

# **FY' 2021-2022 Paralyzed Veterans of America California Chapter Annual Report**

**July 1, 2021- June 30, 2022**



## Paralyzed Veterans of America California Chapter

The Paralyzed Veterans of America California Chapter (PVACC) has a rich history dating back to the initial incorporation of the PVA national organization in 1946. It is one of the first original chapters and has served several thousands of veterans over its long and prosperous tenure. The California Chapter is a member of the Paralyzed Veterans of America chartered by the United States Congress and signed into law by President Nixon on August 12, 1971. PVA California Chapter is a nonprofit organization dedicated to serving the needs of its members, all of whom have paralysis caused by spinal cord injury and/or disease, ALS or recent veterans who have Multiple Sclerosis. The main office is located at the Tibor Ruben VA Medical Center in Long Beach CA inside the Earnest Boars MD spinal cord injury center.

### Officers:

Elmer Jacobs – President  
Jose Reynoso –Vice President  
Alex Calvo –Treasurer  
Bob Molinatti – Secretary

### Board of Directors:

Charles Whitehead  
Lamont Jacobs  
Charles Walker  
Teresa Gaspar

### Administrative Staff

Elizabeth Lara – Office Manager

### PVA National Service Officers

Enrique Chavez — Senior NSO Ernest Bors M.D. SCI Center *Inpatient Benefits*

Alan Williams / Joseph Phillips - Los Angeles Regional Office

*Los Angeles, Kern, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Ventura, Hawaii*

Robert Kamai - Eric Meekins San Diego Regional Office

*San Diego, Riverside, imperial, Orange, San Bernardino*

### Chapter Administrative Office

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# HISTORY OF THE “FIRST” PVA CHAPTER



The Paralyzed Veterans of America California Chapter has a long and historic legacy as the first incorporated Chapter of the Paralyzed Veterans of America. On January 18, 1946, in the Recreation Hall of the Red Cross, seventy paraplegic patients of the Birmingham General Hospital in Van Nuys, California. The Center used the work of Doctor Ernest Bors (1900–1990) who was one of the foremost experts on neurology in traumatic spinal cord injury. Dr. Bors had developed a holistic multidisciplinary approach for treating spinal cord injury, that is still used in care centers today. Military doctors from around the world visited Birmingham General Hospital to learn about this new traumatic spinal cord center. After the war on 31 March 1946, the Hospital was turned over to the Veterans Administration and renamed Birmingham Veterans Administration Hospital. Dr Bors was instrumental in the development of the National Paralyzed Veterans organization. The chapter was chartered in 1946 under the name Birmingham Paralyzed Veterans Association. When the Paralyzed Veterans of America national organization was chartered in 1947, the Birmingham PVA became one of eight original Chapters, and was the only chapter serving veterans west of the Mississippi River. The VA Hospital closed in 1950, the Vets at Birmingham were moved to the Veterans Administration Long Beach Hospital along with the chapter administrative offices where they still exist today. Shortly after the move to Long Beach, the chapter changed their name to the “California Paralyzed Veterans Association.” They pulled away from the national organization and continued to independently serve veterans for 12 years from 1951-1963 before rejoining the organization as the Paralyzed Veterans of America California Chapter under the national organization. Today, The Spinal Cord Unit at the Tibor Rubin VA Medical Center bears the name of Dr. Bors in recognition of all the work he has done for the Veteran Spinal Cord community.



## Chapter Programs

The PVA California Chapter adheres to PVA national guidelines requiring member service in five key program areas: *Liaison, Membership, Sports and Recreation Advocacy, and Communication.*

### Liaison

PVA California Chapter serves to coordinate and communicate with the Department of Veterans Affairs, VA Health Center and other veteran's health services which directly affect our membership. PVA California Chapter currently has full-time National Service Officers to interact with our members, ensuring they receive their entitled VA benefits. We assist and remain available to assist our members as needed.

### Membership

PVA California Chapter maintains an active membership base throughout our region. We provide membership opportunities to qualified veteran members and those interested in our programs (associate members). We actively pursue new members, volunteers, and supporters.

### Sports & Recreation

PVA California Chapter maintains an active sports and recreation program for our members, and the disabled in our region. This program provides tangible health benefits, support, opportunity, and camaraderie for all involved. PVA California Chapter provides grants to our members and associate members to participate in a variety of recreational programs.

### Advocacy

PVA California Chapter advocates for our members and the disabled community by remaining cognizant of local and national disability issues. We remain actively vigilant in assisting and representing our members regarding anything affecting their civil rights when issues regarding disability arise. PVA California Chapter also maintains a vocal and visible presence on disability related issues in the community. We strive to promote fair opportunity and equal access.

### Communications

PVA California Chapter maintains active communication with our membership and the disabled community through a variety of ways. PVA California Chapter hosts an active website that provides service links to a variety of disability resources. We also produce a periodic newsletter, hold meetings of the membership and work with local disability organizations to ensure national and local information regarding disabled issues are provided to our membership.

## Liaison

PVA California Chapter serves to coordinate and communicate with the Department of Veterans Affairs, VA Health Center and other veteran's health services which directly affect our membership. PVA California Chapter currently has full-time National Service Officers to interact with our members, ensuring they receive their entitled VA benefits. We assist and remain available to assist our members as needed.

## Long Beach VA Hospital and SCI/D Center

One of PVA California Chapter's primary missions is to maintain a program that provides liaison with the VA health care facilities and institutions where members receive healthcare services and work with their veteran service organization. The relationship between the Veterans' Administrations Long Beach healthcare system and the PVA California Chapter is a long and symbiotic one period the hospital has always provided accommodations for the chapter, while the chapter has always provided for the other then medical needs of the patients this year, we provided \$20,000 in toiletries, snacks, and iPads to the patients in the wards. PVA California Chapter continued involvement shows their willingness to maintain a long-term program geared toward the education and treatment of paralysis, so nurses and physical therapy students are appropriately trained in the specialized area associated with spinal cord injury/disability. This ensures that our members are treated by those trained in the specialized field and receive the best care possible. This is an investment in the future health and treatment of our members and others with spinal cord injury or disease.

## Community Support

We all started building a strong relationship with local community hospitals and rehab centers in our effort to find veterans who may not be aware of their veterans benefits and VA access. We meet with local city government veteran committees and are working on growing a strong community awareness through school programs parades and numerous meetings and gatherings with various city organizations.

Building community partnerships is paramount to the success as a chapter as well. Whether at a state nursing home or mentoring disabled youth, PVA California Chapter is committed to giving back through volunteerism and philanthropy. We believe this is the cornerstone of bringing disability awareness to the community. PVA California Chapter proudly supports multiple community and local veteran organizations across Southern California advocating for disability services and the veteran's benefits period through our involvement, PVA California Chapter is able to forge ahead and make a positive difference in the disabled and veteran communities we are currently working with Rotary clubs in Long Beach and signal hills, the Bixby knolls Kiwanis, Seal Beach lions, along with multiple local DAV, VFW and American Legion chapters slash posts.

## Partner Organizations

Often overlooked in the nonprofit world is the partnership formed with like organizations. PVA California Chapter is proud to work hand in hand with many top tier nonprofits that have similar goals and much needed specialization which allows our members a greater variety of opportunities to experience. We are extremely proud of our strong ties and support to many local and national organizations including:

Disabled Sports USA

The Triumph Foundation

Rancho Los amigos Foundation

Angel City Sports Foundation

US Adaptive Recreation Center

Adaptive Adventures

Palms and Pines Parasports

Challenge Aspen

The National Ability Center



## Membership

PVACC maintains an active membership base throughout our region. We provide membership opportunities to qualified veteran members and those interested in our programs (associate members). We actively pursue new members, volunteers, and supporters. Serving our members is the cornerstone of PVACC's focus. The purpose of our Chapter is geared toward promoting membership involvement in our various programs. The Chapter's membership efforts are therefore concentrated on providing programs and services to our members. We serve members living across 30+ states and 3 foreign countries. When we published last year's annual report, we had 632 members, which was down from 651 earlier in FY20. At the time of this publication, we had 603 members.

PVACC has made it a priority to educate our members about the various benefits and services available to them. The Chapter is also a major community resource contact for our members. PVACC maintains direct communication with our National Headquarters and the PVA Regional Service Office.

### In Memory of our Members:

From July 1st, 2021, to June 30th, 2022, to our deep regret, 31 members of our PVACC family passed away. We salute the following comrades for their service to our country and our Chapter. May they all rest in peace.

*David Anderson  
Lloyd Broyles  
John Wiley  
Joe Borland  
Kurt Phillips  
Jesus Garcia  
Ronald Hayward  
William Craig  
Alejandro Calvo  
John Carter  
Robin Rustan  
William Baker  
Madison Canfield  
Benjamin Vinuya  
Billy Bollinger  
Ronald Lang*

*Lee Wilkins  
John Gatlin  
William Giles  
Christopher Harrison  
Mitchell Anderson  
Ronald Dilday  
Ronald Seibert  
Manual Alonso  
Landis Berthiaume  
Pepito Eclarinal  
Louis Smith  
James Patton  
Robert Grant  
George Gibson  
Robert Hampton*

From July 1st, 2021, to June 30th, 2022, we had 17 new members join the California Chapter:

*Ronald Stark  
Luis Aguilar  
Vincent Smith  
Richard Dorisse*

*Leonard Snyder  
Robert Price Junior  
Richard Banks  
Kenneth Rhee*

*William Zerby  
Benjamin Castro  
Edward Beck  
Artis Flanagan*

*Floyd Berryman  
Terri Santiago  
Justin Sweet  
Gary Crabtree*

## Sports&Recreation

PVA California Chapter maintains an active sports and recreation program for our members, and the disabled in our region. This program provides tangible health benefits, support, opportunity, and camaraderie for all involved. PVA California Chapter provides grants to our members and associate members to participate in a variety of recreational programs. Typically, a strong and active mission set of the chapter, COVID made in person Sports and Recreation opportunities almost impossible during the year. The cancellation of the July 202 National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Portland was the first official cancellation of the VA's Sports and Recreation programs this Fiscal year. Followed by the Golf Tournament, Summer Sports Clinic, Golden Age Games, Creative Arts Festival, and then the Winter Sports Clinic April 21.

## Chapter Chat

One of the first ZOOM meetings we started was our weekly Chapter Chat. Every Friday at 1:00 PST we would open the ZOOM room and have a wide variety of speakers on a myriad of topics. We had presenters from all the Major VA sporting events share about their virtual programs coming up and National PVA staff members share what they do at the National Office. We had non-profit partner organizations share, and lawyers, and sometimes some of our members simply share info.

## Bingo

The Tuesday BINGO Session became quite popular, and during the year we gave over \$4500 in prizes every week to members just for jumping in and playing a quick hour of BINGO via ZOOM. We think even when we are back in person both the Chapter Chat and BINGO programs will still be active.

## Sports Grants

As members found the ability to venture out more, we were right there to support them financially if they wanted to go camping or biking, or even to drive in theaters for entertainment. While we were not able to support many members going to huge events due to the simple lack of events happening, we were still able to figure out how to provide over \$30,000 in grants to members to get out and do something fun even during COVID to help keep them active in times of mass social distancing. This was nearly 3x more grants provided than last year when we only gave out \$11K miscellaneous sports grants.



## Advocacy

The Chapter's Advocacy Program is essential to ensure members, as well as those in the community, are represented at the local, state, and federal level. It is the role of the Board of Directors and staff to advocate for policies and laws which foster and strengthen the rights of those with SCI/D and those with disabilities in general. As Government Relations Director Teresa Gaspar has worked to take this mission to the next level. She has a committee of dedicated volunteers who meet with southern California legislators and stay abreast of current legislative affairs impacting our members and the chapter. PVACC members are served by a multitude of national legislative officials (Congressmen and Senators) across Central and Southern California. PVACC must keep informed regarding veterans related activities and upcoming legislative efforts both locally and nationally. Annually, we attend a Government Relation Seminar in Washington, DC and meet with our federal representatives across 28 congressional districts on a myriad of issues, including veteran's benefits, healthcare, *The Independent Budget* and matters directly affecting our membership of more than 20,000 nationwide. In early Spring PVACC all 8 volunteer representatives received PVA legislative training and then held ZOOM meetings with our elected representatives. We look forward to being able to attend that conference and meet with our Congressional members on the Hill face-to-face soon.

### 2021 Advocacy Priorities:

*Increase Compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act*

*Strengthen the Air Carrier Access Act*

*Preserve and Strengthen Social Prioritize Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities*



Our AGRD team looks forward to returning to D.C. in person soon after a year of virtual ZOOM meetings with our elected officials.

## Communication

Communication with our members is a core mission of the chapter. Experiencing the entire year virtually made us relook the way we accomplished this mission. We no longer have the luxury of waiting for our members to come to us and initiate communication before or after a medical appointment. We had to reach out to them. Which made us realize in the past we really were only communicating with a small percentage of our members as most of them did NOT come into our office to chat. We split up the 600+ members across all the directors and a small group of volunteers and started to call each member we had a good phone number on every month as part of our "Buddy" or "Wellness" checks. Everyone who made the calls got as much out of connecting with our members as much as the members seemed to appreciate the phone calls.

In addition to our Buddy/Wellness checks, every member gets a personal text and phone call on their Birthday from the "Birthday Crew" manned entirely by fellow chapter members who volunteer their time each day to call fellow members on their birthday and wish them kind words on their special day.

After rethinking how to better support this mission due to COVID we also implemented a new texting protocol for our members. Roughly once a week we send some basic information out to our members via SMS Text letting them know about upcoming events and opportunities. We continue to use Constant Contact to send professional emails to all the members with valid email accounts with a wide variety of information and opportunities for them. We also sent good old fashioned hard copy letters to members asking for contact information updates and sent our first post card campaign in years to members as well, letting them know the Dodgers provided us season tickets again for our members.

We also started two weekly ZOOM sessions for our members. A weekly virtual BINGO session on Tuesdays, and a "Chapter Chat" on Fridays. You can read more about them in the Sports and Recreation section of the report. Over the past few years, the newsletter and website have been the primary means of communicating with our members. In Fiscal year 21 we continued to publish MOMENTUM!! every 3 months for our members and continued our focus on each of the various branches of service as a theme for each issue. Our web-based contact page had nearly 150 individual contact requests from members and others asking all sorts of questions of the chapter.













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California Chapter