

# 2019

Thursday, April 4



## NATIONAL DISABLED VETERANS WINTER SPORTS CLINIC

wintersportsclinic.org | #wintersportsclinic

### Veteran finds his passion on the slopes of Snowmass

By Patrick Hutchison

Joel Bowman is back for more. He's beaming from ear to ear as he makes his first turns in a sit ski.

He would prefer to be standing like last year, but recovery from a broken leg prevents that for now. Bowman nails the turns and flies down the mountain, just one more accomplishment in the world of adaptive sports that he never thought possible.

In 2002, as his Air Force squadron prepared to deploy in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Bowman is performing a routine check on a hydrazine line in an F-16. He knew how important the line was for the aircraft after spending a dozen years in the Air Force.

"An F-16 without thrust is a lawn dart," Bowman said. "If you can land a plane that has flamed out, you're a hero." Bowman has cleaned up a lot of crashes and seen things he would rather not see. On that day however, a routine check ended his military career.

Fast-forward to 2017, and Joel Bowman is tending to his hobby farm near Richmond, Virginia. It is never routine. Every day is something new. Confusion one day. Memory loss another. Complete cognition misfires the next day. For Bowman, the traumatic brain injury he suffered when the hydrazine line blew up in his face changed nearly every aspect of his life. What's next? Is this it? Where do I go from here?

Another Veteran suggested adaptive skiing—a notion Bowman shrugs off at first, but then decided why not? In 2018, he signs up to attend the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic.

"When we got off the plane, they rolled the red carpet out for us," Bowman said of his first Clinic. "I felt undeserving." Undeserving and unprepared.



Air Force Veteran Joel Bowman is exhilarated at the end of his run on Snowmass slopes.

On the mountain that first year, Bowman looked down. He was terrified. "I can't do this," he told himself. His muscles are sore, he had a headache and he felt the vertigo. Bowman's instructor, Ann, marched up to him as he froze in fear.

"Look at me," she commanded. Bowman did. Ann taught Bowman how to ski down the slope as if she was teaching him to ride a horse. It works. Bowman is a self-described country boy and took her instructions to heart. Then, he stopped. He was frozen again.

"What's wrong," asked Ann.

"I just experienced joy for the first time since I don't know when," Bowman said.

Since last year's Clinic, Bowman has discovered himself a true skier. His broken leg was from a black diamond attempt just a few months earlier, but today, he is back on the mountain, once again fueling his passion.

"It is exhilarating, scary, awesome!" he says at the bottom of the run. "I absolutely love this."

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FULFILLING OUR PROMISES  
TO THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO SERVED

By Bryan Lett

## Survivor

Air Force veteran regains purpose through adaptive sports



Air Force veteran Harris Walker has survived cancer, open heart surgery and the loss of his right leg below the knee—and he credits adaptive sports and the Winter Sports Clinic as one of the reasons why.

“I thought I lost my life, but I found a better way. My wife, Gerri, actually said ‘you can be an inspiration to other veterans,’” said Walker. “I didn’t want to sit around and pity myself for the shape I’m in.”

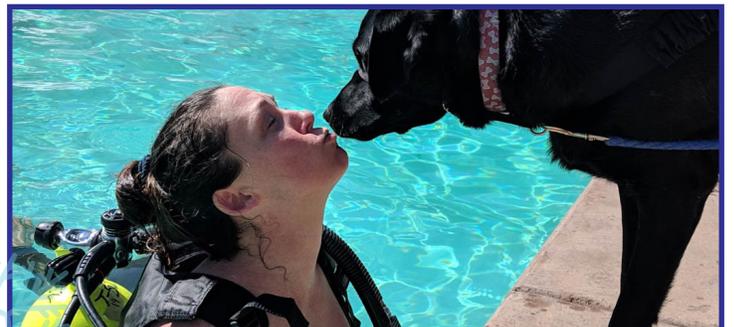
Ever since that moment, it became his personal mission to not only continue his recovery but encourage his fellow veterans who may be experiencing something similar to pursue activities they may not have previously considered.

“I know too many injured veterans who think they should just sort of wait out life,”

Walker explained. “I talk to them about my adaptive sports experiences and try and show them that there are things out there for them to experience. I tell them about how I learned to do things that I had known nothing about. I never thought about skiing before—you get excited about things you never before considered. It is life changing.”

Although, Walker, making his second Winter Sports Clinic appearance, says his favorite events are curling, bowling and skiing, his biggest takeaway from his first clinic in 2016 was the relationships he built with fellow participants.

“We get to go somewhere where we see people just like us,” Walker said. “I love the fellowship. Once you meet all of the girls and guys involved with the clinic, you never forget them.”





# Nothing is stronger than the heart of a volunteer



Now in its 33rd year, the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic has established itself as the world leader in adaptive winter sports programs for injured Veterans. But more than three decades of success would not be possible without the engine that makes it all go—the dedicated and selfless volunteer instructors, coaches and equipment fabricators.

At the clinic and throughout the rest of the year, DAV has numerous volunteer opportunities that enable interested individuals to continue giving back to the men and women who served.

DAV's largest volunteer initiatives involve transporting Veterans to medical appointments and augmenting care and service in VA medical facilities, community living centers and clinics.

Volunteer duties are limitless, ranging from simply being a buddy to a Veteran during recovery or therapy to other more technical and professional opportunities. In 2018 alone, DAV volunteers provided nearly 4.8 million hours through the VA Voluntary Service Program, the DAV Transportation Network and the DAV Local Veterans Assistance Program (LVAP). This donated time is the equivalent of over 2,300 years of full-time work at a 40-hour-per-week average.

In 2007, DAV created the LVAP for individuals who are interested in volunteering but do not live close enough to a VA medical center or who have special skills or talents they want to put to use helping our heroes. This program empowers volunteers to serve where they live and still receive the same incentive awards as those under the well-known VA Voluntary Service Program.

The options for volunteers under LVAP to provide direct assistance to Veterans and their families are virtually limitless. Volunteers can take on any task that might improve a Veteran's life. In 2018, LVAP reached unprecedented heights, with volunteers dedicating more than 2 million hours in a variety of ways.

Since 1987, the nationwide DAV Transportation Network has provided rides to and from VA medical centers at no cost to Veterans. This unique program ensures Veterans, who may otherwise not be able to make their appointments, receive critical medical care. In 2018, volunteer drivers dedicated over 1.4 million hours while covering almost 18 million miles and providing more than 625,000 rides to Veterans for their medical appointments.

“Knowledge is power, and it's our responsibility to make sure our volunteers, potential volunteers and participants here at the clinic are well aware of the many ways for us all to give back,” said DAV National Voluntary Services Director John Kleindienst. “Whether you can volunteer just an hour of your time or an entire day, it has a resounding impact on the life of the Veteran. Don't think that just a short amount of time cannot make a huge difference. The need is too important.”

This year, DAV announced a new tool to help further infuse excitement into the organization's volunteer efforts—a web-based community called [VolunteerforVeterans.org](http://VolunteerforVeterans.org).

While many of our volunteers are Veterans themselves, this new site is a game-changer because it links Veterans from across the country directly to volunteers looking for ways to help. Nothing like this existed before among Veterans service organizations, and it illustrates how DAV is really innovating the idea of volunteering in this community.

Year after year at this clinic, and on a daily basis across the country, you can see how crucial volunteer services are within the Veteran community. Visit [\*\*VolunteerforVeterans.org\*\*](http://VolunteerforVeterans.org) to create a profile, volunteer with DAV or help connect volunteers with opportunities in your area.