

## About United Spinal Association

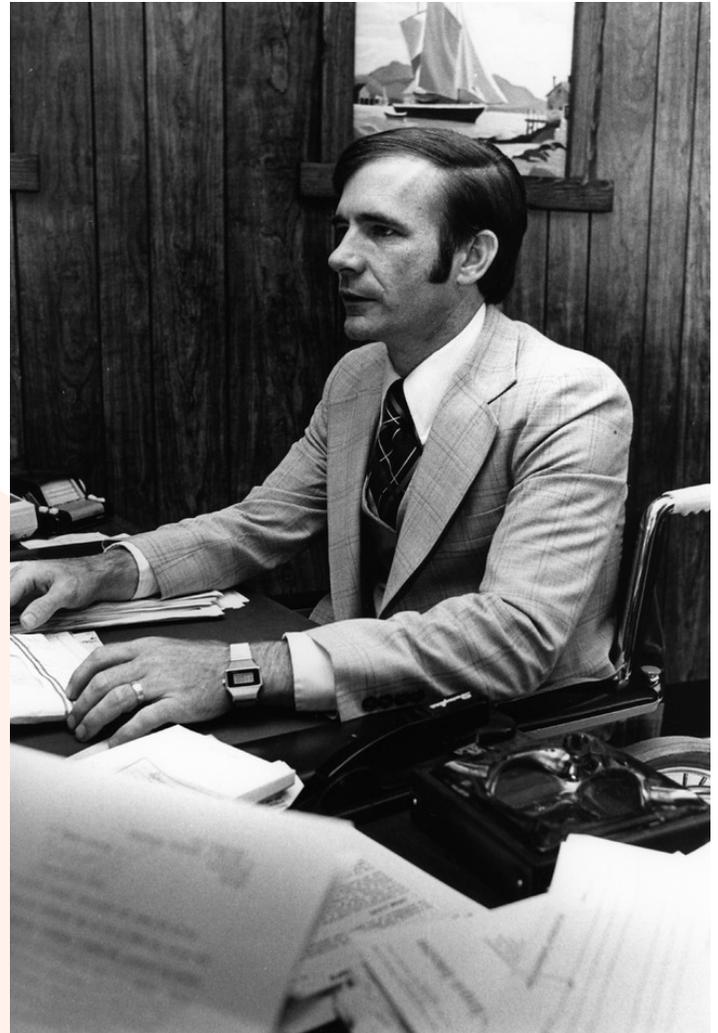
United Spinal Association is dedicated to enhancing the quality of life of all people living with spinal cord injuries and disorders (SCI/D), including veterans, and providing support and information to loved ones, care providers and professionals. We believe no person should be excluded from opportunity on the basis of their disability. Our goal is to provide people living with SCI/D programs and services that maximize their independence and enable them to remain active in their communities.

This year marks our 70th Anniversary. United Spinal began with a small group of World War II veterans advocating for greater civil rights and independence in New York City and today we are now the largest non-profit organization dedicated to enhancing the quality of life of people living with spinal cord injuries and disorders across the country.

## Our History

**1946**—Robert Moss rolls his wheelchair down to Grand Central Terminal in New York City and led his fellow World War II veterans in a passionate protest. The comrades, who were spinal cord injured in combat, had only one goal in mind: to simply reintegrate back into society and be afforded the rights and benefits they deserved. The lack of resources, accessibility and knowledge of disabilities left the men lacking proper healthcare, the ability to get an education, and unable to work. But their courageous actions and determined spirit to fight for what they deserved spawned a movement that would play a major role in the formation of United Spinal Association and improve the lives of millions of future generations of Americans. Pushing for greater independence, equal civil rights, and better treatment at VA hospitals, the men formed the congressionally chartered Paralyzed Veterans Association (PVA). The PVA served as both a support group for the men to vent

their grievances and as a platform to bring awareness on a legislative level of the needs and rights of those who were injured fighting for their country. Soon, the group expanded across the country forming localized chapters one of which was the Eastern Paralyzed Association (EPVA), which transformed into the humble beginnings of United Spinal Association.



**1948**—70 EPVA members rally to fight for the passage of our nation's first accessible housing bill, Public Law 702, to build homes for paralyzed veterans.

**1968**—EPVA fights for equal access to federally-funded buildings and facilities for Americans living with disabilities—leading to the passage of Architectural Barriers Act. This act requires that facilities designed, built, altered, or leased with federal funds are designed and constructed to be wheelchair accessible.

**1970**—During the leadership of the renowned James J. Peters, who served as EPVA's president for three decades between the 1970s and 1990s, the organization helped



improve the quality of health care for veterans by winning denied benefits for individual veterans and securing money for VA programs and infrastructure. Peters' spent the majority of his career working tirelessly to expose the unfair treatment imposed upon veterans. In 1970, the organization made history when Peters' persuaded Life Magazine to publish a cover story revealing the appalling conditions that spinal cord injured Vietnam vets were enduring at the Bronx VA Medical Center. The article uncovered a harsh reality and brought the somewhat hidden issues facing veterans to the national stage. Triggering a public outcry



and grabbing the attention of leaders in Washington D.C., the Bronx VA Medical Center was completely demolished and rebuilt from the ground up per Congressional order. Renamed in honor of Peters in 2005, the hospital now specializes in spinal cord injury care and recovery.

**1973**—EPVA advocates for the eventual passage of the Rehabilitation Act. This law prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in federally funded programs and improved access to, among other services, health care, social services, recreation, housing, and transportation. Perhaps most importantly, the Rehabilitation Act gave people with disabilities educational opportunities that they had never enjoyed before.

**1985**—New York City settles the 1979 civil suit brought by EPVA, agreeing to make all city buses accessible, retrofit key subway stations and commuter rail stations, and ensure that all new stations are accessible. The settlement also establishes a paratransit system for people unable to use mass transit. United Spinal reaches a similar settlement with the city of Philadelphia in 1989 and, together, the two rulings become the model for the public transit provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act, which was enacted in 1990.

**1987**—EPVA helps establish the PVA-EPVA Center for Neuroscience Regeneration Research. It opens at the West Haven, CT VAMC in conjunction with the Yale University

Medical School. The Yale Center has been on the forefront of cutting-edge research throughout its history and has numerous “firsts” in understanding the mechanisms behind spinal cord injuries and disorders. These include the first demonstration that cell transplantation can enhance nerve impulse conduction in the injured spinal cord; the first demonstration of the molecular basis for remission in multiple sclerosis (MS); the first demonstration of the molecular basis for pain after SCI; and the first demonstration that bone marrow stem cells—introduced intravenously—can protect the injured brain and spinal cord.

**1990**—EPVA plays a role in writing portions of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Celebrating its 25th Anniversary in 2015, we continue to use the ADA to fight for the rights of our members. Over 1,000 wheelchair users and other people with disabilities gather on the White House lawn to witness President George H.W. Bush sign the ADA into law. The ADA ultimately protects the basic civil rights of over 43 million Americans with disabilities. It provides a clear and comprehensive national mandate for the elimination of discrimination against individuals with disabilities.



United Spinal has used the ADA in transit, employment, and accessibility cases, as well as polling place access disputes. We have used ADA to fight for community integration, to the maximum extent feasible, for those with disabilities because, as the U.S. Supreme Court held in *Olmstead*, a case which required the states to provide care and shelter in the community when possible and not in institutions, “unjustified isolation of individuals with disabilities is properly regarded as discrimination based on disability.”

**1995**—EPVA's advocacy efforts help make New York City's entire bus fleet 100 percent wheelchair accessible. Every



month, more than 60,000 riders with disabilities ride New York City’s lift-equipped buses.

**1996**—EPVA is instrumental in getting New York City to create sidewalk curb ramps so that wheelchair users could navigate the City’s streets. We also initiated a major advocacy campaign to make every bus and many of the subway stations in the City accessible.

**2004**—Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association expands its mission in an effort to help all Americans with spinal cord injuries/disorders (SCI/D), including veterans, and becomes United Spinal Association.

The Association creates its VetsFirst program to assist veterans and their eligible family members in obtaining the benefits they are entitled to, deserve and need. Today, VetsFirst continues the important work to uphold the values, objectives and mission needed for our nation’s veterans no matter when or where they served.

**2005**—To help injured veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, United Spinal Association successfully lobbies Congress for Traumatic Injury Insurance legislation. The bill provides for an immediate payment of between \$25,000 and \$100,000 for active duty soldiers who sustain a life-altering injury while serving their country. The law is written and passed in record time thanks to the efforts of United Spinal’s legislative staff.

The Bronx, NY VA hospital is formally re-named the James J. Peters Veterans Affairs Medical Center to honor the lifelong dedication to the health and welfare of spinal cord injured veterans of our late Executive Director Jim Peters. Secretary of Veterans Affairs James Nicholson and Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton are keynote speakers.

**2011**—United Spinal announces merger with National Spinal Cord Injury Association. With more than 125 years of combined service to the disability community, United Spinal and NSCIA unify to become the single, largest membership organization dedicated to improving the lives of people with spinal cord injuries and disorders (SCI/D) nationwide.

**2012**—United Spinal mobilizes disability activists from its

national network of member chapters and support groups for its first annual Roll on Capitol Hill—an advocacy event in Washington, D.C. that directly expresses to legislators the need for greater access to health care, wheelchairs, and policymakers — critical to the health and well-being of people with disabilities. The theme for the event: ‘Do Nothing About Us, Without Us’, captured the ongoing desire of people with disabilities to play a key role in shaping policies that affect their lives.

**2014**—New York City’s Taxi and Limousine Commission votes unanimously to expand its accessible taxi fleet to 50 percent by 2020. The unanimous decision is a huge victory in a long battle that spans over 15 years of litigation and includes a class action lawsuit filed by United Spinal, along with other disability groups in 2011 that argued that the TLC must provide meaningful access to NYC’s taxi system under Title 2 of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

United Spinal and Disabled in Action, plaintiffs on behalf of all New Yorkers of voting age with mobility and vision disabilities, won a unanimous panel decision by the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit that found the Board of Elections in New York City (BOE) discriminated against voters with disabilities by failing to make its poll sites accessible to voters with disabilities on Election Day.

**Present**—United Spinal’s initiatives in research and education, government policy and legislation, civil rights and advocacy, accessibility and architectural design, and competitive athletics have made it the fastest-growing not-for-profit in America dedicated to helping those with spinal cord injuries or disorders.

