

2019

Tuesday, April 2



NATIONAL DISABLED  
**VETERANS**  
WINTER SPORTS CLINIC

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## Caregivers find friends, support at Clinic

By Randy McCracken

When reaching your 70s most people think of retirement—or at least slowing down. However, Emile Meylan, and his wife, Lisette, are not like most people. Just when they thought life was settled it took a turn, and in 2004, they found themselves as the caregivers to their daughter, an Iraq War Veteran.

After completing her second deployment to Iraq, Mariela Meylan was traveling in a convoy through Kuwait when she, and three others in her unit, stopped to change a flat tire. As they were working a hit-and-run driver crashed through the Americans killing two fellow soldiers and leaving Meylan's mangled body in the dust.

The injuries she sustained were massive – a traumatic brain injury, fractured pelvis, collapsed lung, severed liver and a stroke that left her partially paralyzed. Meylan was immediately evacuated to Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Germany where she lapsed into a coma. She was then transferred to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center where doctors told her parents she would not survive.

“One doctor told us that she would never wake up,” said Lisette Meylan. “Another said she would never speak or walk again.”

It took eight months for Meylan to come out of the coma and a decade of therapy to become the person she is today.

She continues to defy her initial prognosis and these days Meylan stays active with everything from



Army Veteran Mariela Meylan gets ready to hit the slopes at this year's Clinic

yoga to horseback riding. She is enjoying her fourth year at National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic, a place where her parents have also made friends. In 2016, she was named the DAV Freedom Award recipient for inspiring her fellow participants. Like the veteran they support, the Meylan family finds much in common with others in Snowmass this week.

“We have met a lot of other caregivers that we can talk with and relate to,” Lisette Meylan said. “We are all in the same boat as a family and community. It helps to talk with other people who understand.” Both point out the specialized care their daughter continues to receive.

“We are grateful for the VA. We see many people who are not Veterans and they do not receive the same level of care,” Lisette Meylan said. For now, the couple continues to focus on their daughter's care.

“Taking care of Mariela is the most important thing in our lives and we are determined to make things better,” Lisette Meylan said.

Co-hosted by:

VA



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of Veterans Affairs



FULFILLING OUR PROMISES  
TO THE MEN AND WOMEN WHO SERVED

## A lesson in persistence



Brittany Elliott knows a thing or two about persistence.

While at Marine boot camp in 2013, she broke her femur after falling from the 60-foot rappel tower, an injury that required a long and intensive healing process. After 24 months of recovery, Elliott was a mere 30 days away from returning to the military when she was hit head-on by a drunk driver.

“The next morning I woke up and I had no movement from the neck down,” said Elliott, who was diagnosed with a T1 spinal cord injury. “I had to relearn how to do everything, including feed myself, hold my head up and sit up on my own. I was starting from ground zero.”

The dream of reenlisting in the military

may have been gone, but it wasn't enough to crush her spirit.

“I was very athletic and very outgoing before my accident happened, and I wanted to maintain that even though it was going to be a lot different,” she said.

Elliott has poured herself into rehabilitation, eventually regaining movement in her arms, and has fought for clearance to attend the clinic. This year, her persistence will finally pay off.

“I've tried for three years to be able to get the okay to go to the Winter Sports Clinic, so I'm super excited to finally be able to go.”

“My life was changed forever,” said Elliott. “But I didn't want it to change every aspect of my life. You don't want to lose every aspect of who you are as a person.”





VIEW MORE PHOTOS: [flickr.com/TheDAV](https://www.flickr.com/photos/TheDAV/) or [facebook.com/Sports4Vets](https://www.facebook.com/Sports4Vets)

## Get Social

This week, inspire other Veterans, family, friends and people everywhere by sharing your experiences through social media. Don't forget to use the hashtag **#wintersportsclinic** when sharing comments, photos and videos.



Social media is a great way to stay connected during and after the Clinic. Another way to stay connected is by using the free Clinic app for updates during the event. It's available by searching for "Veterans Winter Sports Clinic" where other mobile applications are available. Start connecting today!



## DAV advocate providing free claims help

Do you need to file or update a benefit claim? A Marine Veteran and professional benefits advocate is back on the mountain this year to help participants access the benefits they earned in uniform.

Carmen McGinnis is a benefits expert based out of the Denver VA Regional Office and will be here today through Friday in the Sponsor Room at the Westin (212) from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. She will answer your questions about disability claims and other earned benefits.

"I'm so happy to be here at the Winter Sports Clinic again helping veterans," said McGinnis. "I love being a part of contributing positively to ensure our participants are getting the benefits they deserve."

McGinnis says she understands first-hand the challenges Veterans face navigating an often-complicated benefits process, and she enjoys helping fellow Veterans overcome obstacles. Last year, she helped 23 claimants at the clinic.

"As a Veteran, you get out and sometimes you feel like you can't connect with anyone," said McGinnis. "I find that I am at home with DAV because it gives me a sense of purpose, and I feel very fortunate to be able to change lives. I have a direct influence on the quality of life of our claimants, every single day."

McGinnis wanted to follow in the footsteps of her uncle, who served as a door gunner in Vietnam. She began her career of service the afternoon of Sept. 11, 2001, when she headed to a recruiter's office and committed herself to what has become a lifelong dedication to service for her country.

McGinnis was serving as a Marine Security Guard when an injury from Afghanistan began having an impact on her duties. She left the Marine Corps in 2008, after six years of honorable service.

She still felt the call to serve, so McGinnis began working as a DAV claims specialist in 2011 and has been helping her fellow Veterans ever since.

"I feel that I've survived what I've survived for a reason: to learn that my real strength comes from helping others," McGinnis told White House staff during an interview in 2017. "I absolutely love that I get to wake up every day and help change people's lives. Not many people can say that."

Short on time? You can still get complimentary assistance with your claim when you return home from Snowmass. Find the national service office nearest you by visiting **benefitsquestions.org**.



Carmen McGinnis,  
DAV National  
Service Officer

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### CEU Educational Workshops

#### Interdisciplinary Approaches to Patient Care in PM&R Population

6-7:30 p.m.

Castle Peak Auditorium, 2nd Floor  
Snowmass Conference Center

Presented by:

Dayna Geiger, DPT; Jennifer Thomas, OTR/L; and Heather Brown, MTRS, CTRS

#### People skills and Communication

6-7:30 p.m.

Castle Peak Auditorium, 2nd Floor  
Snowmass Conference Center

Presented by:

Dr. Dick Bell, DEd