



## **PAUL-STEPHEN VARSZEGI**

US Marine Corps (*Retired*)

**Paul-Stephen Varszegi**, a retired US Marine Corps veteran, is President and Founder of **U.S. Veterans' Rowing & Kayaking Foundation™ (USVRK™)**, est. 2012, now surpassing its 10th anniversary of burgeoning success as 2023 forms more international military partnerships. Having sustained injuries while serving, Paul is a lifetime member and devotee of the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) and American Veterans (AMVETS), both organizations to which his indebtedness returns favored support. His name is registered amongst the honorable members of the National Association of Distinguished Professionals (NADP). Furthermore, Paul is a licensed pilot <sup>[1]</sup> and certified paralegal.

Paul first entered the business world while yet studying at Stony Brook University, owning his first income property at the age of 18. Further developing his business acumen, he worked for the Prudential Insurance Company as a special agent for three years, part-time, climbing in rank from 58th worldwide in 1983, 11th in 1984, 1st for new business written in 1985—breaking Prudential's historic record by selling the largest premium life insurance policy with an annual payment of \$1.3 million.

Grounded early in sound business principles and practices, Paul went on to establish his own company, **Varson Corporation**, hence turning it into a multimillion-dollar real estate organization that owned, managed and constructed residential and commercial properties in two states. In 1986, one of his most noteworthy achievements included the development of the largest condominium complex at that time in Greenwich, CT.

In 2012, while on staff at Connecticut's West Haven VA Healthcare facility, Paul committed to volunteering weekends to assist six problematic, war-injured veterans under his recreational rehabilitation adaptive rowing program. Noting remarkable progress, new benchmarks were celebrated. Soon after, in answer to the glaring need to integrate more effective modalities for reviving veterans' psycho-social motivation in lockstep with physical rehabilitation, Varszegi officially launched the founding of the **U.S. Veterans' Rowing & Kayaking Foundation**, <sup>[2]</sup> a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization which grew nationally to over 16,000 members by 2018. Dedicated exclusively to improving military veterans' quality of life, the organization offers some of the most unique and exciting rowing and kayaking programs in the country. Originally headquartered in Trumbull, CT, now more accessible year-round in Sarasota, FL, Paul's non-profit <sup>[3]</sup> volunteer organization continues to offer customized healing and wellness programs designed to holistically relieve the underlying pain points of veterans suffering from a wide, complex variety of health issues: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), military injuries/amputations, blindness/vision impairments, spinal cord injuries, to list a few. In fact, to overcome adaptive barriers and include as many vets as willing in simultaneous competition, it was Varszegi who was the pioneer in creating **TeleRowing™**, an interactive rowing machine that syncs all event athletes via real-time internet video streaming. <sup>[4]</sup> As **USVRK's** acting President and Executive Director of National Program Services, Varszegi is both proud and humbled witnessing the contagious enthusiasm being sparked by his mission's intrinsic good. **USVRK's**

program success continues to thrive in large part on the ore of curative camaraderie, a wondrously cathartic *golden* remedy in its own right, vitally needed to rehabilitate and mitigate the impact of veterans' uniquely held stressors. Paul's goal was to see **USVRK Foundation** become the governing body for all military rowing and kayaking in the United States and now works closely with the Department of Defense and the Veterans Administration providing specialized training programs for active duty military and retired US veterans.

Prior to joining the service, Paul's sportsmanship skills excelled as a former swimmer in his teen years, then as a competitive trap shooter in the 1980's, traveling extensively to compete in marathon tournaments. He is currently the holder of multiple World Indoor Rowing Records on Concept2 machines. [5] His latest fitness accomplishment was to host **Official World Record™** challenges, at which time he succeeded in setting three (3) impressive Official World Records in less than four (4) hours. They included: 50-yard underwater swim without fins on one (1) breath; standing on his toes while balancing on a BOSU® Ball without coming down on his heels or falling off for 15-minutes, followed by the successful completion of 1,500+ sitting ab crunches using 80 pounds of weight for one (1) hour non-stop. [6] On Saturday, November 3, 2018, Varszegi led a group of senior veterans and immediate family members of his foundation in setting a historic group World and American record with 21 participants trained and selected by Varszegi himself from various Atria Senior Living communities throughout Long Island, NY. [7] The group set 30 combined records on the Concept2 rowing machine. Varszegi's **U.S. Veterans' Rowing & Kayaking Foundation** now holds more military rowing records than any other organization in the world, including its civilian competitor, the **United States Rowing Association (USRowing)**.

In 2019, persuaded by former opera soprano and rowing partner, Ana Panagulias, Paul traveled to Hungary to conduct a Concept2 adaptive world record

challenge for disabled civilian Hungarian rowers. From April 1st through December 31st, 2019, Paul's group hit 72 combined Concept2 world records, beating second-place finisher, United Kingdom, while displacing third-place finisher, United States of America, inadvertently catching the attention of the Hungarian Military as well as Veterans Affairs (VA) in Washington, DC. The eventual outcome greatly benefited Varszegi's goal to create a Hungarian-based non-profit rowing association for Hungary's own military members. Legally incorporated in 2019, the organization is called **David vs. Goliath Hungarian Foundation™** (<https://www.davidvsgoliathmagyarfoundation.org>).

Native-born in Budapest, seizing a rare dual-citizenship opportunity, Paul again returned to his picturesque motherland to train more widely for international competition while also donating time to mentor promising young athletes. Paul made PR2-adaptive top rower of the Hungarian team, one of several nations invited to 2019's European Trial Championships hosted in Gavirate, Italy. Thereafter, motivated by that first international racing experience in Italy—exclusive to civilian rowers only—Paul resolved to unveil an all-inclusive experience open to all international military rowers and kayakers, thus ending the monopoly of the international governing body **FISA** (*French: Fédération Internationale des Sociétés d'Aviron, est. 1892*) based in Switzerland, hence renamed **World Rowing®**. Paul created his own international governing body catering to all military disabled and able-bodied member athletes—worldwide. Thus, in 2022, the **Military World Rowing & Kayaking Federation™ (MWRK™)** based in Gibraltar was announced (<https://www.militaryrowingrecords.com/>).

Today, one year post-launch, despite the relentless tide of adversities and unprecedented obstacles the global pandemic thrashed upon Earth's shores and inlands, the international "family" of Gibraltar's emerging non-profit Federation has risen seven countries strong, and rising still. It is exhilarating to note that at the time of this writing, a growing

company of determined athletes worldwide are being expertly coached —championing the brink of hopelessness to record-breaking wholeness— finding solace and support training amongst reunited and newfound comrades for upcoming competitions on the horizon. At present, Paul-Stephen Varszegi’s **Military World Rowing & Kayaking Federation** is scheduled to host its 2023 annual flagship Championships in Gosport, United Kingdom. Additional US and international events are currently in negotiations, including 2025’s **Military World Rowing & Kayaking Federation** Championships to be held in the United States. ☆

## References

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