

■ A.A. Meeting on a Frozen Continent

McMurdo Station is Antarctica's largest community, home to about 1,200 people in the summer and 240 in the winter. Situated on Ross Island, the station covers nearly 1.5 square miles and has a harbor, an airport, and a helicopter pad. It also has an A.A. group, the Ross Island Group, which meets once a week. "We have everything we need," says Kelly J., a member. "There are currently four of us, and between us we have a good many years of sobriety."

McMurdo Station has been around since 1955 and for most of those years it was a naval operation. It now is civilian-run and exists solely for the support of science. "At some point during those 50 years a fellow from New Zealand started the group that is now the Ross Island Group of Alcoholics Anonymous. Exactly when he started it I don't know," says Kelly.

Harry S., another member of the group, says he "was told by some A.A. members in Christchurch, New Zealand, that the meeting may have been started by a Kiwi fellow back in the days when it was a military base."

The group meets every Tuesday night in the Chapel of the Snows. The format is usually open discussion, with a reading of How It Works, from the Big Book. "Outside in the cold Antarctic night the wind may be howling and a blizzard raging. It's not uncommon for the wind chill temperature to drop to minus 80 degrees or lower."



Chapel of the Snows, where the Ross Island Group meets, photographed during a snow storm.



McMurdo Station, Antarctica

says Kelly. "Inside though, we're warm with our Big Book, coffee pot, and fellowship."

There are basically two work seasons at McMurdo, summer and winter. (Currently, it's winter, and dark all the time, at the very bottom of the Southern Hemisphere.) What this means for the meeting is that there likely will be a total rotation of members at the end of a season. "In effect, a whole new group emerges," says Harry. "They may elect to change the format, or the meeting date and time to fit their schedules. They may even occasionally change the name of the group—and why not? Each season has its own flavor."

Harry has been attending the meeting the longest, five years. "But not continuously," he points out. "I have done two summers and four winters, with a year off somewhere in there. I've seen some of the same people from time to time, but mostly the group changes each time." Harry speaks of a woman who had her introduction to Alcoholics Anonymous during his first season in Antarctica. "She 'got it' and, last I heard, she had three years of continuous sobriety. Sobered up on the ice!"

"Antarctica presents an opportunity to put the principles of the program to the test in an extreme and remote environment," says Harry. "Turns out, it works a hundred percent here as well as anywhere else."

The other three current members, including Kelly, have been going to the Ross Island Group for only a matter of months.

Kelly is eight years sober, while Harry S. is sober 20 years. "Together we four members have 51 years of continuous sobriety," says Kelly.

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It appears their group is the only one in the area. “There is a small New Zealand station just over the hill, but I’m almost certain they do not have an A.A. group there. As there are no more inhabitants on this ice-laden island save for a few penguins, I feel secure in saying that the Ross Island Group is the only A.A. meeting in town.”

He adds that “there are many other countries with small stations dotting the map of Antarctica, so it would be presumptuous of me to say we are the only A.A. group on the entire continent.

“Whether we are or not, I will say this: I am truly grateful that the Big Book found its way to this vast frozen place at the bottom of the planet,” says Kelly.

■ Accessibility Committee Paves Way For Hearing Impaired to Do Service

One of the country’s three alcohol treatment centers for the deaf is in Vancouver, Washington, and some of those passing through that facility wind up as members of local A.A. groups. As a result, there are now about 50 hearing-impaired A.A.s in the area.

In response, the Access [Accessibility] Committee of Districts 7 and 37, which is part of Area 72 (Western Washington), has been making a special effort to involve these A.A. members in service.

“Even in Alcoholics Anonymous the hearing impaired can be extremely isolated,” says Virginia E., an A.A. member on the Access Committee.

The committee was formed only early last year. Before that, any A.A. members who needed American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation had to go to Portland, Oregon, or the surrounding areas for meetings. Now, says

Virginia, “we have four deaf G.S.R.s representing four different groups of deaf A.A. members.”

A few months back a call from the area opened the door to another opportunity for these A.A. members to do service. An inmate in the correctional facility on McNeil Island was deaf and unable to participate fully in the A.A. meeting brought into that facility weekly. According to Virginia, “the area chair said ‘let’s call Virginia and see if we can help this guy out.’”

The Access Committee in Vancouver was able to line up six hearing-impaired A.A. volunteers and have them cleared by the McNeil Island facility to attend the Forging Ahead A.A. Group that meets there. The plan is for these volunteers to participate in the meeting, affording the deaf inmate there an opportunity to be a part of the group in a way that so far has been impossible.

“I have been advised that the deaf inmate’s eyes lit up when he heard other deaf A.A.s were coming,” says Virginia. “We are planning to make this a monthly thing,” she says, noting that getting to the facility will take them about two hours. “We are not exactly sure what the format will be. For the first meeting, we plan to bring four volunteers: three deaf A.A. volunteers who know how to sign and one A.A. volunteer who speaks and also knows how to ‘read’ signing.” The first meeting was scheduled for the second half of August.

Meanwhile, A.A. volunteers who are deaf and willing to address groups in schools, treatment centers and correctional facilities are getting pointers on how to conduct this service work.

“Local deaf A.A.s were given tips at our last July Access Committee meeting on how to present Alcoholics Anonymous according to A.A. Guidelines,” says Virginia. “Sharing continues monthly at our business meetings on carrying the A.A. message to those with special needs.” Virginia reports that their Access Committee meetings are ASL interpreted.

“We cover the basic issues that we would cover with anyone representing A.A., such as how to treat the drug issue, sticking to A.A. principles, etc.,” says Virginia.

“Our focus the first year of the committee was to get ASL A.A. meetings going in Vancouver. In addition, the deaf also have their own A.A. meetings,” says Virginia.

Making these A.A. members feel a part of greater A.A. is the goal of the work they are doing in Vancouver, she says. “They want to be a part of mainstream A.A.”

■ Upcoming Regional Forums

- November 4-6—the East Central Regional Forum will be in Houghton, Michigan.
- December 2-4—Southwest Regional Forum, Embassy Suites Hotel, Rogers, Arkansas.

For more information you may call the Regional/Special Forums coordinator: (212) 870-3120, or e-mail: regionalforums@aa.org.

■ A.A. Archives Celebrates 30 Years

Give visitors to the General Service Office a choice of what to see first, and the great majority will head straight for the Archives. More and more, A.A.s are fascinated with our Fellowship's history. Just as we have learned the importance of keeping the memory green in our personal lives, we increasingly recognize the need to know and understand our collective past in order to assure our future.

November marks the 30th anniversary of the A.A. Archives. Housed at G.S.O.—in quarters far larger and more impressive than the modest three rooms where they opened in 1975—the Archives are the principal repository of the thousands of documents, oral histories, photographs, and other artifacts that hold the story of our past.

Visiting A.A.s first enter an exhibit room that features dozens of photographs of people and places from A.A.'s early days. They have the opportunity to see such treasures as the letter from famed psychiatrist Dr. Carl Jung to Bill W. in 1961, every printing of all four editions of the Big Book, awards such as the Lasker Award given to A.A. in 1951, and Bill's original office sofa (now reupholstered). A special favorite with visitors are the scrapbooks of newspaper articles about the early Fellowship, beginning in 1939. G.S.O.'s first archivist, nonalcoholic Nell Wing, described them as "priceless" treasures, "not only because they carry a unique and panoramic picture of A.A. events, people and places, but because they reveal how the general public and reporters viewed and described alcoholism and the A.A. Fellowship over the years."

At times, visitors are moved to tears when they discover aspects of their own personal history. Now that the Fellowship is 70 years old, there are second- and third-generation A.A.s, and it is not unusual for members to come across records of parents and even grandparents who were helped by the founding members. People from other nations find poignant reminders of their own countries' early days, such as the Russian teapot used in very early meetings and a handmade plate sent by Polish members when A.A. there was in its infancy.

But these artifacts, while they possess great significance and symbolism, are only one chapter in the Archives story. Nonalcoholic archivist Judit Olah says that the emphasis during the past several years has been on encouraging A.A.s to see the Archives not primarily as a place for collectibles but as an historic repository. She and her staff, along with the trustees' and Conference Archives Committees, are concentrating on making the Archives' vast storehouse of history more readily accessible to members of the Fellowship and to researchers with an interest in A.A. They have been working on audio preservation, digitizing audio material from as far back as the 1940s and '50s—early General Service Conferences, talks by some of our first trustees, and so on. They are also improving the organization of early letters, pamphlets, and other documents and creating data bases to make them more readily accessible. A computer scanning system has been implemented over the past five years.

Along the same lines, with the encouragement of the 2004 Conference, the editorial perspective of the Archives newsletter, *Markings*, has shifted from sharing among area and local archivists to issues designed to deepen our understanding and appreciation of the Fellowship's roots. The new direction was kicked off by an issue on movements and philosophies that were precursors to A.A. and has been followed by issues on A.A.'s early relationship to the business world and to members of the clergy and the medical community who influenced our early development. Additionally, the Archives is gradually making a selection of early audio resources available to the Fellowship—CDs containing brief samples of anecdotes by co-founder Bill W. and talks by some of the original trustees were shared with the Conference and at Regional Forums in 2004.

More sophisticated technologies have become increasingly necessary as the volume of requests for information from the Fellowship has grown by leaps and bounds. The widespread use of e-mail by members, for instance, and the effort to help A.A.s in their search for information keep



the office staff hopping. Along with Judit, these hard-working nonalcoholics include assistant archivist Michelle Mirza, research assistants Noela Jordan and Maureen Carothers, and two temporary assistants. Judit reports that she alone receives over 100 e-mails a week, and the rest of the staff deal with their own requests—most of which require research before they can be answered.

The physical care of early group records, area histories, original manuscripts, books and pamphlets, and newspaper files is one of the most important responsibilities of the Archives staff. Old paper, such as all early correspondence, may be particularly fragile because of its high acid content. These documents are first deacidified, then placed in acid-free folders; some are also encapsulated in Mylar for further protection. In the interest of security, many documents are stored off-site, and the Archives has recently expanded its storage by using space in the basement of the building where G.S.O. is located, as well as in New Jersey and in the Catskills. These documents can be made available to researchers when needed.

The richness and variety of resources found in the Archives is remarkable—even more so given its precarious beginnings. Nell Wing, who served as Bill W.'s secretary for many years, often told of her sometimes frantic efforts to make sure that valuable historical material was retained and preserved. Her archival work began, informally, as early as 1955, when Bill W. was thinking about writing an A.A. history. He, Nell, and Ed B., a writer hired to help with the project, got together at Stepping Stones, (Bill and Lois's home in upstate New York), on the weekends to work on the writing and research. In an interview with Grapevine staff members, Nell said: "Ed didn't think we needed to keep all that material. As he was going through the pamphlets and the letters, he would throw most of them in the wastebasket, and I would say, 'Ed, we can't throw all this away.' I knew from experience that each letter contained at least five ideas. But Ed didn't think much of it was important anymore. So I stopped

arguing. After he left, I went through the wastebasket, took everything out, and put it all back where it came from. Otherwise, I can assure you we would have lost a lot of material.

"And interestingly enough, one of the office managers in the late 1980s decided, because we didn't have a lot of space, to throw everything away from the past two years. I screamed bloody murder. I said, 'Bring them up to me and I'll see what we can do with them.' Otherwise, who knows? But people in our country do not understand the importance of archives. We're a now people—we don't think in the future. This is what makes Bill so remarkable, because he believed strongly in preserving the past."

According to Nell, "Bill realized the need to preserve A.A. records almost from the beginning of the Fellowship. In the early fifties, he traveled with a tape recorder to Akron, Cleveland, and Chicago, interviewing the earliest members as well as nonalcoholic friends." The immediate objective was to obtain a selection of stories for the projected second edition of the Big Book, but the long-term benefit was to provide a base for a history library at G.S.O. In a 1954 letter requesting oral histories, Bill wrote: "I would like to have you make a tape recording about your recollections of the old days.... You can get a good running start at the history by retelling your own personal story.... I hope you can dwell at length on the difficulties, as well as the humor of those days, relating as many anecdotes as possible.... It isn't hard to prepare a fact sheet and so forth. The hard thing to lay hold of is the atmosphere of the whole proceedings, and anecdotal material that will make the early experience live."

Bill W. always had a profound sense of history, and believed that A.A. Archives were a necessity "...to keep the record straight so that myth does not predominate over fact as to the history of the Fellowship." Unfortunately, as his widow Lois recalled at the opening ceremony for the Archives, much of the early correspondence and records were not saved "because we were just too busy trying to help alcoholics and their families." Bill always appreciated the theoretical importance of records, Lois went on, "but he wasn't very good at doing anything about it." And past trustee Tom S. recalled visiting Bill in his office one day when Bill was trying to locate something in his files, and thinking "it was a mess."

Experiences such as that one prompted Tom S., along with fellow trustee George G., to urge strongly that an Archives be established. In the early 1970s, a fire in the building where G.S.O. was then housed brought dramatically to the attention of the trustees the dangers of losing vital historical records and artifacts. A trustees' Archives Committee was formed in 1973, and in the fall of 1975, a ribbon-cutting ceremony marked the official opening of the Archives, housed in three rooms on the eighth floor of G.S.O.'s offices at 468 Park Avenue South in New York. George G., chair of the trustees' Archives Committee, presided, and Lois W., Tom S., and then-chair of the



General Service Board Dr. John L. Norris (“Dr. Jack”) all spoke briefly.

One of the first responsibilities of the trustees’ committee was to add to the collection of tape-recorded experiences of early members. At the same time, Nell Wing was collecting group histories, writing to the groups and asking how and by whom they were started, “how they grew, people who were especially helpful, dates, anecdotes about people and events, community cooperation, group problems—just anything at all you might have stored away in your memory.” Group histories are also an important resource for the many area and local archives that have sprung up throughout the Fellowship over the past few decades. The great majority of areas now have their own archives committees, and many have published area histories.

The spiritual principles we live by developed over difficult years of trial and error. Our founders made every mistake in the book and, miraculously, learned from them all to create a body of tradition that can carry us through any difficulties of the present day. The Archives play a vital role in our collective lives, preserving and making accessible the lessons of our past, reminding us not only of what happened, but why it happened.

In a May 1995 *Box 4-5-9* article, past archivist Frank M. reflected on the purpose of history in the life of A.A.. “It is,” he said, “not to blindly worship the past but to make the past relevant to the present.” He points out that “collecting A.A. memorabilia has become enormously competitive. We live in a material society, and collectibles—whether they’re baseball cards or A.A. pamphlets—are a big item. I’m afraid we might be beginning to worship *things* and losing sight of the *content*. Archives is about something else—to make clear the relevancy of history to our lives, and to deepen our appreciation of what we have been given. It’s about gratitude, not things.”

NOTE: As this issue of *Box 4-5-9* was going to press, Judit Olah announced she was leaving her post as archivist after 11 years. Judit’s last day was August 26. Questions relating to G.S.O. archives should be directed to Michelle Mirza, assistant archivist.

■ Hurricane Katrina

Since the tragic destruction wreaked by Hurricane Katrina, the General Service Office has received numerous phone calls and e-mails from A.A. members and groups, asking what they can do to help A.A. members in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. The immediate needs of people in those states are shelter, food, water and medical supplies; as in any disaster, these are things that A.A. cannot supply. However, many agencies and relief organizations are working to supply these basic needs, and we suggest you, as individuals, contact them.

We are contacting intergroups and central offices in

cities where there are evacuees to offer our support and fill any literature needs they might have.

We would like to share a portion of an e-mail we received from Don M., delegate from Louisiana:

“We are overwhelmed and touched by the outpouring of A.A. love and support that we are receiving from around the A.A. world. Along with many others, my family and I evacuated from the New Orleans area before Hurricane Katrina devastated our city and homes. A.A.s across the Gulf South are spread out throughout the country. Communication is tough. There have been hundreds of e-mails from A.A.s from everywhere A.A. is. In all appropriate cases, I will post these on our Web site, consistent, of course, with our Traditions. The love and fellowship in A.A. is powerful beyond words. The tremendous hope and serenity that our Steps and Traditions bring are evident in all with whom I have spoken. The dominant theme in each conversation is ‘to whom can I be of service?’ ”

■ Sober Recollections Evoke the Spirit of Gratitude Month

Back in 1979, when Babs G. of New York City was a year sober in A.A., she had a dream that is as vivid to her today as it was then: “I dreamed that my hair was tied up in curlers—only instead of ordinary curlers, there were miniature wine bottles all over my head.” She woke up feeling panicky, she relates, “thinking I’d been drinking. Then, when I realized it was all a dream and I was still sober, I laughed out loud. Whenever I think of that dream, I still do.” She adds, “A.A. restored me to sanity. It also gave me back my sense of humor.”

Looking for ways to say, “Thank you, A.A.,” Babs soon learned about Gratitude Month, celebrated by U.S. A.A.s in November (by Canadians in October) with special Traditions meetings and contributions to the General Service Office for its world services. Some members take time out for reflection, others accelerate their Twelfth-Stepping activities. As A.A. co-founder Bill W. wrote in 1959, “Gratitude should go forward, rather than backward. . . . If you carry the message to still others, you will be making the best possible repayment for the help given to you.” (*As Bill Sees It*, p. 29)

Increasingly members have found that collectively they can say thank you all year long with the A.A. Birthday Plan. It provides a way for members to celebrate their individual and group anniversaries by setting aside a dollar or more for each year of their sobriety and sending it off to G.S.O, their local intergroup/central office or area committee. Says Raleigh F., of Dade City, Florida: “In 1982, when I was 15 years sober, I heard a speaker talk about

the Birthday Plan. It seemed like a great way to express my gratitude and maybe even contribute a bit to someone else's sobriety, so on my next anniversary I sent \$16 off to G.S.O. Nearly 23 years later I'm still doing it."

The Birthday Plan began back in Oklahoma City in 1954. While attending a state meeting, Ab A., then a delegate (Panel 3) from Tulsa, Oklahoma, was "inspired" by fellow A.A. Ted R., who suggested that members might like to commemorate their sobriety by "giving it away" on their A.A. birthdays. "The idea," Ab explained, "is that you talk about this in your own group. However, the group doesn't vote on whether to accept the plan—that's an individual, voluntary thing." Ab was especially mindful of oldtimers "who are no longer active. If we can get these people to make their birthday contribution, it is a habit they won't forget—one that will remind them about the most important day of their lives."

Thanks to the tireless efforts of Ab and his friends, the results were spectacular. The Birthday Plan took hold quickly in Oklahoma, where contributions to G.S.O. nearly doubled the first year. The plan spread across the U.S. and Canada and today is followed by A.A.s worldwide. When Ab died in 1956, the August issue of the fledgling *A.A. Exchange Bulletin* (forerunner of *Box 4-5-9*) noted in an obituary, "From the Oklahoma City Intergroup came this message: 'We all feel there could be no nicer way to leave "footprints in the sands of time" than Ab's in his tireless work on the Birthday Plan, and [we] enclose a check for \$110.'"

Were Ab with us today, he doubtless would be pleased to know the Birthday Plan is flourishing still. He might also urge A.A.s on to greater effort, saying as he did, just months before his death, at the state assembly in Great Bend, Kansas, "I want you to remember how this inspiration came to me... by talking to older members, and to new ones too. They want to do something. They want to be a part of this Fellowship. They feel when they make a little investment that they are a part of it. And they are!"

California's Mike H., of Ventura, is high on both participation and gratitude. "In March," he says, "I celebrated my 25th anniversary at a meeting. Afterward a young fellow came up and said, 'You've been sober longer than I've been alive.' I was tickled I'd stuck around A.A. long enough to have someone say that to me. As I said that night—and others, too, because there are always new ears to hear—"This is not a celebration of my birthday. It is a celebration of the power of A.A. to keep a drunk sober." Mike notes that he celebrates every anniversary by contributing a dollar for each sober year to G.S.O.: "It's a way of saying, 'Thank you for another year of my life.'"

The Birthday Plan is observed by groups as well as individuals. Some groups collect contributions from members on a voluntary basis throughout the year or until the number of dollars matches the members' total years of sobriety. On the particular group's birthday, the money collected is sent to G.S.O.

Gratitude is a serious-sounding, high-dignity word but, as Babs's "hair-curling" experience shows, its close companions are humor and joy. The Big Book (p. 132) concurs: "Outsiders are sometimes shocked when we burst into merriment over a seemingly tragic experience out of the past. But why shouldn't we laugh? We have recovered, and have helped others to recover. What greater cause could there be for rejoicing than this?"

Contribution Envelopes (FR-2) and Birthday Contribution Envelopes (FR-5) are available, free of charge, from G.S.O.

■ For the G.S.O. Staff It's Time to Rotate

Every other September, G.S.O. staff members come in the Monday after Labor Day, gather up their plants and pictures and other personal belongings, and head for a different office than the one they've occupied for the previous two years. It's rotation time, and like group officers and other volunteer service workers, our paid staff members follow that time-honored A.A. tradition. One may go from corresponding with prisoners to working on public information, another from arranging Regional Forums to dealing with professionals interested in A.A., a third may move from the literature desk to coordinating the work of the staff as a whole. Whatever the specific assignment, staff members at G.S.O. develop an enormous amount of adaptability and versatility—along with a healthy humility as they become beginners at regular intervals.

Like most A.A. customs and traditions, the practice of rotation evolved through trial and error. In *Concept XI of Twelve Concepts for World Service* (p. 58), Bill W. described what happened under a more familiar way of operating: "We once had the conventional system of one highly paid staff member with assistants at much lower pay. Hers had been the principal voice in hiring them. Quite unconsciously, I'm certain, she engaged people who she felt would not be competitive with her. Meanwhile she kept a tight rein on all the important business of the place. A prodigy of wonderful work was done. But suddenly she collapsed, and shortly afterwards one of her assistants did the same. We were left with only one, partly trained assistant who knew anything whatever about the total operation... Thereafter we installed the principle of rotation in a considerably larger staff."

In any other office, changing jobs every two years would be virtually unthinkable, but for A.A.s who work for the Fellowship, it's an extension of what they are used to in their groups and other service jobs. For the recovering alcoholic, becoming entrenched in one position, whatever it may be, can lead to the desire for power and prestige, something no sober alcoholic can afford. In the home group and in service assemblies, rotation gives more

people a chance to serve and to participate in decision-making, and ensures that no one can impose his or her personal desires on any part of the Fellowship as a whole. At G.S.O., too, it discourages the tendency to accumulate power, keeps principles before personalities, and in addition guarantees the Fellowship a staff that is well equipped to handle any situation, no matter what may happen to any individual worker.

As A.A. has grown over the past 70 years, the scope of its activities, and thus the demands on the office staff, has expanded tremendously. In addition to taking responsibility for one facet of service, most staff members correspond with A.A.s in one geographical area of the U.S. or Canada, and each acts as secretary to a committee of the General Service Board and a Conference Committee. While there is a basic body of work that needs to be done, situations change and from time to time new assignments are added and existing ones are reconfigured in light of emerging needs or the particular background of the current staff. In the recent past, for example, one person was assigned primarily to corresponding with the growing number of Spanish-speaking members. Currently, there are two staff members who speak Spanish, and there is no longer a need for a separate Spanish services assignment. This September, as a result of shifting workloads, a new assignment has been added: secretary of the trustees' Nominating Committee and of the Conference Committee on Trustees, formerly tasks that were part of another assignment.

The transition from one job to another is a challenge, but long years of experience make the process remarkably smooth. Each staff member prepares a rotation memo, with an overview of the assignment and an update on current projects. Anyone who has questions about his or her new responsibility can find help not only from the person who just rotated out, but from others who have done the assignment in the past. Weekly staff meetings, too, provide a regular opportunity to bring problems and current information to the group as a whole, whether to "pick the brains" of others with more experience or to make sure that everyone is well informed about what's going on around the Fellowship.

When asked, staff members generally appreciate the variety in their work, and agree that rotation, while it has its difficult moments, serves to keep them on their toes and teaches them to rely on the voice of collective experience. A staff member who retired several years ago remarked that two-year rotation keeps the staff "a little off balance" and forces them to ask for help. "Because we rotate we always have to depend on other people, include other people. Otherwise it becomes my assignment, done my way." Another longtime staff member, now retired, remarked, "Rotation was good for my ego—it meant I didn't have to know everything."

Rotation has been described as "anonymity in action"; it keeps reemphasizing the importance of the message over the messenger. As a *Box 4-5-9* article from ten years

ago explained: "It teaches that none of us is the center of the universe and that what matters is the survival of the Fellowship as a whole. So the principle of rotation connects quite directly with all of our Twelve Steps and with the Traditions that address our primary purpose, anonymity, and the authority of a Higher Power."

■ Districts and D.C.M.s Link Together A.A. Groups

The geographical units known as districts link A.A. groups in local areas to each other and to A.A. groups across the country. The term "district" was mentioned during early General Service Conferences, and both "district" and "district committee member" were used informally in the 1950s. The term "district" was included in the 1955 draft of *The Third Legacy Manual of World Service* (now called *The A.A. Service Manual*). A 1975 supplement to *The A.A. Service Manual* formalized use of the term "district."

The current edition of the Service Manual defines a District as "containing the right number of groups—right in terms of the committee member's ability to keep in frequent touch with them, to learn their problems, and to find ways to contribute to their growth and well-being. In the majority of areas, a district includes six to 20 groups. In metropolitan districts, the number is generally 15 to 20, while in rural or suburban districts the number can be as small as five."

Some areas have formed districts along linguistic lines, with boundaries independent of geographic district boundaries. There are, for instance, districts comprising only Spanish-speaking A.A. groups; Illinois now has a Polish district.

Individual groups elect general service representatives (G.S.R.s) who attend district meetings. This group elects the district committee member. The D.C.M. conveys the group conscience of their district's A.A. members to the area committee.

D.C.M.s may in the course of their terms make the rounds of A.A. groups in the district. According to Tracey K., District 9, Area 43, New Hampshire, "I went off to visit a meeting in my district that hasn't had a G.S.R. in many years. I had been invited to attend the business meeting and talk to them about general service."

Districts may be part of areas that range widely in size. Area 79, British Columbia and the Yukon, for instance, has 46 districts that contain 750 groups spread over 800,000 square miles.

As *The A.A. Service Manual* explains, the "district committee member is an essential link between the group G.S.R. and the area delegate to the General Service Conference. As leader of the district committee, made up of all G.S.R.s in the district, the D.C.M. is exposed to the group conscience of that district."

What qualifies an A.A. member to be a D.C.M. is that the person have sufficient time in A.A. (generally four or five years), along with the time, energy, and commitment to devote to this service position. The D.C.M. is expected to attend all district meetings and area assemblies and to hold regular meetings of all G.S.R.s in the district. The D.C.M. also keeps the G.S.R.s informed about Conference activities.

On the other side, it is up to the D.C.M. to keep the area delegate informed of what the groups are thinking.

“Taking responsibility for protection of traditions and minority opinion without stifling growth, encouraging participation and camaraderie without pressure or demands, and participating in discussion of controversial issues without dominating or giving offense has been an exciting journey,” says Tracey.

■ Revised A.A. Guidelines on Finance Address Issues of Money and A.A.

The recently revised and expanded A.A. Guidelines on Finance cover such topics as rent, the role of the treasurer, reimbursement for service workers’ expenses, and the role of the General Service Board.

The Guidelines also include information on opening bank accounts and obtaining tax I.D. numbers. A.A. groups are more and more frequently being asked to supply an I.D. number to a bank when opening a checking or savings account, whether or not it is interest-bearing.

Many groups have asked G.S.O. if they can use its I.D. number. The answer, however, is no.

A group must obtain its own I.D. number, a relatively simple process. The first step is to obtain a “Federal ID Number.” Each group must file form SS-4, “Application for Employer Identification Number.” To obtain the form, call your local IRS office. You can also access the IRS Web site and download the form at www.irs.gov.

One question on the form is whether there is one group exemption number that applies to all. There is not; each group must obtain its own number.

Another issue is tax-exempt status. An A.A. group is not automatically a nonprofit or charitable entity, nor can it be included in G.S.O.’s tax-exempt status. (G.S.O. is exempt under Section 501 (C) (3) of the code.)

In fact, very few groups undertake the process of becoming a nonprofit organization recognized by the state and federal government. For more information, obtain IRS form, Publication 557, “Tax-Exempt Status for Your Organizations.”

If your group then decides it wants tax-exempt status, contact the IRS for Package 1023, “Application for Recognition of Exemption,” under Section 501 (C) (3) of the Internal Revenue Code. You will also need Form 8718,

“User Fee for Exempt Organization Letter Request.” An accountant or tax lawyer can be helpful in dealing with the rigorous reporting that may be required,

These topics and more are covered in detail in the Finance Guidelines (MG-15), which are available by mail from the General Service Office and online at http://www.aa.org/default/en_pdfs/mg-15_finance.pdf.

■ Mobile Meetings Keep Shut-Ins Connected to A.A.

Every alcoholic knows the isolation of the active drunk, and the relief that occurs in sobriety when we don’t have to be alone anymore. It’s easy to assume that we need never be lonely again—but members in several parts of the country have begun to realize that there are many A.A.s who are becoming isolated in sobriety when, because of physical or other limitations, they are unable to get out to meetings. Some are confined to their homes, others to nursing homes or hospitals, and there is a growing need to provide help for them.

In several parts of the country, members are getting together and taking “itinerant meetings” to these A.A. members. Moe M. from Huntington Beach, California, helped start the Doorstep Drunks: “My sponsor encouraged us to start this project, because there was a need that wasn’t being taken care of. We began taking meetings to a friend of my sponsor’s at his home, and he was able to stay in touch with his group and not become lonely or withdrawn. After he passed away, South Orange County H&I helped us get the project going—and kind of adopted us.

“For the most part, we take meetings at the request of a member or someone else familiar with the situation. The meetings last about an hour, and we keep taking them as long as the people need them. Oldtimers say they are reminded of A.A. in the 1950s and ’60s, when meetings were mostly in people’s homes and were more intimate than they are today.”

Moe continues: “We now have an e-mail list of about a hundred people, and when we have a request we call on them. A typical e-mail request would read like this one: ‘We are bringing a regular meeting to J---’s house this Tuesday night at 7 p.m. J--- is feeling and looking a lot better and will soon be back attending his regular meetings, so if you have not had a chance to experience this meeting, please join us. If you’d like to attend, please e-mail back, or call so that we can get a head count.’”

Steve C. in Rockport, Illinois, his area’s special needs coordinator, says that they found a lot of A.A.s in nursing homes. “Some of them knew that if they left, they’d drink. We work with the directors of the nursing homes, and we’re now taking regular weekly meetings to two homes.”

Both projects have been helped by their local H&I committees, but they are careful to avoid overlap, and they

follow clear guidelines. The traveling meetings are for established A.A. members, not for newcomers, and the person needs to be both physically and mentally able to participate. Moe reports: "Here is what we pitch at A.A. meetings: 'Traveling 12 Steppers is a volunteer A.A. group who will bring a weekly or biweekly A.A. meeting to members of A.A. who due to their physical health cannot attend regular meetings. The Doorstep Drunk meetings can be on a temporary basis, lasting only a few weeks, or possibly for several years. Doorstep Drunks would bring meetings to A.A. members in their own homes, rest homes, hospitals, etc. If you know of A.A. members who would like a meeting brought to them, let us know. Or if you would like to be of service and volunteer to be a traveling 12 stepper, let us know that also.'"

For those who participate, the rewards are great. Moe says that—like so much of A.A. service—the traveling meetings are as good for the people who bring them as they are for the recipients. He tells about taking a meeting to an oldtimer who had met Bill W. and talked about him: "we brought him several meetings, including his last one." And he tells of another member in her 70s who was confined first to a nursing home, then to her own home, and is now back at meetings and doing well. Whenever he helps out a fellow member by participating in a mobile meeting, Moe says, "I always feel that I'm getting the better deal."

Corrections

■ Inmates and Outside A.A.s Bring Off Prison Convention

A.A. members have been bringing meetings into the Larch Correction Center in Yacolt, Washington, for almost half a century. Larch, a minimum security facility, houses approximately 400 inmates, of whom from 30 to 50 go to the two A.A. meetings there each week. It was one of these inmates who asked if Larch could host a prison convention. The answer, it turns out, was yes.

The inmate had gotten the idea from an article on a prison convention in the July 2003 issue of the Grapevine. At the facility's next A.A. business meeting, members voted to investigate the possibility of such an event.

The prison superintendent and the chaplain were then invited to a meeting with the outside A.A. volunteers and Larch's A.A. members, who call themselves the Mountaineers. The inmates talked about what A.A. had done for them, while one volunteer disclosed that she first found Alcoholics Anonymous in prison.

"On that occasion we approached the superintendent with the idea of a two-day A.A. event," says Patty K., the then corrections chair for Districts 7 and 37. "She said

it sounded like a wonderful idea, one that deserved further discussion.

"We created a packet that included a copy of the Grapevine article about the other prison convention, a few personal stories, statistics from the Corrections Workbook, and a plan for the two days. The administrators granted us a tentative yes."

The Corrections Committees of Districts 7 and 37 discussed how to proceed. "We went to an area assembly and to the Area Corrections Committee. It seemed we had the blessing of everyone to go ahead," says Patty.

There are 20 outside visitors who are cleared to enter the facility and about 10 who attend regularly. Of the two meetings per week, one is run with outside volunteers and one solely by the Mountaineers.

According to Patrick M., an A.A. member and an inmate at Larch, "We've got a really good group here." Patrick, who first started going to A.A. while in Larch, celebrated two years of sobriety in July. He notes that some of the outside A.A.s who bring in meetings have also served time in correctional facilities like Larch. "They have been in my shoes, and now they're successful."

Mike E., who got sober in prison and was released as an inmate from Larch in July 2003, remembers attending meetings there.

"One night Patty said to those of us at the meeting: 'you are probably here as a direct result of drinking. If you don't want to come back, get to a meeting the first day you get out.'

"At this point, I had been attending meetings long enough that I was listening. I went up and got myself a meeting book, and the first day I got out of prison I went to a meeting. About the only thing I did for two weeks after I got out was to go to meetings," says Mike, who is now four years sober.

"People in prison come to the meeting for different reasons. It's something to do. It gets you out of the cell. My friend J.C. told me he went for the coffee and donuts. He went for one reason and wound up staying for another.

"Basically, as A.A. members in prison, we don't care why you come. You don't have to like A.A. You can come just to hang out. Whatever the reason, you are welcome," says Mike.

According to Patty, "A.A. has a really good reputation in the prison. We follow the rules and we honor our commitments." Nevertheless, as the weekend grew closer, "some of the correction officers were a little nervous about so many 'one-time clearance' people showing up when it was visiting day for the rest of the prison," says Patty.

She e-mailed the outside A.A.s scheduled to attend to let them know what to expect and what was expected of them in the facility. Her e-mail covered dress codes and issues about contraband, among other points.

The Larch authorities "were a little concerned about security," says Patty. "We were not allowed to sit with the inmates during lunch or dinner and they didn't allow

much 'just talking' time. They wanted things to be structured," says Patty.

Of the 42 outside A.A. members cleared to attend the convention in Larch, 39 showed up, a few of whom had traveled hundreds of miles. Local members opened up their homes to those traveling in for the convention.

"The inmates were there at 7 a.m. on the first day of the convention to help set up. We squeezed into the program building family room, which has classrooms and is less prison-like than other areas. We brought food, coffee, tea, fruit, donuts, bagels, cream cheese and other supplies. We had access to a knife and can opener in the chaplain's office."

The space for the convention held a maximum of 99 persons, meaning some of those from the outside could attend only one of the two days.

The three workshops were: "A.A. 101," "The Twelve Steps," and "A.A. History." Each workshop was presented twice to allow for as many to attend as possible.

"There wasn't an empty seat in any of the classrooms. There was conversation, questions, and answers."

According to Patrick, "to be made to feel so comfortable by the people visiting, that was something to be cherished. The workshops were great. The coolest thing at the Convention was the two women who explained the Twelve Steps. They made them so clear.

"All these people from the outside who came in, that was awesome. They're from the streets and are interested in what we are doing in here. There was a cop, a judge, business owners—it was overwhelming. The outside A.A.s said somewhere in a newsletter that the Convention was a success. But they don't know what a success it was to us."

P.I.

■ New P.S.A. Offers Hope and Help to the Suffering Alcoholic

A new public service announcement for television has just been produced by the trustees' Public Information Committee and approved by the General Service Conference. Called "Living in Chaos," it spotlights the fear, desperation and kinship of active alcoholics.

At the start of the film a young woman, obviously drunk and disheveled, is booked by a female police officer; she can barely stand as her fingerprints are taken and she is admitted to jail. Before being locked in her cell, she cries into a phone, "No! I have NOT been drinking!" As the camera cuts away, she wails through the bars, "Who's going to take care of my kids?" In a subsequent scene a young professional woman pulls a hidden bottle of liquor from her desk and takes a generous swig just before her boss upbraids her for being undependable. Returning to her desk, she makes

a phone call as a voice-over says, "Is your life trying to tell you something? If your drinking is affecting your life, look us up. We're in your phone book and on the Web. We're Alcoholics Anonymous, and we're here to help."

The new P.S.A. is available in 30-, 20- and 15-second spots. Most often P.S.A.s get airtime through the efforts of local P.I. committees working with TV stations in their areas. Their collective experience is reflected in a service piece, "Suggestions for Working with Your Local Radio and Television Stations to Help Carry the Message," which is available from the General Service Office.

The first television P.S.A.s were approved by the Conference in 1966. In 2001, and in subsequent years, a Conference Advisory Action authorized central distribution and tracking of the announcements. Accordingly, a copy of "Living in Chaos" is being sent to nearly 800 of the larger TV stations and networks in the United States and Canada. This in no way replaces the work of local P.I. committees, which are sent a list of the stations scheduled to receive P.S.A.s from the distributor. A.A. committees are free to make follow-up contacts with these stations and to approach other local TV outlets as well.

A variety of TV P.S.A.s, most close-captioned for the hearing impaired, are available in English, French and Spanish from local intergroups/central offices and G.S.O., \$10 per video. Two of the videos can be viewed on the A.A. Web site (www.aa.org) in the "media" section: "Reach Out," showing vignettes of three very different people reaching for hidden bottles of liquor as a substitute for the approval they crave, among other things; and "We Know What It's Like," which dramatizes the different faces of active alcoholism—a drunk driver, a married couple battling over the husband's drinking, and a mother passed out on the couch as her children look on anxiously. All the P.S.A.s end on a note of hope and encourage the alcoholic viewer to contact Alcoholics Anonymous.

Because A.A. is a program of "attraction rather than promotion," in the spirit of Tradition Eleven, the Conference makes sure that all our P.S.A.s adhere to that vital principle. As Concept XI (*The A.A. Service Manual/Twelve Concepts for World Service*, p. 51), points out, "We are trying our best to reach more of those 25 million alcoholics who today inhabit the world. We have to reach them directly or indirectly....We need the increasing good will of editors, writers, television and radio channels....It is to, and through, all these resources that we must try to carry A.A.'s message to those who suffer alcoholism and its consequences."

It is difficult to assess the number of alcoholics who arrive at A.A. as a result of having seen the P.S.A.s. But as A.A. cofounder Bill W. observed in an October 1957 Grapevine essay, "While word of mouth and personal contact have brought in many a newcomer, we can never forget that most of us are able to trace our chance of recovery back to our friends in communication—we read, or maybe we heard, or we saw." (*The Language of the Heart*, p. 181)

Calendar of Events

Events listed here are presented solely as a service to readers, not as an endorsement by the General Service Office. For any additional information, please use the addresses provided.

September

The following event was inadvertently left out of the previous issue.

30-October 2—Wichita, Kansas. 48th Annual Kansas Area Conf. Write: Ch., Box 4282, Wichita, KS 67204

October

7-8—Montréal, Québec, Canada. 44th Area 87 Conv. Write: Ch., 1480 Belanger Street, Suite 101, Montréal, QC H2G 1A7; congress87@aa-quebec.org

7-8—Montréal, Québec, Canada. 44^e Congrès de la Région 87. Write: Ch., 3429 Rachel, Montréal, Québec H1X 1Z3

7-9—Montgomery, Alabama. Alabama/Northwest Florida Area 1 Assembly. Write: Ch., 1314 Stanford Rd. Dothan, AL 36305

7-9—Morrilton, Arkansas. Arkansas Conf. of Young People in A.A. Write: Ch., ARKYPAA, Box 250309, Little Rock, AR 72205; www.ARKYPAA.org

7-9—Council Bluffs, Iowa. Area 24, 2005 Fall Conf. Write: Ch., Box 1671, Bellevue, NE 68005

7-9—Columbus, Ohio. Eighth Correctional Facilities Conf. Write: Ch., Area 53 CFC, Box 1201, Columbus, OH 43216-1201; www.area53aa.org/cfc

7-9—Edmond, Oregon. High Desert Round-up. Write: Ch., Box 5966, Bend, OR 97708

7-9—Bastrop, Texas. 21st Annual Fellowship in the Pines Conf. Write: Ch., 167 Lost Pine Dr., Bastrop, TX 78602

7-9—Corner Brook, Newfoundland, Canada. 41st Annual Assembly. Write Ch., 53 Webster Place, Corner Brook, NL A2H 5E3

7-9—Playa Tamarindo, Costa Rica. 12th Annual Int'l. Wave of Pacific Groups. Write: Ch., Fiesta del Mar, Playa Tamarindo, Guanacaste, Costa Rica; waveofsobriety@aol.com

7-9—Osijek, Croatia. Fifth Southeast Europe Regional A.A. Conv. 2005. Write: Ch., Box 367, Split 21001, Croatia

14-16—Lewiston, Idaho. WSEA 92 October Assembly. Write: Ch., Box 1834, Lewiston, ID 83501

14-16—Lansing, Michigan. 17th Annual Fall Weekend. Write: Ch., 1500 East Michigan Ave., Lansing, MI 48912; www.aalansingmi.org

14-16—Carson City, Nevada. Second Annual Northern Nevada Native American Conf. Write: Ch., Box 2096, Carson City, NV 89702; www.nnnaa.org

14-16—Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. 64th Annual Laurel Highland's Conf. Write: Ch., 1470 Blossom Hill Rd. Pittsburgh, PA 15234

14-16—Waukesha, Wisconsin. 2005 Area 75 Fall Conf. Write: Ch., Box 256, Elm Grove, WI 53122

14-16—Angeles City, Philippines. Philippines Tenth Fall International Conv. Write: Ch., 1996 Marlin Ave., Angeles City, Philippines

15-16—Kalispell, Montana. 11th Annual "Fall Refresher." Write: Ch., 6477 Hwy 93 S. #226, Whitefish, MT 59937

15-16—Quetzaltenango, Guatemala. 36.a Convención Nacional de A.A. Write: Ch., 11 Avenida "A" 7-62 Zona 2, Ciudad Nueva, Guatemala; osgaa@intelnet.net.gt

15-16—Revel, France. 14^o Conv. Midi-Pyrénées, Write: Ch., Maison Des Associations, Place du Premier Mai, 81100 Castres, France

19-23—Cataluña, Spain. Costa Brava Int'l Conv. Write: Ch., Apartado Correo 157, 17300 Blanes, Girona, Spain; www.aaspain.org

20-23—Memphis, Tennessee. 31st Annual Bluff City Fellowship. Write: Ch., Box 20831, Memphis, TN 38124-0831; http://bluffcityfellowship.tripod.com

21-23—Santa Barbara, California. 21st Annual Santa Barbara Conv. Write: Ch., Box 91731, Santa Barbara, CA 93190-1731; www.sbaaConv.org

21-23—Provincetown, Massachusetts. Serenity by the Sea. Write: Ch., Box 227, Provincetown, MA 02652; ptownroundup@comcast.net

21-23—Bellingham, Washington. Mt. Baker Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 28231, Bellingham, WA 98228

27-30—St. Paul, Minnesota. 15th Annual National/International Native American Indian AA Conv. Write: Ch., NAI-AA, Box 1643, Sioux Falls, SD 57101; www.nai-aa.com

28-30—Wadell, Arizona. 16th Dry Camp Round-up. Write: Ch., 18735 W. Chipman Rd. Buckeye, AZ 85326; point2point@att.net

28-30—Bradenton, Florida. Sixth West Cost Sponsorship Weekend. Write: Ch., Box 17712, Sarasota, FL 34276

28-30—Branson, Missouri. Colors of Fall/Western Area of MO Conv. Write: Ch., 811 S. Commercial St., Apt. A-8, Branson, MO 65616

28-30—Lincoln, New Hampshire. Fall Festival. Write: Ch., Box 696, Lincoln, NH 03251; stepfestival@yahoo.com

28-30—St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands. Promises in Paradise Caribbean Conv. Write: Ch., Box 307556, St. Thomas, VI 00803; www.promisesinparadise.com

November

4-6—Ormond Beach, Florida. Eighth Jekyll Island Gratitude Weekend. Write: Ch., 34 Glen Falls Dr., Ormond Beach, FL 32174; www.jekyllislandaa.com

4-6—Houghton, Michigan. East Central Regional Forum. Write: Forum Coordinator,

Planning a Future Event?

To be included in the *Box 4-5-9* Calendar, information must be received at G.S.O. three months prior to the event. We list events of two or more days.

For your convenience and ours — please type or print the information to be listed on the Bulletin Board page, and mail to us:

Date of event: from _____ to _____, 20 _____

Name of event: _____

Place (city, state or prov.): _____

For information, write: (exact mailing address) _____

Contact phone # (for office use only): _____

Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163; Regionalforums@aa.org

4-6—*Kerhonkson, New York*. 55th H.M.B. Area Conv. Write: Ch., 59 Violet Avenue, Poughkeepsie, NY 12601

4-6—*Casper, Wyoming*. Wyoming State Fall Conv. Write: Ch., 1508 S. Walnut St., Casper, WY 82601

4-6—*Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada*. 17th Annual Vancouver Round-up. Write: Ch., 4391 Nanaimo St., Vancouver, BC V5N 5H9

4-6—*Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada*. 61st Annual Keystone Conf. Write: Ch., 208-323 Portage Ave., Winnipeg, MB R3C 3C1

11-13—*Framingham, Massachusetts*. 42nd Massachusetts State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 531, Hopkinton, MA 01748-9998

11-13—*Cincinnati, Ohio*. 13th Annual Buckeye Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 53531, Cincinnati, OH 45253; BuckeyeRoundup@hotmail.com

11-13—*Houston, Texas*. 21st Annual Spirit of Houston. Write: Ch., Box 228, Spring, TX 77383

11-13—*Nice, France*. Alcoholics Anonymous Conv. — The Road to Recovery. Write: Ch., 11 rue de la Bufta, 06000 Nice, France; www.aarivera.org

11-13—*Panama, Rep. de Panama*. 2^o Convención de Panama. Write: Ch., Apartado 6-3290, El Dorado, Panamá, Rep. de Panamá; aadepanama@hotmail.com

16-18—*Kingdom of Bahrain*. Fifth Annual GCC Conv. Write: Ch., Box 30965, Budaiya, Kingdom of Bahrain.

18-20—*Delavan, Wisconsin*. Sixteenth McHenry's Sobfest. Write: Ch., Box 717, McHenry, IL 60051-0717; www.soberfest.org

19-20—*Versailles, France*. 45th Anniversary of Alcooliques Anonymes France — National Congress of A.A. France. Write: Ch., General Service Office; 29, rue Campo Formio, 75013 Paris, France; www.alcooliques-anonymes.fr

24-26—*Miami, Florida*. Décima Convención Hispana de A.A. Del Estado de la Florida. Write: Ch., Box 351358, Miami, FL 33135

25-27—*St. Louis Park, Minnesota*. 65th Founder's Day Weekend. Write: Ch., Box 8027, Minneapolis, MN 55408-0027; www.FoundersDayMN.org

25-27—*St. Louis, Missouri*. 2005 Spiritual Homecoming. Write: Ch., Box 8626, St. Louis, MO 63126; www.stl2005.org

25-27—*Hamilton, Bermuda*. Bermuda Conv. Write: Ch., Box WK178, Warwick BX, Bermuda

December

2-4—*Rogers, Arkansas*. Southwest Regional Forum. Write: Forum Coordinator, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163; Regionalforums@aa.org

3-6—*Fuenfrola, Spain*. Costa Del Sol Convención. Write: Ch., Apartado 106, Fuenfrola, Malaga, Spain 29640; www.aaspain.org

16-18—*Papeete, Tahiti*. A.A. in Tahiti 20th Anniversary Conv. Write: Ch., BP 50097-98716 Piraé, Tahiti, Polynésie Française

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