

THE BEACH REPORTER



The Community Newspaper of The Beach Cities

Manhattan Beach • Hermosa Beach • Redondo Beach • El Segundo

September 13, 2007

(310) 372-0388, www.tbrnews.com

Volume 31 Number 32

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Senior earns another bronze at Golden Age Games

by Sascha Bush

Over the last two years, senior athlete and Redondo Beach resident Michael McCann has won three bronze medals in the National Veterans Golden Age Games. Prior to his most recent win, McCann was quoted as saying, "Maybe some 60-year-old kid will come and bump me out of the medals altogether."

The 62-year-old wasn't bumped from the winners' block, however; McCann picked up his fourth medal during this year's competition in Houston, Texas.

Recognized as "the only multievent sports and recreational" competition for seniors, the National Veterans Golden Age Games is sponsored by the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Veterans Canteen Service and Help Hospitalized Veterans. Open to military veterans age 55 or older and who receive care through the VA program, the games "keep people moving," said McCann. "It's a place you can express yourself competitively."

McCann first attended the 2005 games in Norman, Okla., after learning about them through the VA Web site. The U.S. Army veteran had previously participated in the California Senior Olympics, winning medals in both shot put and discus; but at the National Senior Olympics, he joked, "I found out I wasn't very competitive on the national level." McCann proved he was in fact very competitive, when his first year in the Golden Age Games he placed third in both the half- and quarter-mile bicycling sprint. At last

year's games in Hampton, Va., he won another bronze in the quarter-mile event. This year's competition, held Aug. 27 through 31, was especially tough, McCann explained – the gold medal winner finished with a time of 45.3 seconds, McCann won the bronze again at 45.8 seconds.

Don't doubt that seniors are a competitive group, said McCann. "Next year, in Indianapolis, there will be two people coming into my division just as fast as the first- and second-place finishers this year."

According to a press release sent by Susan Fleece, program specialist for VA National Events, the focus of the games is not only to promote the spirit of competition, but also to highlight the "preventative and therapeutic value of sports, fitness and recreation in the lives of older Americans." The Golden Age Games were first inspired by the recreational activities offered to seniors at VA hospitals, and eventually evolved into a weeklong, national event with several different competitions "specifically adapted to meet the needs of the participants." Where there are such vigorous physical competitions as bicycling, swimming, golf and shot put, there are an equal number of less strenuous offerings as the 10-meter air rifle, dominoes, bowling and croquet. Now in its 21st year, the Games encompass various events for veterans divided by gender, in seven age categories, and subdivided by whether the competitor is

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VA Games

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ambulatory, uses a wheelchair or is visually impaired.

Since 2004, the Golden Age Games have been a "qualifying event for competition in the National Senior Games." Last year, more than half the participating veterans qualified.

This year, more than 600 senior athletes convened in Houston, hosted by the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center, with Vietnam veterans and older-than-70 competitors comprising the largest number of participants.

To maintain a competitive edge, McCann keeps himself fit by regularly jogging and bicycling, and working out in his home gym. "Redondo Beach is the most wonderful place on earth for training," he exclaimed.

"We have the bike path, it's just a half-mile from my home, which is the perfect place for athletes to run and bike."

McCann, who for the last 13 years has worked for the state Employment Development Department helping veterans

receive job training, said that each year he has attended the Games has been a great experience. "There's the competition," he said, "we can experience culture in other cities, and we're meeting other vets and share our experiences with each other."



Michael McCann, racing toward a bronze medal at the National Veterans Golden Ages Games.

(photo courtesy of Michael McCann)