



Tuesday, August 12, 2003

Kenneth A. Peterson – Always An Athlete

by: Kim Byers

VA National Events, Ann Arbor, Michigan

“I’ve been an athlete all my life,” said Ken Peterson of Toledo, Ohio, this year’s recipient of the George Gangi Inspiration Award. Peterson, 62, is attending his sixth National Veterans Golden Age Games. He started in 1996 (as soon as he was eligible to compete at age 55) when he was selected as the Games’ *Best Male Athlete*. The selection was made for good reason.

Growing up, Peterson played football, baseball, track and tennis prior to becoming an accomplished long-distance runner while in college. He first ran competitively in 1969, and over the years has run the Boston Marathon five times, the Detroit Free Press Marathon three times, and nearly 30 other marathons.

A member of the *Ann Arbor VA Classics* Golden Age Team, Peterson receives care at the Toledo VA Outpatient Clinic and the VA Ann Arbor Healthcare System. He first learned about the Games while visiting the Ann Arbor facility for an appointment and finding a handout about the event. He’s been attending ever since. Peterson relishes the opportunity to compete, and he also enjoys watching his teammates in their events.



Ken Peterson

“Ken is an example of a ‘true athlete,’” said Deborah Bray-Arthur, coach of the Classics. “He trains well, competes well and has good sportsmanship. It is a pleasure to have him as a team member representing our medical center.”

At the 2003 Golden Age Games, Peterson competed in bicycling (half and quarter mile), table tennis and croquet,

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Hosted by the
**Togus VA Medical/Regional
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Veterans of Foreign Wars



Department of Veterans Affairs

VFW “Salutes” Naval Reserve Unit

by: Annie Tuttle
VAMC Loma Linda, California

While many participants’ uniforms are packed with care and stored in attics, this year’s VFW Volunteers of the Year wore their uniforms each and every day. The white uniforms of Captain Margaret Ronzio and the six Navy Reserve members from the Naval Reserve Information Bureau, Detachment 1028 from Kansas City, Missouri, have become a familiar site at the Golden Age Games. They began volunteering in 1997 at the Games in Leavenworth, Kansas.

With over 100 years of Reserve experience between them, the seven-person team is crucial to our efforts to publicize your attendance at the Games. From the rank of captain to petty officer second class, each member of the team worked long hours telling the world about your achievements at the Games this year. Every day, the Navy Reserve Team express how honored they feel to have the opportunity to work at the events serving veterans.

Captain Ronzio is affectionately referred to as “Captain Margaret” by the participants, volunteers and staff who have come to know her over the past six years. From the very beginning, Captain Margaret has led this team with a drive for perfection and a compassion for veterans that cannot be matched. She has created a team that genuinely symbolizes the true spirit of volunteering.

When their job is done in Public Relations, they just keep going. You will spot their white uniforms directing veterans to events, enjoying conversation in the Commons, locating lost items and assisting veterans with their trays.

Once the day is over and their uniforms are retired for the night, rumor has it they have also kept the disco floor alive, serving as dance partners for those participants who like to dance the night away.

They are proud to wear their own uniforms, but they are equally proud of serving you.



Captain Ronzio

Givens Award Given

by: Susan DeKeyzer
VAMC Alexandria, Louisiana

Bill Givens was the chief recreation therapist at the Topeka, Kansas VA Medical Center. He was one of the original planning committee members for the first Golden Age Games as well as the first Meet Director.

Givens passed away suddenly in January 1999. In honor of his continuous work and commitment to the Golden Age Games, the Bill Givens Award is presented each year to the individual who exhibits extraordinary support of veterans’ participation in the Games.

Congratulations to Alice Lunt of the Togus, Maine VA Medical Center, recipient of the Bill Givens Award for the 2003 Golden Age Games.

Lunt is a member of the planning committee for the 2003 Games, and has played an integral part in making this year’s Games a success. Hard to find in just one location, Lunt has been

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Gangi Award

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earning two gold and one bronze medal. “I’m really excited about the medals in bicycling this year, because I broke my ankle about five months ago and was still hobbling around only two weeks ago,” he said. At past Games, Peterson also competed in the pentathlon event.

A veteran of the U.S. Army, Peterson served in Europe from 1960-1964. He first worked in Personnel, but was later appointed company clerk in an infantry division stationed in Germany. Professionally, Peterson was an accountant for 18 years, but later made a career change to become a professional carpet/furniture cleaner.

Ken Peterson is a survivor in many ways. He has overcome three bouts with cancer, undergoing both

radiation and chemotherapy treatments. He firmly believes that staying active and involved with sports aided in his recovery. “It’s saved my life,” he said.

“Being active helps you both physically and emotionally.”

Like most participants at the Golden Age Games, Peterson speaks highly of the special camaraderie among the veterans here, in addition to the obvious health benefits that come from competition. “I’ve met a lot of great people at these Games,” he said. “You meet new people all the time. When you go to these events, you renew those friendships.”

According to Peterson, “Everyone who competes here is a winner, whether they come away with a medal or not. If you like to compete, it’s definitely a worthwhile experience.” He also enjoys the opportunity to travel. “You get to see various parts of the United States – I like to

visit these places and attend the special tours and activities that are available to us. The Golden Age Games give us a chance to visit these areas, that we probably wouldn’t be able to see otherwise.”

Back home in Toledo, Peterson is an active volunteer in the community, donating time to “Mobile Meals,” a respite program at his church, helping with a bike race for the MS Society, and is an active member of the Toledo Roadrunners Club, where he helps with races and other local events. Staying involved and keeping active are what keep him going.

Ken Peterson – outstanding athlete, survivor, straight-shooter, proud veteran, great sportsman, good friend. And, above all, a true inspiration to us all.

Givens Award

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all over the University of Maine campus ensuring that things are going smoothly for participants.

The success of the 2003 Games is evident in the smiles on the faces of the participants, their coaches and family members. Lunt’s hard work and dedication to the 2003 National Veterans Affairs Golden Age Games has definitely made a difference in the lives of the veterans who made the trip to Orono to compete for the Gold.



Alice Lunt

Special Forces Team Led by Special Coach

by: Kenny Ragland
Navy Journalist Second Class

Among the ranks of the outstanding coaches this year, it wasn't hard to spot Kellie Okoniewski. She was the one cheering the loudest, moving the fastest and sharing the biggest smiles with her veteran participants. She also took the time to help other veterans and coaches throughout the venues.

Okoniewski, coach of the Bath, N.Y. *Special Forces* team, has been named by the VFW as this year's Coach of the Year for the 2003 National Veterans Golden Age Games in Orono, Maine.

Monday morning, Okoniewski, a recreational therapist and four-year coach from the Bath VA Medical Center, was at the Family Fun Bowling Center making sure the participants were in their designated location and ready for the competition.

"Making sure the veterans are prepared and at their events at their designated times is an extremely important role of the coaches," said David Krueger, National Event Director for the Golden Age Games.

Each year the VFW, national co-sponsor of the Games, recognizes the efforts of one coach who goes above and beyond in support of participating veterans. This award is given to the coach who best exemplifies commitment and dedication to the veterans at the Games.

"She is an outstanding person and has given me a lot of confidence in myself," said pentathlon silver medalist team member Amalia Pellon.

"She's a heck of a coach," team member and Army veteran Frank Szydowski said. "The best thing is her being here with me."

What a Team!

by: Kim Byers
VA National Events, Ann Arbor, Michigan

The Veterans of Foreign Wars proudly presents a group award to recognize the extraordinary efforts of this year's local transportation team and Giselle White, transportation chair. They did an outstanding job all week transporting participants, volunteers, staff and guests to and from the venues, dorms, cafeteria, tents, alternate activities (and everywhere else we needed to go).



Giselle White

THANK YOU ALL!

*You took us here, you took us there
You took us just about everywhere!*

*By cart, van or bus,
Without ever a fuss.*

*You were there through it all
Whenever we'd call.*

*Up the road, through the lane
You're the best here in Maine!*

