

NEWS RELEASE

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DAV Names Joseph Cassilly Disabled Vet of the Year

NEW ORLEANS—The Disabled American Veterans (DAV) will honor retired Army veteran Joseph I. Cassilly as the Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year for 2011 at the organization's 90th National Convention at the Hilton New Orleans Riverside. The award will be presented by DAV National Commander Wallace E. Tyson on Saturday, Aug. 6.

"Joe Cassilly is a truly deserving of the top honor bestowed by the DAV," said National Commander Tyson. "At every turn, life offered him some pretty stiff challenges, and he was never found wanting."

Cassilly is a member of DAV Chapter 30, Bel Air, Md. He enlisted in the Army in 1968 and trained to become one of the Army's elite Rangers. In October 1970, Cassilly was severely injured while serving with F. Co., 75th Rangers, 25th Infantry Division in Vietnam. During a helicopter extraction in enemy territory, Cassilly was attempting to climb into a Huey on a rope ladder while carrying an M60 machine gun. The draft of the helicopter's blade pulled the ladder out from underneath Cassilly and he plummeted more than 50 feet. He landed on the machine gun, which broke his neck and left him a quadriplegic.

Years of recovery and rehabilitation followed, but Cassilly didn't let his injuries deter his success. He started his academic career by earning an undergraduate degree at the University of Arizona in Tucson in 1974. In 1977, he then went on to earn a law degree at the University of Baltimore.

Despite being told he could not be a trial lawyer because of being bound to a wheelchair, Cassilly sued his county government and local municipal government for failing to make government-owned facilities accessible to the disabled.

"When I returned from Vietnam, the world wasn't nearly as accessible as it is today," Cassilly said. "I wasn't trying to make a name for myself. I was just trying to get the government to uphold its own laws."

While serving as an Assistant State's Attorney in 1982, Cassilly made the decision to enter politics and ran for State's Attorney of Hartford County, Md. He won the job and has held onto it ever since.

Along the way, Cassilly has found time to remain a visible figure in the veterans community of greater Baltimore.

"Joe is truly an inspiration to the local veterans community," said DAV National Service Officer supervisor Ron Minter, who is a member of Cassilly's DAV Chapter. "Whether he is tangling with elected officials in Washington or helping design more accessible stadiums for sports fans in Baltimore, Joe has made this area better for disabled veterans and safer for us all."

The 1.2 million-member Disabled American Veterans, a non-profit organization founded in 1920 and chartered by the U.S. Congress in 1932, represents this nation's disabled veterans. It is dedicated to a single purpose: building better lives for our nation's disabled veterans and their families. For more information, visit the organization's website www.dav.org.

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