

N.S. Vol. 26 No. 12 December 2022 #382

★★★ Annual Veterans Day Dinner ★★★

Everyone that attended the Annual Veterans Day Banquet had a great time. About 50 people showed up to bid on the silent auction items, collected by Jim Darby, while visiting with friends and enjoying the pre-dinner cocktails. In addition to the keynote speaker, Ale Hernandez, from the Road Home Program at Rush, pre-recorded messages from Senators Dick Durbin and Tammy Duckworth, U.S. Representatives Jan Schakowsky and Mike Quigley, and Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot were shared. We thank buglers Melissa Terrell and Sue Jones, and singers Dean Ogren and Nancy Pifer. All joined in when the U.S. Armed Forces Medley was played.



From our Chapter President



Season's Greetings to our AVER members, heroes, and allies! It has been another long year in a transitional period of our lives where the quarantine and pandemic shift has changed us in many ways. For AVER, we have lost friends, and I want to honor them with some time to reflect on this holiday period. We have also experienced tragedy for our LGBTQ+ community in Colorado; may we stay resilient and supportive of one another. I want to thank our dedicated team and loved ones that connected so many together this past year, and I cannot believe we are wrapping up 2022. This past Veterans Day Dinner accomplished many goals for me: gather new and old faces, continue the tradition of a

fantastic organization, and honor the service of people that had sacrificed a part of their lives and identity for the freedom of many. We had a great reunion full of new friends and returning friends, catered food by the wonderful Ann Sather crew, greetings from leaders, beautiful musical talents, and a wonderful speaker, **Ale Hernandez**. Thank you so much for your support, and I wish you all a very safe and joyous holiday wherever you are. Continue to live with pride and love, **Brandon Chong**.



Monthly In-person AVER Meetings for the Chicago Chapter • Join Us!

We meet up every month on **First Thursdays** at 7pm (Chicago, Central time zone) at the **Center on Halsted**. **Everyone** is welcome to attend our monthly Board meetings **in-person** or via Zoom!! For Zoom, check the averchicago.org website for the active link (click on the highlighted "Zoom" link near the bottom of the webpage) to get into the Zoom meeting. To join via audio: call 312-626-6799 with ID 488-863-384 and passcode 328090.

A Christmas Carol

The Veterans Assistance Commission of Cook County (VACCC) has partnered again with the Goodman Theatre to provide a limited number of free tickets for Cook County Veterans and their families to see a performance of "A Christmas Carol." All veterans will have an opportunity to request up to four free tickets. The available time and dates are evening performances from December 1 through 18. Please contact Elizabeth Soto by telephone at (312) 433-6012 or email her at Elizabeth.Soto2@cookcountyil.gov to reserve your free tickets. Check out the Goodman Theatre website for more information on this holiday production: <https://www.goodmantheatre.org/carol>.

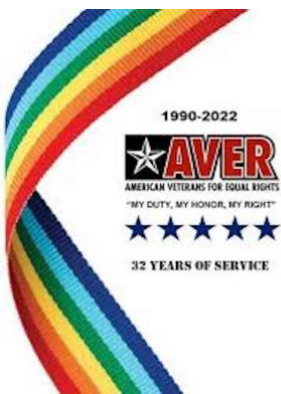


From AVER National

The last couple of years have been extremely challenging for our organization as it has been for many other groups. Our chapters have started to meet in person again but also still rely on remote or hybrid communication modes and social media, like Facebook, to connect with members. Many of us are finally able to venture out and meet in public at various Pride events around the country for the first time. We have missed the camaraderie.

Once again, the national Board decided not collect dues for the coming year (10/1/2022—9/30/2023). The Board did allow a chapter to collect the chapter's portion of the dues, if they wish, but many of the chapter Presidents feel that they will not. Since it has been a few years since I have sent out new membership cards, I am sending out new cards to all members with a valid mailing address this year. If, in the past, I have had a returned envelope from my mailing I have marked that address as not good. For these individuals, I will mail the cards to the chapter President and he/she/they will then hand deliver to members. Here are the "rules" for membership:

- If you are a member in good standing on 9/30/2022, then you pay no dues.
- If you had joined within the past year and paid your dues then no dues are requested.
- All new members that join on or after 10/1/2022 will pay the customary \$35.00.
- All Lifetime Members, Honored Elder Members, and Active Duty personnel will pay no dues with the Lifetime and Elder categories needing no explanation. These are noted on the membership card.



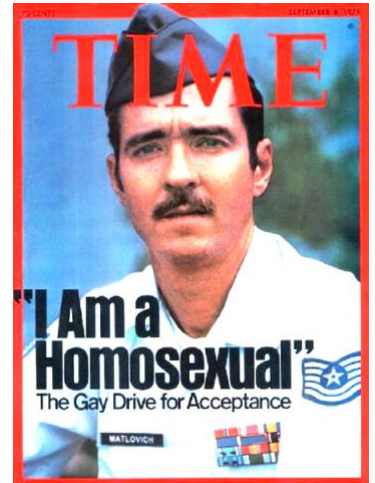
The responsibility lies with you to update me of any changes to your address, email, or telephone number. I then give those to your respective chapter. Please help me get items to you from AVER. How to stay connected? There are many ways to do it. Our Facebook page is <https://www.facebook.com/AVER.HQ/> and the national website is <https://aver.us/>. Our email listserv is MailChimp. Please email me if you wish to be added or removed from this listserv. Everyone is automatically added unless you indicate otherwise. Our Twitter account is @AVER_HQ. Chapters have their own websites and Facebook pages; please go to the national website to find these sites.

I wish each and every one of you the best for the rest of the year and 2023. You can contact me at membership@aver.us. **Steph Patten**, AVER National Membership Chair

American Veterans for Equal Rights, Chicago Chapter, P.O. Box 29317, Chicago, IL 60629, Telephone: 773-752-0058, www.aver.us and www.averchicago.org. You can email any of the Chicago Chapter officers with the following address: president@averchicago.org, secretary@averchicago.org, or treasurer@averchicago.org.

Reflecting on Veteran's Day and LGBTQ Veterans

November 11 is Veteran's Day in the U.S. It's a significant date since it is Armistice Day, the day that marks the end of World War I. On the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month in 1918, when the armistice was signed, over 20 million people had lost their lives. It's also a very special day to honor the millions of proud LGBTQ Veterans that have served with distinction in the military but faced extraordinary discrimination. Many examples come to mind of those who fought this discrimination and led amazing lives. Franklin Edward Kameny had been drafted and served in the Army during World War II but was fired from his position as an astronomer in the Army Map Service. As a result, he became a spokesman for equality for decades. U.S. Air Force Technical Sergeant Leonard Matlovich had served three tours of duty in Vietnam, earning a Bronze Star for bravery, a Purple Heart, and an Air Force commendation. He also faced discrimination and became a spokesman for equality by becoming the first openly gay person to be on the cover of "Time Magazine" in 1975. He died in 1988 and his body was buried at the Congressional Cemetery in Southeast Washington DC with full military honors. There are countless stories that are like these. Fast forward to 2009, when a recent Rhodes Scholar joined the U.S. Navy Reserve, served for 8 years, and became the Mayor of South Bend in 2011, and later served in Afghanistan in 2014. "Mayor Pete," as he was often called, served two terms as Mayor before deciding to engage in politics. During his tenure as Mayor, he came out as gay, and married while in office. After an unsuccessful bid to run for President of the



United States, he accepted a position as Secretary of Transportation. His appointment was confirmed in 2021, making him the first openly gay Cabinet secretary in U.S. History. He too serves as a champion of equality. As we honor those who have served in the military, let us remember how much they have sacrificed "to preserve and protect the land that we love," and the selflessness that "beats in the hearts" of America's military personnel. (Quotations from President Obama, 2016.) Let us continue to honor those who served in the military and those who fought for our rights to be open gay, proud, and equal.



Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day

On **December 7**, we remember the world changing event known as Pearl Harbor Day. Honor the memory of those who served and lost their lives. Consider sending a care package to a member of the Armed Forces. The Pacific National Monument reminds us of that day over 80 years ago. The attack resulted in 2390 military casualties with 1177 on the USS Arizona alone. Every battleship was badly damaged or destroyed including the USS Oklahoma and USS Utah. At a time when gay men were being screened by psychiatrists during their induction physical, the need for men forced the military to accept and integrate most gay inductees; they were considered vital to the military. In addition, because married or pregnant women were barred from enlistment, a disproportionate number of lesbians also served in the military. However, when the military did expel LGBTQ soldiers, they were dismissed with blue ticket discharges. These discharges were rarely supported by a formal procedure or inquiry, but they were accused of "undesirable" behavior. It is estimated that nearly 50,000 U.S. Army soldiers received a blue discharge, and they were generally banned from receiving benefits from the G.I. bill.





Ale Hernandez reflected on her past military experience and current role in the Road Home program with an attentive audience. At right: AVER placed a wreath at the Halsted-Addison LGBTQ Veterans Memorial. Below: Dean Ogren, Larry Simpson, Ale, Jim Darby, (Bruce Inman, kneeling), Ben Saucedo, Nancy Pifer, and Brandon Chong.



Respect for Marriage Act (RFMA)

The U.S. Senate voted last month to officially pass the *Respect for Marriage Act* and moves it to the House for a vote where it is expected to pass. Twelve Republicans joined the Democrats in passing the bill. (Senator Raphael Warnock missed the vote since he's busy campaigning in the Georgia runoff.) While not perfect, this is an historic bill that repeals the Defense of Marriage Act while enacting substantive protections for same-sex and interracial couples. The bill does not require all states to allow same-sex marriage, even though that is currently the law under the Obergefell v. Hodges decision. However, if the Supreme Court overturned Obergefell and previous state prohibitions on same-sex marriage returned, the *Respect for Marriage Act* would require states and the Federal government to respect marriages conducted in places where it is legal. The bill also includes religious exceptions that protect religious and non-profit organizations from supporting same-sex marriages. Obergefell reiterated that the bill was flawed since same-sex couples are treated as second-class citizens since they would have to perform the wedding in a state that recognizes same-sex marriage. However, Obergefell also recognizes that the bill will protect the marriages of millions of LGBTQ Americans who are concerned about future lawsuits and decisions from the current Supreme Court. The President is expected to sign it into law after passage by the House.



= Chicago Chapter 2022-2023 =

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