

PRESS RELEASE



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Gay, Lesbian & Bisexual Veterans of America, Inc.

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GAY, LESBIAN & BISEXUAL VETERANS OF AMERICA **HOLD BIENNIAL CONVENTION IN CORPUS CHRISTI, TEXAS**

Gay, lesbian and bisexual veterans from across the country converged on Corpus Christi, Texas President's Day weekend for two days of networking, educational seminars, speeches, planning sessions and the election of national officers. And for the first time in history a gay veterans service organization used facilities aboard a U.S. Naval vessel for their plenary session.

The general membership convention, which is held every two years, began with a reception on Friday evening at the Sandy Shores Hotel. Convention attendees met for cocktails and hors d'oeuvres and got acquainted before beginning the serious work which brought them to this convention.

Saturday morning GLBVA officers hosted a continental breakfast for convention attendees, the officers welcomed the convention delegates and the invocation was delivered by Reverend Sandy O'Steen of the Metropolitan Community Church of Corpus Christi. The highlight of the morning session was a slide-presentation on the history of the gay, lesbian and bisexual veterans movement presented by James Darby and gay veteran Max Woerner presented a dramatic reading from his new work titled, "War Stories Woven of Khaki Love and Olive Drab".

Following a luncheon on the mezzanine, guest speaker Warren Dinges spoke to the group and gave them an update on the progress of his case against the United States military. Dinges, who was a Captain in the Air Force, was convicted by military court martial for engaging in a private consensual adult relationship and served a five month sentence in the maximum security military confinement facility at Fort Leavenworth. Following a question and answer period, Captain Dinges thanked the group for their outspoken position on the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy and wished them luck in their future endeavors.

The afternoon workshops focused on topics such as the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, discussions of possible benefits from utilizing recruiting and informational tools such as AOL, the internet and the World Wide Web and an open forum for attendees to ask questions or voice concerns and opinions.

The Sunday morning plenary session made history as the group met aboard the aircraft carrier USS Lexington (CV-16), which was anchored less than one-hundred yards from the convention's hotel. This was the first time that a gay veterans service organization has used a United States naval vessel for a plenary session. The Officers Ward Room aboard the World War II aircraft carrier was

decked out in the finest of military tradition with the American flag, the rainbow flag, several military banners and the flags of all branches of the U.S. Armed Forces. After arriving for the Sunday morning plenary session, some convention attendees toured the aircraft carrier while others swapped “war” stories and spoke of their dedication to continuing the fight for the right of gays, lesbians and bisexuals to serve openly in the military. Later in the day members were served a meal from a traditional “chow-line”, listened to speeches from the organization’s leaders and then began the nominating process which would culminate in the election of the officers who will govern the organization for the next two years. Results of the election are as follows:

President.....	James Darby.....	Chicago, IL
Vice President.....	Nancy Russell.....	San Antonio, TX
Secretary.....	James Donovan.....	Plainville, IL
Treasurer.....	Mel Tips.....	Cathedral City, CA
Regional Coordinator.....	Mack Thomas.....	Mission Viejo, CA
Vice-President Public Affairs.....	Edward Clayton.....	Birmingham, AL
Vice-President Veterans Affairs.....	Max Woerner.....	Guerneville, CA
Vice-President Legislative Affairs.....	Cliff Arnesen.....	Boston, MA
Vice-President Membership.....	Ed Kassing.....	Chicago, IL
Vice-President Gay Liaison Support.....	Bud Robbins.....	San Francisco, CA

During the session a special award was presented to outgoing President Nancy Russell honoring her for all her hard work over the past four years in building the organization and establishing a viable presence on the national political scene. Under her administration the organization saw a significant increase in membership, obtained its 501(c)3 status, testified before numerous committees during the 1993 LIFT THE BAN campaign and established a solid financial footing which will ensure the organizations long-term survival. A plaque was presented as a small token of the groups appreciation and a standing ovation demonstrated the respect and admiration the members have for Ms. Russell and her dedication to their cause.

The highlight of the Sunday session came when newly elected President James C. Darby called on the group to endorse a declaration which asserts the unacceptability of the current “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy, reaffirms the organizations commitment to the eventual removal of ALL policies preventing the service of gay, lesbian and bisexual men and women in the United States Armed Forces, and calls again for the president to lift the ban. The group unanimously endorsed the Lexington Declaration and instructed that copies of this declaration be sent to the President and all members of congress.

GLBVA, Inc. is the only national non-profit organization for gay, lesbian and bisexual active duty, reserve and veteran members of the United States Armed Forces, their families, friends and supporters.