



The Pacesetter

14th National Veterans Golden Age Games

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Beverly Smith Inspires Us All!

— by Kim Byers —



She trains, she competes, and she mows her own lawn. She gardens, she keeps up the Long Island home where she's lived since 1949, and in the summer, she drives 600 miles in one day to take part in family reunions. Attending the past ten National Veterans Golden Age Games, she's collected an impressive array of winning medals – including four shiny new gold ones this year. It's hard not to know Beverly Smith (athlete #404), this year's George Gangi Most Inspirational Athlete Award winner.

At 80, Smith is the picture of good health and vitality. Always

looking fit and trim, she exemplifies what these Games are all about. With a quick wit and winning personality, the sound of her frequent laughter rings out across crowded gymnasiums and swimming pools, where she's a glowing recipient of continuous hugs and handshakes. And her bright eyes shine with a genuine glimmer when she describes the Golden Age Games.

"I think the Games are an excellent thing," Smith says. "I hope it continues forever, because lots of older veterans don't have anything to look forward to like this. But with the Games, they can practice all year, come with their teammates and really enjoy themselves. I think it's one of the best things VA has ever done." In addition to the opportunity the Games give her to compete, Smith also enjoys being able to travel, visit new places, and meet as many other veterans as possible.

A World War II Navy veteran, Smith was stationed stateside in Iowa from 1945-46, serving as an aviation machinist mate – an airplane mechanic – for pre-flight crews, accompanying them on long flights across the country. After leaving the service, she moved to

North Babylon, by Long Island's south shore, and started working at the Northport VA Medical Center (VAMC) in 1950. Her VA job suited her well – she retired only three years ago after 47 years of government service. At the hospital, she started working in Personnel, later served as a unit secretary, and went on to become an Administrative Officer of the Day, managing hospital operations during the off-hours. In that role, she got to know a lot of veterans, a joy she continues to savor.

Smith first attended the National Veterans Golden Age Games in 1991, in St. Petersburg, Fla., after a recreation therapist at the Northport VAMC told her about the event. She came to the Games with three other members of the Northport team that year, and fell in love with the event. For years, she



would bring an autograph book along so she could collect as many signatures as possible during the week. She still has it, Smith says, and cherishes the memories it inspires.

Originally from Ohio, Smith has been active in sports since the eighth grade, playing softball and later basketball through high school. Still a member of the Northport Islanders Golden Age Team, she stays fit by swimming three to seven times each week, and bowling twice a week. The training shows – three of Smith’s gold medals this week came from the swimming (freestyle, 25 and 50 meters) and bowling events, in addition to another gold in the pentathlon. She enjoys watching her teammates and other veterans compete, and is an enthusiastic cheerleader from the sidelines.



For Beverly Smith, enjoying life in one’s “golden age” is really not about winning medals. For veterans who have never tried the event, her strong advice is to “Get up off your duff and get out there and try! It’s not a matter of winning at each

event you participate in, but the idea is to try. I think that everybody here is a winner. At my age, I hope I can bring some kind of incentive to help others get started.”

That, she does. As Beverly Smith reached the summit of the 25-foot climbing wall, a feat she accomplished several times this week, cheers of “Go, Beverly!” resounded through Exhibition Hall. They came from young and old alike. They came from active duty personnel helping at the event, and from fellow veterans, volunteers, VA employees, service organization members, and friends. They came from spectators hailing from California to Maine, and from Michigan to Texas. And when she reached the top, Smith paused a moment to take in the view, smile at the crowd and wave to all her fans, as if to say “Hey, look at me – I made it!”

Passing of the Torch

The torch has passed! And VA North Texas Health Care System (VANTHCS), host of the 15th National Veterans Golden Age Games, June 9 – 15, is eager to shower veterans with a hearty dose of Texan hospitality.

“The 2001 Golden Age Games will surely be a memorable event for all veterans,” announced Alan G. Harper, director of VANTHCS. “Our employees are working diligently to make ‘Championship Gold’



(the theme of next year’s Games) an unforgettable experience.” A patriotic fireworks display will light the Texas sky during the opening ceremony, kicking off a week of exciting competitions and special excursions to local attractions.

Hopefully, you had an opportunity to stop by the booth outside the Shawnee Room and say hello to the folks from Duncanville, Texas, a city conveniently located in the heart of the Dallas/Fort Worth

metroplex, where next year’s Games are being held. City Mayor Glenn A. Repp, a Navy veteran, was manning the booth yesterday, sharing his enthusiasm with competitors and volunteers as they walked past. “We, call ourselves the ‘City of Champions’ and we know that these men and women are all champions, so what better place to host the 2001 Golden Age Games,” he declared.

The Final Word

Anticipation is building, and next year’s Games are shaping up to be another fantastic event. As we gear up for our trip home, let’s look back at all the fun we had, the friends we made and the great week here at the Games. We’ve enjoyed seeing all the competitors again, and look forward to seeing you next year. Thanks to all the veterans for sharing their stories with us, and please let us know if a story of you at the Games makes it into your hometown newspaper. We’d also like to thank the local VA staff—they’ve really put on a fantastic event! Please let them know what you think about their efforts. There is a comment box in front of the Sunflower Room, so be sure to give them your thoughts. Once again, stay safe, stay fit and keep practicing for next year’s competitions!