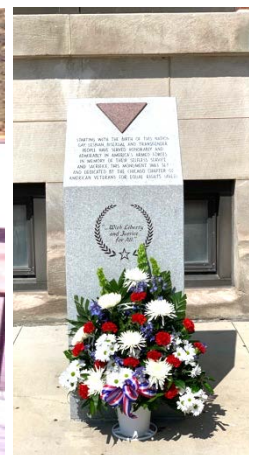


Memorial Day 2023

We hope that you were able to attend one of the many Memorial Day events across the country. Memorial Day is the day to honor our nation’s fallen heroes who paid the ultimate sacrifice while serving in the military. There are many ways to recognize and mourn those we have lost. We visit cemeteries, like our Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery in Elwood, and place American Flags on the gravesites of known veterans to participate in a National Moment of Remembrance, or we attend a local parade to support and learn from surviving veterans and active servicemembers. Often overlooked, or dismissed, are the countless sacrifices from our LGBTQI+ servicemembers and veterans. Over centuries they served and never had an opportunity to be their authentic selves. We do see more memorials across the country and around the world recognize LGBTQI+ servicemembers and veterans. Unfortunately, due to bans and laws, like “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” we also lost thousands of veterans who were never able to reveal if they were LGBTQI+. President Biden noted last year that “Memorial Day will always be a day of pain and pride. As a nation, we undertake a sacred ritual: to reflect and to remember. Because if we forget the lives that each of those silent (gravesite) markers represent—mothers, fathers, siblings, spouses, children—if we forget what they sacrificed, what they gave so that our nation might endure strong, free, and united, then we forget who we are. They chose a life of purpose and a mission. And above all, they believed in duty, in honor, and in their country. We are free because they were brave. We live by the light of the flame of liberty that they kept burning. A part of them is still with us no matter how long ago we lost them.”



Upcoming Chicago AVER Events

Chicago Pride Parade. Chicago AVER is marching in the Chicago Pride Parade on Sunday, June 25. We need to **recruit about 50 people** to help carry all of the service flags, AVER banner, and huge U.S. flag. Street barricades go up early so try to join us around 10:45-11:15am north of Montrose on Broadway to get organized. **If you are interested in joining us to march in the parade and carry the flag, please email president@averchicago.org or secretary@averchicago.org.** The parade follows Broadway south to Halsted, then south on Halsted to Belmont, east on Belmont to Broadway, and south on Broadway to Clark/Diversey, and then east to Lincoln Park. ***We really need your help to show off our pride, so please consider joining us and sign up now!!***

Upcoming Local Area Events

June 1. Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital, 5000 5th Ave, Hines, 60141, will be raising a rainbow flag on campus at 11am. Everyone is invited to attend. For more information, contact Lorry Luscri, 708-202-8387, ext. 21228.

June 17. Combined Veterans of Berwyn Sixth Annual Luncheon and Expo, 12Noon – 6pm, with job fair (bring your resume) and BBQ (bring your appetite). All veterans eat free (with proof of service); non-veterans \$15/adult, \$5/child under 12. Morton West High School, 2400 Home Ave, Berwyn, 60402. For more information, call 708-512-4730 or email combinedveterans@yahoo.com.

June 16. Veteran Resource Fair. 8am to 3pm, Presented by the Chicago Stand Down Committee, 5200 S Cottage Grove Ave, Chicago, 60615. Services (Vet center, Housing, Employment, Healthcare, etc.) and Food for veterans who are homeless, home insecure, or in-need. Bring Veteran ID or DD-214 for Registration. For questions or more information, call 312-569-5750 or 312-569-8288.

Claim Your Plaque

Get your free Military Service Plaque to display your military memories from Together We Served. The 6.5"x11" plaque, example shown here, can be created for framing. See <https://togetherweserved.com/basicplaque>.

The image shows a military service plaque for LTC Michael Christy, USA Retired. The plaque features a dark background with a star pattern. At the top left is the Department of the Army seal. The name "LTC MICHAEL CHRISTY" and "UNITED STATES ARMY" are prominently displayed. Below this, it says "USA RETIRED". To the left of the text is a photograph of the retiree in military uniform. To the right are various military symbols: crossed rifles, a ribbon, a leaf, a parachute, and a unit crest. The text on the plaque provides the following details:

- FINAL RANK:** Lieutenant Colonel
- SERVICE YEARS:** 1966 - 1984
- MOS:** 46A-Public Affairs Officer
- PRIMARY UNIT:** 1969-1970, HHC, 1st Battalion, 12th Cavalry

At the bottom of the plaque, it says "Copyright © 2022 Togetherweserved.com".

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.

Clothing Deals and More

Veterans can get exclusive discounts on hundreds of brands, including Grunt Style, Under Armour, Rothco, The North Face, and more. Visit <https://shopvcs.va.gov/> to shop and save on thousands of items. Discounts on sunglasses, outdoor gear, hotel bookings, electronics, and more. With every purchase, the Veterans Canteen Services program will give back to Veteran programs.

New Chicago Director of Veterans Affairs

Outgoing Mayor Lori Lightfoot announced the appointment of Kevin Barszcz as the new Director of Veteran Affairs for the City of Chicago in early May. Barszcz is a Chicago native, Chicago Public City Schools graduate, and a U.S. Navy Veteran with over a decade of community experience. Mayor Lightfoot noted that “Since the early days of my administration, Kevin has served on the Advisory Council of Veteran Affairs, and most recently, as a Chicago Recovery Project Manager focused on homelessness support services. He is an incredible leader who advocates for all veterans and their family members.” Before joining the Mayor’s office, Barszcz worked with the Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS) to support Asylum Seekers from Texas and donation coordination, and established the interagency task force on homelessness to increase communication between city departments, stakeholders, and community partners to support the City’s most vulnerable population.

VetLink Summit

Join student veterans from several colleges and universities as they share their stories of aspiring to greatness and reaching what were thought be unattainable goals. Hear from admissions officers and administrators as they discuss applying to undergraduate programs, law and business schools, and graduate programs. Learn from experts as they discuss professional and academic opportunities such as consulting, banking, entrepreneurship, technology, and public service. Registration is free and all current and aspiring student veterans or service members are welcome to join. For more information, see <https://www.service2school.org/>.

VA Healthcare

If you are a Veteran who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or another related identity and facing a mental health challenge, seek help. Check out the VA site for more information on services, benefits, and your rights for adequate healthcare. You’ve earned it! <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/lgbtq-plus/>

Wisconsin’s New DVA

Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers has appointed James Bond to lead the state’s Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA). Bond is a former Marine, openly gay, and has been with the DVA since 2010, most recently serving as Deputy Secretary since 2019. Prior to his appointment with the state’s DVA, he was employed by the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development as Deputy Division Administrator and as Bureau Director of Management Services. He served on active duty from 1983-1988. He currently lives in Madison with his husband Todd and two sons.



New State Veterans Home

The Veterans' Home at Chicago received notice of its official certification from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) to be recognized as a State Veterans Home. "Our Veterans bravely served this country and defended our freedoms, and they deserve a quality of care that reflects that sacrifice," said Governor JB Pritzker. "The Veterans' Home at Chicago has proven through this certification that it is a place Veterans and their families can trust, and I'm grateful for their hard work in earning this certification and providing a quality home for our heroes." Illinois department of Veterans' Affairs Director Terry Prince noted that "The Home's leadership and team have worked diligently to ensure that every detail of the Home met USDVA standards. This official recognition allows the Home to admit more Veterans into the 200-bed state-of-the-art home, staffed by dedicated medical professionals and staff." Although the USDVA does not manage the State Veterans Homes, to participate in the program, USDVA must formally recognize and certify a facility as a State Veterans Home. The USDVA then surveys all facilities each year to make sure that they continue to meet federal standards. This certification establishes a partnership between the Home and the federal government which qualifies the Home for financial support. "Caring for Veterans is a sacred mission that we all share at the Chicago Home," said T'Kira Siler-Wilkerson, Home Administrator. "The team is ready with open arms to welcome more Veterans and continue creating a vibrant, compassionate environment." The \$121M project broke ground in 2008, and the first residents were greeted in January 2022. The Home itself will employ up to 300 staff. (Updates about this Home have been reported in this newsletter in the November and December 2020, and November 2021 issues.)

Gone But Not Forgotten: "All Gave Some – Some Gave All"

Fr. Michael Bonnett, USAF
Kay Borovina, USAF
George Buse, USN, USMC
Brian Donegan, USAF
David Digel, USN
Jerry Hatch, USA
Michael Higgins, USA
Terry Higgins, USMC
Jeff Howe, USA
Louis Kalafut, USA
Shelton, Key, USN

Robert Kutzmer, USAF
High Lunde, USA
James Malick, USAF
Ruth Marr, USN
Larry McKeon, USA
James Merrill, USA
Stephen Michaels, USA
Joe Nolan, USN
Michele Parisi, USN
Raymond Rivera, USAF
Walter Rusterholtz, USA

Bill Schneider, USAF
Ronald Schwed, USA
John Stokes, USA
Chuck Swanson, USN
Richard Stuckey, USA
Al Treb, USN
Randy Williamson, USN
Gary Wyant, USAF
Ed Zasadil, USA

= Chicago Chapter 2022-2023 =

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VP/Treasurer Larry Simpson
VP/Secretary Ben Saucedo

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Heather Yang

VetPride: Bernie Santarsiero/Jim Darby

Parliamentarian: Larry Simpson

Junior Board Members

Ben Diseroad
Stanley Jencyk

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.

Page 1 Photo Information: Clockwise from upper left: Chicago Memorial Day Parade 2022; Chicago Pride Parade 2017; AVER LGBTQ Veterans Monument at the corner of Halsted and Addison; Tomb of the Unknown Soldier 1993; AVER LGBTQ Monument at Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery.