



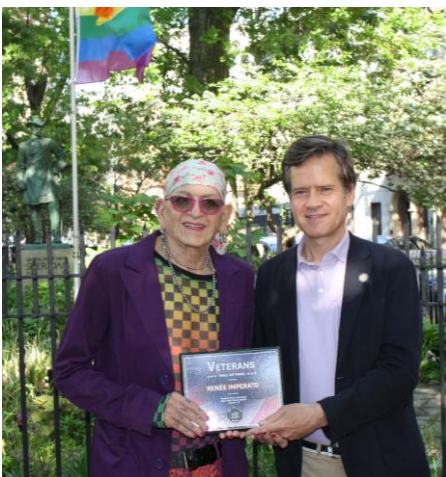
# SAGEVets Newsletter

sage | Advocacy &  
Services for  
LGBT Elders  
We refuse to be invisible™

Summer 2021

## Dear SAGE Veterans and Friends:

As we enjoy the last month of summer 2021, we pause to reflect on the work we have accomplished over this last quarter. SAGEVets programming for Memorial Day and Pride Month kept us focused on why our services are so important...this is *a one of a kind program!* Advocating for older LGBT veterans is not only necessary; it is crucial to improving equity within the American culture. This message resonated powerfully during our Memorial Day activities, including a ceremony for [SAGE veteran Renée Imperato](#), who was inducted into the New York State Senate Veterans' Hall of Fame last November. Renée's remarks stressed that, "this is not a beginning for equal rights, it is a continuation." She also expressed her dedication to advocating for 100% entitlements in health care for *all* veterans. SAGEVets also hosted a virtual program, [Finding Access to Veteran Benefits and Healthcare during COVID-19](#). The New York State Division of Veterans' Services, VOLS (Volunteers of Legal Service), and NYC Health & Hospitals joined us to share updates on how services for LGBT veterans have changed due to the pandemic. I was honored to be invited to speak at the *Veteran Memorial Day Rally* hosted by Black Veterans for Social Justice, joining BVSJ Founder Job Mashariki, CEO Wendy McClinton, Congressman Hakeem Jeffries, Assemblymember Stefani Zinerman, and Brooklyn DA Eric Gonzalez. SAGEVets was also fully engaged during Pride Month – please see the full report below.



SAGE veteran Renée Imperato & New York State Senator Brad Hoylman

The veteran community also experienced some turbulence this quarter. There was a shakeup within the NYC Council Committee on Veterans that led to the early departure of Chair Chaim Deutsch and Citywide Veterans Director Joe Bello, both of whom we thank for their steadfast support of SAGEVets and NYC Veterans. We welcome Councilmember Eric Dinowitz as the new Chair and look forward to continuing our work with the Committee on Veterans. Lastly, Shawanna Boyd, U.S. Army National Guard veteran and Care Manager at SAGE who facilitated our weekly Veteran Support Group, has left SAGE to pursue her Ph.D. We wish her well and

thank her for her amazing work with the SAGEVets program.

We have some exciting virtual and in-person events coming up! Please take a look at the Upcoming Events section and stop by and say hello when we are in your area.

Stay strong and battle on,  
Ashton Stewart, SAGEVets Program Manager



## UPCOMING EVENTS

SAGEVets is coming to your town! Stop by and say, "Hi!" either virtually or in-person when we are at an event near you. And thank you for sharing our invitations with your listserv!

- August 13: 10am-1pm  
[Veterans Stand Down City of Rochester, NY.](#)
- August 21: 4pm-8pm  
[Hudson Valley Veteran Appreciation Day](#)
- August 31: 6pm-7:30pm  
[SAGEVets in Central and Western New York Virtual Launch Party!](#)
- September 18: 10am-1pm  
[Middletown, NY Elks Lodge Veterans Stand Down](#)
- Sept. 6-12 [Suicide Prevention & Awareness Week – Rochester, NY](#)
- [New York State Fair](#)  
SAGEVets will have a table set up on Pride Day (8/27) and Armed Forces Day (9/2).

**Please take a moment** to complete a quick survey about this newsletter. We would love to hear from you:  
<http://sageusa.org/sagevets-survey>

---

## SAGEVets News & Updates:

Through our work with older LGBT veterans, we recently discovered the existence of a policy that provides no safety net for LGBT veterans who were discharged from service prematurely. Since September 7, 1980, the minimum active duty service requirement for eligibility for VA healthcare is 24 months of continuous active duty (unless ordered for another period of time). Even with a discharge upgrade, those discharged for sexual orientation or gender identity could be considered ineligible. Since discovering this gap, we have been working with the NYS Division of Veterans' Services and the NYC Department of Veterans' Services on advocating for a policy change. Since 1980, close to 40K veterans have been discharged from active duty service short of the two-year requirement. We are seeing progress in making a legislative change and hope to see this policy gap corrected soon.

SAGEVets assisted a legally blind veteran with a little-known veteran benefit, the New York State Blind Annuity Program. We helped the veteran gather the required documentation and prepared his application for the New York State Division of Veterans' Services. We are currently working with a second veteran who also qualifies for this program. Please feel free to reach out to us should you have questions about eligibility.

We received news that a second SAGE veteran's Restoration of Honor Act application was approved in July! This victory has restored the veteran's sense of pride for his service and makes him eligible for the blind annuity benefit! We thank the attorneys at Patterson Belknap Webb & Tyler LLP who helped make this possible. We were also delighted to learn that a SAGE veteran previously rated at 50% disability was increased to 80% thanks to the phenomenal work by the NYS Division of Veterans' Services! This case is ongoing, and we are hopeful that the rating will soon be increased to a full 100%.

Finally, SAGEVets was honored to be recognized by Governor Cuomo for our work with older LGBT veterans this past Memorial Day with a special Proclamation.

### **Newsletter notes: Pushing for Policies that Improve the Experiences of Older LGBT Vets**

New York's [Restoration of Honor Act](#) continues to become more accessible with a recent amendment signed by Governor Cuomo on June 2 ([A.2014/S448](#)) that will make it easier for eligible veterans to qualify for this benefit by permitting a qualifying diagnosis from New York licensed medical professionals, ending the requirement to receive this diagnosis solely from the VA.

Please also urge your legislators to support an important bill that bolsters the Restoration of Honor Act: the Pension Buy-Back bill – [A9640/ S8280](#) that aims to “extend the Retirement and Social Security Law, in relation to providing credit for military service to members of the State public retirement systems.”

# sageVets

Western and Central New York

This is an exciting year for SAGEVets as we continue to develop the program with support from partners across the state. Last year was our first official partnership with SAGE affiliate SAGE Upstate and we are delighted to be continuing our work with Kim, Dan, and Rita again this fiscal year! As we develop new relationships with senior groups, recovery programs, and veteran service providers, we hope to welcome many new faces into our SAGEVets family.

In addition, we have a new SAGEVets Outreach Coordinator helping us promote the program in the Finger Lakes and Western New York regions. It is an honor to welcome Wanda Martinez-Johncox, former LGBT Veteran Care Coordinator for the Canandaigua, Bath, and Rochester VA to the SAGEVets team! Wanda worked for the VA for almost eleven years and received many awards for her advocacy work with LGBT veterans, including the *I CARE* award, the *Caregiver of the Year* award, the *Phenomenal Woman* Award, and the Empire State Pride Agenda's *Community Champions* award. We are thrilled with our SAGEVets team and look forward to a productive year.

For more information please visit:

<https://www.sageupstate.org/>

## SAGEVets Spotlight

In 1962, when the war in Vietnam was escalating, Robyn Jordan was drafted into the US Army. She was stationed in Germany and was fortunate enough to not see any combat. However, Robyn faced other battles during her service. Racism and prejudice were rampant in the ranks, and Robyn quickly developed her own strategy to protect herself and hide who she was. "You learn to force yourself to go to sleep" Robyn recounts, "and I had to learn how to overtake people bigger than me to not let down my fellow soldiers." Robyn's courage and intellect are what carried her through her time in the service and as a civilian.

Robyn is an accomplished artist and photographer with an impressive portfolio. As one of the first African American women working for *Redbook* magazine and with the late Helen Mann-Wright, editor of *Leica Photography* magazine, she is a trailblazer. Despite these successes, Robyn struggled and found herself briefly homeless. In 2019, at the age of 75, Robyn reached out to SAGE seeking support in her search for affordable housing and in her 25-year quest to have gender-affirming surgery. SAGE assisted her every step of the way, helping her prepare applications and gathering supporting documents for low-income housing programs. We also provided moral support and help with navigating the multitude of appointments and health exams to ensure she was fit enough for the surgery and a full recovery.

Remarkably, at the age of 76, Robyn completed her



U.S Specialist Robyn Jordan

surgery last October, one month before we helped her move into her new home at SAGE's Stonewall House, a low-income, LGBT-friendly residence in Fort Greene, Brooklyn.

Robyn was honorably discharged in 1964. Her courage and wit are profound. She is a wonderful conversationalist and storyteller. Recently, Robyn represented SAGEVets at the National Conference for Homeless Veterans (NCHV) where she shared her traumatic story about being forced into a men's homeless shelter, and she offered policy recommendations to help people like her so that they wouldn't have to face the same humiliation. We thank Wendy McClinton and Black Veterans for Social Justice for connecting SAGEVets and Robyn to the NCHV. Please join us as we salute Robyn for her courage and inspiration!

---

## SAGEVets: Pride Month Recap

SAGEVets hit the ground running this Pride Month with a virtual event taking place on June 2<sup>nd</sup> for the [Delaware Valley Veterans Consortium](#). Ashton presented along with [Kristin Beck](#) (first known female Navy Seal) and Donald Gallagher, LGBT Veteran Care Coordinator at the Corporal Michael J. Crescenz VA in Philadelphia. There are no programs for LGBT veterans in the Delaware Valley region, making this an important event for SAGEVets to be part of. We hope to soon see a link to this passionate presentation that illuminated challenges faced by older LGBT veterans seeking healthcare, dignity, and respect.

A big thank you to the Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum for including SAGEVets in their Book Club event honoring Pride with a reading and discussion of the groundbreaking classic, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II*, by Alan Bérubé. We thank SAGE veteran, WWII hero, and acclaimed poet Edward Field for joining us! Thank you also to our friends at the Intrepid for including SAGEVets in their [Pride Month blog!](#)

Additionally, [Ashton was interviewed by D. Sandberg](#), Host & Producer of "Let's Talk Vets" at WJFF Catskills Radio, tabled at a Veterans Stand Down in Dutchess County, and gave presentations for the Hudson Valley Veterans Task Force, and the Northport VA in Long Island as part of their recognition of Pride Month.

## SAGE Programming

Learn more about our resources for LGBT elders and SAGE's work at <http://sageusa.org>. For programs that are specific to New York, visit <http://sagenyc.org>.

### Caregiving

Many people don't think they are caregivers, but if you are assisting your partner, spouse, friend or neighbor with shopping, escort services, laundry, household chores, cleaning or just regular check-ins, you fit the description. If you are a caregiver, or if someone is helping you, SAGE can help through its Caregiving support program. We provide counseling, support groups, case management, and can help pay for respite homecare, group socialization or specialized items. For more information [click here](#) or call 212-741-2247 and ask for the Care Manager on duty. SAGE's Caregiving Program is funded through the New York City Department for the Aging.

### Veteran Support Group (VSG) – Now offered as a telephone meeting! Fridays from 2 – 3 pm

Please contact Ashton Stewart for call-in information [astewart@sageusa.org](mailto:astewart@sageusa.org), and join us for engaged, casual conversation.

Finally, please take the time to fill out a quick survey on the SAGEVets newsletter. Your opinion matters>> <http://sageusa.org/sagevets-survey>

## New York State SAGE Affiliates

### SAGE Hudson Valley

300 Wall Street  
Kingston, NY 12402  
845-331-5300  
[programs@lgbtqcenter.org](mailto:programs@lgbtqcenter.org)

### SAGE Long Island

125 Kennedy Drive, Suite #100  
Hauppauge, NY 11781  
631-665-2300  
[koneill@lgbtnetwork.org](mailto:koneill@lgbtnetwork.org)

### SAGE Rochester

100 College Avenue, Suite #100  
Rochester, NY 14607  
585-244-8640  
[SAGE@outalliance.org](mailto:SAGE@outalliance.org)

### SAGE Upstate

431 E. Fayette Street, Suite #050  
Syracuse, NY 13202  
315-478-1923  
[lsloan@sageusa.org](mailto:lsloan@sageusa.org)

## New York City SAGE Centers

### Edie Windsor SAGE Center – Manhattan

305 Seventh Avenue, 15th Floor  
New York, NY 10001  
646-576-8669  
[info@sageusa.org](mailto:info@sageusa.org)

### SAGE Center Bronx at Crotona Pride House

1784 Prospect Avenue  
Bronx, NY 10457  
[jcollazo@sageusa.org](mailto:jcollazo@sageusa.org)

### SAGE Center – Harlem

220 West 143rd Street  
New York, NY 10030  
646-660-8954  
[sageharlem@sageusa.org](mailto:sageharlem@sageusa.org)

### SAGE Center Brooklyn at Stonewall House

271 Myrtle Ave  
Brooklyn, NY 11201  
212-741-2247  
[sagebrooklyn@sageusa.org](mailto:sagebrooklyn@sageusa.org)

### SAGE-GRIOT Senior Center – Brooklyn

GRIOT Circle, Inc.  
25 Flatbush Avenue, 5th Floor  
Brooklyn, NY 11217  
718-246-2775  
[reunion@griotcircle.org](mailto:reunion@griotcircle.org)

### SAGE-Pride Center of Staten Island

Pride Center of Staten Island  
25 Victory Boulevard, 3rd Floor  
Staten Island, NY 10301  
718-808-1365  
[lsloan@sageusa.org](mailto:lsloan@sageusa.org)

*SAGEVets programs are made possible by public funds facilitated by the New York City Council's Committee on Veterans, the New York State Legislature and the Grace J. Fippinger Foundation.*

 Advocacy & Services for LGBT Elders  
**We refuse to be invisible®**