



# Valor games

BY ALFRED HU  
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“Valor Games Far West” (VGFW), which took place on Coast Guard Island in Alameda from May 30 – June 2, 2019, gave disabled veterans and active duty service members a chance to form friendships and camaraderie, an opportunity to overcome mental hurdles in dealing with their disabilities, an opportunity to step outside their comfort zone, and a sense of accomplishment while participating in three days of Paralympic sports competition. The goal of the Valor Games is also to introduce adapted sports to attendees in order to promote ongoing adapted sport participation in their communities and to empower these veterans not only through their individual competitions, but also through incremental steps in returning to a civilian lifestyle.

During the 2019 Games, participants competed in archery, biathlons, cycling, rowing, powerlifting, field shotput and discus. According to Victor Backer, public relations coordinator for the event, there were 112 athletes, of whom 59 were new, and 53 were returning. Eighty-three were men, and 29 were women. Ages ranged from 27 to 79. All branches of the Armed Services including the National Guard were represented, and participants came from throughout California and even from out of State.

“It went great and everybody had a great time,” Backer says. He also mentioned that the VGFW are the only Games not open to public access, since it is held on a Coast Guard island base. Backer added that in addition to sporting events, there were occasions for veterans to socialize and enjoy entertainment – such as performances by rock and cabaret bands, and even by three women who sang hits from the Andrews Sisters.

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The VGFW is for any disabled veteran or active duty service member who is eligible for VA healthcare and lives in the Western Region of the United States. Eligible disability conditions include but are not limited to amputation and limb loss, post-traumatic stress disorder, spinal cord injury, stroke, traumatic brain injury and visual disabilities.

Backer presented the case of Shanon Hampton, a retired Air Force Master Sergeant who suffered from traumatic brain injury while serving in Iraq. With the mindset of adapting to different situations no matter how easy or grave, and after support and encouragement from family and from VGFW director Jessica Elix, he decided to participate in adaptive sports, which marked a turning point in his life. After competing in the Valor Games of 2015, he signed up for as many sports as were compatible with his disabilities. He then trained on various terrains, completed two Ironmans, climbed several mountain peaks and even competed at the 2018 Warrior Games at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs. After several other athletic competitions, he was able to compete in the 2018 Invictus Games in Sydney Australia. The Valor Games helped develop his confidence to open up to new



and exciting challenges for which he is very grateful.

“The Valor Games isn’t just a place to play games; it is so much more than that. It is a place to come to rebuild, a place to come to break down the walls, a place to come where you can be safe. My first instincts upon arrival were to stay inside my shell, however; Jessica and her mother had other plans! They went to work on me to open up, participate, and enjoy myself in a safe environment,” says Hampton.

The Valor Games first started in Chicago, Illinois in 2011 and after two successful years it expanded to three additional regions of the country, including the Bay Area (the only Valor Games event west of the Rockies). Since 2013, when the first Bay Area event was held, more than 500 participants

have taken part in these Games with sponsorship from organizations such as AT&T, NBC Bay Area, Coca Cola, Kaiser Permanente, USAA, US Coast Guard, Wounded Warrior Project, and the Northern California Regional Paralympic Sport Program to name a few. In addition to sponsorship, eight collaborating Paralympic Sport Clubs contributed the required expertise, coaching, training, equipment and volunteers to make the event a resounding success.

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What’s noteworthy about these Games is that the athletes don’t merely compete for the medals. “Valor Games is an experience that you won’t really find elsewhere, with the most amazing athletes; I think everyone can learn from an environment like that, whether academically, intellectually, or motivationally,” said Kyle Siskar, Sports Council officer, and president of the West student-chapter of the American Chiropractic Association. Siskar and his team of Sports Council members provided athletes with various complimentary chiropractic services during the 2018 Valor Games.

According to Jessica Elix, Director of the VGFW, the event will be held again from June 11 – 14, 2020 at the same location.

In addition to sponsors, Valor Games also depends on generous donations from the public. To learn more about Valor Games, become a sponsor, or make a donation, please visit <https://valorgames-farwest.com/> or contact Jessica Elix at [valorgames@fwwaa.org](mailto:valorgames@fwwaa.org).

