

New York's John Devine Selected

John Devine has a zest for life. It's a part of everything he does, from the love in his voice as he speaks of his wife and daughters, to the competitive enthusiasm he displays when scoring a strike at the bowling alley.

John has used his zest for life to deal with his disability, and, along the way, he has become a positive example and mentor for countless disabled veterans. His can-do attitude and determination have also earned John the highest individual honor bestowed on a member of the Disabled American Veterans.

In recognition of John's inspiring example and willingness to build better lives for America's disabled veterans and their families, DAV National Commander James E. Sursely will present the Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year Award for 2005 to John at the opening session of the 84th National Convention of the DAV and Auxiliary in Las Vegas, Nev., Aug. 14.

The New York native's journey as a veteran began when he enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps in August 1967. Following boot camp, he completed the grueling reconnaissance training and earned slot in A Company of the Marine Corps' 1st Reconnaissance Battalion, during the Vietnam War.

At approximately 2 a.m. on the morning of April 26, 1968, John and other members of his recon team were patrolling on a rocky hill in an area known as Charley Ridge. In the distance, they

could hear rifle fire and see tracers in the valley. The sound and light from flares illuminated the darkness.

"What the —" were the only words John got out before a mortar round landed between him and the radio operator. The radio operator was killed, and John was thrown down the hill a short distance.

"I was out of it at that point," John said. "My ears were ringing; I was dis-

I would not be here if not for James Machmer, the corpsman on the ground. I know he paid attention in class, because he successfully gave me a transfusion at 2 o'clock in the morning, under fire, with a flashlight in his mouth."

It was still dark when John was medically evacuated by helicopter to the military hospital at DaNang, where he spent nearly a week. While there, he learned his 12-man recon team had been attacked by North Vietnamese Army soldiers. The exploding enemy mortar round, which seriously wounded John, resulted in the loss of his right leg at the hip, toes on his left foot, damage to his left calf and thigh, and hearing loss.

He was medically retired from the Marine Corps in August 1969, after 14 months of hospitalization, he joined DAV National Amputee Chapter 76, Malverne, N.Y., in 1970. He has served in a variety of offices and projects, including three terms as Chapter Commander.

After a year working at the New York City Police Department responding to as many as 100 calls a day from police officers requesting information about the status of lost property, John returned to school at St. Johns University in Queens, N.Y., earning his B.S. degree in 1975. During this time, his mother and father encouraged him to give golf a try, and he played from time to time with college friends.



John Devine and his sister, Peggy, reminisce during a stroll at a park near his home on Long Island. Devine, named the DAV Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year for 2005, is Commander of DAV National Amputee Chapter 76, Malverne, N.Y.

oriented; and I couldn't hear.

"They pulled me back up the hill, and the corpsman went to work on me.

Following college, John carved out a career as a certified financial planner with the New York Life Insurance Company from 1975 until retiring in 1997. As his career grew, John also grew a family. He met and married his wife, Carolyn, and together they raised two daughters, Kimberly and Susan. He and Carolyn now operate their own novelty T-shirt business..

John also continued to play golf and other sports, including swimming, skiing, and bowling. In 1997, he made his way to the National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic held that year in Crested Butte, Colo., in 1997 to give skiing a try. He was 48 years old. At the 2002 event, John was photographed skiing down a mountainside at Snowmass, Colo., in a monoski flying a large U.S. flag behind him. The photo was featured on the annual poster announcing the 2003 clinic.

"I remember that scared kid in the VA," John recalls of himself. "I came into the handicapped community scared, angry, and confused. At first, I didn't want to go out in public without my prosthetic, but with a lot of work I eventually overcame it.

"Sports were part of the carrot that got me there. It started with swimming. I never got great at it, but I got good at it, and I felt good about it. It got me out in public, and I stopped feeling self-conscious about my disability. It's still there in my mind, but I'd rather be out there doing things with or without the prosthetic than staying back and not doing things."

"Doing things" includes bowling a 300 (perfect) game, as part of an 803 score in a three-game series in 2000. Most bowlers will agree, that's hard to beat consistency by anyone's standards; and on June 26, 1992, on the fourth hole at the Lancaster Host



During a visit to Walter Reed Army Medical Center, John Devine, right, chats with U.S. Army Specialist Oscar Olguin, who suffered the loss of his right leg during combat in Iraq.

Resort and Conference Center at Lancaster, Pa., he hit a 190-yard-shot using a 5 wood. There was a sweet "thwack!" John watched the ball sail through the air, bounce, roll, and disappear. That's right. John scored a hole in one.

Additionally, he serves on the Chapter 76 baseball and golf committees, and assists the National Amputation Foundation with fundraising efforts in conjunction with the Eastern Amputee Golf Association. He has also chaired the Long Island Classic (an amputee golf tournament) for the past eight years and is the 2003 recipient of the DAV National Commanders Trophy at the National Amputee Golf Association tournament awards banquet.

While Commander of Chapter 76, John re-activated the Chapter's amputee program and, along with some friends from the Chapter, including Past National Commander Donald A. Sioos, have traveled to Washington, D.C., to visit with members of the U.S. military whose wounds and injuries have required amputation. John listens to the new amputees, some no older than his daughters. He understands what they are going through and often reassures them with, "You may not

believe it, but one day you'll laugh at all of this."

"We spend time talking with the young men and women who have had limbs amputated as a result of their wounds," John said. "We try to give them hope and inspiration, and we let them know there is life after amputation. By being there and telling the young disabled veterans about our lives, we demonstrate there is a full life ahead of them. If I can ski, bowl, and golf, they can do whatever they want to do!

"We also discuss VA benefits and programs available to them and tell them about the benefits of joining the DAV. These visits really mean a lot to our newly disabled veterans and I will keep doing them until all of our military men and women have returned from Afghanistan and Iraq."

Demonstrating ability, not disability, by example is a byproduct of John's way of life. It wasn't something he set out to do and he is still humbled by the recognition it has brought him.

"When I learned I had been selected as the Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year, I was taken aback by it," John said. "I am honored and humbled to receive this award, and I truly believe there are others as worthy as me out there.

"If my example of helping myself, influences another disabled veteran to help him—or herself, or gets them motivated to try sports, I'm truly glad. I know my family, sports, and getting involved in my Chapter and other organizations have made all the difference in the world in my life, and I hope others find the same satisfaction."

With examples like John Devine, the DAV Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year for 2005, paving the way, the future looks very satisfying. 