

N.S. Vol. 27 No. 9 September 2023 #391

Chicago Summer Air Shows

Perhaps you caught the Chicago Air and Water Show in August which featured the U.S. Air Force Thunderbirds, U.S. Army Parachute Team Golden Knights, U.S. Navy F/A-18F Super Hornet “Rhino” and Legacy Flight Demo Teams, and other U.S. Air Force teams. In addition, there is the Northern Illinois Airshow on September 9 in Waukegan. For more information, check out <http://northernillinoisairshow.com/>.



Chicago Pride Parade

Hopefully you had an opportunity to enjoy the 52nd Chicago Pride Parade with others in June. Every year, in addition to the Color Guard, we carry a large 50’ U.S. Flag. We’re always looking for volunteers, and this year we had an enormous number of volunteers from the **Seagull Institute**. (Thank you David Reithoffer!) Here’s a couple of images to show just how large that flag is, and the crew that helped support us during the parade.

Thank you all!!





Veteran Unemployment

In August 2023, the veteran unemployment rate was 3.6%, up from 2.8% in July, 2.7% in June, and 2.4% in the previous year. In comparison, the non-veteran unemployment rate was 3.7%, up from 3.4% in July, and 3.6% in the previous year. Rates vary by a number of factors. For example, the unemployment rate for veterans ages 18-24 decreased in June, from 6.9% to 6.5% while the rate for veterans ages 25-34 increased from 1.8% to 2.1%; the unemployment rate for veterans ages 65 and older decreased in June, from 4.4% to 3.5%. The unemployment rate for female veterans was 2.1% in June, which is lower than that for non-veterans, at 2.8%. Likewise, the unemployment rate for Black/African American veterans was 2.5% in June, which is lower than that for non-veterans, at 6.3%. Check out the U.S. Department of Labor website for more information and help in finding a job as a veteran: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/vets>. The website contains information to help veterans and their spouses find jobs, training, and assistance with transition to civilian life.

University of Chicago Veteran Events

The Office for Military-Affiliated Communities (OMAC) serves as the central hub for resources, support, and programming for the military-affiliated community—undergraduate, graduate, and professional students, alumni, staff, faculty, and their families—at the University of Chicago. Info: <https://veterans.uchicago.edu/>. [*Women in Boots*](#). Female veterans speak about their own military experiences and post-service careers. [*LGBTQIA+ and the Veteran Identity*](#). Veterans talk their experiences of serving in the military openly. [*Black History Month*](#). Veterans network and honor African Americans who are serving or have served. [*Honoring the Hurt and their Heroes*](#). Veterans share their experiences of living with service-connect injuries. [*SE4 Career and Resource Fair*](#). The Boeing Company and the University of Chicago present the Autumn 2023 SE4 (Supportive Services, Education, Employment, Entrepreneurship, and Engagement) Career and Resource Fair in partnership with the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, the Cook County Department of Veterans Affairs, the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs, and the Chicago Commission on Human Relations, National Able Network, Chicago Brigade, Blue Star Families, and Veterans Business Project. The event is on Friday, September 29, 1-5pm, Midway Plaisance Ice Rink, 1130 Midway Plaisance, Chicago 60637.

2023 National AVER Convention

AVER is hosting their national convention in Fort Lauderdale, FL on Oct 14-16 at the Pride Center at Equality Park in the City of Wilton Manors. Accommodations will be at the Sonesta Ft. Lauderdale Beach, just steps from the ocean. Special rates will be honored for 3 days before and after the convention so stay and play! Contact Lee Lawson, email: son_oflaw@yahoo.com or check out the <https://aver.us/> website for more information.

Jesse Brown VAMC General Tele-Town Hall Meeting

Virtual online town hall meeting on Tuesday, Sept 12, 5-6pm (Central time). For more info, check out <https://www.va.gov/chicago-health-care/events/60809/>.

Seeking Honorable Discharges

A new, class action, lawsuit was filed in San Francisco federal court in August seeking to force the U.S. Department of Defense to upgrade veterans to honorable discharges and remove their sexual orientation from military paperwork. As many of 35,000 veterans who were barred from serving in the military because of their sexual orientation were dishonorably discharged under the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (DADT) policy. About 14,000 veterans were discharged from the military under DADT, but more than 20,000 others were also discharged since 1980. The Department of Defense has partnered with the Department of Veterans Affairs for greater outreach to inform veterans of the procedures to update their records but the process is complex, can take years, and often requires hiring an attorney. The lawsuit seeks a comprehensive review of the process.

UK Strategy for Veterans

The British Government set out a “Strategy for Our Veterans” in 2018 with a ten-year vision for veterans and their families to transition back into civilian life. The plan outlined an approach to improve services for veterans and their families as they transitioned out of military service, gather data to better serve the veteran community, and fully recognize the contributions that veterans have made to society, including those who were challenged by negative stereotypes, like LGBTQ+ servicemembers. An updated report was issued in August that included a review on the impact of the ban of LGBT personnel serving in the military before 2000, the specific challenges that women face upon the transition to civilian life, the establishment of hundreds of housing units to combat veteran homelessness, and a strategy to boost employment of veterans. Perhaps our VA needs to review it!!

Drag Performances on Military Bases

The August issue of the *Modern Military Magazine* was dedicated to the history of drag performances on military bases, and the implications and consequences of the Pentagon’s decision on LGBTQ+ protections and the ban on drag shows: <https://modernmilitary.org/>. This reminds me of similar policies during “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” when gay pride month couldn’t be acknowledged or celebrated, and the gay flag was banned from being posted. We see again attacks for true equality and inclusion, and the freedom to celebrate who you are. These bans also fail to recognize that drag shows provide a unique venue for troops to decompress during a time of stressful conflict, as in the World War II-era shows hosted by the USO and American Red Cross. During WWII, Irving Berlin helped to create these shows for the troops with an all-soldier cast in the 1942 stage production “*This is the Army*.” These productions were a huge fundraising success at New York’s Broadway Theater, and led to a 1943 film production with Ronald Reagan and George Murphy. Performances were promoted by Hollywood as “normal male soldiers doing their duty to entertain their peers and promote good morale amongst the troops.” It also provided a safe space and cover for members of the gay community to serve. More information can be found at the National WWII Museum (<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/>) and the War History Online website (<https://www.warhistoryonline.com/>). These drag shows were prevalent, not only in WWII for U.S. troops, but worldwide, and in other wartime venues. In the First World War, every single division in the Canadian and British Expeditionary Forces would have had a female impersonator as part of their concert troupe. Some drag performers, like Perry Watkins, were openly gay, and reenlisted several times and was promoted to Sergeant First Class and honorably discharged, after challenging the Army in a lawsuit. A 1994 film, “*Sis: the Perry Watkins Story*,” recounts his career; also read <https://shcp.ashp.cuny.edu/items/show/2822>.

PFLAG National Convention

Join PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) is holding its national convention, “Learning With Love” on October 19-22 in Washington D.C. The convention will begin with lobbying on Capitol Hill on the first day. This is your chance to tell all 538 Congressmen and Senators why it’s important to support LGBTQ+ people and their families. Register by September 18: <https://pflag.org/>.

Battle Betties

AVER, Chicago Chapter, was again extremely fortunate to have Battle Betties host a fundraiser in August at Diamond Jim's Tavern and Gas Grill, 323 Meier Street, Suite 1325, East Dundee, IL 60118. Battle Betties is a non-profit organization that solicits donations to support servicemembers, veterans, and their families, and raise awareness of their needs. The organization hosts Mission Retreats to holistically help veterans transition out of service. Check out <https://battlebetties.org/> and <https://www.diamondjimssundee.com/> for more info! Justin, Larry, Brandon, and Matthew were able to attend the fundraiser and performance.



Upcoming Chicago Chapter Board Elections and Annual Dues Due

Please join us to help organize events and learn more about the organization. It's time for the annual elections, and everyone is encouraged to help nominate and elect our chapter board members. Also your annual dues are now due and can be paid online via the <https://www.averchicago.org/pay-dues>.

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](https://www.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.

= Chicago Chapter 2022-2023 =

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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.