



Chicago Pride Parade Grand Marshal Announced

Chicago, IL - Eric Alva, openly gay ex-Marine, and activist, is the Grand Marshal of this year's Chicago 39th Annual Pride Parade on Sunday June 29 at 12 Noon.

Eric is best known for coming out in 2007 and joining Congressman Martin Meehan in introducing the Military Readiness Enhancement Act, a bill designed to repeal the military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy.

Before that day, Eric who was born in 1970 in San Antonio, Texas, decided to join the United States Marines after graduating from high school and attending community college for two semesters. After serving in Somalia during Operation Restore Hope in 1992 and 1993, and ten years of being stationed in Japan and California, Eric was called upon to serve in the Iraq War.

In January 2003, in the build-up to the war, Eric's unit, the 3rd Battalion 7th Marines, was deployed to the Middle east. His unit was among the first to cross the border of Kuwait into Iraq for the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Three hours into the ground war, near the city of Basra, his unit stopped to rest. While stepping out of his vehicle, Eric triggered a landmine. The violent explosion threw him from the vehicle with a broken left leg, a nerve damaged right arm and a badly injured right leg that was later amputated. He had become the first American wounded in the war, and the war's first Purple Heart recipient.

After 13 years of military service, retiring as a Staff Sergeant, Eric Alva went back to college to finish his degree. While at school, he decided to be true to himself and help others, coming out as gay. In February of 2007 he joined Congressman Meehan in his efforts to repeal the military's, "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy. With this step, he openly admitted to the military and the world that he is a gay man, and one that had served and proudly sacrificed for his country.

Eric took a courageous step towards fighting for the rights of GLBT Americans, and in particular, for those who have served and are currently serving in the military, but are unable to be true to themselves. His goal is to help achieve civil rights for all citizens of the United States.

Eric is the national spokesperson for the Human Rights Campaign fight to repeal the military's discriminatory GLBT policy. Since coming out, he has been featured on Good Morning America, Anderson Cooper 360, Live with Paula Zahn, Newsweek, USA Today, and numerous other newspaper and radio stations across the country.

Among Eric's awards and recognitions for his service is the 2003 Heroes and Heritage Award from La Raza, the 2004 Hero's Among Us Award from People magazine, the 2004 Patriot Award from the city of San Antonio and the 2007 Public Citizen Award from the National Association of Social Workers.

Eric has a bachelor's degree in social work from Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio, where he lives with his partner Darrell and their two dogs, Champ and Bo. He will graduate with his master's degree in 2009, and then hopes to pursue a career working with diverse groups and continuing to work towards social justice.

Eric, who also served as a Grand Marshal of last year's San Francisco Pride Parade, will be riding in a classic car near the front of this year's Chicago Annual Pride Parade.

For parade details and registration, visit www.ChicagoPrideCalendar.org