

Ski Gram Newsletter

Wednesday March 30, 2011

An Amazing Year

In 1997, David Riley lost all four limbs to a bacterial infection, but it will take more than that to slow him down.

The medically-retired Coast Guard aviation survival technician likes to go fast and live life to its fullest, which is why he is a perfect fit for the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic.

The Alabama native made his first trip to Snowmass Village in 2010 for the 24th National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic. The Clinic was lived up to its reputation as the premier winter sports clinic rehabilitation event, Riley said.

"I had heard that the Winter Sports Clinic is an incredible, life-changing event," Riley said. "I was happy to discover that it was everything I'd been told and more."

"I like to go fast. I drive fast and, even on two prosthetic limbs, I move fast. Being able to burn down that mountain puts a smile on my face every time."

Riley said the Clinic also offered him the opportunity to meet and mentor younger disabled veterans.

"I think the severity of my injuries are a blessing in the way that they give me instant credibility and friendship with younger veterans injured in combat," Riley said. "I am more than a decade out from the event that took my arms and legs. I have a family and a purpose in life. I think they realize they can have the same things."

Just a few months after the Clinic, Riley learned that he was going to be honored for his work with his fellow disabled veterans.

The DAV honored Riley as the Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year for 2010 at the organization's 89th National Convention in Atlanta. The award was presented by then-DAV National Commander Roberto Barrera, who had met Riley at the Clinic.

The award recognized him for his outstanding volunteerism and his commitment to inspiring his fellow disabled veterans.

"David is the kind of veteran whose visible injuries draw questions from many curious people . While this is not an easy role to step into, David has made the most of his disability by unfailingly turning his struggle into a positive and inspirational force," said Barrera. "He continues to serve the veteran community with the same courage and tenacity he displayed as a Coast Guard rescue swimmer."

Riley lost both arms, both legs and several internal organs to a bacterial infection that ravaged his immune system and burned his skin from the inside out. After narrowly surviving the infection's early onslaught, Riley spent more than a month in a coma and many more months building up the strength to attempt physical therapy.

While Riley's recovery has been described as miraculous by medical professionals and his family, the event has not defined his life.

"The sickness is just another of many events in my life. It took some things from me, but it gave me many things too," Riley said. "I'm definitely a better person for going through it but it is not the beginning or the end of my story."

Riley, 50, and his wife Yvonne have three children. The couple lives in Semmes, Ala. Riley, a life member of DAV Chapter 7 in Semmes, Ala., is an active volunteer at the VA medical center in nearby Mobile.

"Volunteering and attending events like the Winter Sports Clinic put me in direct contact with the men and women that have come to mean so much to me," Riley said. "I feel as if I am blessed and want to give whatever I can as long as I'm able to give it."

Going National

What started as an informal support group at the 2006 Winter Sports Clinic has grown into a national non-profit organization .

Cheryl Lynch stood and watched with a mixture of disbelief and amazement. There was Vice President Joe Biden on stage at the opening ceremonies of the 25th National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic. And on the right lapel of his sport coat was a pin for American Veterans with Brain Injuries, Inc., a non-profit organization she set up in 2009. "To see him there, wearing our pin, was overwhelming," she says. "Brain injury is in the newspapers all the time, but nobody really knows what it is until you've lived it."

Living with brain injury is something she knows very well. Her son, Chris Lynch, fell from a building during a training mission while serving with the 82nd Airborne Division and suffered a severe brain injury. In that instant, her life changed forever. She quit her job and spent the next year accompanying her son as he received treatment at military and VA hospitals. After treatment, her son was medically retired from the Army. The transition home to Pensacola, Fla., was particularly difficult. "Chris was mad as hell," she recalls. "He wanted to rejoin his unit and he couldn't accept the fact that he wasn't going back."

It was during this time that she first learned of the Winter Sports Clinic through an article in a newspaper. She called Clinic Director Sandy Trombetta and made plans to attend the event in 2003. That first year was an eye-opening experience for Lynch and her son. Skiing the mountain and sharing the moment with his fellow Veterans awakened something in her son. But being at the Clinic also left him feeling somewhat isolated and alone. "Chris felt like he was the only one with a brain injury. His symptoms weren't readily visible and he often felt like he was on the outside looking in," she explains.

In the subsequent years, she noticed more and more participants with brain injuries. One of them was Alan Babin Jr., who like her son, had also served with the 82nd Airborne Division. She immediately felt a kindred spirit with his mother, Rosie Babin. "The family members, we all share a connection. We can relate our struggles, our hopes, our fears; there is an immediate connection," says Lynch.

That year at the Clinic, 2006, Lynch put together an impromptu support group meeting for Veterans with brain injuries, their families and caregivers. About 15 people showed up. The format was simple. The Veterans introduced themselves and talked briefly about their lives. As one Veteran began to talk, he suddenly broke down in tears. It was the first time he had ever spoken about his brain injury. "At that moment I knew this could be very powerful," Lynch recalls. Babin agrees. "Peer to peer connections are invaluable. For the first time we realized that we are not the only ones going through this, and that was huge," says Babin.

When Lynch returned to Florida following the Clinic, she started American Veterans with Brain Injuries, Inc., (AVBI) as a peer support network and resource Web site www.avbi.org. One of the site's key features was a chat room where Veterans and their loved ones could discuss issues they were facing. "As a whole, I think we can learn a lot from each other and overcome those feelings of isolation," says Lynch.

As her son's recovery progressed, he began venturing further and further from home. Sometimes, problems would follow. "There were several run-ins with police," she says. Law enforcement officers mistook her son's brain injury symptoms for signs of intoxication. In response, she created a tri-fold wallet card describing common brain injury symptoms and listing a point of contact for emergencies. She also designed a medical alert dog tag that points medical or law enforcement personnel to the tri-fold card for information. "I made this originally for Chris, but I realized they can benefit all Veterans with brain injuries."

Today, the AVBI Web site has more than 3,000 Veterans registered. Lynch knows many of them by name. Through the site, they receive the dog tags, wallet cards, a subscription to a Web-based cognitive exercise program, and grants to attend adaptive sporting events like the Winter Sports Clinic. And she still holds the annual support group meetings at the Clinic, which now has about 50 attendees.

When her son gave a lapel pin to Vice President Biden, Lynch never expected him to wear it. So when he did, she felt a strong sense of purpose. "My life changed forever when Chris was injured," she says. "Now I want to give others a reason for hope and the possibility for a brighter future."

Let's Get to Twistin'

A legend in pop music drops into the Clinic tonight to provide a free concert. Chubby Checker will take the stage tonight at 8 p.m. in the Conference Center Ballroom.

Born Ernest Evans in South Carolina and raised in South Philadelphia, PA, he earned the "Chubby" nickname as a teen.

With a natural gift for imitation, he enjoyed impersonating the styles of his musical heroes Fats Domino, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Elvis Presley. He began performing in churches and on the streets with his singing group, The Quantrells, and soon attracted the attention of music executives in Philadelphia.

Checker signed with Cameo-Parkway Records in 1959 and was encouraged to make his own version of "The Twist," a song originally written and performed by Hank Ballard. But it was Checker's version and his accompanying dance routine that gave the song new life. He was dubbed "The King of the Twist." In fact, it was Dick Clark's wife who came up with the name Checker, a reference to the similarity between the portly singer and Fats Domino.

An appearance on Dick Clark's American Bandstand launched Checker's version of "The Twist" to the No. 1 billboard spot in August 1961, where it remained on the charts for 18 straight weeks. In November of that year, it reentered the charts again for a record-breaking 21 weeks. With this formidable achievement, "The Twist" became the first and only 45 single to ever appear in the No. 1 spot in two different years.

Checker continued to capitalize on the twist theme with similarly titled songs, such as "Twistin' U.S.A." and "Twist it Up" in the early 1960s, and even "Let's Twist Again" in 1999. He also starred in two films featuring the twist sensation, Twist Around the Clock (1961) and Don't Knock the Twist (1962).

Make sure to swing by the Conference Center tonight for a great show by a pop music icon and get out on the dance floor!

VA Careers: Veterans Preference

Do you know about Veterans preference in hiring?

Veterans qualify as preference eligible if they are a disabled veteran, a veteran who served on active duty in the Armed Forces during a war or in a campaign or expedition for which a campaign badge is authorized; a veteran who, while serving in the Armed Forces, participated in a military operation for which an Armed Forces Service Medal was awarded; or a recently separated veteran, meaning a veteran last separated from active duty within the last three (3) years. Preference eligibility is available to spouses of Veterans who have 100% disability. All job candidates must meet the qualification requirements for the position.

For complete information on eligibility, visit our careers web site at: www.VAcareers.va.gov

Representatives from VA Careers will host an information table every day during breakfast and lunch in the Conference Center Ballroom. Stop by for more information and to get any of your questions answered, they're here to help you!

What Are You Saying?

Which of the seven dwarves best describes you?

William White and Rudy the black lab
US Marines
Wood Dale, IL

"Oh, I'm definitely Grumpy...that's seriously me. Rudy would be Happy."

Rhonda Akers

US Army

Fairland, OK

"Oh, I'm definitely Bashful...but, once you get to know me, I really open up."

Frank Miller

US Army

West Palm Beach, FL

"I think I'm Sneezy...'cause it just feels good to have a really good sneeze!"

Alfred Clarke

US Army

West Palm Beach, FL

"I'm going to say I'm Bashful."

Carlos Figueroa

US Army

Los Angeles, CA

"I'm a lot like Dopey...always goofing around, never really that serious."

Vote!

Swing by the Conference Center Lobby to place your votes for the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic Awards! Categories include Most Excellent Coach, Ski Instructor Extraordinaire, Best Face Plant and the Spirit Award. Awards will be presented at closing ceremonies Friday night.

Prosthetics Post

The Prosthetics Post is the place to get the answers for your most frequently asked prosthetics questions.

Dear PDP,

I have a lower leg condition and wear a rigid ankle brace that is rated 0% service-connected. Am I eligible for clothing allowance?

Sincerely – Limping-a-Long

Dear LAL:

Veterans who have a 0-100% rated service connected disability or condition that requires the Veteran to use a prosthetic or orthopedic device that tends to wear or tear the Veteran's clothing (e.g., pants, shirts, etc.) are potentially eligible for an annual clothing allowance. The clothing allowance may also be paid if the Veteran has a service connected skin condition requiring the Veteran to use a prescribed medication causing irreparable damage to the Veterans' outer garments. (NOTE: Irreparable damage does not include stains that are removable through regular laundering or dry cleaning).

MASSAGE

Complimentary massages are available, by appointment; from 1 - 4 p.m. and 6 - 9 p.m. Massage is located in the Elbert room in the Silvertree Hotel. Please call (970) 430-9373 to schedule an appointment.

WHEELCHAIR AND PROSTHETICS REPAIR

Located at the Host Room in the Conference Center.

Hours are:

6:30 a.m. - 8:45 a.m.

11 a.m. - 1 p.m.

4 p.m. - 5:30 p.m.

In between these hours this person (Don) can be reached @ 970-430-9417. Please do not call after 6 p.m. unless it is an emergency. If you need to contact the Prosthetics Repair person (Joe) please call 970-430-9415.

Medical Room

For emergencies dial 911

Medical room phone:

(970) 923-8330

Location

The medical room is located in the Bedford A conference room, one level below the mall, across the street from the Mountain Chalet Hotel. Stairway access from the mall is next to *Christy Sports*.

Wheelchair access is by elevator at the far end of the mall above the bus terminal.

Transport

Van transport is available from the Silvertree Hotel to the medical room. Find the medical van in the front of the hotel or call the medical room to arrange transportation.

After Hours

Call the medical room for recorded instructions on how to contact the "on call" medical provider. If unsuccessful, call the hotel operator.

Menu

Today's Lunch

Chicken Noodle & Tomato Basil Soup

Turkey or Ham Sandwiches

Today's Dinner

Spinach Salad with Red Pepper and Feta Cheese with Vinaigrette Dressing

Spaghetti with Bolognese Sauce

Meat Lasagna

Zucchini with Red and Yellow Peppers

Italian Bread and Butter

Variety of Desserts

Tomorrow's Breakfast

Fresh Sliced Fruit

Oatmeal with Granola, Raisins, Sliced Bananas, Almonds & Skim Milk Assorted Breads/Muffins

Sausage and Bacon

Breakfast Potatoes

Omelet Bar with Cooked-to-Order Omelets to include Ham, Cheese, Mushrooms, Peppers, Fresh Tomatoes, Green Onions, and Salsa

Fresh Ground Coffee, Decaffeinated Coffee, Herbal Teas, and Assorted Chilled Juice

Transportation Schedule

Snowmobiling

First Trip	6:45 a.m.	7:15 a.m.
Second Trip	9 a.m.	9:30 a.m.

Please make sure to load at the correct time for your assigned trip.

Sled Hockey	7:45 a.m.
Fly Fishing	8:30 a.m.

Cross Country Skiing

First Trip	8:20 a.m.
Second Trip	1 p.m.

Buses will run up and down the mountain throughout the day. The 1 p.m. bus will pick up any participants

Hot Springs	9:30 a.m.
Shooting Sports	10 a.m.
Aspen Gondola	10 a.m.
Curling	12:45 p.m.

Event Schedule

6 a.m. – 5 p.m.	Host Room: Conference Center
6:30 – 8:30 a.m.	Breakfast: Conference Center Ballroom
8 – 11:30 a.m.	Snowmobiling: T Lazy 7 Ranch
8:30 - 11:30 a.m.	Downhill Skiing: Buckskin, Powder Horn, Longshot
9:30 a.m. – 4 p.m.	Glenwood Springs, Lunch at Elks Lodge, Hot Springs
9:30 a.m. – 3 p.m.	Fly Fishing Float Trip on the Crystal River: Carbondale
9 a.m. – 3 p.m.	Cross Country Skiing, Snowshoeing, Biathlon
	Introduction (Top of the Village); Elks BBQ Lunch at Top of the Village
9 – 11 a.m.	Scuba Diving: Silvertree Hotel Pool
9 – 11 a.m.	Sled Hockey: Lewis Ice Arena, Aspen
10 a.m. - Noon	Rock Climbing: Conference Center Circle
10:30 a.m. – 4 p.m.	Aspen Trip, Lunch at Elks Lodge, Mountain Gondola Ride
11:15 a.m. - 1p.m.	Lunch: Conference Center Ballroom
11:30 a.m. – 4 p.m.	Shooting Sports/Archery: Basalt Trap Club
12:30 – 3:30 p.m.	Downhill Skiing: Bullrun, Glissade, Rocky Mountain High
1- 3 p.m.	Rock Climbing: Conference Center Circle
1:30 – 3:30 p.m.	Curling: Aspen Ice Rink
2 – 4 p.m.	Scuba Diving: Silvertree Hotel Pool
4:15 – 5 p.m.	Ski Instructor Meeting: Eldorado Room, Silvertree Hotel
4:30 p.m.	Team Leader Meeting: Stone Bridge Inn, Council Meeting Room
5 p.m.	Coaches' Meeting: Max Park Room, Wildwood Lodge
4:30 – 6 p.m.	Dinner: Conference Center Ballroom
6 - 7:30 p.m.	CEU Educational Workshop: "How to Interact and Assist Blind or Visually Impaired Veterans" Aspenwood Meeting Room, Fall Lane Presented by, Eva M. Gergely, MA
6:30 – 8	p.m. Instructional Workshop: "Self Defense for Everyone" Max Park Room, Wildwood Hotel Street Level Presented

7:30 – 9 p.m. by Special Agent Mark Copanzzi, U.S. Secret Service
CEU Educational Workshop: “Focusing on Abilities; Tools
for the Clinicians Toolbox” Aspenwood Meeting Room,
Fall Lane Presented by, Larry Cannon and Ben Webster

8 – 11 p.m. Entertainment: Conference Center Ballroom Chubby
Checker

6 a.m. – 5 p.m. Host Room: Conference Center