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NEWS RELEASE

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Local Veterans compete in VA National Golden Age Games

MARTINSBURG, W.Va. – Nine Veteran patients from the Martinsburg Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) are heading to Fayetteville, Arkansas, June 28 to July 2 to participate in the 2014 National Veterans Golden Age Games (NVGAG).

“My goal this year is to bring home a medal and establish a lot of different friendships,” said Zachary Johnson, a second year NVGAG participant. “This year is going to be better because I know what to expect and we’ve been training all year.”

Exercise and training for the 2014 National Veterans Golden Age Games started last August, just a month after Veteran patients from Martinsburg VAMC won 12 medals and two of the Games’ highest awards during the 2013 National Veterans Golden Age Games. Training for the NVGAG is done through the recreation therapy program at Martinsburg and at Shepherd University Wellness Center.

“The target of our recreation program here and our involvement in the Games is to promote yearlong wellness and fitness,” said Darren “Chewie” Yowell, medical center recreation therapy assistant and Golden Age Games coach. “The Golden Age Games is a perfect opportunity for Veterans to kick-start their yearlong wellness and improve their overall health.”

Sponsored by the Department of Veterans Affairs, the National Veterans Golden Age Games is the only national multi-event sports and recreational seniors’ competition program designed to improve the quality of life for senior Veterans, including those with a disability. The National Golden Ages began in 1985 in Albany, Georgia.

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“Table Tennis is my best event,” said Celestine “LaRue” Nelson, medical center health technician and Golden Age Games assistant coach. Nelson won the Bronze Medal in table tennis, a Gold Medal in the quarter-mile cycling and a Silver Medal in the half-mile cycling during last year’s National Veterans Golden Age Games. “Our coach Chewie, does not accept “No” and always helps you excel.”

During last year’s Games, Veteran patients from Martinsburg VAMC won medals in events, such as the quarter-mile cycling, half-mile cycling, swimming, table tennis, horseshoes, air rifle, croquet and shot put. Additionally, The Coach of the Year Award was awarded to Darren “Chewie” Yowell and the George Gangi Inspiration Award was awarded to Robert “Sparky” Sparkes.

In April, Martinsburg VAMC hosted its first Mini-Games event to help prepare Veterans who planned to attend the NVGAG this month. Veterans from Martinsburg, Perry Point and Baltimore, Maryland and Washington D.C. were all in attendance to practice for the anticipated event. Bowling, ping pong, shuffleboard, shot put, discus and javelin were among the events Veterans participated in. This past Saturday, Veterans from Martinsburg gathered again to practice for their upcoming experience.

“We have been participating in the National Golden Age Games for over 25 years and we always demonstrate the Martinsburg Spirit in all of our events,” said Timothy J. Cooke, medical center director. “I am very proud of all of our Veterans who are participating in the National Veterans Golden Age Games and I wish them the best of luck.”

Veterans from the Martinsburg VAMC have participated in the Games for more than 11 years and have to be 55 years of age and older in order for them to compete against other participants in various high-and low-impact sports events. This year’s group of nine Veteran patients, range in age 58 to 96 years.

“I love competitive sports and training for the Golden Age Games has helped me stay active, boost my self-esteem and improve my overall health,” said Johnson. “Preparing for the games has helped me get out more and more, instead of staying in the house.”

The funds for this year’s athletes were raised through fundraising and donations from Veteran service organization, the community and individual fundraisers sponsored by the Veteran. Donations are still being accepted and can be completed online through the Department of Treasury by visiting www.martinsburg.va.gov and clicking on the E-Donate button near the bottom of the page.

Beginning June 30, the Martinsburg VAMC’s Facebook, www.facebook.com/MVAMC, and Twitter, www.twitter.com/MartinsburgVAMC, pages will feature each of the Veterans competing in this year’s games. In addition, photos of the Veterans competing in events, receiving medals and traveling to and from the games will be posted on the social media sites.

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For more information about the National Golden Age Games, visit www.veteransgoldenagegames.va.gov. For media interested in scheduling an interview with Veteran participants, contact the Public Affairs Office at 304-263-0811, ext. 4013.

The Martinsburg VA Medical Center mission is to honor America's Veterans by providing exceptional health care that improves their health and well-being. Located in West Virginia, the medical center offers a comprehensive range of services, including internal medicine, ambulatory surgery, audiology and speech pathology, dental, nursing home, nutrition, podiatry, prosthetics, women's health, mental health, and rehabilitation medicine. With a service area of nearly 130,000 Veterans in West Virginia, Maryland, Virginia, and Pennsylvania, the medical center operates four VA-staffed Outpatient Clinics in Cumberland, Hagerstown, Fort Detrick, Md., and Stephens City, Va. and three contract clinics in Franklin and Petersburg, W.Va. and Harrisonburg, Va.

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Photo caption: Celestine “LaRue” Nelson a three medal winner during the 2013 National Golden Age Game practices for the upcoming 2014 National Golden Age Games that will be in held Fayetteville, Arkansas, June 28 to July 2.



Photo caption: Darren “Chewie” Yowell and Robert “Sparky” Sparkes, take a moment to pose after receiving the “Coach of the Year Award” and the “George Gangi Inspiration Award” during the 2013 National Golden Age Games. Robert “Sparky” Sparkes is the oldest Veteran participant on the Martinsburg VA Medical Center team. Pictured from left to right: Darren “Chewie” Yowell and Robert “Sparky” Sparkes.