

JIM UMBENHOWER



Jim Umbenhower was an athletic kid, always playing baseball, football, basketball, swimming or running track until a house fire diminished his lung capacity forever.

In 1973, a house fire took the lives of Umbenhower's younger sister and one of his brothers, and left the 16-year-old with severe lung damage.

Umbenhower had given up on sports until a fellow Marine introduced him to bowling during his first duty station in 1975. Bowling allowed him to compete again and soon he was bowling for the Marine Corps all over the world.

By the '80s, Umbenhower was bowling 75 to 80 games a week. The game took its toll and after years of cortisone shots and pushing through the pain, Umbenhower was again facing physical limitations. Eventually, doctors had to remove all the cartilage from his wrist and said he would never bowl again, but he worked around the injury and kept going.

A few years later his left knee, which supports his weight while bowling, gave out. Three surgeries and a new knee later, Umbenhower was again advised to give up the game. But he was never one to back down.

"Like any pro sport, I had to learn to work around them to keep playing," Umbenhower said. "A lot of bowlers spend time in gym working on leg power, but I am working my upper body strength because that's what I need to keep going."

Now, 62 and living in Broken Arrow, Umbenhower said he still bowls 17 miles an hour and 400 plus revolutions.

On the rare occasion when he is not bowling, Umbenhower and his wife, who is also a veteran, travel the country raising awareness about veteran suicide and providing support to military men and women.

In 2017, Umbenhower won his division at the United States Bowling Congress' Oklahoma tournament and moved onto the National Senior Championships in Las Vegas. He also competed at the National Senior Games in Birmingham that same year.

During the past three years, Umbenhower swept men's singles, men's doubles and mixed doubles each year, walking away with nine gold medals in total.

This summer, Umbenhower won another gold medal with partner Ronald Coleman of Virginia at the 2019 National Senior Games in Albuquerque.

"I've spent too much time and money learning this to give it up and start something new. I love the sport and it's been good to me so I'll keep going."

Oklahoma Senior Games competitions occur annually in September and October. This year, competitions will be held in Oklahoma City, Tulsa, Shawnee, Norman, Yukon and Warr Acres.

Events include three-on-three basketball, track and field, golf, swimming, water walking, 5K and 10K runs, 5K power walk, 5K race walk, bowling, tennis, table tennis, golf croquet, shuffleboard, cycling, cornhole, badminton, archery, pickleball, racquetball, softball and triathlon. Participants age 50 and older will compete in categories by age and gender.

Oklahoma Senior Games qualifies athletes for National Senior Games competition held every two years. About 300 athletes who qualify in 2020 will represent Oklahoma in the National Senior Games competition November 5-18, 2021 in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.

For more information visit www.okseniorgames.com or call (405) 821-1500.