



Athlete Profile (National)

Penny Gillett
Navy Veteran
55 years old
Walton, Nebraska

Penny Gillett has attended 24 of the past 29 National Veterans Wheelchair Games. She is part of a small group of competitors who have seen this event grow substantially over the years. Gillett says what she has noticed most is the increased number of women Veterans, another group she holds dear to her heart.

In her early twenties, Gillett was a Navy Corpsman stationed in the Great Lakes area. She began to develop chronic ailments such as back pain, weak legs and shaky eyes. After only a year and a half, she was discharged from military service with a then-undiagnosed illness. She later learned that it was multiple sclerosis (MS).

Rather than give up, Gillett continued her education and earned her master's degree in clinical psychology and a license in marriage, family and child counseling. Unfortunately, the disease eventually caused Gillett to lose her ability to speak and she was forced to discontinue her practice.

Still, not wanting to give up, she found her voice again by writing and publishing a book called, "*Miracles in the Darndest Way.*"

Gillett also found success in other ways. She has accumulated a wide array of honors at the Games and other nationally sponsored athletic events. In 1995, Gillett was selected, along with Army veteran James Torres of Caguas, Puerto Rico, to receive the annual *Spirit of the Games* award. The coveted award is given each year to the athletes who most exemplify the qualities of a true champion – athletic excellence, sportsmanship and strength of character.

In 1997, she was the first female competitor to win the National Rifle Association's Beeman event, a shooting competition that promotes precision shooting for persons with disabilities.

Penny Gillett continues to demonstrate the generosity, tenacity, kindness and inspiration that earned her accolades so many years ago and, because of that, her tremendous *Spirit of the Games* continues.

