



COVENTRY: In this Tuesday, July 19, 2016 photo US Army Vietnam War combat veteran William Long, 65, of New Haven, Connecticut, center, is escorted from the water by volunteers after water skiing during an adapted sports program for veterans. — AP

VETERAN VITALITY: SPORTS CAMP CHALLENGES AND CHANGES THEM

PROVIDENCE: Marine veteran Joyce Ralph sometimes stays at home in Massachusetts instead of going for a bike ride or doing other things she likes to do. She feels too anxious because of her post-traumatic stress disorder.

Army veteran Paul Miosek sometimes feels isolated at his home in New York. No one else he knows is in a wheelchair. The two were among a group of about 50 veterans who took part in July in the Veterans Affairs New England Summer Sports Clinic in Rhode Island. For a week, they kayaked, water skied, cycled and sailed - activities designed to get them and other veterans thinking more about what they can than can't do. "This gives me a chance, with my anxiety, to push myself a little further, to realize there are safe places in the world," said Ralph, 52, of Halifax, Massachusetts.

The veterans ranged in age from their 20s to 80s. The rehabilitation clinic is open to veterans with spinal cord injuries, amputations, vision loss, mental health problems and other disabilities. Miosek (pronounced MY'-sak), 47, of Scotia, New York, lost both legs in 1990 when his head hit a power cable as he stood atop an armored vehicle in Germany, then fell 20 feet. Meeting other veterans at the clinic with similar injuries made him feel he's not alone.

"I feel a kinship toward them, since we are in that boat together," he said. "While in service, we faced a lot of obstacles that we overcame. Now that I'm a disabled veteran, and with other disabled veterans, there are things that we can overcome together, as well." In Coventry, Rhode Island, VA volunteers and water ski instructors set up different ways veterans could ski depending on their needs, from a sling-like seat in the center of a wide ski to a three-person tube.

'You made my life!'

Navy veteran Raquel "Rachel" Ardin uses a wheelchair most of the time. Ardin, 62, of

North Hartland, Vermont, was serving in Greece when she broke her neck falling out of a bunk in 1976. She taught herself to walk again, but the scar tissue from her injury began causing problems several years ago. During her first run of the day, and her first time ever on water skis, Ardin whooped the whole way.

The crowd of volunteers and fellow veterans on shore clapped and cheered. Afterward, Ardin told the volunteers, "You made my day. You made my life!" "I want to cry, I'm so happy," she told them. "Thank you, guys!" The sports clinic is modeled after the VA's national adaptive sports program, in which veterans nationwide compete in games. The VA Boston Healthcare System runs it, and the Providence VA Medical Center hosts it.

"Some of the more traditional activities that occur in VA hospitals, bingo, card playing, those sorts of things, while those are nice, we had a young generation that came out of the battlefield," said Richard Leeman, assistant chief of voluntary services in Boston. "They wanted to do the things they did prior to their injury."

There's also a winter sports clinic for skiing and snowboarding at Mount Sunapee Resort in New Hampshire. This was the seventh year of the summer clinic and the third time the Providence medical center has hosted it. The VA worked with many local groups to organize the activities.

"They pushed themselves to a new limit that they now know they can do," said Susan MacKenzie, the medical center's director.

"They have confidence that they can set goals for themselves and move forward, not just in sports but in any part of their life," Miosek said he "feels alive" at the clinic. "I'm able to get the energy out and do the things that I can't do at home," he said. "I use that energy all year long, to kind of let go and go for it." — AP

MAN FINDS MAMMOTH TUSK WHILE DIGGING ON PROPERTY

PRESTON: An Idaho man stumbled upon a rare find while using a backhoe to dig in a gravel pit on his property. "It came to the point where I seen something weird or different inside the hill so I just stopped, kinda brushed off some of it," Kasey Keller of Preston told KIFI-TV.

Upon closer inspection, the object Keller first thought was a plastic pipe or petrified wood appeared to be bone. He decided to call in the experts. The object, according to Utah State University, was a 31/2-foot tusk of a Columbian mammoth. It could be anywhere from 12,000 to 15,000 years old.

Both Utah State University and Brigham Young University took a piece of the tusk for carbon dating. Columbian mammoths were 12 feet to 15 feet tall and likely roamed the grasslands of Lake Bonneville,

according to the university. The type of sediment the tusk was found in indicates that it washed up after flooding, the school said. Keller said paleontologists from BYU said they will return the tusk after preserving the mammoth remains. "From what I was told, the odds of finding that in this area are rarer than finding a needle in a haystack," said Keller. "And according to USU, they said they haven't found any other mammoth remains in Cache Valley."

He said the discovery inspired his twin boys, who recovered pieces of the tusk that broke off when Keller was digging with the backhoe. "It's kinda cool to think what actually was here on your property or you know, by your house," Keller said. "I'm definitely going to be digging with a lot more gracefulness because who knows what I might find." — AP

NEW ZEALAND FARM COMPANY STOPS USING PALM OIL

WELLINGTON: New Zealand's state-owned farming company said Monday it will stop using palm kernel products to feed its animals as it seeks to take better care of the environment. Landcorp announced it will stop using the products by the middle of next year. Environmentalists have linked growth in the palm oil industry to rainforest destruction in Indonesia, which in turn is contributing to the decline in species like the Sumatran tiger. Landcorp Chief Executive Steven Carden told The Associated Press that consumers worldwide are willing to pay a premium for natural products, including grass-fed meat and dairy. "We are really concerned with producing food in a responsible and environmentally friendly way," Carden said.

He said making the change also made sense

from a strategic and commercial viewpoint. Farmers typically use imported palm kernel cake, also known as expeller, as part of a diet for dairy cows, especially during the winter or when natural feed is low. The cake is a byproduct of palm oil production. Palm oil is a common ingredient in many household products, from margarine to lipstick. Carden said the company will replace palm products with locally grown alternatives like maize silage and chicory. Landcorp is one of the largest farming companies in New Zealand, with 140 farms and 850,000 animals. It uses about 15,000 metric tons of palm cake each year. But thousands of dairy farmers who provide milk to the country's biggest company Fonterra will continue to use the product, after Fonterra said Monday it had no immediate plans to stop using it. — AP

BANGLADESHI BOY WITH MYSTERIOUS 'OLD MAN' ILLNESS Baffles Doctors

'The Curious Case of Bayezid Shikdar'

DHAKA: A four-year-old Bangladeshi boy suffering from a mysterious illness that makes him look like an old man has been admitted to hospital for tests, doctors and his family said. Doctors at a top hospital in Dhaka have agreed to try to diagnose and treat Bayezid Shikdar, who comes from a poor farming family, for free after learning of his plight on the weekend. Born with excess skin that hangs from his limbs and face causing it to sag, Bayezid also suffers from related heart, vision and hearing problems. His father, Lablu Shikdar, said numerous doctors have been at a loss to explain his condition.

"We sold our land to treat him at local hospitals. We took him to religious healers and herbal doctors, but his condition did not change. This hospital is our last hope," Shikdar told AFP at Dhaka Medical College Hospital this week. "We hope they'll make him look like any other normal child." Doctors initially suspected he suffered from progeria which causes rapid and premature ageing shortly after birth, leading to severe health complications. The extremely rare genetic disorder was the subject of Hollywood movie "The Curious Case of Benjamin Button" starring Brad Pitt. But doctors at the Dhaka hospital expressed caution, saying extensive tests were needed.

Multitude of problems

"In progeria, the ageing process accelerates with time," Abul Kalam, head of the hospital's burns and plastic surgery unit, told AFP on Monday. "But Bayezid's parents have said the ageing of their boy has been halted recently. He has shown signs of improvement. "We're investigating his condition. In addition to loose skin, he



DHAKA: In this photograph taken on August 7, 2016, four-year-old Bangladeshi child Bayezid Shikdar(R) sits with his mother Tripti Khatun on a bed at Dhaka Medical College Hospital. — AFP

has problems in his heart, ear, eyes and penis." Doctors said his genetic condition may also be the result of inbreeding, with marriage among relatives including first cousins common in Bangladesh's rural areas.

Bayezid's mother, Khatun, stressed that her son was just like any other child. "He is very fond of fish and rice. He plays football and hide and seek with his cousins," she told AFP after her son's case was highlighted in Bangladesh media

on the weekend. "When I first saw him he looked like a bundle of skin. We had no idea what he was afflicted with. We thought the condition would go away soon." He is an extremely talented boy. There are days he grabs books and wants to go to school. But we thought he's still too young." Doctors at the same hospital have also been treating a 26-year-old father dubbed "Tree Man" for the rare and massive bark-like growths on his hands and feet. — AFP

TINY ASIAN BEETLE WREAKS HAVOC ON N AMERICA TREES

Fighting the insect

CHICAGO: Over the next two years, grounds crews in St. Louis will cut down nearly one out of every five trees, altering the US city's leafy landscape for at least a generation. The Midwestern metropolis made the tough decision with the knowledge that if it does not cut down the trees, most will quickly die. St. Louis is the latest victim of the Emerald Ash Borer, an Asian beetle smaller than a penny, which emigrated from China via shipping materials and is destroying millions of trees in North America.

The insect targets the Ash tree—a common variety in Midwestern cities, where the tree can survive cramped sidewalks, harsh winters and road salts used to keep streets clear of ice and snow. In St. Louis, city forestry commissioner Skip Kincaid is tasked with dealing with the invasive pest and the destruction it is expected to cause in the next few years. "I'm trying as best I can to enlighten the public about how devastating it is going to be," Kincaid said. To head off the Emerald Ash Borer's advance, Kincaid will cut down almost all of the city's 14,000 Ash trees—or roughly 17 percent of all trees—over the next two years.

Scientists have discovered a pesticide treatment that can keep the insect from killing trees. But Kincaid said that wasn't an economically feasible solution, as it must be repeatedly applied every other year. The forestry expert surveyed the value of each tree, quantifying the benefits they provide in terms of property values, reducing storm water runoff, and reducing energy costs through natural cooling. Only 1,000 made the cut. The rest will be removed and replaced with a variety of species, but it will be years before they reach the size of the Ash trees. "This is something where quite honestly, we really have no other choice," Kincaid said.

A 'devastating' bug

Noel Schneeberger, a US Forest Service expert at the forefront of the beetle battle, says once the Emerald Ash Borer infests an Ash, the chances of it surviving are basically nil. "In terms of targeting a single genus of trees, it's pretty devastating," Schneeberger said. Officials have tried regional quarantines to keep the bug from spreading. But barring the transportation of firewood—thought to be the primary way the bug spreads—has not worked. Scientists estimate that about 30 million trees have already succumbed to the beetle, and by the time its path of destruction concludes, hundreds of millions more will be dead, brittle, and ready to fall during a storm.

What perplexed scientists at first was that the Emerald Ash Borer is a relatively benign beetle in its native East Asia—where Ash trees have evolved with the insect. It makes so little fuss in Asia that when it arrived in North America, scientists were not even able to identify the strange insect. In East Asia, the bug only seems to attack Ash trees that are already sick or dying. Healthy Ash appear to have a natural chemical resistance. But a vast majority of Ash trees in North America do not, and the bug has been spreading unchecked since its arrival on the continent in 2002. It has reached 26 US states, as far south as Texas, and north into Canada. In one experiment, scientists were able to induce North American Ash trees into producing compounds necessary to kill the beetle. The question of whether such efforts can be used en masse remain to be answered.

The infestation has been particularly devastating for many cities in the Midwest, where streets can have rows of Ash trees for blocks at a time. The insect burrows into an Ash tree, creating tunnels that completely destroy the tree's ability to move nutrients through its bark. The destruction is so thorough that the tree usually starves to death in less than five years. The US Forest Service labels the beetle "the most devastating forest insect to reach North America in modern times."

Still, over the last 14 years, scientists have made progress in learning more about the beetle, the tree variety it targets, and about other previously unknown insects. Through trial and error, they discovered that a coordinated response can keep trees alive. Heavily infested trees should be removed and healthy trees treated with certain pesticides applied every two years. St. Louis is following a similar plan focusing on the healthiest and biggest trees, and getting rid of the rest. "St. Louis has probably the approach that is used most commonly across the country," said Richard Hauer, a professor of urban forestry at the University of Wisconsin who has been helping cities deal with the problem.

How to co-exist

In forests, it's a different story, and scientists are trying to figure out how best to handle the Emerald Ash Borer now that it has moved in. For

one, woodpeckers seem to love to eat the beetle's larvae. They are proving a natural predator, but the plucky birds can't do the job by themselves. Researchers found that they eat only about 16 percent of all Ash Borer larvae. In China, scientists found other natural predators previously unknown to science—small parasitic insects which are relatives of ants and wasps. Working together, the parasites can reduce the beetle's populations dramatically—anywhere from 50 to 90 percent.

Scientists have begun controlled releases of the parasitic insects in North America, and are studying whether they can create a biological balance of sorts, to reduce the Ash Borer population and keep more trees alive. But any hope that millions of trees can be saved is a false one, as the parasite controls are in their "infancy," Hauer said. "Give it several decades, or a century," he said, pointing out that biological controls for previous deadly infestations have taken 50 years or more to have an effect. In cities, one of the key lessons to take away from the Ash Borer invasion, is that too much of one tree is not a good thing, Kincaid said.

In St. Louis, he is planning to replace Ash with a far greater diversity of trees, so that no one insect can wreak mass havoc again. "We're in a world now where every year, it's a different invasive pest," Kincaid said. "That's why it's critical to have this diversity of species. So if something moves in... you won't wipe out 17 percent of your street trees." — AFP



CHICAGO: A piece of a dead tree cut down in Chicago and stripped of its bark, shows the tunnels dug by the Emerald Ash Borer. — AFP

RECORD NUMBER OF HIV CASES IN PHILIPPINES PROMPTS ACTION

JAKARTA: The Philippines has posted a record number of new HIV infections, prompting campaigners to call on authorities to step up efforts to battle the potentially deadly disease. A total of 841 new cases were recorded in June, the highest ever monthly figure since the country's first reported case in 1984, according to the health department's latest statistics released this week.

Over 90 percent, or 777 cases, were trans-

mitted through sexual contact, the majority of them among men who have sex with men. Injecting drug users accounted for 60 new cases and the remaining four were cases of mother-to-child transmission. New cases of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) which can lead to AIDS have been rising in the Philippines, bucking the international trend which shows new infections falling.

"This is a cause of concern for us," Gerald

Santos from Manila-based campaign group Project Red Ribbon told the Thomson Reuters Foundation yesterday. "But to look at it with the glass half full, it also shows awareness is at an all-time high, meaning more people are aware of HIV and are getting tested." However, he said the actual number of new infections could be higher, as stigma associated with HIV prevents at-risk group from getting tested. "The government should double their efforts

in spreading awareness about HIV before it is too late," added Santos, the group's treasurer.

The Philippines saw new infections double between 2001 and 2012, according to a UN AIDS agency (UNAIDS) report in 2013 which showed the epidemic was also expanding in Indonesia and Pakistan. Increasing infections among injecting drug users sharing contaminated needles combined with low condom use and high fertility rates have raised con-

cern over "downstream" HIV infections - when the virus spreads to people not typically at risk of HIV, like children who acquire the virus through mother-to-child transmission. There have been 34,999 HIV cases in the Philippines since record-keeping started in 1984, with 83 percent diagnosed in the last five years, according to the health department. Globally, some 36.7 million people are living with HIV, according to UNAIDS. — Reuters