American Veterans for Equal Rights (AVER) Chicago Collection

Creator: American Veterans for Equal Rights Chicago
Dates: 1990-2005
Quantity: 0.75 linear feet
Acquisition: Donated by James Darby, February 2006
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Language: English
Finding Aid: Written by Rebecca Redinger, June 2008; Updated by Katie Latham, 2014; Updated by Andrea Martinez, 2018

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Historical Note

The American Veterans for Equal Rights (AVER), formerly known as the Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Veterans of America (GLBVA), is a non-profit, chapter-based association of active, reserve and veteran service members whose stated mission is to advance equal rights and equitable treatment for all present and former members of the U.S. Armed Forces. The organization was founded on May 17, 1990 by lesbian activist and former U.S. Army Sgt. Miriam Ben-Shalom, along with the assistance of four gay and one bisexual veteran. The following year, when Ben-Shalom was elected the organization’s president, she began traveling the country, creating new chapters and laying the groundwork for a National Constitution and By-laws.

In 1993, GLBVA participated in the largest LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered) demonstration ever held in the United States—the 1993 March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay, and Bi Equal Rights and Liberation. It was there that GLBVA held its first National Convention—an event that was to be held annually. In addition to organizational meetings and the electing of new officers, members of
GLBVA participated in wreath laying ceremonies at Arlington and Congressional Cemeteries, and a White House demonstration in opposition to the Ban against Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual service members openly serving in the military. Thirty people were arrested including three members of GLBVA: Miriam Ben-Shalom, Jim Darby and Don MacIver.

Since 1994, GLBVA has conducted yearly National Convention meetings in various cities across the United States. They have also participated in Joiner Conferences on the Concerts of Veterans and a variety of LGBT veterans events in Washington D.C. In 2001, GLBVA donated $2,200 to the WWII Memorial in honor veterans, particularly gay veterans, whose service has been overlooked.

At the 2002 National Convention, GLBVA delegates voted to change its name to American Veterans for Equal Rights (AVER), a more suitable acronym. Later that year, AVER was asked to participate in the Library of Congress Veterans History Project—an oral history project set up to record the memories of United States Veterans.

AVER continues to have a strong presence in the LGBT community and actively campaigns to overturn the ban against Gays and Lesbians in the military and “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” legislation.

**AVER Chicago**

The Chicago chapter of AVER was founded in June 1992 by James Darby and Bill McGarry. The chapter has become an effective advocate for LGBT veterans in the Chicago area, provided moral, financial, and social support.

AVER Chicago has helped to initiate and plan the City of Chicago’s Annual Salutes to LGBT Veterans, the first of which was held in 2003. Since then, the group has become an important co-sponsor. Every year, members of AVER Chicago march in the city’s Memorial Day Parade as an openly LGBT contingent. They also take part in the Pride Parade, held each summer in Chicago. AVER have been active participants of the parade since 1992, carrying their huge American flag, which has been fondly nicknamed “Gus.”

In 2006 AVER donated copies of its monthly newsletter, *VetPride*, and the national publication, *The Forward Observer* to the Pritzker Military Library, Gerber/Hart Library, and Chicago History Museum to ensure that LGBT veterans will be and remain part of the city’s historical record. In 2007 AVER was inducted into the Chicago Gay and Lesbian Hall of Fame.
Scope and Content of the Collection

The collection contains newsletters and related documents from the Chicago chapter of the American Veterans for Equal Rights. These publications include *Vet Pride* and *The Forward Observer*. The collection also contains a brief historic overview of the organization, and an accretion folder for recent mailings, etc.

Arrangement

The collection arrived with a well-ordered arrangement, which the PMML staff have maintained. Folder Two contains the original purple content folders.

The collection is organized in three series:

Series One: Organizational Administration

Series Two: Publications

Series Three: Accretions—Miscellaneous Mailings

Rights

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Related Collections

Robert C. Baldridge Collection

Key Subjects

This collection is indexed under the following headings in the Library’s online catalog. Researchers interested in materials about related topics, persons, or places should search the catalog using these subject headings.

Names

Ben-Shalom, Miriam
Darby, James
American Veterans for Equal Rights (AVER)
Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Veterans of America (GLBVA)

VetPride

The Forward Observer

Subjects

Civil-military relations-- United States
Gay rights-- United States
Soldiers-- United States-- Conduct of life
United States-- Armed Forces-- Gays-- Government policy
United States-- Military policy

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A Personal Message from the National President

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VetPride - Aver Newsletter