1-31-2012

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January 31, 2012

DURHAM, N.H. – U.S. Paralympics, a division of the U.S. Olympic Committee (USOC), has made two grants to Northeast Passage at the University of New Hampshire to support the program’s Paralympic activities for disabled veterans and members of the U.S. Armed Forces. Northeast Passage received $150,000 to launch the New England Veterans Paralympic Regional Development Program and $17,000 for its Paralympic Sport Club.

In total, more than $4.4 million in funds from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs were awarded to 95 community organizations around the country. In New Hampshire, additional grants went to AbilityPlus Inc. of Manchester, Adaptive Sports Partners of the North Country (Franconia), New England Disabled Sports (Lincoln), and New England Handicapped Sports Association (Newbury). Grants ranging from $2,500 to $500,000 were provided to USOC partner organizations and community programs to increase the number and quality of opportunities for physically or visually impaired veterans to participate in physical activity within their home communities and in more advanced Paralympic sport programs at the regional and national levels.

“Northeast Passage has been providing adaptive sports and therapeutic recreation services to disabled veterans for the last 10 years. We have seen first-hand the healing power of sport,” said Jill Gravink, founder and executive director of Northeast Passage. “We are proud to partner with the Paralympics and Department of Veterans Affairs to build the network of services, assuring that high-quality opportunities are available to every veteran that needs the service.”

“We couldn’t be happier with this latest round of grants to be awarded to these new partner organizations,” said Chris Nowak, director of VA National Veterans Sports Programs and Special Events. “These grants provide more outlets for our disabled veterans and injured service men and women to stay active and perhaps, ultimately, the opportunity to take their athleticism to the next level of competition as a U.S. Paralympian.”

“This funding is already having a tremendous impact on disabled veterans and disabled members of the Armed Forces,” USOC CEO Scott Blackmun said. “Through the USOC/Veterans Affairs partnership many community programs have been able to expand their programming and provide increased opportunities for veterans to participate.”

With the larger grant, Northeast Passage will help build a pipeline for veterans with disabilities to access community adapted sports and recreation programs. Northeast Passage will work to match veterans with Paralympic Sport Clubs based on their individual needs, whether geographic, sport-specific, or expertise in a particular diagnosis.

With the grant to its Paralympic Sport Club, Northeast Passage will recruit disabled veterans from around New England to participate in adapted recreation with a focus on the Paralympic sports of sled hockey, shooting, Nordic skiing, and handcycling. The organization also will offer the opportunity for participation in the sports of golf, paddling, water skiing, quad rugby, power soccer, and hiking/outdoor access. Working closely with VA hospitals and other veterans’ organizations, Northeast Passage’s Paralympic Sport Club will introduce sport to disabled veterans and connect the veterans with community resources.

Research has shown that regular participation in physical activity has a positive effect on the rehabilitation process, self-esteem, education, employment, and overall health.

Northeast Passage, founded in 1990, is a nationally renowned UNH program that develops and delivers barrier-free recreation programs for people with disabilities. Learn more: www.nepassage.org.
The grant funding for this program is awarded by U.S. Paralympics, a division of the U.S. Olympic Committee, through funding provided by Veterans Affairs. The grants are provided to facilitate the growth of Paralympic sport programming for disabled veterans and disabled members of the Armed Forces.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state’s flagship public institution, enrolling 12,200 undergraduate and 2,300 graduate students.

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