

Gloria Frankel

(1940 - 2007)

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Sources:

- Learn more about Frankel and the Seahorse:
<https://blog.history.in.gov/gloria-frankel-the-seahorse-the-south-bend-lgbt-clubs-fight-for-gay-rights/>

When Gloria Frankel opened South Bend's first gay club, the Seahorse, in the early 1970s, she recalled "people were ashamed of who they were and frightened of the severe consequences if they were found out. . . . being caught in a gay bar would land you in jail and lose you your job." But she was determined "to open a bar where gay people openly socialized." Quickly, patrons of the unassuming bar came to consider each other family.



Gloria Frankel (right) and friend, circa 1950s, courtesy of LGBTQ Collection, Michiana Memory, St. Joseph County Public Library.

The Ohio native was a cab driver and owned a janitorial service before she founded the Seahorse. It opened on the heels of the famous 1969 Stonewall Riots, which immediately forwarded the movement for gay liberation and LGBT rights. The Seahorse did so at a local level by providing patrons with a venue for entertainment, dialogue, and activism.

The Seahorse withstood vandalism, causing Frankel to board the windows and patrons to enter only through the front. Despite harassment, Frankel hosted events for the Michiana Lambda Society, which promoted social gatherings and advocated for gay individuals. She also grew the local LGBT community, opening The Seahorse II to accommodate increased patronage. Frankel also served as an unofficial mentor to others in South Bend who established gay bars, like Jeannie's Tavern. In 1974, she successfully challenged the city to allow same sex dancing.

An unidentified arsonist firebombed The Seahorse in 1982, leaving one occupant hospitalized. Yet, the bombing demonstrated the solidarity of South Bend's LGBT community, as members scrambled to get the bar back to code within days, avoiding shutdown. In the early 1990s, Frankel led the local fight against HIV/AIDS, making The Seahorse a site for free HIV testing and counseling, in an era when many LGBT people felt uncomfortable going to the health department. In 1997, the Chicago Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce recognized Frankel for 20 years of service to the LGBT community. Frankel passed away in 2007 and the club closed shortly thereafter.