

## **The Lee S. Covino Collection, 1974-1993**

### Abstract

Lee S. Covino has been an advocate for veterans and the handicapped, disabled and elderly for many years. Covino is a Vietnam veteran and the co-founder and a former chairman of the Veterans Action Coalition (VAC). He also served as a member of Governor Cuomo's Council on Home Care. The collection documents Covino's work and the relationships he established with local leaders and politicians to accomplish the goal of establishing better services for Staten Islanders. The collection also documents the activities of the Veterans Action Coalition (VAC) and provides insight into the needs and activities of Vietnam Veterans in the local and college communities directly after the Vietnam War.

### History of the Veterans Action Coalition

*This was prepared by VAC co-founders Lee Covino and Jeff Breen for an informational page on the VAC here - <http://www.mystatenisland.com/servlets/WebPage?actionid=950&eid=42728>  
We have reproduced it here to give context for the collection's records that are related to the VAC.*

The VAC was originally known as the "Veterans Advisement Center," and located on the campus of Staten Island Community College (now the Petrides Center), in Sunnyside, Staten Island (NY). The office was a result of the federal Veterans Cost of Instruction Program (VCIP), which lasted from 1972 through 1977. During that time, the G.I. Bill permitted veterans from the Vietnam, Korea and WWII-eras to attend college. The VAC staff was comprised of three full-time salaried veterans counselors and veteran peer-counselors full-time students from these groups. Services offered included benefit and peer counseling, crisis intervention and other academic and support services. The Outreach and support services were under the direction of James Reyes Salazar.

In 1973, we initiated a legislative newsletter, which was distributed to the 2,600 or so on-campus-vets, as well as federal, state and local elected officials. A Korean War Veteran, Frank Covino, designed the VAC logo. The triangle represents the Veterans Administration symbol for priority disabled, as was shown on VA Medical Center ID cards at the time; the book symbolizes experiential as well as academic knowledge; the helmet stands for all branches of the Armed Forces; and the lightning bolt is for effective grass-roots advocacy. As the G.I. Bill wound down in the late '70's, the vets were graduating and moving into various professional capacities. We continued to address issues affecting veterans and to preserve the network, which was previously established.

In 1981, the Veterans Action Coalition teamed up the late Betty Southerland of the Civic League of a United Tottenville (CLOUT), and sponsored Staten Island's FIRST welcome home for Vietnam Veterans and their families at Clove Lake Park during Memorial Day weekend. Where bring-your-own BBQ event became an annual one, highlighting a different issue for ten years in a row. Issues included: a 1980 Welcome Home to Vietnam Veterans; health effects of Agent Orange exposure (1981); a 1982 tribute to the living (all wars); dedication of the Vietnam Memorial in Washington DC (1983); honoring the dead by helping the living (1984) a 1985 tribute to vets and families of all ages; honoring Middle-East Peacekeepers (1986); Welcome home to Korean War veterans (1987); honoring WWII Merchant Marines (1988); and special thanks to female military veterans (1989).

During this time, the VAC also sponsored bus trips to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. as well as lobbying trips to Albany, NY. The VAC has also delivered testimony at federal, state and city-level hearings on a myriad of issues including housing, liability insurance (right to assemble, judicial review, elderly veterans care in state care planning, transportation (public bus link to VA

hospital in Brooklyn from Staten Island NY), defense initiatives, and handicapped access at polling places.

By the fall of 1985, the Veterans Action Coalition had been organized into a 23-member board of directors with over 800 members; the first annual election endorsement process was completed; goals and objectives of the group were drafted; and the VAC newsletter continued to publish on a sporadic basis. The first comprehensive VAC endorsement cycle of federal, state and city elections was completed in November 1988. The Certificate of Incorporation, along with an affidavit declaring all previous activities was prepared pro-bono by White and Case, executed on May 30, 1988 (Memorial Day) by cofounders Jeff Breen and Lee Covino, and registered with the State of New York on June 15, 1988.

Our incorporation, unlike other veterans groups, allows for the ENDORSEMENT MECHANISM, since we ARE NOT tax exempt. Also we are unique in that in that no particular wartime-era dominates the agenda...all veterans issues brought to the board are formally addressed.

Lastly, we have no auxiliary; civilians are eligible to become VAC members and even run for a seat on the board (the majority of the board, however, are veterans from all eras, as stated in the by-laws).

There are no dues. However, members must sign an affirmation for enrollment which list the veteran's dates of service and voting address, and affirms that the veteran/civilian is a registered voter and will vote in all elections and referenda which may appear on the ballot each year, in order to maintain active membership in the VAC.

In August, 1989, the Stars and Strips National Tribune (founded in 1877) recognized the VAC with the inclusion of this biography into their archival files, which highlight all significant veterans organizations established since the post-Civil War period.

In December 2000 the College of Staten Island (City University of New York) accepted all issues of the VAC Newsletter and VAC special projects into their archives.

### Contents

Each of the folders was originally organized into a binder. The binders have been removed for preservation purposes but the titles of the binders and the organization of each binder's contents remain intact. The files are generally arranged in reverse chronological order.

#### -Portfolio of Lee Covino I, 1975-1980

- Correspondence and articles relating to various efforts by Covino to address issues related to adult homes, Medicaid, senior citizens, and the hearing impaired
- News releases discussing Medicaid regulations, Broadview Manor and the Veterans Advisement Center.
- Statement of the purpose for the Veterans' Action Coalition (VAC) newsletter.

#### -Portfolio of Lee Covino II. 1981-1984

- Two items of correspondence a photocopy of the certificate nominating Covino to be appointed as a member of the State Council on Home Care Services.
- Clippings on Vietnam Veterans' services and the creation of a Veterans' Outreach Center on Staten Island. Covino worked at the center and assisted in its creation.

#### Portfolio of Lee Covino III, 1985-1990

- Correspondence & clippings regarding Covino's appointment as a member of the State Council on Home Care Services.
- Clippings discussing Vietnam Veterans' programs, issues and events on Staten Island.

#### -Press Releases, Testimonies and Community Service Projects, 1976-1984

- Statement before the U.S. Department of Defense – Department of the Navy concerning the proposed Navy Homeport on Staten Island.
- Press release, newsletters, clippings and statements related to Vietnam Veterans' issues and events.
- Public hearing statements, correspondence and clippings related to adult homes and issues affecting the handicapped and disabled.

#### -Press Releases, Testimonies and Community Service Projects, 1985-1993

- Several testimonies and statements from various public hearings made by Covino as Chairman of the Veterans Action Coalition (VAC).
- One public hearing statement made by Covino before the New York State Senate Health Committee on his nomination to the Council on Home Care Services.
- Press releases and a few newsletters put out by the Veterans Action Coalition (VAC).
- Two public hearing statements by Adolphus S. Stuart, Executive Board Member of the Veterans Action Coalition.
- One press release meal programs for senior citizens from the City of New York Department for the Aging.

#### -V.A.C. Newsletter, 1974-1977, 1984-1990

- Newsletter on interests of concern to veterans. This was issued first by the Veterans Advisement Center on the campus of the Staten Island Community College (SICC) and continued to be published under the College of Staten Island after SICC became part of the college in 1976. The college's name no longer appears on the newsletter starting in the fall of 1988.

#### -V.A.C. Newsletter (Special Projects), 1974-1977

- Correspondence concerning Veterans' affairs.
- Materials concerning the treatment of Veterans at Staten Island Community College.
- Newsletters and one report on Veterans' issues and benefits including education benefits, life insurance, VA payments and discharge reviews.
- There are a few items on handicapped children and the hearing impaired mixed in with these materials.

#### -A One-Stop Multi-Purpose Center Concept for the Borough of Richmond, 1978-1979

- Preliminary proposal for a one-stop center for the elderly, handicapped and disabled, prepared by Covino in association with Professor Tom Burcaro and Sharon Gelfand. 59p. 1979.

- There is an item of correspondence from the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare on the concept. 1978.

-Regulations of the Commissioner of Education (PL-93-380) A Critique, 1976-1978  
(File is closed to researchers).

- Correspondence and information detailing the specific problems that the Covinos' were facing with the schooling of their hearing-impaired ward.