

Can do: Marine veteran focuses on abilities at rehabilitative golf event



Chicago native is headed to the 25th annual National Disabled Veterans TEE Tournament in Iowa

When Marine Corps veteran Judy Ruiz first tried golfing following a diagnosis of Multiple Sclerosis, she needed a wheelchair.

At this year's [TEE Tournament](#), she will play standing.

"Golf increased my hand and eye coordination and gave me upper body strength," said Ruiz, a Chicago native. "You're working so hard without realizing it because you are having a great time."

Multiple Sclerosis, which affects a quarter of a million Americans, is a chronic and often disabling disease that attacks the central nervous system—the brain, spinal cord and optic nerves. Ruiz's diagnosis is connected to military service.

She never golfed before her diagnosis, but signed up for the TEE Tournament after eligibility expanded from veterans with

vision loss to include those who sustained a physical injury or illness as a result of their service.

“When I first became disabled all I could think about was what I couldn’t do,” said Ruiz. “Hines [VA hospital] and golf have taught me to focus on my abilities, not my disabilities.”

Ruiz said that she has been hooked ever since she first made contact with the ball.

“Attending the TEE Tournament makes me want to keep getting better,” explained Ruiz. “To me that’s the key with these events. It’s four to five days of learning a new skill that I can move forward with—not just leave behind.”

She also appreciates the opportunity to play alongside her fellow veterans.

“It’s awesome because when we get out there [on the course], regardless of what branch we served in or what disability we have—we’re all on the same playing field,” said Ruiz. “We learn from one another. It is great to come together with [disabled] veterans outside of a hospital setting, where we can all focus on our abilities.”

Ruiz encourages all disabled veterans to give adaptive sports like golf at the TEE Tournament a try.

“I tell every newly injured veteran to think about what you can do, not what you can’t do,” explained Ruiz. “People will help you go forward. You just have to let them in. I am living proof there’s life after injury.”