

THE ROAD TO VICTORY

A timeline of historic moments in LGBTQ elected history in the Chicago area



1980: Tim Drake was the first openly gay Chicagoan to win an election, as convention delegate for John Anderson's presidential bid. Drake was a Republican activist at the time. Gay businessman and Democratic

activist Chuck Renslow ran as an Edward Kennedy delegate.

1993: Marc Loveless, an African-American gay man, won a local school council post.

1994: Tom Chiola became the first openly gay person to win major public office in Illinois, when he won a seat on the bench of the Cook County Circuit Court. Cook County has one of the highest concentrations

of openly LGBTQ judges in the country, according to the Alliance of Illinois Judges.

1996: Larry McKeon became the state's first openly gay (and openly HIV-positive) state legislator,

when a north-side district elected him to the House of Representatives.

1996: Sebastian Patti became a judge, and in 2009 he took his seat as the first openly gay appellate court justice.

1997: Joanne Trapani became the first open lesbian elected to office in Illinois, as a member of the Oak Park Village Board, and in 2001 she became Village Board president—the state's first openly lesbian

mayor. Also that year, an openly gay man, Ray Johnson, won a trustee post in Oak Park.

1999: Nancy Katz was the first open lesbian judge in the state, after being appointed

as an associate judge of the Cook County Circuit Court.

2003: Tom Tunney was appointed the city's first openly gay alderman, and he has run successful

re-election campaigns ever since.

2004: Sherry Pethers became the first open lesbian elected to a judgeship when she won a tight race in Cook County.

2006: Debra Shore made history by being the first open lesbian elected to a countywide seat as a commissioner of the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District.

JUDICIAL PRIDE

There is a large and historic concentration of openly LGBTQ people who have served or who are currently serving on the bench in Illinois. Charter members of the LGBTQ group Alliance of Illinois Judges are: **Hon. Eileen Brewer** (Ret.); **Hon. Cheryl D. Cesario** (Ret.); **Hon. Tom Chiola** (Ret.); **Hon. Sophia H. Hall**; **Hon. Nancy J. Katz** (Ret.); **Hon. Stuart Katz**; **Hon. Norene Love** (Ret.); **Hon. Mike McHale**; **Hon. Sandra R. Otaka** (deceased); **Hon. Sebastian T. Patti**; **Hon. Sherry Pethers** (Ret.); **Hon. Mary Colleen Roberts**; **Hon. James Snyder** (first openly gay president of the Illinois Judges Association); **Hon. Colleen Sheehan**; and **Hon. Lori M. Wolfson** (Ret). Also of note: In 2012, **Mary M. Rowland** was sworn in as Federal Magistrate Judge, U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois. She is one of very few out LGBT people to be appointed to serve as a federal judge in the country.



Above: Hon. Mary M. Rowland.
Below (L-R): Hon. James Snyder; Hon. Norene Love; Hon. Mike McHale.

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BEHIND THE LAVENDER DOOR

Abraham Lincoln (1809–1865): Rumors abound about the orientation of the 16th president of the U.S. But some historians believe he was either gay or bisexual. (See C.A. Tripp's 2005 book, *The Intimate World of Abraham Lincoln.*)

Pearl M. Hart (1890–1975): Studs Terkel managed one of her failed attempts for a City Council seat (she ran in 1947 and 1951), then she twice ran unsuccessfully for judge. She is in the Chicago LGBT Hall of Fame.



Eddie Rosewell (1927–1999): The Cook County treasurer's career ended in disgrace when he hired a former window washer to a high-level job—a closeted man who paid a public price.

Lilia Delgado: While not fully out of the closet, Delgado was known in the community. Mayor Harold Washington knew she was gay when he appointed her to the city's Cable Commission. She ran for Cook County Board of Commissioners in 1987, coming within 5,000 votes of one of the ten seats (at the time, Chicago board seats were elected citywide).



Judy Rice, who is now a Cook County judge, was the Chicago city treasurer 2000–2006, but came out after she served.

These lists are not meant to be comprehensive, but rather highlight certain significant elections and "firsts" in area history.

More than 100 openly LGBTQ people have run for office to major posts in Illinois, from judicial seats to city councils and county, state and federal offices. While those efforts started decades ago, the onset of the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s really kick-started the regional LGBTQ movement into action on a variety of fronts, not just in health-care advocacy, but in politics and beyond. But who were the first to break down the closet doors and take their seats at the table? Here are the highlights.



2006: Openly gay, HIV-positive activist **Greg Harris**, who was appointed to complete Larry McKeon's term in the General Assembly, was later elected and continues to serve, making history in 2019 as the first openly

gay majority leader of the state House of Representatives.

2009: Open lesbian **Deb Mell** won a state representative post, serving until 2013, when she was appointed by Mayor Rahm Emanuel to fill

the 33rd Ward aldermanic seat vacated by her father, Dick Mell. She won re-election in 2015 and is in a runoff April 2.

2009: **Marge Paul** was elected as an open lesbian alderman in suburban Berwyn. In

2017 she was elected city clerk in the same election where four LGBTQ candidates won for city council.

2009: **Mark Tendam** won election to the Evanston City Council, becoming the suburb's first

openly gay elected official.

2011: **Kelly Cassidy** was first appointed to a state representative post, and she has won re-election every cycle since.

2011: **James Cappleman** was

elected alderman of the 46th Ward.

2012: **Sam Yingling** won a suburban seat for state representative in the 62nd district.

2015: Two openly gay men won seats on the Chicago

City Council in the same cycle: **Raymond Lopez** (15th) and **Carlos Ramirez-Rosa** (35th); they are the first Latino/x out LGBTQs on the City Council.

2018: **Lamont Robinson** became the first African-American

LGBTQ person to win a major non-judicial elected post in Illinois when he won for 5th district state representative.

2018: **Kevin Morrison** became the first openly LGBTQ member of the Cook County Board.

2018: **Marcelino Garcia** became the first LGBTQ person of color elected to the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District.

2019: **Maria Hadden** unseated longtime incumbent 49th Ward alderman Joe Moore to be the first openly LGBTQ African-American elected to Chicago's City Council and first African-American LGBTQ woman elected to a nonjudicial post in Illinois.

2019: The fact that **Lori Lightfoot**, an openly LGBTQ African-American woman, even made it to a runoff for mayor was historic and hardly predictable decades ago. But now, she may make more history as the first openly LGBTQ person to win election as mayor of Chicago, the nation's third-largest city.

ONLY IN HORSESHOES

Your can't win if you don't run ... and a few bold LGBTQ people paved the way for what would be the first openly LGBTQ person to win in Illinois.

1971: **Michael Bergeron**, later founder of *The Chicago Gay Crusader* newspaper, ran for at-large delegate to the Democratic National Convention.

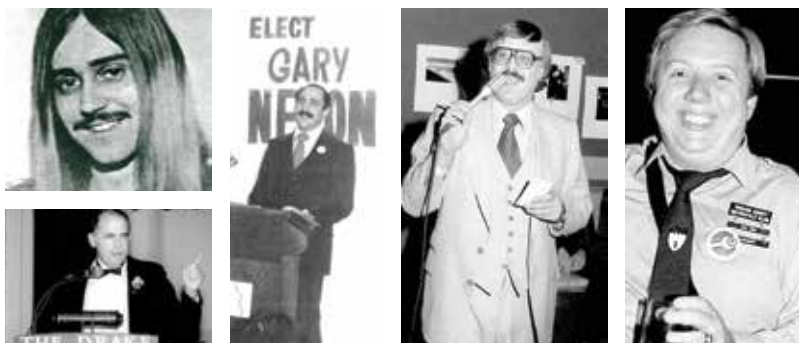
1974: Radical gays **Don "Red Devil" Goldman** and **Nancy Davis** ran for alderman in the 44th and 43rd wards, respectively.

1977: **Gary Nepon**, at age 28, ran for 13th District state representative.

1979: **Grant Ford** (who passed away this year), publisher of *GayLife* newspaper, ran for 44th Ward alderman.

1987: Baton Show Lounge owner **Jim Flint** ran a widely covered race for Cook County Board, when city seats ran citywide.

1987 and 1991: **Dr. Ron Sable** came within a few dozen votes of unseating incumbent 44th Ward alderman Bernie Hansen in his first race, but lost by a wider margin in 1991; he died in 1993 of AIDS complications.



From left: Michael Bergeron (above); Dr. Ron Sable (below); Gary Nepon; Grant Ford; Jim Flint.

A joint project by the *Chicago Reader* and *Windy City Times*

For more details, see *Out and Proud in Chicago: An Overview of the City's Gay Community*, edited by Tracy Baim



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