

# MEMORIAL

James J. Peters, 1945–2002

James J. Peters, Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association's (EPVA's) Executive Director of 31 years, died on September 6, 2002, after a short illness. Born in 1945, in Brooklyn, New York, Mr. Peters attended Western New England College in Springfield, Massachusetts, and the United States Army Engineering College at Fort Belvoir, Virginia, where as Second Lieutenant, Civil Engineer, he sustained a spinal cord injury (SCI) in 1967.

In September 1969, Mr. Peters began his life-long career at the EPVA as deputy executive director. The next year, he worked with *Life* magazine on a story about the deplorable conditions facing paralyzed Vietnam veterans at the old Bronx Veterans Affairs (VA) Hospital. The publication of the article forced the VA to build a new Bronx Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) and to establish a stand-alone national Spinal Cord Injury Service.

In July 1971, Mr. Peters was appointed Executive Director of EPVA. A short time later, he established a partnership with the association's national organization, Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA), to create PVA/EPVA, Inc., of Wilton, New Hampshire, a direct mail premium fund-raising corporation. Since its inception, PVA/EPVA, Inc., has raised more than \$1 billion in donations for programs that serve veterans with SCIs throughout the nation.

James Peters devoted his life's work to the improvement of health care for veterans with SCIs. Through Mr. Peter's efforts, EPVA joined with local institutions, including the Mount Sinai Medical Center and the New York Medical College, to provide advanced methods of treatment to veterans who are paralyzed in the metropolitan area. On the national level, Mr. Peters worked tirelessly and successfully to have spinal cord medicine designated an official subspecialty by the American Board of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation. He was instrumental in revitalizing the American Paraplegia Society, the national organization of physicians who provide care to persons with SCI. Peters was the founder of the American Association of Spinal Cord Injury Nurses and the American Association of Spinal Cord Injury Psychologists and Social Workers.



**James J. Peters**  
*Executive Director*  
*Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association*

James Peters had a passionate commitment to spinal cord research. Through his leadership, EPVA once more joined with PVA to build the PVA/EPVA Center for Neuroscience and Regeneration Research of Yale University, located at the West Haven VAMC. At this facility, basic research is conducted toward a cure for SCI and multiple sclerosis. Peters helped to establish the Spinal Cord Damage Research Center at the Bronx VAMC, where scientists investigate the impact of SCI on other body systems.

James Peters provided service on many national and local bodies involved in veterans and spinal cord health care. He was appointed by President Carter and reappointed by President Reagan to a Select Commission on Spinal Cord Injury. Peters served as special consultant to several chief medical directors in the VA. Under VA Secretary Jesse Brown, Peters was appointed to a Task Force for Improved SCI Care. He served on the Board of Directors of the Alliance for Aging Research. In New York, Peters was a member of the State Disability Prevention Council and the State Spinal Cord Injury Research Commission.

Among many public honors, James Peters received the 1986 Administrator's Award from the

VA, recognizing his outstanding leadership in veterans health care. In 1989, he was New York Medical College's recipient of the Terence Cardinal Cooke Medal for distinguished service in health care. Then in 1993, he was awarded an honorary Professorship in Urology from Katholieke Universiteit in Louvain, Belgium, for his efforts in improving care for persons with disabilities.

James Peters was elected vice president of the PVA each year for 23 consecutive years, between 1977 and 2000. America's veterans with SCI lost a true friend when Jim Peters left us.

***Terence J. Moakley***

*Associate Executive Director*

*Public Affairs, Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association*

**A Personal Note**

I had the honor and privilege to be associated with Jim Peters for 31 years. The experience of working together, along with many others, and of implementing some great ideas in the early 1970s

that allowed a small organization to grow into the dynamic and highly successful nonprofit organization it is today has been nothing less than extraordinary. The incredible record of accomplishments we have accrued over the years speaks for itself, and many tributes to Jim Peters attest to this.

Jim was a true leader and his commitment and dedication to improving every aspect of the lives of paralyzed veterans, as well as civilians, were an example to us all. Those of us who had the good fortune to be associated with Jim can truly say that we learned from the best and that he left us well equipped to continue our mission.

On a more personal level, I was in no way prepared for the tremendous void he has left in my heart. I have lost my partner, my mentor, and one of the best friends I have ever had.

***Gerard M. Kelly***

*Executive Director*

*Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association*