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National Veterans Wheelchair Games coming to Louisville in 2019

By [LISA HORNUNG](#) | June 13, 2018 3:00 pm



Jeremiah Lucas, left, and Lucas Sawyers spoke to reporters after the news conference. They are both veterans and wheelchair athletes. | Photo by Lisa Hornung

The [National Veterans Wheelchair Games](#) are coming to Louisville in summer 2019, the Robley Rex Veterans Administration Medical Center announced Wednesday.

With more than 800 athletes expected to attend, the games will have an estimated economic impact of \$2.4 million, said Gen Howard, senior sports sales manager at the Louisville Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Louisville is no stranger to hosting adaptive sports. In April, Louisville hosted the National Wheelchair Basketball Tournament, and in 2013, the city hosted the U.S. Quad Rugby championships.

Because of the city's experience in hosting these adaptive events, the airport and hotels around the city are prepared and accommodating to the visiting athletes, said Greg Fante, vice president of sports development for the Louisville Sports Commission.

"A lot of people wouldn't think of what it takes with arrivals and departures (at the airport), but these people are arriving ... typically there's the one chair they live in every day, then there's the one they compete in, and maybe they have a backup," Fante said. "We're lucky that our airport authority gets it and is on board with the Convention and Visitors Bureau and Sports Commission with these types of events."

The wheelchair athletes love the competition

Jeremiah Lucas, an Army veteran, will compete in his third games this year in Orlando, Fla. He participates in field events, such as discus, javelin and shot put, as well as volleyball and softball. He said that the games gave him a new view of what his life could be while using a wheelchair.



Jeremiah Lucas, right, spoke during the news conference. Also pictured are Kurt Thielen and Cynthia Breyfogle of the VA medical center. | Photo by Lisa Hornung

“I first attended the games two years ago in Salt Lake City, and it was an absolutely wonderful, inspirational and an eye-opening experience for me,” Lucas said in a short speech at the news conference. “It changed my life and showed me that there is life after injury and being put into a wheelchair. There are so many things I didn’t think I would ever be able to do or could do, and now I’m able to do them.

“The games give me something to look forward to every single year,” he continued. “It’s awe-inspiring to see some of the athletes and some of the people who come out and support and do the things they do at the games.”

Lucas said attending the games in other cities has been fun, too.

“It’s amazing,” he said. “People come out, and they’re there to meet you at the airport, the bus station, when you pull into the hotel; it’s just phenomenal.”

Lucas Sawyers, a Kentucky National Guard veteran, said he is looking forward to playing in his first games this year. He’ll compete in wheelchair basketball and archery.

Sawyers said he’s glad the games will be in Louisville so that disabled veterans can see what’s available to them.

“There’s a lot of different levels and injuries and ratings and what not,” Sawyers said. “It’s good to see that almost everybody can get up there and do something and try.”

The event will be in July 2019. The main venue will be at the Kentucky International Convention Center, but events will be spread across various venues around the city.

“If people are looking for an opportunity to support our Armed Forces and the sacrifices that are made, then this is the event to come to,” Fante said. “You’re going to see a great sporting event, and you’re going to see some tremendous athletes competing.”

LISA HORNUNG

Lisa Hornung a native of Louisville and has worked in local media for more than 15 years as a writer and editor. Before that she worked as a writer, editor and photographer for community newspapers in Kansas, Ohio and Kentucky. She has a bachelor’s degree in journalism from the University of Georgia, and after a 20-year career in journalism, she obtained a master’s degree in history from Eastern Kentucky University in 2016.



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