

UNITED SPINAL_{NOW}

Celebrate Today's New Leaders

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Since the name of this column is United Spinal Now, this article will be about United Spinal now.

First, United Spinal Association yesterday – United Spinal used to be Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association (EPVA) and was founded in 1946 by paralyzed veterans in Veterans Affairs hospitals in Staten Island and The Bronx. EPVA then, and United Spinal Association now, have always been member-run and committed to facilitating successful life in the community for people with disabilities.

EPVA sued the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) in 1979, and in 1984, settled the suit for accessible buses, key rail station access and Access-A-Ride. Almost 20 years ago, EPVA left Paralyzed Veterans of America and became a national organization. We now have 58,000 members and 45 chapters around the country.

This year, United Spinal Association's virtual Gala, which is available on our YouTube channel, honored this year's recipients of the newly-established StrongWheeled Together Awards. Visit the YouTube channel, and see and hear the people in our community who are paving the way to the future. Also see disability rights legend Judy Heumann, as she discusses her early days of advocacy, and her relationship with EPVA's leaders.

Jim Langevin, an iBot-using, quadriplegic, retiring Rhode Island Congressman, who by his presence changed Congressional attitudes towards people with disabilities and whose advocacy has helped millions, addressed the audience in what sadly might be his last remarks about disability as a Congressman.

Author, activist, advocate, responsible government employee, and my friend, Yesenia Torres, of the New York Chapter, won a StrongWheeled Together Award. Her enthusiasm is infectious and inspires those with whom she works. Remember, visit the YouTube Channel and watch the event. There's great entertainment, too, including New York's own 4WheelCity.

Back to United Spinal now. The organization publishes New Mobility magazine, available in print and online. Every member receives New Mobility for free. Membership is free, as well. Most of United Spinal's programs benefit all those with mobility impairments, not just spinal cord injuries or disorders.

United Spinal Association's Resource Center, available by phone and online, responds daily to inquiries that are disability-related. Civil rights, access, benefits, and a host of other issues are addressed by our staff or experts with whom we collaborate. Our Accessibility Consulting Services staff are experts in barrier-free design. Our Tech Access Initiative brings together industry pros with our most tech-savvy members to promote inclusive and universal design in addressing technological innovation.

United Spinal's Washington, D.C. staff has lobbied on every major disability issue for decades. Our Advocacy Live events allow advocates to meet virtually from all over the U.S., share war stories, methods and tales of triumph or temporary defeat. We have worked hard to get the Department of Health and Human Services to change its horrible, "in-the-home" policy, which restricts Medicare-funded chairs to those that can be used in the home. (Not the surrounding community.)

You can join United Spinal Association, and/or its New York chapters. You need not have a spinal cord injury or disorder, or a mobility impairment; however, you must be interested in the needs and rights of people with mobility impairments.

Go online and visit United Spinal Association's website at www.unitedspinal.org. There's a wealth of information about healthcare, durable medical equipment, lifestyle, accessible design, civil rights and advocacy issues and lots of ways to participate if you want to.

New York's disability community has a rich history of advocacy and empowerment. Its future is brighter because of that history.

Check out the StrongWheeled Together Member Awards Gala on YouTube, and get a peek at what future leaders are imagining.

