepsis, pancreatitis and a whole host of other subsequent health issues, Rankin made some changes for the better.

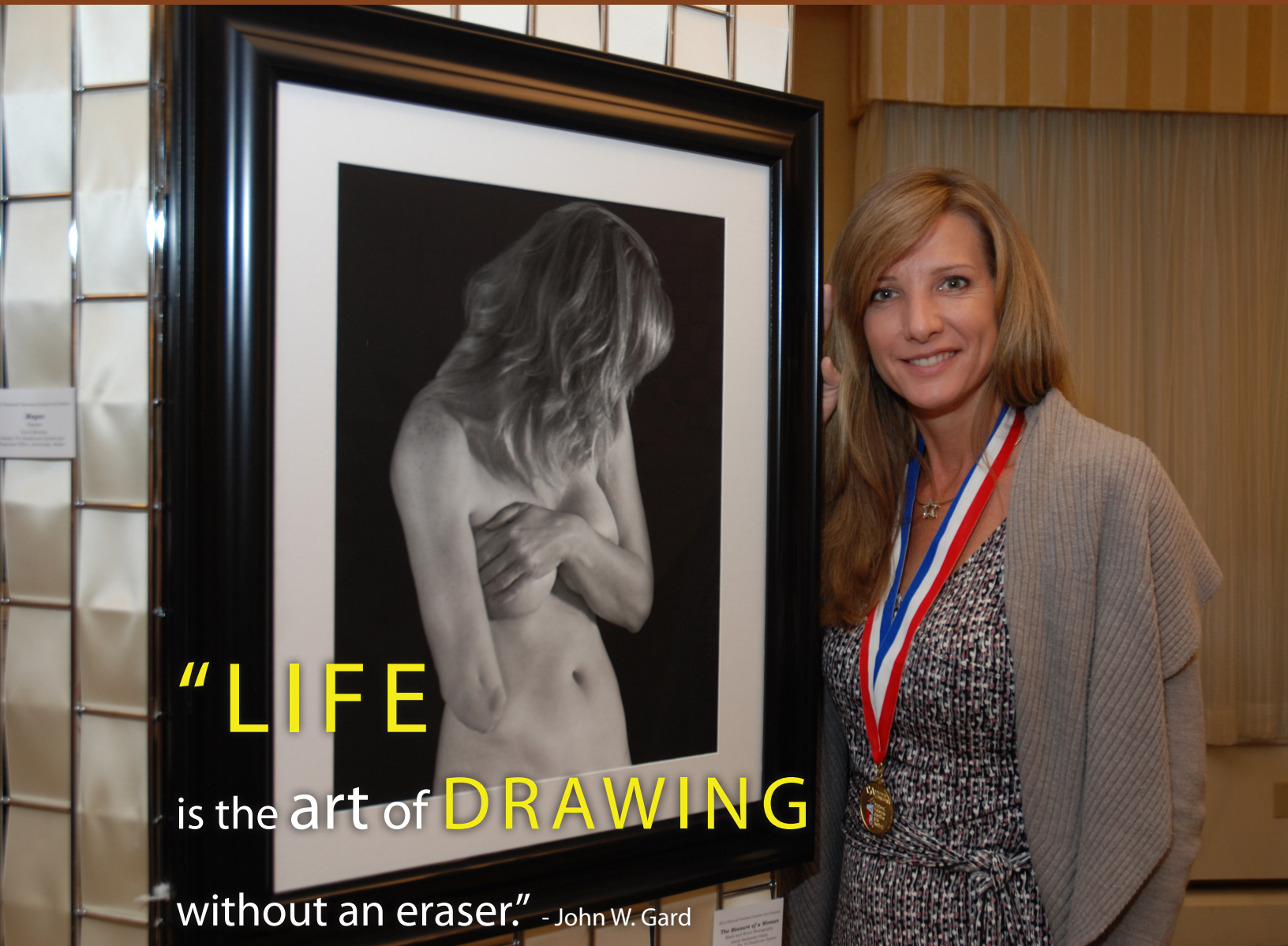
Today, after pulmonary rehabilitation and lifestyle adjustments, Rankin is stable. She exercises regularly, enjoys biking and swimming, and of course art – her regular therapy.

**“I have a pretty good quality of life compared to five years ago when I was housebound,” she said.**

Rankin largely credits VA doctors for their professionalism and expertise in helping her through her crisis. It's also her family, friends and fellow Veterans who, she said, give her joy, hope and a reason to keep pushing and to keep coloring inside the lines.

*By Erikka Neroes  
Writer / Editor TCF Intern  
North Texas VA Health Care System*





**"LIFE**  
is the art of **DRAWING**  
without an eraser." - John W. Gard

# SOCIAL MEDIA



**TWITTER:**  
[@VAAdaptiveSport](#)  
[#NVCAF](#)



**FACEBOOK:**  
[www.facebook.com/  
VeteransAffairs](http://www.facebook.com/VeteransAffairs)



**YOUTUBE:**  
[www.youtube.com/  
DeptVetAffairs](http://www.youtube.com/DeptVetAffairs)



**Flickr:**  
[www.flickr.  
com/photos/  
veteransaffairs](http://www.flickr.com/photos/veteransaffairs)