

IT DOESN'T HAPPEN BY ITSELF

It is the hard-working support staff, all of them nonalcoholic, who help make sure that the General Service Conference runs smoothly, so that Conference members can devote themselves, with clarity and focus, to the business at hand. Under the charge of John Kirwin, assistant controller and business administrator, the GSO support staff sees to the nuts and bolts of the operation: the convening of 134 voting members, the booking of over 150 guest rooms and meeting rooms, the care and feeding and coffee-ing of everyone for seven days, and the systematic daily processing of information and communications.

Booking the hotel is done two years in advance, because so many "breakout" rooms are needed — eleven for the Conference committees, one for a hospitality suite, and one for the clerical support staff. Menu planning begins months before; John likes to vary the menu throughout the week — beef, chicken, etc. — and tries to accommodate special dietary meals, such as vegetarian dinners. "Of course," Kirwin says, "we stipulate no alcohol in the food. We're fortunate to have had the same chef for several years, and he knows our needs."

The planning meetings begin in December, when the preliminary agendas are prepared for the GSO staff; the first information packets go out to delegates at the beginning of January. When the Conference convenes, about 100 cartons' worth of materials are trucked to the hotel. The Conference portfolio given out to members on the first day is a sort of guide to everything and includes a Conference manual, the Service Manual, an AAWS literature catalog (which functions as a ready reference of Conference-approved literature), the Conference Report from the previous year, an AA meeting list for New York City, and the schedule for in-house AA meetings (held each morning at 7:30).

The cost of the Conference is borne by the General Fund, which is partially offset by the delegate's fee of \$600 and by group contributions. About half of the delegates bring spouses, partners, or friends; these visitors are on

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their own, financially: they must pay for their own airfare, meals (except the first dinner on Sunday night), and other expenses. A volunteer hospitality team, from New York AA and Al-Anon, entertains visitors by taking them sightseeing around the city.

A clerical support staff is on-site at the Conference from Saturday or Sunday throughout the week, its temporary office complete with eight personal computers and two printers. On the days the committees meet — Monday and Tuesday — a staff assistant and staff secretary for each one are there to help prepare the committee reports.

The technology requirements for the Conference include microphones, a timing system for speakers, overhead projectors for presentations, VCRs and audio systems for reviewing audio-visual materials (for example, AA public service announcements), and tape recorders — all general sessions are taped. One of the biggest headaches, Kirwin explains, is finding the space when extra meetings must be scheduled. "It's not uncommon that a committee needs an extra meeting if it hasn't completed its agenda." A special Early Bird edition of the GSO newsletter, Box 4-5-9, is prepared at the end of the week; this includes a description of the Conference and its theme, and all newly passed Advisory Actions. Thus delegates have an immediate record of the Conference week to take home and share with their area.

Look for an in-depth report on the 1995 General Service Conference, along with a digest of Conference Advisory Actions in the August 1995 Grapevine

