



THE  
FORWARD OBSERVER

THE NATIONAL NEWSLETTER OF AMERICAN VETERANS FOR EQUAL RIGHTS, INC.  
VOLUME 3                      ISSUE 1                      AUGUST 2007

**Military Readiness Enhancement Act  
reintroduced in Congress.**

**2007 National Convention  
OPERATION : LIFT THE BAN V**

**AVER lays Memorial Day wreath  
at Tomb of the Unknowns**

**2007 Pride Highlights**



*photo by Denny Meyer, AVER PAO*

**21 April 2007 - Playhouse Square Canteen - Legendary LGBT rights activist and gay WWII combat veteran Dr. Franklin E. Kameny, PhD. (at right) swears in AVER National Board members (L-R) Treasurer Mark LaFontaine, Secretary Marie Ann Bohusch, and President James Donovan, at the AVER Memorial Military Ball during AVER's 2007 National Convention in Cleveland, OH.**

# THE FORWARD OBSERVER

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P. O. Box 1490  
2020 Pennsylvania Ave. NW  
Washington, DC 20006

★★★★★

#### ***Forward Observer Committee:***

**General Contact**  
*editor@aver.us*

**Committee Chair**  
Ray Allen  
*vp@aver.us*

**Editor in Chief/ Layout**  
Marie Ann Bohusch  
*secretary@aver.us*

**Assistant Editors**  
Judi Carey  
*region5vp@aver.us*

Denny Meyer  
*publicaffairs@aver.us*

★★★★★

#### ***AVER Executive Board***

President James Donovan  
*president@aver.us*

Vice President Ray Allen  
*vp@aver.us*

Secretary Marie Ann Bohusch  
*secretary@aver.us*

Treasurer Mark LaFontaine  
*treasurer@aver.us*

Past-President AJ Rogue  
*aj\_rogue@aver.us*

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## FROM THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Dear Fellow Vets & Allies.

As Gene Autry used to sing: "I'm back in the saddle again..." You have shown your confidence in me by again electing me President of AVER. I hope to justify this confidence.

I want to introduce you to your new board: Vice-president is Ray Allen of Sacramento Valley Veterans. Secretary is Marie Ann Bohusch of NEOAVER (Northeast OH). Mark LaFontaine of AVER Florida Gold Coast continues as our treasurer, and A.J. Rogue remains on the board as Past-President. I will endeavor to keep you informed of our activities.

We had an exciting time at our National Convention in Cleveland. The programs were varied, and the presentations, sight-seeing and food were great! More about the convention later in this issue.

On Memorial Day, your president placed a wreath at the Tomb of The Unknowns in Arlington National Cemetery as part of the National Ceremony. I'm pleased that in this small but important way, the military acknowledges our fallen LGBT service members. The privilege to perform this very important act is very humbling, and leaves me in awe!

Membership in AVER continues to increase, 40+ new or renewed members since Convention! A quick review of the database indicates that the chief source of membership is Word Of Mouth. That's right, Word Of Mouth, by you folks, telling your friends, acquaintances and even strangers about our organization. Second is PRIDE, followed by the internet and the press.

In the coming months, you may be called upon to participate in projects that you checked on your application forms, e.g. fund raising, public speaking, etc. Please do all you can to help.

I end this with a motto I recently discovered:

***"Get involved - the world is run by those who show up!"*** (unknown)

Faithfully,

***Chief Jim Donovan***



AVER is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender active duty, reserve and veteran service members, dedicated to the fair and equal treatment of all veterans and service members, and to honoring the sacrifices of all who served past and present. Membership in AVER is open to all who support the goals of the organization and does not suggest or imply sexual orientation of any of its members. All membership information is strictly confidential, as directed by the AVER National Constitution, within the limits of applicable laws.



*News from the VA  
Office of Public Affairs:*

## VA Medical Centers Extending Hours

**Change Benefits New Combat  
Veterans, Older Vets**

WASHINGTON (15 June 2007) -- In order to provide more health care for more veterans, especially mental health services, Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jim Nicholson has directed the 153 medical centers of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to keep their doors open longer.

"Illness doesn't follow a 9-to-5 schedule," Nicholson said. "I'm directing our medical centers to provide extended hours to ensure we're there for the veterans who have earned our care."

Although the extra hours apply to many hospital-based programs and services, Nicholson said his latest decision was based upon a desire to ensure VA's more than 9,000 mental health professionals are available when veterans need them.

VA operates the largest integrated health care system in the country and the nation's largest mental health program. About 5.5 million veterans are expected to seek health care from VA's nationwide system this year, accounting for about 800,000 hospitalizations and 60 million outpatient visits.

In recent months, Nicholson has announced a number of initiatives to improve mental health care for returning combat veterans, including the hiring of suicide prevention coordinators for each medical center, 100 new adjustment counselors for VA's 207 Vet Centers, and 100 new medical center employees to serve as advocates for the severely wounded.

VA's mental health experts will gather in Washington in July for a four-day conference reassessing the Department's programs for veterans, especially veterans from the conflict in Iraq and Afghanistan.



## VA's Suicide Hot Line Begins Operations

**Nicholson:  
"Help a Phone Call Away"**

WASHINGTON (30 July 2007) – To ensure veterans with emotional crises have round-the-clock access to trained professionals, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has begun operation of a national suicide prevention hot line for veterans.

"Veterans need to know these VA professionals are literally a phone call away," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jim Nicholson. "All service members who experience the stresses of combat can have wounds on their minds as well as their bodies. Veterans should see mental health services as another benefit they have earned, which the men and women of VA are honored to provide."

The toll-free hot line number is 1-800-273-TALK (8255). VA's hot line will be staffed by mental health professionals in Canandaigua, N.Y. They will take toll-free calls from across the country and work closely with local VA mental health providers to help callers.

To operate the national hot line, VA is partnering with the Sub-

stance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).

"The hot line will put veterans in touch – any time of the day or night, any day of the week, from anywhere in the country – with trained, caring professionals who can help," added Nicholson. "This is another example of the VA's commitment to provide world-class health care for our nation's veterans, especially combat veterans newly returned from Iraq and Afghanistan."

The suicide hot line is among several enhancements to mental health care that Nicholson has announced this year. In mid July, the Department's top mental health professionals convened in the Washington, D.C., area to review the services provided to veterans of the Global War on Terror.

VA is the largest provider of mental health care in the nation. This year, the Department will spent about \$3 billion for mental health. More than 9,000 mental health professionals, backed up by primary care physicians and other health professionals in every VA medical center and outpatient clinic, provide mental health care to about 1 million veterans each year.



**Department of Veterans Affairs** press releases can be read on the internet at: [www.va.gov/opa/pressrel](http://www.va.gov/opa/pressrel)

AYER applauds this progress. Timely medical care can make all the difference between a temporary injury or illness and a permanent disability. Suicide rates are known to be higher in the LGBT community than among Americans at large, but many civilian mental health staff are not well versed in **service related** crises which could effect **any** veteran, so the hotline is very welcome news.





# Ending Don't Ask, Don't Tell

## MREA returns to Congress

by Marie Ann Bohusch

On 28 February 2007, Rep. Marty Meehan (D-MA), chair of the House Armed Services Sub-Committee on Oversight and Investigations, introduced into Congress the Military Readiness Enhancement Act of 2007 (110th Congress H.R.1246). This followed in the footsteps of the News Years statements against Don't Ask Don't Tell (DADT) by former Chairman of the JCS General John Shalikashvili and former Secretary of Defense William Cohen.

Although the 2005 version of this bill (109th Congress H.R.1059) died in committee at the end of the session with just 122 co-sponsors, H.R.1246 headed out of the gate with 110 co-sponsors on board, including several freshman Representatives.



*Rep. Ellen Tauscher (D-CA) - official press photo*

A University of California Blue Ribbon Commission reported in 2006, that DADT has already cost our nation's military more than \$363 million to recruit and train replacements for the more-than 11,000 troops discharged under DADT. That figure includes nearly 800 specialists who were considered to have mission critical job skills, more than 300 of whom were foreign linguists.

In May of this year, a group of 40 Congressmen, led by Rep. Meehan asked the House Armed Services Committee for a hearing to discuss the continuing dismissal of high value Arabic linguists. Their discharge number has now reached 58 total, during a war in which their value is indisputable. Rep. Meehan and others believe this is clear evidence that DADT is a threat to our national security, and unnecessarily puts our troops in harm's way.

On 1 July 2007, Rep. Meehan stepped down from Congress to accept the position as Chancellor of the University of Lowell (Mass.). Since that time, the banner of H.R.1246 has been taken up by Rep. Ellen Tauscher (D-CA).

Rep. Tauscher is the Chair of the House Armed Services Sub-Committee on Strategic Forces, and is also a member of the Air and Land Forces Sub-Committee, and the Oversight and Investigations Sub-Committee. Rep. Tauscher has a high track record of sponsoring / co-sponsoring bills that directly pertain to human rights issues and the support of our Armed Forces service members at home and away.



*Rep. Marty Meehan (D-MA) - official press photo*

The march of H.R.1246 continues to progress. The bill currently has 131 co-sponsors, and there is a push to get new hearings on DADT scheduled during 2007. (*Full bill text is on page 21*)



To help further the progress of this bill it is vital for all of our LGBT veterans and allied supporters to contact their US Representatives, with compelling letters encouraging them to sign on as co-sponsors of "H.R.1246. The Military Readiness Enhancement Act of 2007." Congress has literally hundreds of active bills at any point in time, so please be sure to include the bill number and use the full name of the bill, not the acronym.

To find contact info for your local US Rep, go to **[www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov)**, or visit the **[www.HRC.org](http://www.HRC.org)** "Take Action Resources" section. Full bill tracking is available by searching "hr 1246" (bill number) at the Library of Congress THOMAS web site: **[thomas.loc.gov](http://thomas.loc.gov)** (no www).

# OPERATION : LIFT THE BAN V PLAYHOUSE SQUARE CANTEEN

AVER 2007 National Convention - Cleveland, Ohio

An overview by Chief Donovan:

Dear Fellow Members of AVER,

I want to take this opportunity to introduce your new officers and give you an overview of the convention. The National AVER Election was held on the 2nd business day of the convention and the following people were elected: Chief Jim Donovan as National President, Raymond Allen as Vice-president, Marie Ann Bohusch as Secretary & Mark LaFontaine as Treasurer.

Chief Jim lives in Plainville IL, and is the coordinator of the Lt. Tom Dooley Chapter, the virtual chapter for those "at large" members. Chief Jim was president from 2000 to 2003 and returns to the job. "I look forward to renewed interest in our organization, and to watching it grow as we accomplish our most pressing goal: the death of Don't Ask, Don't Tell."

Ray Allen is the president of the Sacramento Valley Veterans Chapter in Sacramento CA. Ray served in the USMC for 6 years and was involved in the first Gulf War. Although Ray was unable to attend the convention, he stated, "Thank you for showing your trust in me by electing me to the VP position. I have been with AVER for the past 5 years and believe in the mission of this organization: End DADT and promote community within the LGBT Veterans Community."

Marie is the president of NEOAVER, the Northeast Ohio chapter and has been a member of AVER since 2004. Marie is also the Chair of the AVER Web Development & Information Technology Committee, and is especially suited for the position of Secretary. "I am honored to take on

the role of AVER secretary. This new office is a good match with my ongoing role as Chair for Web&IT Development, as the AVER web site is a vital tool for facilitating the flow of information and interaction between the membership and officers, and between the various regions of the country."

Mark remains our treasurer, and continues to do an outstanding job. He has been a member of AVER for 3 years, and was one of the founding members of AVER-Florida Gold Coast Chapter in Ft. Lauderdale FL, currently our fastest growing chapter. "Responsible accounting is critical to any organization. I am gratified that you had the confidence to choose me to continue in the position of national treasurer."

The 2007 AVER National Convention was held in Cleveland OH in mid-April, splendidly hosted by NEOAVER. Chapters and members from across the nation attended the proceedings which included delegates from Ft. Lauderdale, New York City & Rochester NY, San Antonio & Houston TX, San Diego, Palm

Springs & Sacramento CA, Chicago & Plainville IL, Cleveland OH & Minneapolis-St. Paul. Just as NEOAVER assured everyone, we would start a bit chilly, but ended up with a gloriously sunny weekend.

Seeing the sights of Cleveland included an amazing tour of the Cuyahoga County Soldiers & Sailors Monument (Civil War) whose spectacular Victorian statuary fills a city square with the "Goddess of Liberty" at the top of a column and four bronze groupings at base depict Navy, Cavalry, Infantry and Artillery. This monument was one of the first in the nation to depict "live action" bronzes instead of the traditional puff-chested statues and busts. The guided tour included the spacious interior, where the marble walls are engraved with the names of more than 9000 local Civil War service members. The tour was capped by a special-request tour of the "catacombs" below, which are normally closed to the public.

The convention's sumptuous open festival of food and drink had invited guests from the Ohio LGBT community including representatives from Equality OH, Cleveland Pride, Transgender American Veterans Association (TAVA), and the Gay People's Chronicle.



*inside Cuyahoga Cty. Soldiers & Sailors Monument - photo courtesy of Denny Meyer*

## CONVENTION PRESENTATIONS:

Janet M. Briggs, MSN, RN, CNP started us off with a presentation on current VA HIV/AIDS research and treatment programs. The VA provides more than 22,000 HIV+ veterans access to the most “bleeding edge” HIV/AIDS treatments and medications in the world, making the VA the nation’s largest single provider of HIV health care. Research progress in this field is being led by the VA, and is very promising!

Denny Meyer of AVERNY and James Darby of Chicago presented a colorful history of LGBT service in America’s military from the Revolutionary War to the present, and the more than decade-long history of GLBVA/AVER’s work to repeal DADT while serving the needs of our own patriotic and courageous LGBT veterans.

Friday’s lunch was capped with a presentation by Mike Scheunemeyer and Robert Meyers-Bradley on the United Church of Christ’s secular retreat scheduled for August 2007. This event is tailored specifically for returning LGBT war veterans and their partners. The organization’s work includes support of LGBT service members and veterans.

A Freedom to Serve Roundtable included Denny Meyer, editor of Military Equality Alliance’s “The Gay Military Times,” Kathi Westcott, SLDN, and Ben Gomez, AVER. They presented an update on the multi-organizational alliance of those working together to advocate the passage of the Military Readiness Enhancement Act, the congressional bill that would repeal the DADT policy and allow all Americans to volunteer to serve openly with pride, regardless of sexual orientation, and without discrimination. Kathi continued with a discussion on the impact of DADT on families.



*Conventioners with Cleveland City Councilman Joe Santiago - photo courtesy of Dick Rogers*

The Friday Movie Night started with an old fashioned Soda Fountain Ice Cream Social, and featured Joe Acton’s **Courage Doesn’t Ask**, and Tom Murray’s feature length documentary **TELL**. Both directors were present to discuss their movies and answer questions.

On Saturday morning, openly gay Cleveland City Councilman Joe Santiago gave a presentation on his service in the Navy, and led an informal discussion on networking with other community groups and using community center resources. His inspiring story may be read in the archives at [www.thegaymilitarytimes.com](http://www.thegaymilitarytimes.com).

Former AVER Vice-president Dave Guy-Gainer presented a very informative discussion on chapter development. He and Mark LaFontaine described the formation of AVER’s 501(c)(19) VSO status.

Bruce Hestley of the Summit County Veterans Service Commission informed the convention delegates about the services accessible through Veterans Service Officers and county level veterans service commissions around the US.



*Mark LaFontaine, Marie Ann Bohusch, Chief Donovan, & Dr. Kameny - photo by Dick Rogers*

AVER’s traditional grand Military Ball was the highlight of the convention. The Ball featured Tim Stallman of RAVER (Rochester, NY) and members of Cleveland’s Blazing River Freedom Band playing spectacular and jazzy renditions of Americana, swing, marches and a medley of Armed Service anthems. Chief Jim proudly sang the National Anthem as the uniformed color guard consisting of AJ Rogue and Mel Tips presented our colors. Outgoing president, A.J. Rogue gave a stirring farewell address and was presented with a gavel and plaque. A.J. introduced Dr. Frank Kameny, our keynote speaker. A.J. remains on the board as Past-president.

Dr. Franklin Kameny is a real pioneer in the LGBT equality movement. He held us all in rapt attention as he regaled us with his very unrepentant tales of his more than 40 years of activism for our rights. His WWII combat experience may be read about at The Gay Military Times, as well as a description of his address to the convention may be read by Cleveland reporter Eric Resnick. At age 82, Dr. Kameny says the only goal he has left to see accomplished is the abrogation of DADT!

The convention was quite a success, and there were many favorable comments, especially for the food and the military ball. While Cleveland was very welcoming, nice, and even charming, AVER’s next convention in 2009 will be in Ft. Lauderdale, FL. Start making your plans now for a not-to-be-missed convention in the Sunny Florida Gold Coast!

**see more photos on page 8-9.**





May 2004 - SGT Danny Ingram, BG Keith Kerr, HMC Jim Donovan at the AVER National Convention Military Ball, Washington, DC. photo courtesy of Chief Donovan.

## News from AVER's National Officers

### ... from the Executive Board

The Board of Directors of AVER is proud to announce the ratification of Danny Ingram as AVER Vice President for Region II. Danny has been a member of AVER since 2003 and is the president of the very active Atlanta (GA) chapter.

"I first met Danny at the AVER convention in DC and felt that he would be a real asset in the leadership of our organization," said AVER President Chief Jim Donovan upon Danny's ratification by the chapters in Region II.

Danny served our country as a Sergeant in the US Army from 1988 to 1994. Following a statement made in support of Bill Clinton's promise to lift the ban, Danny became one of the first soldiers to be discharged from the US military under the then new "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, 10 days before his ETS date.

He brings a wealth of leadership skills and experience both to his

chapter and the AVER board, and we all very much look forward to continued growth and momentum in AVER's Region II.

Chief Donovan  
AVER President  
[president@aver.us](mailto:president@aver.us)

### Public Affairs Officer

Denny Meyer, AVER Public Affairs Officer, has recently represented AVER via mainstream and gay media Op Ed articles and interviews for print, internet and radio as well as speaking publicly at universities and organizations.

In October, Denny gave the National Coming Out Day commencement speech at Brown University in Providence Rhode Island. In March he spoke on the Public Policy Panel at the Harvard Law School Lambda DADT conference, and at the Queens County Ethical Culture Society in New York City.

Last Autumn, he was interviewed live on the Sue Wiley Show on the ABC affiliate statewide in Tennessee, speaking about the history of gay

and minority service members in the military. He then responded to listener call-in questions and commentary. One caller, with a rich blue-grass accent said that he did not believe that blacks, women, nor homosexuals had any place in our military because they were simply too much trouble. Knowing the answer, Denny asked the caller if he'd ever served in the military. Of course, he said, "no." Denny then explained that in our armed forces we all work together as a team and all service members must be 'team players' in order to qualify for the honor of serving our nation.

Similarly, when a caller raised the 'shower issue,' Denny asked him if he'd ever served; again the answer was, "no." Denny then explained that in the military we get up at 5:30 AM and at that hour no one wants to look at anyone, period; we take a two minute shower and all we can think about is getting to the mess hall for coffee and food. In the military, he told the caller, we are professionals who put aside our private lives in order to work together to defend freedom. End of story.

Among numerous other newspaper and radio interviews, Denny recently spoke on NPR (National Public Radio) regarding the homophobic comments made by JCS Chairman Gen. Peter Pace. In January, when General Shalikashvili spoke out for the repeal of DADT, quotes from AVER officers were sent to gay publications for inclusion in news articles, an Op Ed with those quotes was published in The Gay Military Times and the New York Blade, and a press release was sent to AP and other mainstream and gay media. Press releases are also sent to AVER chapters and Regional VPs for redistribution to local and regional media.

In March, AVER Public Affairs launched a Congressional Call Campaign, in coordination with



SLDN, in which chapters can have members and constituents call the Capitol Switchboard to be connected with their Representative's voice mail to leave a scripted message urging them to cosponsor the Military Readiness Enhancement Act.

A Public Affairs SOP, with press release and media guidelines, is currently being worked on, and will be available to all chapters once given final approval by the National Board.

Denny Meyer  
Public Affairs Officer  
publicaffairs@aver.us  
718-849-5665

## Vice President Veterans Affairs

AVER Veterans Affairs is developing a framework to gear up AVER's VSO services. Via former VP Dave Gainer and AVER Treasurer Mark LaFontaine's tireless efforts, the IRS recently granted AVER 501(c)(19) status which qualifies AVER to be Chartered by Congress as a VSO. Once the latter occurs, AVER will be able to send volunteers to be trained by the VA as Certified Veteran Service Officers (CVSO).

We will then be able to begin providing services to LGBT vets at the chapter and regional level which are similar to those provided by the much larger organizations, guiding our own with regards to benefits, disability claims, discharge upgrades, and other needs.

Volunteers with experience and time for responding to LGBT veterans service needs are now needed on several levels. At the first level, AVER chapter / regional 'limited' Veteran Service Officers will establish relations with and obtain guidance from local County CVSOs, DAV, and other veteran service organizations; and then provide guidance to LGBT vets seeking assis-



*Defense Dept. photo by Staff Sgt. D. Myles Cullen*

## The place where valor sleeps...

### *Memorial Day in Arlington: National ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknowns*

Every year at Arlington National Cemetery, the US President holds a national wreath laying ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknowns. Attendees include not only current service members and Pentagon staff, but also US Senators and Representatives, delegates from Veterans Service Organizations (VSO), honored guests and the loved ones of the fallen.

As a VA recognized Non-chartered VSO, AVER has been invited to the wreath laying ceremony for a number of years. This year, our returning president Chief Jim Donovan took up the honors in AVER's name for all LGBT service members who have fallen in the line of duty.



*Chief Donovan, with escort, presents AVER's  
wreath at the Tomb of the Unknowns,  
Memorial Day 2007.  
photo courtesy of Chief Donovan*

tance, and referral for expanded services to LGBT sensitive VSOs with whom they have established a working relationship. At the second level, after AVER VSO is chartered, AVER volunteers will be sent for full VA CVSO training and will then provide full services to LGBT vets locally, regionally, and nationally.

If you have some experience and have the time to devote to either of the above levels, please contact AVER Veterans Affairs VP Denny Meyer to volunteer. Additionally, volunteer coordinators are needed to establish and maintain our VSO network. You must have experience and time to devote to this effort.

Currently, AVER Veterans Affairs continues to provide guidance and referral to LGBT vets who contact us for assistance via internet and telephone inquiries.

Denny Meyer  
VP - Veterans Affairs  
vetsaffairs@aver.us  
718 849-5665

## Chair - IT & Web Development

I am currently looking for volunteers to help out with the AVER website. During my move to Cleveland [proper] last summer, it became very obvious that we need to have more people collaborating on keeping our national web site up to date and growing.

If you are familiar with web development or systems administration and have time to volunteer to the AVER National web site, please contact me. On the back side, we are looking for folks familiar with UNIX flavors, Apache, MySQL, and PHP. Please include a brief synopsis of your experience.

*(cont. on page 9)*



*Delegates wind their way through the tunnels below the Cuyahoga County Soldiers & Sailors monument. This area is normally off-limits to the public as they are working on renovations, but the monument is staffed by veterans, and so we were able to get a special tour - photo by Carl Rimmer*



*After the election - the outgoing and incoming Executive Board members together. (L-R) Mark LaFontaine, AJ Rogue, Dave Guy-Gainer, Ben Gomez, Marie Ann Bohusch, and Chief Donovan - photo by Dick Rogers*



*Bill Mullins, Dick Rogers, Jean Thompson, Patrick Bova, Chief Donovan, & Mark LaFontaine relax after lunch - photo by Denny Meyer*



*Chief and his accompanists. Chief Donovan warms up for the National Anthem with Tim Stallman of RAVER (far right) and twelve members of the Blazing River Freedom Band - photo by Carl Rimmer*



*AJ Rogue and Mel Tips carrying the colors after the National Anthem as led by Chief Donovan - photo by Carl Rimmer*



*Clockwise from front-L: Ed Zasadil, Mel Reiser, Barb Howard, Mel Tips, Ben Gomez, Kathi Westcott, Larry, and Jean Albright - photo by Denny Meyer*

**Looking for more convention photos?  
Visit [www.aver.us](http://www.aver.us)!**

(cont. from page 7)

By the end of Summer 2007, the new version of the AVER web site should be online. As I mentioned during the Convention, I am currently customizing an Open Source content management system (CMS). The interface of this system will allow officers to self-maintain the pages specific to their official duties, even with no prior web experience. This CMS will also enable much more interactivity between members and officers, with faster dissemination of news, etc.

In early 2006, James Apedaile and myself created AVERBB accounts for all AVER members who had included an email address on their membership applications. In March 2006, we sent out the first broadcast email to all members which included login instructions for the AVERBB. If you have lost those instructions, please contact us at [webtech@aver.us](mailto:webtech@aver.us).

If you have never included your email address on your membership application and would like to join the AVERBB, please get that to Chief Donovan, and we will set up an account for you. To prevent confusion, **do not** set up multiple accounts. The AVERBB is only for dues-current AVER members, and is located at [www.aver.us/averbb](http://www.aver.us/averbb).

The BB is still very under-used even though it is the fastest way for members to interact online in an environment where access is 100% restricted to current AVER members. We encourage you to take advantage of this resource already just a click away. More functions will come on line in just a few months.

If you need help with the AVERBB and use Yahoo! Messenger, you can add AVER\_webtech to your buddy list. See you on "the BB!"

Marie Ann Bohusch  
Chair - IT & Web Development  
[webtech@aver.us](mailto:webtech@aver.us)

## Convention Chair

Region I really stepped up for the National Convention this year. While the Executive Board helped tremendously with administrative matters, NEOAVER and other members in Region I handled a huge amount of leg-work, and so I feel the need to acknowledge some folks who are not members of NEOAVER and may be a bit "unsung."

At the top of the list is Tim Stallman from RAVER, for his invaluable work with the Blazing River Freedom Band, which provided live music during the Military Ball cocktail hour, plus the National Anthem. Tim orchestrated all of that from Rochester, NY, quite a feat. He also took on the task of organizing and securing donations for the silent auction, and even drummed up a sponsorship from a local LGBT business in Rochester.

Also of great help to the convention from Region I was Denny Meyer of AVERNY. Denny worked many hours and "connections" to help arrange meal-time speakers, including coordinating with Mark LaFontaine to help bring in Dr. Frank Kameny.

One executive board member who really "stood out from the pack" was Mark LaFontaine. In addition to helping bring in Dr. Kameny to speak for the Military Ball, Mark held all financial reins with the hotel and helped us secure some of the largest sponsors. With Mark in charge of AVER-FGC, we are really looking forward to the 2009 Convention in Ft. Lauderdale.

Last hail goes to Chief Donovan, who over the course of a weekend and a fair deal of hairpulling, printed and collated **all** of the Convention programs.

Marie Ann Bohusch  
Chair  
AVER 2007 National Convention



*AVER-FGC members Dick Rogers and Bill Mullins visit the Renaissance Hotel at the historic Terminal Tower - photo courtesy of Dick Rogers*



*Cleveland Pride Pres. Alex Leopold, VP Dana Aritonovich, and RVP I Marie Ann Bohusch, Opening Reception - photo by Denny Meyer.*



*RAVER founder Tim Stallman plays us a tune with the BRFB - photo by Carl Rimmer.*

## Chapter Reports

### ★ AVER Region I



After having been discriminated against, by the parade organizers, in the 2005 NYC Veterans Day Parade, we were determined to be very visible in 2006. On November 11th 2006 AVER-NY had a block-long contingent composed of the Lesbian and Gay Big Apple Corps Marching Band with dancers, rainbow color guard, acrobats, the band playing Americana; and AVER-NY members and supporters. AVER-NY marchers were led by WWII Vet Major Willit Fields; and Rhonda Davis. The crowds cheered and loved us. The parade organizers (having been called on the carpet, for the previous year's discrimination, by Out Lesbian New York City Council Speaker Chris Quinn) treated us with

total respect and announced us from the reviewing stand at Times Square.

AVERNY president Denny Meyer helped organize and spoke at local DADT conferences at Hofstra University and Columbia University. He and AVERNY Vice President James Reilly participated in NY City Council Veterans Committee meetings which focused on advocating for City funding for local NYC Vet Resource Centers. AVERNY board members, in an effort led by Claude Ashby Jr., have been visiting and keeping track of hospitalized members and seeing to their needs.

The 2007 AVERNY Pride Awards in May honored NYC Congressman Gary Ackerman (who spoke out while questioning Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, suggesting that the State Dept. hire American military trained linguists who were discharged due to DADT), and among others our chapter treasurer, John Pulhamus, for his tireless efforts.

In May 2007, Denny Meyer, Pres. of AVER-NY, received a New York City Commendation proclamation, at the NYC Comptroller's annual Pride awards, for his service and "for his work in breaking down the barriers to social justice." Accepting the honor, Denny said: ...



[L-R]: AVERNY Board member Claude Ashby, Jr., Denny Meyer, NYC Comptroller Wm. Thompson, Jr. - photo courtesy of Denny Meyer

**"The Right of gay people to choose to volunteer to serve in America's Armed Forces, openly in Pride, without discrimination, is no different from the right to Choose to MARRY, nor from all the other rights and responsibilities that we demand."**

When President Truman integrated our armed forces by executive order in 1948, Bigots told Truman that they could not shower with nor take orders from Black Americans. His order may have set the precedent for the civil rights that *nearly* all Americans now enjoy.

Today, bigots say that they cannot shower with nor take orders from Gay Americans. The Military Readiness Enhancement Act, which would repeal Dont Ask Dont Tell, is currently in the US House of Representatives, and will soon be introduced in the United States Senate, and it will be signed by the *next* president.

It has been such a long time since a few brave souls stood shouting at police in Sheridan Square. Yet, from the streets to seats at the table, from Stonewall to the Senate, our struggle for freedom and full inclusion in American Equality has persevered, we shall prevail, we will win."

Denny Meyer  
Pres AVER-NY  
averny@att.net



2006 NYC Veteran's Day Parade - photo courtesy of Denny Meyer





Tim Stallman of RAVER really outdid himself for the National Convention this year. Working long distance over several months with members of the Blazing River Freedom Band, Cleveland's only 'Lesbian, Gay & Allies' marching and concert band, he made sure that we had live music throughout the cocktail hour before the Military Ball, as well as for the singing of the National Anthem.

Tim was the primary delegate working on the silent auction gathering contributions from local Rochester businesses and organizations, including Hedonist Chocolates and Veterans Outreach Flag Store, and also helped us secure a convention sponsorship from OUTlandish, a local Rochester LGBT store.

Since the convention, there has been some new interest in the chapter locally, and we hope to have RAVER officially chartered very soon.



Although BRAVER meetings have been sparse this year, several members of the chapter got together for a memorial barbecue in April, with other friends and family of M. Todd Shinkle, to **celebrate** the life of their late chapter president, who died 15 April 2006.

BRAVER is hoping to regain some momentum this Fall and move forward on some new chapter activi-

ties. LGBT veterans in or near Columbus who may be interested in becoming active with the chapter should contact Mike Warner at:

[mwarner1117@wowway.com](mailto:mwarner1117@wowway.com).



NEOAVER kicked off a terrific Spring by hosting the AVER 2007 National Convention and Military Ball. For a full write up on this event, please refer to *page 4*.

After several grueling months of preparing for the convention, the following weekend this April, we "let somebody else run the show" and had a relaxing weekend manning an info table at CLAW - the Cleveland Leather Awareness Weekend.

This was the sixth year for CLAW, and the second year that NEOAVER has been there to represent AVER. More than 2000 leathermen and leatherwomen descended upon Cleveland for a weekend of leather family fun and philanthropy. The event is strictly a fundraising weekend, no contests.

During CLAW, we spent a good deal of time educating folks as to exactly what Don't Ask Don't Tell and Article 125 of the UCMJ force upon members of the military regarding their private lives, including bisexuals and heterosexuals, and why it is thus important that we Lift the Ban, and ammend Article 125 to **exclude** [non-reproductive] sexual acts between mutually consenting adults.

During our quiet time this Summer, we have strengthened old contacts and made several new through

our liaison work with a local organization, TransFamily of Cleveland, which has helped many transveterans in our region, as well as nationally. Our local VA clinicians are extremely protective of transveterans, as well they should be, so until we heard it come directly from one transveteran, we were completely unaware that many local transveterans are referred directly to TFC as a local support group **by** VA clinicians.

NEOAVER had a fairly quiet summer in "recovery" from the convention, but we are looking forward to some "socials" this Fall and Winter to get things back into high gear.

Marie Ann Bohusch  
Pres. NEOAVER  
[qcws@neoaver.org](mailto:qcws@neoaver.org)



January proved to be a most interesting month for Veterans here in Broward County. Several of our board members attended the meeting of the Broward County Veterans Council. We were informed of a new contractor who has been brought in to oversee the building of the new Outpatient Clinic in Sunrise. The clinic has been running into many difficulties over the years and the construction has stalled several times. The new contractor assures us that he foresees the new installation to be operating by the year-end. This will be good news for those who live further out west in Broward County, but not so for the thousands of veterans who live east of 441. I believe that many of our veterans will not want to take the journey out west to seek assistance for their medical care. We must make sure that the VA is willing to provide

the necessary transportation to these displaced veterans so that their care is not interrupted. I will be meeting with representatives of the Oakland Park VA Outpatient Clinic to see how they plan to address this issue.

In April, Broward County Commissioner Ken Keechl and the Broward County Board of County Commissioners Approved the appointment of A.V.E.R. Vice-President Richard A. Rogers to the Elderly and Veterans Advisory Board of Broward County.

In May, our chapter had the highest attendance of any Veterans group at this year's inaugural breakfast event at the McDonald's Air and Sea Show. Mr. Markoff, head of the MDM Group, stated that he wants to "kick-off" every year with this event. He and all of the sponsors were VERY impressed and have promised to continue it in the future. A special thanks to Dick Rogers and Bill Mullins for manning our telephone lines over the weeks preceding the event and to all of our members who attended. Another impressive part was Marc Hansen singing the national anthem. We have so much talent in our group and it showed with Marshall Belmaine and Marc Hansen's impressive performances this year. Good job, gentlemen.

Mark LaFontaine  
Pres., AVER-Florida Cold Coast  
mjl@aver-fgc.us



*Amy Shoosmith, Congressman Ron Klein and Mark LaFontaine - AVER-FGC Chapter attends the Thirty Year Celebration to help promote Veterans initiatives - photo courtesy of John Muller*



*AVER Georgia leads the Atlanta Pride Parade - photo courtesy of Danny Ingram*



AVER Georgia founder and former President Jeff Cleghorn hosted a party at his home June 23 during Atlanta's annual Pride Festival for Petty Officer 2nd Class Stephen Benjamin, a high profile Arab linguist recently discharged from the US Navy under DADT.

Benjamin has used his discharge to help publicize the inherent danger of the DADT policy, appearing on CNN's Paula Zahn Live and The Colbert Report, and had an Op-ed published in the New York Times.

Also present at Cleghorn's party was Navy CTI3 Davie Santos, the Iraq veteran "adopted" by AVER Georgia while serving overseas, along with a dozen young active duty LGBT service members from Georgia.

Santos, also an Arab linguist and also discharged under DADT following his return from Fallujah last spring where he was attached to marine unit, was presented with a gold

service bracelet from AVER Georgia at the party to honor his service in the US military.

On Pride Sunday, AVER Georgia's color guard lead the annual Pride Parade with a contingent of 8 flags, 2 rifles, and 2 vehicles carrying veterans from Iraq, Afghanistan, the Gulf War, Vietnam, Korea, and World War II. We were very proud to have Davie march with us in the parade.

Following the parade, AVER opened the Sunday program with a taps ceremony from the main festival stage. The ceremony included World War II veteran Jack Strouss, who served under George S. Patton and who celebrated his 84th birthday that very day. Also participating in the ceremony was Monica Helms, national president of Transgender American Veterans Association (TAVA) who is a third generation Navy veteran and whose son is currently serving in the US Marines in Iraq. The ceremony featured both a bugle and a trumpet playing "echo" taps, which was extremely well received by the audience in Atlanta's Piedmont Park.

Danny Ingram  
Pres. AVER Georgia  
president@avergeorgia.org

## ETERANS Chicago

We are very fortunate that Mayor Daley has been so supportive of all Veterans. A dozen Chicago AVER members joined dozens of other veterans groups for the City of Chicago's Veterans Day Celebration at Soldier Field, followed by a great meal in the Cadillac Room.

Following the City festivities, we held our 14th Annual Veterans Day Dinner, with a great turnout. Our speaker, Rob Fojtik, was one of the college students from SoulForce who tried to enlist in the military, but only on the condition that they accept him as openly gay. The recruiting office refused him, and Rob was arrested along with several other SoulForce members. Chicago Chapter honored him with the "Happy Warriors Award." He is truly one of our heroes.

On Sunday November 12, the Chicago Chapter honored Allen Schindler for the 14th year with a Remembrance Ceremony at his grave in Steger, IL.

Some of the publicity surrounding our Veterans Day events brought inquiries about the history of GLBVA/ AVER and our Chapter, including an

invitation to speak at Northwestern U.

With retired Chairman of the JCS Gen. John Shalikashvili and former Secretary of Defense William Cohen each speaking out in January against DADT, there has been a flurry of activity and requests for LGBT veteran speakers. Our members have since given presentations at Lewis College, Lake Forest College, Medill School of Journalism, and at GLAD in Decatur, IL

Following the AVER convention, which 5 Chicago members attended, our first big event was the City of Chicago's 10th Annual Memorial Day Parade. We were one of the 275 entries to march down State St. We were joined by the LakeSide Freedom Marching Band, and we received a great response along the route.

A dozen members attended the 14th Annual Remembrance Ceremony for Allen Schindler in Steger, IL. Allen's mother Dorothy graciously thanked everyone for remembering her son.

Pride Month in Chicago was truly over-the-top, and the activities kept everyone going for days. To start with, a dozen vets attended the Mayor's Reception for the LGBT community at the Cultural Center on Tuesday, June 5.

On Saturday June 9, we celebrated our 11th Annual Flag Day Beer Bust & BBQ at Buck's Saloon. We had all the fixings for a fabulous BBQ picnic, and Buck's Saloon is so good to us.



WWII veteran Ed Zasadil at the Chicago 2007 Salute to GLBT Veterans - photo by Tracy Baim, Windy City Times.

We were very excited to have RADM Steinman as the featured speaker at our 5th Annual "Salute to GLBT Veterans" in Daley Plaza on June 21. RADM Steinman urged everyone to do whatever he or she can to help us overturn DADT. There were at least a dozen vets on the stage, who each spoke eloquently about their time in the military.

On Saturday June 23, AVER members staffed a booth at the Pride Fair. We were pleased with the number of members who turned out to help. Pride Fair on Halsted St. is always such an 'interesting' experience.

On Sunday June 24, we marched in the 38th Annual Pride Parade, and carried GUS, our giant 50 foot flag. This was our fastest parade ever; start to finish in less than one hour.

SLDN will be hosting the "Meet The Generals" event in Chicago at the Center On Halsted on August 3rd. AVER will be supporting this event, and a good number of local members will be attending and hope to meet some of the heroes of our movement.

The North Halsted Street Market Days are Saturday and Sunday, August 11th and 12th. AVER always has a booth at this event which is the largest of its kind in the Midwest. This is a great recruiting adventure for us.

James Darby  
Pres. AVER Chicago Chapter  
jamesdarby@aol.com



2007 Chicago salute to LGBT Veterans - photo courtesy James Darby





*Houston Pride 2007 - members of the Wes Giles Memorial Color Guard (San Antonio) and Houston chapter members gather before the parade - photo courtesy of Ron Clarke - AVER Region IV VP*

## **Region IV**

### **AVER Houston**

Having recently taken over the AVER Houston Chapter presidency from Mitch Rainey, in April 2007, Barb Howard attended the national convention in Cleveland, to get better acquainted with the ropes of the office, as well we renew some old friendships and build some new bonds.

The Houston Chapter sent members to the Austin Gay Pride Parade to participate in the Wes Giles Memorial Color Guard. The parade kicked off at 7pm on Saturday June 2, 2007. The parade was attended by approximately 70,000 people.

Over the weekend of 23 June, the Wes Giles Memorial Color Guard participants were hosted by Barbara Howard for the 2007 Houston Pride Parade. Color Guard members took the #1 position, marching immediately behind the Marshal's banner.

AVER members also helped man the Serviceman's Legal Defense Network's booth at the Houston Pride Festival on June 23, 2007. Houston

boasts the original night-time pride parade, stepping off at 8:45pm, and it remains the largest LGBT event in the Southwest states. Over 200,000 people attended the parade and cheered the Color Guard as they passed.

The Houston Chapter of AVER meets on the first Tuesday of each month at 7pm, at the Barnaby's on West Gray. Members or those wishing to know more about or join AVER are encouraged to attend the monthly meetings.

Barbara Howard  
Pres. AVER Houston  
[barb73165@sbcglobal.net](mailto:barb73165@sbcglobal.net)



*AVER-SA member Dee Villarrubia, and chapter President Robert O. (Bob) Weeks, at the SLDN Booth, Pridefest San Antonio - photo PrideFestSA*

## **AVER San Antonio**

On 2 June 2007, members of the AVER San Antonio chapter's Wes Giles Memorial Color Guard officially kicked off their month of Pride travels in Austin for the 6th Annual Austin, Texas Pride Parade. This was the 6th consecutive year that the [now-named] Wes Giles Memorial Color Guard has lead this parade, and we look forward to leading it in the future.

For 2007, SLDN took its Pride Festival campaign up a notch and branched out into many more cities, frequently with the staffing help of AVER members. On 16 June, AVER-SA member Dee Villarrubia and chapter President Robert O. (Bob) Weeks pitched in to help staff the booth at PrideFest San Antonio.

This was San Antonio's 26th Annual PrideFest, making it one of the oldest Pride events in the Southwest. The Color Guard from the Bexar County Sheriff's department turned out for the festivities, and the mother of gay Marine veteran Eric Alva was given the PrideFest Community Service Award, making this an all around terrific year for the visibility of uniformed service in LGBT San Antonio.

On 23 June 2007, members of AVER-SA made the trek to Houston to march in the Houston Pride Parade. A big "Thank You" goes to Barb Howard, President of AVER Houston for making this all possible. It had been about three years since an AVER color guard had lead this fine event down Westheimer Road to the cheers and applause of thousands of spectators.

Robert O. (Bob) Weeks  
Pres. AVER-SA  
[r\\_weeks78230@sbcglobal.net](mailto:r_weeks78230@sbcglobal.net)



## **AVER Palm Springs**

Mel Tips, President and founder of AVER Palm Springs, and Treasurer Mel Reiser attended the National Convention in Cleveland, 18 April through 22 April. The speakers were very good, and all attending gathered much information on issues affecting AVER. We all enjoyed the and the showing of the two films on Friday night. The Military Ball had the local Blazing River Freedom Band and a great Steak dinner, in addition to fine speakers.

During the May 19th chapter meeting on Armed Forces Day, more than a dozen local members attended a barbecue at the home of Mel Tips where the films "Courage Doesn't Ask" and "TELL" were shown, courtesy copies donated to our chapter by directors Joe Acton and Tom Murray during the AVER National Convention. Everyone had a wonderful time.

On Memorial Day, several chapter members attended the activities at the Desert Memorial Cemetery where the GLBVA obelisk honoring all veterans is located.

On 6 June, seven chapter members were taken to Hollywood's El Capitan Theatre to see "Pirates of The Caribbean, Worlds End"; followed with a dinner at Edwards Steak House in El Monte.

On the weekend of 21-22 July, members of AVER Palm Springs travelled for the San Diego Pride Parade and Festival, in support of the San Diego AVER Chapter.

The September meeting of the Palm Springs chapter will take place on the 19th, at Park West Mobile Park.

Mel Tips  
Pres. AVER Palm Springs  
miltips@aol.com



Sacramento Valley Veterans has been listed with the California Department of Veterans Affairs this year, and has been invited to the openings and ground breaking of various veterans events. We've been honored to have been able to attend a good number of events, though due to scheduling conflicts we could not attend all.

On 16 June 2007, the Sacramento Valley Veterans color guard led the Sacramento Pride Parade for another year. This year we had a member from the American Legion Alexander Hamilton Post 448 out of San Francisco join us, and a Iraq Clergy Army veteran.

We have also set up an ongoing display at our LGBT Library and Archives, which covers the history of California veterans and the battle to end DADT.

After a very busy Summer, Sac. Valley Vets is relaxing for a somewhat quieter Autumn, but our membership drive continues. Please check our web site for our schedule of events.

Ray Allen  
Pres. Sacramento Valley Veterans  
raymond\_allen@sacvalleyveterans.org

## **San Diego AVER**

Earlier this year, members of the San Diego Chapter of AVER made a presentation to the San Diego County United Veterans Council on the toll felt by the Armed Forces due to the more-than-300 linguist discharges, more than 11,000 discharges total due to DADT, particularly the financial costs of discharging LGB personnel, recruiting, and training the replacements of all those discharged.

While staffing a table at Long Beach Pride, 19-20 May, we had a membership drive and card campaign. The card campaign asked festival attendees to write to their congressional representatives who have not co-sponsored H.R. 1246, asking them to support the bill. On 5 June 2007, Congresswoman Loretta Sanchez (CA-47) signed on as co-sponsor #125.

On Memorial Day, a wreath presentation was made at Fort. Rosecrans National Cemetery on behalf of the chapter.

Ben Gomez  
Pres. San Diego AVER  
elranchoboy@cox.net



Summer in the Northwest might mean endless hours of sunshine, boating, Blue Angels and hydro's but to AVER Puget Sound it means one thing. Pride season. Pride events start in early June and go well into July. Places we never even heard of suddenly roll out the rainbow carpet and host a party. Somehow, there are always women on loud motorcycles and at least one gay vet. We can't visit every event but we sure do try!!

This year was no exception, although with some of our members also pursuing other LGBT rights at the state level, we have not been able to make as many festivals as previously. We hit four total, Seattle, Tacoma, and Kitsap, plus the new addition: Bellingham.

Our monthly meetings and potlucks became planning meetings for whatever was next and we look forward to a nice quiet dinner and a movie at our August meeting.

On 23 June, we had a booth at Seattle's Queer Fest to collect signatures to support ending DADT. We collected about 250 signatures in 6 hours and some potential new members.

On 24 June, we were the Color Guard for the Seattle Pride Parade. Each volunteer wore their uniform, and we had a member of each service for each service flag. I was a little worried about the Marine Flag but the day before a young Marine offered to march with us. Good thing it was an official military function.

Wells Fargo Bank honors one group each year. This year, they decided to honor LGBT veterans. They asked if I knew any gay vets who would like to ride as their guests. We offered the opportunity to LGBT veterans who wanted to participate but were

unable because of physical limitations. Each was also allowed one guest. The Veterans and guests were announced and honored at the reviewing stand in front of thousands. It was very moving and I am grateful to Wells Fargo to offering us this opportunity.

On 14 July, we had a booth at Tacoma Pride, where we collected close to 500 signatures. Maybe it was the uniforms and clipboards! Tacoma has a large Army base - Fort Lewis, and McChord Air Force Base is nearby.

On 15 July, we headed north to Bellingham. Although Bellingham has had a Pride event in the past, this

year was their first parade. The parade organizers had sent a rep to one of our meetings to request AVER provide a color guard. Two volunteers from the local community offered to carry our banner and we were set to go. Although I had to call cadence, we didn't look too bad. To see the video at YouTube.com, type in keywords Bellingham Whatcom First Annual Pride Parade. It's not quite Seattle but we were happy to be there. One of our newer members, Patrick English carried the American Flag and procured a booth for us on the festival grounds.

July 21st brought us across the Sound to Kitsap Pride in Bremerton. We have been going there for several years. This year, we shared a booth with SLDN. Across all 4 events, we collected over 1000 signatures to support the end of DADT.

Our chapter also had a strong showing in support of the HRC's Legacy of Service tour with speakers Eric Alva, Antonio Agnone, Jarrod Chlapowski, Alex Nicholson, and Daniela Dusac. The event was held in downtown Seattle and moderated by our own chapter member RADM Al Steinman.

Judi Carey  
Pres. AVER Puget Sound  
seasii@aol.com



*Bellingham Pride - Booth backdrop painted by Patrick English and members of a befriended local youth group - photo courtesy of Judi Carey*



*RADM Al Steinman, Seattle - HRC's Legacy of Service tour - photo courtesy of Judi Carey*



*Seattle - HRC's Legacy of Service tour speakers: (L-R) Eric Alva, Daniela Dusac, Antonio Agnone, Jarrod Chlapowski, and Alex Nicholson - photo courtesy of Judi Carey*



*Judi Carey, staffing the AVER Puget Sound booth at Seattle's Queer Fest - photo courtesy Judi Carey*



*AVER Florida Gold Coast Chapter, AVER's largest chapter, really wows the crowds with more than twenty members total out to march in the parade - photo courtesy of Dick Rogers*



*The Chicago Chapter of AVER makes its way down the route of Chicago's 38th Annual Pride Parade with GUS - a 30-by-50 foot United States flag - photo courtesy of James Darby*

Missing a photo?  
HOLY COW!  
Where did it go?!

visit the Pride 2007  
photo gallery at  
**[www.aver.us](http://www.aver.us)**  
and see more



*Front line: Barb Howard of AVER-Houston, Annette Malaski of Austin and Eric Blais. Rear line: Dave Guy-Gainer, David Glover, and Robert O. (Bob) Weeks of AVER-SA - photo courtesy of Bob Weeks*



*Sacramento Valley Veterans lined up before the Sacramento Pride Parade, awaiting their motorcycle escort for the official step off - photo courtesy of Ray Allen*

# AVER DIRECTORY

**Executive Board** - *see inside front cover*

**Region I VP Marie Ann Bohusch**

region1vp@aver.us

**Region II VP Danny Ingram**

region2vp@aver.us

**Region III VP Ken Sholes**

region3vp@aver.us

**Region IV VP Ron Clarke**

region4vp@aver.us

**Region V VP Judi Carey**

region5vp@aver.us

**Public Affairs Officer Denny Meyer**

publicaffairs@aver.us

718.849.5665

**VP - Veterans Affairs Denny Meyer**

veteransaffairs@aver.us

718.849.5665

**VP - Chapter Dev. Dave Guy-Gainer**

dg\_dg@sbcglobal.net

**Membership Chair Chief Donovan**

president@aver.us

**Judge Advocate Gen. Bridget Wilson**

bjwlaw@aol.com

**National Archivist Patrick Bova**

pabova@meginet.net

**LOCAL CHAPTERS:**

**CALIFORNIA**

**AVER Palm Springs**

President - Mel Tips

P.O. Box 5012

Palm Springs, CA 92263-5012

760.329.6560

averps@msn.com

**Sacramento Valley Veterans**

President - Raymond Allen

raymond\_allen@sacvalleyveterans.org

www.sacvalleyveterans.org

**AVER San Diego**

President - Ben M. Gomez

4076 Oregon Street, Unit #2

San Diego, CA 92104

619.459.1019

elranchoy@cox.net

www.orgsites.com/ca/aver\_sandiego

**DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

National Capital Chapter

President - Ray Ice

703.625.8475

**FLORIDA**

**AVER - Florida Gold Coast**

President - Mark LaFontaine

P.O. Box 11247

Fort Lauderdale, FL 33339

954.537.3582

info@aver-fgc.us

www.aver-fgc.us

**GEORGIA**

**AVER Georgia** (Atlanta)

President - Danny Ingram

770.584.9006

president@averageorgia.org

www.averageorgia.org

**HAWAII**

**AVER Hawaii**

President - Sean Smith

2092 Kuhio Avenue #1705

Honolulu, HI 96815

808.497.0650

aver@averhawaii.com

www.averhawaii.com

**ILLINOIS**

**Gay Chicago Veterans**

President - James C. Darby

P.O. Box 29317

Chicago, IL 60629

773.752.0058

jamesdarby@aol.com

**MISSOURI**

**Mid-America Pride Veterans and Allies**

President - Nancy Seymour

P.O. Box 58628

St. Louis, MO 63158

314.631.1427

ladysewitch@hotmail.com

www.mapv.org

**NEW MEXICO**

**Bataan Chapter**

President - Steve Loomis

P.O. Box 37024

Albuquerque, NM 87176-7024

505.301.1737

sloomis@swcp.com

www.orgsites.com/nm/bataan-glbva

**NEW YORK**

**AVERNY** (New York)

President - Denny Meyer

P.O. Box 150160

Kew Gardens, NY 11415

718.849.5665

glbtvetsnyc@yahoo.com

www.averny.tripod.com

**OHIO**

Columbus & Central Ohio

**BRAVER**

President - Mike Warner

mwarner1117@wowway.com

**NEO AVER** (Clev/Ak/Can)

President - Marie Ann Bohusch

1012 Prospect Ave Ste. 820

Cleveland, OH 44115

330.247.4102

qcws@neoaver.org

www.neoaver.org

**TEXAS**

**Houston AVER**

President - Barbara Howard

713.973.1986

barb73165@sbcglobal.net

**AVER-SA**

President - Robert Weeks

POB 15642

San Antonio, Texas 78212

210.558.4845

r\_weeks78230@sbcglobal.net

www.aversanantonio.com

**South Texas**

President - Dan Pugh

SittingBull@the-i.net

**WASHINGTON**

**AVER Puget Sound**

President - Judi Carey

1122 East Pike St

PMB 890

Seattle WA 98122

425.818.4770

seasii@aol.com

www.averpugetsound.org

**CHAPTERS IN FORMATION**

**DE-Rehoboth Beach**

- region2vp@aver.us

**FL - Tampa**

- region2vp@aver.us

**MN - Twin Cities**

- region3vp@aver.us

**NY - Rochester**

- region1vp@aver.us

**TX - Austin**

- region4vp@aver.us



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# TAPS

## *In memory of a member of America's Greatest Generation*

New York, 9 July 2007,  
By Denny Meyer  
originally seen at  
[www.thegaymilitarytimes.com](http://www.thegaymilitarytimes.com)  
photos courtesy of Denny Meyer



One of my troopers died last week; he was 92 years old. He was a World War II veteran who was drafted into the Army as a boy Private in 1941, and retired a lifetime later as a Major in 1974. I attribute his longevity to the fact that he proudly celebrated everything that he was; he simply didn't worry. He was an American soldier, Jewish, and gay. Last year In the New York City Pride and Veterans' Day parades, when I offered Willet Fields, aged 91 at the time, a sign saying "GAY WWII VET," he eagerly snatched it out of my hands, held it high, and led our contingent with it down Fifth Avenue as a million spectators cheered him on. Policemen guarding the parade route left their posts to shake his hand; and thousands shouted, "Thank you for

serving!" Everyone was inspired. He so very proudly celebrated who he was. He was a sweet little teddy bear of a man with white hair and a barrel chest that everyone wanted to hug.

During and after World War II, Willet Fields served in the Philippines and in the Allied occupation of Germany. He was just another soldier -- unless you happened to take a look at the faded ribbons on his old garrison cap that he proudly wore in our parades; and you would see a WWII medal, American Defense Ribbon, Asiatic Pacific Campaign Ribbon, American Campaign Ribbon, National Defense Ribbon, German Occupation Ribbon, The Armed Forces Reserve Medal, Philippines Liberation Ribbon with Bronze Star, and The Philippine Independence Ribbon.

His relatives, who organized his funeral service, celebrated his life his way. His coffin was draped in an American flag to honor his long service to his country. The female Rabbi conducting the service was from his LGBT congregation. The service was attended by many relatives who flew in from around the country, and by nearly 100 gay and lesbian friends of all ages from SAGE (Senior Action in a Gay Environment), his synagogue CBST (Congregation Beth Simchat



Torah), those he'd worked with in the organization Sons of Israel, and his fellow LGBT Vets -members of AVER (American Veterans For Equal Rights New York). A memorial was held in his honor at the LGBT Community Center in NYC, and another was later held across the country in Los Angeles. For Willet Fields, the inevitable was a triumph rather than a tragedy because his life as a soldier, beloved and caring cousin, fundraiser, and gay rights activist was celebrated in all its fullness.

He so very much wanted to march with us again this coming November in the Veterans' Day Parade; you can be sure he'll be with us. I miss him already.

A story written one year ago about Willet Fields is archived at:  
[www.thegaymilitarytimes.com](http://www.thegaymilitarytimes.com)



### **About Taps:**

This section is reserved for obituaries and articles for AVER members who have died since the last issue date, and as well as any prior deaths we have learned of too late for inclusion in previous issues.. We will do our best to include any deaths of which we are notified, but will **always** respect the privacy of any veteran who was not entirely "out" to family.

Please mail obituaries and/or articles to:  
AVER Membership, P.O. Box 97,  
Plainville, IL 62365.  
email: [editor@aver.us](mailto:editor@aver.us)

# Military Readiness Enhancement Act of 2007

(110th Congress H.R. 1246)

HR 1246 IH  
110th CONGRESS  
1st Session  
H. R. 1246

## IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

### A BILL

To amend title 10, United States Code, to enhance the readiness of the Armed Forces by replacing the current policy concerning homosexuality in the Armed Forces, referred to as 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell', with a policy of nondiscrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

### SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the 'Military Readiness Enhancement Act of 2007'.

### SEC. 2. PURPOSE.

The purpose of this Act is to institute in the Armed Forces a policy of nondiscrimination based on sexual orientation.

### SEC. 3. REPEAL OF 1993 POLICY CONCERNING HOMOSEXUALITY IN THE ARMED FORCES.

The following provisions of law are repealed:

(1) Section 654 of title 10, United States Code.

(2) Subsections (b), (c), and (d) of section 571 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1994 (10 U.S.C. 654 note).

### SEC. 4. ESTABLISHMENT OF POLICY OF NONDISCRIMINATION BASED ON SEXUAL ORIENTATION IN THE ARMED FORCES.

(a) Establishment of Policy- (1) Chapter 37 of title 10, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new section:

'Sec. 656. Policy of nondiscrimination based on sexual orientation

'(a) Policy- The Secretary of Defense, and the Secretary of Homeland Security with respect to the Coast Guard when it is not operating as a service in the Navy, may not discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation against any member of the armed forces or against any person seeking to become a member of the armed forces.

'(b) Discrimination on Basis of Sexual Orientation - For purposes of this section, discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is--

'(1) in the case of a member of the armed forces, the taking of any personnel or administrative action (including any action relating to promotion, demotion, evaluation, selection for an award, selection for

a duty assignment, transfer, or separation) in whole or in part on the basis of sexual orientation; and

'(2) in the case of a person seeking to become a member of the armed forces, denial of accession into the armed forces in whole or in part on the basis of sexual orientation.

'(c) Personnel and Administrative Policies and Action- The Secretary of Defense, and the Secretary of Homeland Security with respect to the Coast Guard when it is not operating as a service in the Navy, may not establish, implement, or apply any personnel or administrative policy, or take any personnel or administrative action (including any policy or action relating to promotions, demotions, evaluations, selections for awards, selections for duty assignments, transfers, or separations) in whole or in part on the basis of sexual orientation.

'(d) Rules and Policies Regarding Conduct- Nothing in this section prohibits the Secretary of Defense, and the Secretary of Homeland Security with respect to the Coast Guard when it is not operating as a service in the Navy, from prescribing or enforcing regulations governing the conduct of members of the armed forces if the regulations are designed and applied without regard to sexual orientation.

'(e) Re-Accession of Otherwise Qualified Persons Permitted- Any person separated from the armed forces for homosexuality, bisexuality, or homosexual conduct in accordance with laws and regulations in effect before the date of the enactment of this section, if otherwise qualified for re-accession into the armed forces, shall not be prohibited from re-accession into the armed forces on the sole basis of such separation.

'(f) Sexual Orientation- In this section, the term 'sexual orientation' means heterosexuality, homosexuality, or bisexuality, whether the orientation is real or perceived, and includes statements and consensual sexual conduct manifesting heterosexuality, homosexuality, or bisexuality.'

(2) The table of sections at the beginning of such chapter is amended--

(A) by striking the item relating to section 654; and

(B) by adding at the end the following new item:

'656. Policy of nondiscrimination based on sexual orientation in the armed forces.'

(b) Conforming Amendments- Title 10, United States Code, is amended as follows:

(1) Section 481 is amended--

(A) In subsection (a)(2), by inserting ', including sexual orientation discrimination,' after 'discrimination' in subparagraphs (C) and (D); and

(B) in subsection (c), by inserting 'and sexual orientation-based' after 'gender-based' both places it appears.

(2) Section 983(a)(1) is amended by striking '(in accordance with section 654 of this title and other applicable Federal laws)'.

(3) Section 1034(i)(3) is amended by inserting 'sexual orientation,' after 'sex,'.

### SEC. 5. BENEFITS.

Nothing in this Act, or the amendments made by this Act, shall be construed to require the furnishing of dependent benefits in violation of section 7 of title 1, United States Code (relating to the definitions of 'marriage' and 'spouse' and referred to as the 'Defense of Marriage Act').

### SEC. 6. NO PRIVATE CAUSE OF ACTION FOR DAMAGES.

Nothing in this Act, or the amendments made by this Act, shall be construed to create a private cause of action for damages.

### SEC. 7. REGULATIONS.

(a) In General- Not later than 90 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Defense shall revise Department of Defense regulations, and shall issue such new regulations as may be necessary, to implement section 656 of title 10, United States Code, as added by section 4(a). The Secretary of Defense shall further direct the Secretary of each military department to revise regulations of that military department in accordance with section 656 of title 10, United States Code, as added by section 4(a), not later than 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act. Such revisions shall include the following:

(1) Revision of all equal opportunity and human relations regulations, directives, and instructions to add sexual orientation nondiscrimination to the Department of Defense Equal Opportunity policy and to related human relations training programs.

(2) Revision of Department of Defense and military department personnel regulations to eliminate procedures for involuntary discharges based on sexual orientation.

(3) Revision of Department of Defense and military department regulations governing victims' advocacy programs to include sexual orientation discrimination among the forms of discrimination for which members of the Armed Forces and their families may seek assistance.

(b) Regulation of Conduct- The Secretary of Defense, and the Secretary of Homeland Security with respect to the Coast Guard when it is not operating as a service in the Navy, shall ensure that regulations governing the personal conduct of members of the Armed Forces shall be written and enforced without regard to sexual orientation.

(c) Definition- In this section, the term 'sexual orientation' has the meaning given that term in section 656(f) of title 10, United States Code, as added by section 4(a).

# Vietnam Veterans Memorial

## 25th Anniversary

Join us for a weekend in Washington DC to help in the remembrance of

### The Vietnam Veterans Memorial

**November 9th to the 12th**

We have secured a few rooms at one of the premier hotels in DC

#### The Beacon Hotel

Rates are 159 dollars a night single or double occupancy

Reception to be held Saturday afternoon (time and place TBD)

**Sunday November 11th - AVER will be presenting a wreath in honor of all those who have served and have fallen in silence.**

General Colin L. Powell (USA Ret) and other guest speakers  
will be attending the anniversary remembrance

Immediately afterwards, we will be assembling in a local club to remember those who have passed and celebrate in the memory of the times we shared.

For AVER group information and schedule, please RSVP to *vp@aver.us*

AVER is a grass roots, all volunteer group of veterans striving for equality for all those who have served in uniform for the United States of America, past, present and future. Our only sources of income are membership dues and donations/grants. All of our officers travel throughout their regions and cross-country for pertinent conferences, conventions and activities at their own expense. No one receives a salary.

#### **Becoming an AVER sponsor:**

To make an online donation, please visit the AVER national web site and click on the menu link (*left*) marked "sponsors," or on the donation link located near the bottom of our News column (*right*).

Checks and money orders can be mailed to: **American Veterans for Equal Rights**, P. O. Box 1490  
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