



Quest Dispatch

Quest for the Best!



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Questing for the Best: 2008 Spirit of the Games Winner

Gustave "Gus" Sorenson

With cowbells in hand and enthusiasm coursing his veins, he cheers on his fellow veterans in competition. The bells have become a tradition – the man, an inspiration. With 20 years of National Veterans Wheelchair Games experience backing him, this former president of the Wisconsin Chapter of Paralyzed Veterans of America is honored tonight as the 2008 Spirit of the Games award recipient.

Gustave "Gus" Sorenson, an Army veteran from the city of Sturtevant, enjoys the sports and the camaraderie at the Games, but most of all, he loves the people. Well, Gus, the people are fond of you and your demeanor, too! That is what this award is all about.

The Spirit of the Games award is given to an athlete who clearly demonstrates not only athletic competence, but also sportsmanship and strength of character. Sorenson, as described by his numerous supporters, is humble, kind, encouraging and giving.

Sorenson, 60, has a natural knack for putting people at ease. One Spirit of the Games ballot reads, "Gus is a very friendly and approachable individual who is always willing to help others and serve as a mentor to new and [returning] athletes. Despite his quiet demeanor, Gus is a pillar to Team Wisconsin—someone who can be counted on as a dependable team member. He works very hard both on and off the field. I know that when I feel like giving up in a workout or race, I think to myself, 'Gus wouldn't quit,' and that inspires me to keep going."

He's been on the go in a wheelchair for 39 years. "I've been disabled for a long time, and I've come to terms with my disability," says Sorenson, a combat veteran of Vietnam. "It's not what you've lost—it's what you have left. You play the hand you're dealt and you do what you can with it."

Sorenson was instrumental to the success of the 2007 National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Milwaukee, where he served on the local organizing committee and helped recruit both new athletes and sponsors. Each year at the Games, he favors quad rugby, bowling, table tennis and field events. This week, Sorenson earned a gold medal in table tennis, a bronze in discus and shotput, and competed today in the quad rugby finals. As always, he and his fellow slalom teammates doled out some fierce competition in his quad rugby game.

"There are two things I have to say about quad rugby," said Sorenson. "Old age and treachery will not overcome youth and skill in this sport. I want to know where it was 39 years ago when I was young and strong!"

See "Spirit," continued on page 2



2008 Spirit of the Games winner and Army veteran, Gus Sorenson from Sturtevant, Wis.

“Spirit,” continued from page 1



Gus Sorenson demonstrates his skill at table tennis.

Although Sorenson enjoys the competitiveness of the Games, his heart belongs to the people who make the event happen. “Tom Brown and his staff, PVA and the thousands of volunteers—they’re all good people. They work really hard here at the Games. They want to help; they want to say ‘hi’ and ‘thanks’ to the veterans,” he said. “You can have all the money in the world, but without these people, you would have nothing.”

Another favorite aspect of the Games for Sorenson is watching the novices come in at the start the events. He recognizes their dazed expressions and loves to watch the transformations that take place during the week as they learn new things and gain new perspectives. He remembers what it was like being in that position, and admits that even now after so many years in a wheelchair, he still learns new tricks – for competition as well as everyday life.

He often speaks to school classes and professional groups on what it means to be a veteran and what it’s like to live with a disability. “It’s amazing how much energy children have,” Sorenson said. “They’re young, they’re smart, and I think the future is in good hands.”

Before being honorably discharged from the Army, he served in mechanized infantry. He also served in the infantry while stationed in Panama. After the military, he earned a degree in history from the University of Wisconsin-Parkside.

Sorenson works full time as the government relations director for the Wisconsin PVA, where his primary focus is monitoring legislation that affects veterans and advocating for individuals with physical disabilities. He is also involved in several other assignments such as writing grants, preparing newsletter material and fund raising. And, according to Michelle Lanouette, Wheelchair Games classifier and a physical therapist from Wisconsin, Sorenson likes to mix fun with his work.

“He has a great sense of humor and likes to play pranks,” she said. “Whenever someone has a birthday in the office,

he has kringles delivered to them. He’s very proud of those kringles!” (Kringles, she explained, are a pastry special to Wisconsin.) Lanouette adds, “He is a die-hard Chicago Cubs fan. Every year, he organizes a tailgate party for Wisconsin PVA, personally calling about 400 people just to invite them.”

“I was pretty depressed after my injury,” Sorenson recalls. “I was 16 days out of the Army without a care in the world when I had my car accident. Both of my parents had passed away when I was a teenager and there I was, on my own, paralyzed. I spent 17 months in three different hospitals, almost unheard of now-a-days. The doctor said I’d live maybe 10 or 15 more years—that was the prognosis back then for spinal cord injuries. The VA hospital is the reason I am alive today. These are my family and friends now.”

Past Spirit of the Games Recipients:

Year	Name	Hometown
2007	Philemon “Joe” Valesquez*	Turlock, Calif.
2006	Charles Allen*	Cedar Hill, Texas
2005	Orlando Perez*	Augusta, Ga.
2004	Gary Pearson*	Seattle, Wash.
2003	Wayne Miller*	Silver Spring, Md.
2002	Ken Medieros	Taunton, Mass.
2001	Laura Schwanger	Elkins Park, Pa.
2000	Larry Hughes	Columbia, Md.
1999	Ken Huber	Milan, Mich.
1998	Gil Garcia	San Antonio, Texas
1997	Robert (“Pat”) Sapp	Rockwall, Texas
1996	Holly Koester*	Berea, Ohio
1995	Penny Gillett*	Fresno, Calif.
	James Torres	Caguas, P.R.
1994	Tim Davis	Paso Robles, Calif.
1993	Hope Cooper	San Antonio, Texas
1992	Kater Cornwell	Charlotte, N.C.
1991	† Max Rhodes	Miami, Fla.
1990	Mike Trujillo*	Huntington Beach, Calif.
1989	Jim Martinson	Puyallup, Wash.
1988	† Ken Wright	Palo Alto, Calif.
1987	Russ Monroe	Davison, Mich.

* Present at the 2008 Games

† Veteran has passed away



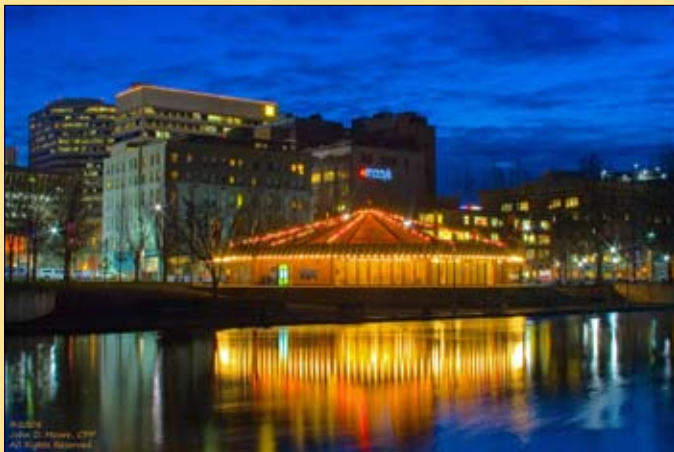
Come to Spokane for the 2009 Games!

“*Rollin on the River*” will take on a whole new meaning in Spokane, Washington in July 2009. The mighty Spokane River will serve as one of the center point attractions for the 29th National Veterans Wheelchair Games, taking place July 13-18, 2009.

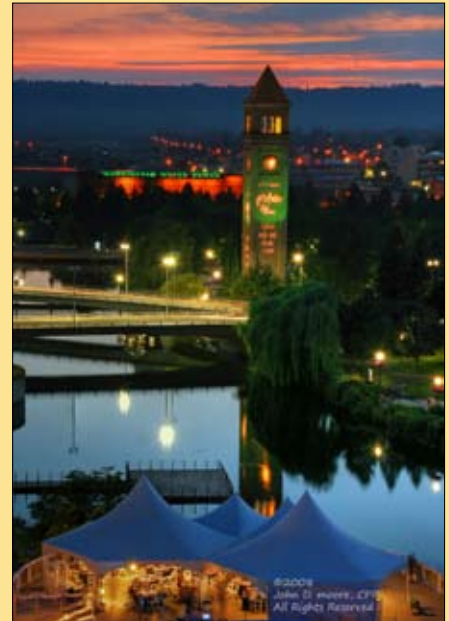
With strong support for veterans in the local area, the entire Spokane community is ready to watch hundreds of wheelchair athletes define a path to victory each time they cross the finish line or reach their own personal goals – and glory – at next year’s event.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Medical Center in Spokane and the Northwest Chapter of Paralyzed Veterans of America are proud to be hosting the Games in 2009. Together, they invite you to again be part of the largest annual wheelchair sports event in the world. “Come make a memory with us,” said Carla Lippert, next year’s local organizing committee chairperson. “The volunteers, VA Medical Center and Paralyzed Veterans Chapter staff are just as excited as the participants about the upcoming year.”

In between sports events and visiting with lifelong friends, athletes and fans can choose from a variety of



local sites to visit. Visitors will marvel at each Spokane site, whether it be the treasured and breathtaking outdoors, or the sports venues near the Spokane Convention Center located in the heart of downtown. The locals tell us their city offers a feeling of welcome to their home while we are away from our own.



“This will be one of the proudest moments in Spokane VA Medical Center history,” said Sharon Helman, director of the facility. “These veterans represent those we serve and those to whom we in VA provide the best possible health care.”

Spokane offers excellent athletic facilities for each competitive event and is expecting more than 500 participants. Still, the 2009 event will not be complete without you being there to relish the opportunity to travel to the beautiful Pacific Northwest and enjoy the benefits of sports competition, camaraderie with other veterans, and a warm welcome to this picturesque part of the country.

Spokane is honored to share its city with all the participants of the 29th National Veterans Wheelchair Games. Sign up for the event when the registration period begins in early 2009! We are all waiting to see you!



Departure Information

Special instructions regarding luggage pick-up and departure information has been provided at your hotel, a copy may be obtained at the hospitality desk.

Shuttles transporting veterans to the airport start running at 3 a.m. Wednesday until 3 p.m. Please be ready to depart from your hotel at least three hours before your flight time. *If you depart after 3 p.m. you are responsible for your own transportation.*

Have a safe trip home!

NVWG Web site

www.wheelchairgames.va.gov

The daily editions of the *Quest Dispatch* are posted on the main page of the Games’ Web site, and individual news releases and photos are located on the “Athlete Information” tab. Final results and other updates will continue for the next few weeks. Look for a great photo gallery from the Games (see the Photo Gallery tab on the main home page). What a great way to share how you have *Quest for the Best* with family and friends!

Thanks to Omaha!



On behalf of the athletes and their families, the coaches, officials, special guests, staff and volunteers, a sincere and heartfelt THANK YOU goes out to the local organizing committee from Omaha. The committee members from the VA Nebraska-Western Iowa Health Care System and the Great Plains Chapter of Paralyzed Veterans of America all worked for nearly two years on hosting the events this past week, and their long hours of planning and steadfast determination clearly showed. From the spirited competitions to special ceremonies and events, from the Kick-off to Kids Day and last night's military review-style entertainment, it has been an outstanding and exciting week for everyone. You have welcomed us all with open arms and made us feel so much at home in our Quest for the Best. It was truly a fitting theme, as we enjoyed the best competition, made the very best of friends and tomorrow bring home the best kind of memories. Thank you, Omaha – you have done the Games proud.

Thanks from the Public Affairs and Photo Team

As we close out this exciting week in Omaha, the members of our Public Affairs and Photography Team want to thank all of the athletes and their families for supporting our efforts here at the Games. We sincerely appreciate your willingness to allow us to tell your inspiring stories in our daily newsletter, on the Games Web site, in your hometown news releases and to media outlets all across the country. Past experience has proven that by doing this, you will inspire countless other veterans in our communities who will make a life changing decision to join us at the National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Spokane next year.



As always, your courage and your athletic skills have dazzled all of us as well – both professionally and personally. In fact, no member of this local and national team will leave the Games unaffected. Thank you for showing us your determination and strength of spirit on the slalom course; your concentration and focus at airguns and archery; your sheer fortitude at swimming and weightlifting; your sportsmanship at basketball, power soccer, softball

and quad rugby; and your steadfast resolve to succeed at every other event and activity this past week. In addition to the medals you have picked up along the way, you have also shown us a lot about mentoring and coaching other athletes, about team spirit, and you have clearly demonstrated how the joy of competition never fades, even after a serious injury. As so many of you have told us, "It's all about ability, not disability." The strong feeling of camaraderie, though, continues to equal the benefits of competition for a large number of our athletes.

As we all depart from our hotels and get on the airplanes tomorrow, remember the very special week we enjoyed here together, on our shared journey to "Quest for the Best." Next winter, on one of those gray (and possibly snowy) days when you're getting cabin fever from being inside, or perhaps just feeling down from the long lack of sunshine, remember the past week in Omaha and put in your DVD from the Closing Ceremonies. It is sure to bring it all back to you – and just won't be able to help smiling as you remember...

Safe travels home, everybody!

*The National Veterans Wheelchair Games
Public Affairs Team*

Quote of the Day...

A good hockey player plays where the puck is.
A great hockey player plays where the puck is going to be.

~ Wayne Gretzky



Wednesday's

Weather

Partly Cloudy

High 90

Low 69