

## Croatians Carry the Message (and Drunks) Any Way They Can

In a village not far from Osijek, Croatia, lives a group of nuns called the Little Sisters of Jesus. If tart-tongued but softhearted Sister Ignatia, the nonalcoholic friend of early A.A. who administered tirelessly to hospitalized drunks in Akron, Ohio, were still here, she'd likely give them a high-five. Because, says Terrence G., a member of the Osijek Group, "the Little Sisters, who always wear blue, are very interested in working with alcoholics and have actually gone around their village collecting drunks in wheelbarrows and carting them home."

Recently, Terrence adds, "we had a big celebration at the home of these nuns. Two fellows marked their first anniversary in A.A., another his second. People came with their spouses, and one man brought his young son, whom he had earlier promised that he would not drink for 30 days. A few nights later, when he received his 30-day chip, I congratulated him—then suggested it might be best for him not to rush out on the town to celebrate."

Until the late 1980s, when the political winds in Eastern Europe shifted dramatically, A.A. in Croatia was almost nonexistent. The Fellowship as such is still in its infancy, and until recently the only A.A. literature available in Croatian was the pamphlet "Is A.A. for You?" But Ksenija P., a member who lives in Split, on the Adriatic Sea, has been instrumental in changing that. Last year, working closely with the General Service Office, New York, she translated the Big Book into Croatian (SCR-2; \$5.60) as a labor of love and is now concentrating on a translation of *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*. "The program of A.A. is a miracle and speaks for itself," she declares. "Of course, I would like to take some credit about A.A. having regular meetings in four towns in Croatia, and for doctors and churches and institutions opening up to us, but I know I did nothing but carry the message."

Ksenija says that "people here are doing some marvelous work in Twelfth Stepping. Oldtimers from Osijek (with two or three years of sobriety) are taking 20-hour train rides to help our struggling 'newcomer'—a group in Rijeka." She notes that a small women's group in Split "is the joy of my life, and the members are doing such a good program. A local doctor, seeing our success, now sends her alcoholic patients to us, which is most gratifying."

Terrence (who Ksenija says is "nothing but an angel") reports that in the Croatian capital of Zagreb, "doctors at the big hospital are sending all the 'graduates' of their alcoholism program to our group if they are from the Osijek area. We now have many of them. One man 'graduated' nine times, another eight! (On several occasions they got drunk on their way home from the hospital.)

Importantly, we have given out many copies of the Big Book—to doctors at that hospital and at another one that has a similar program for alcoholics, as well as to priests and numerous others."

As time goes on, he comments, "one drunk talks to another, and our little group is helping more and more people. It certainly has been a big help to me. There have been some sad stories as well. One lady in our group actually drank herself to death. By the time we got her to the hospital, it was too late for the doctors to do anything. But on a happier note, we have a big supporter in a Carthusian monastery in Slovenia. He's actually an American, and he sends letters that I read at the meetings. In turn, we have sent him some A.A. books and understand they have aroused the interest of visitors to the monastery as well as family members of some of the monks."

Every Monday night, Terrence says, "the Osijek Group has a Big Book study meeting now that we have the translation. And we are already using the rough drafts of the translation of Twelve and Twelve at our Thursday night meetings. Last night we read Step Seven and followed up with a spirited discussion. As perhaps you can tell, A.A. is doing well in Croatia."

Anonimni  
Alkoholiciari

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## Trudging the 'Road of Happy Destiny' In the Alaska Bush

"I am in need of solutions to a situation, and I'm wondering if you can help. The situation is the lack of A.A. meetings for current and potential recovering alcoholics in the Alaskan interior."

Writing to the General Service Office from McGrath, Alaska, where he is "a recovering alcoholic working as a substance abuse counselor," John explained, "Our agency delivers outpatient alcohol, drug and mental health services to the residents of an area about the size of Kentucky that currently has only one regular weekly A.A. meeting in each of two villages and a somewhat irregular bimonthly meeting in another village. The alcohol problem here is deep-rooted and severe. The rates of alcohol-related suicide, sexual abuse, child and spouse abuse and other violence are all amazingly high for an area with a population of slightly more than 1,400 people."

Here John voiced a personal concern. "Since I am both a member of A.A. and a professional counselor," he wrote, "the line between the two blurs at times. It's not the same in the Alaska bush as in Upstate New York, where I got sober and where the boundaries are easier to see. I'm suggesting to people with whom I live and work closely that they attend A.A. meetings—which for the most part don't exist. And where they do, people sometimes don't go because they know that I, their counselor, will be there, and they don't feel comfortable. Am I their friend, their counselor, a fellow A.A. or all three?"

Upon receiving John's letter, G.S.O. immediately contacted two Alaskan A.A.s, one of them Bill B., who chairs the Alaska Area Committee on Cooperation With the Professional Community. "My first consideration," says Bill, "was to find someone in the same boat as John, someone with whom he could identify, and I immediately thought of Jo B., our Alaska Area C.P.C. secretary

who also happens to be a 'two-hatter' like John." As Jo recalls it with a smile, "Bill asked me to make contact, but when he gave me the phone number, he forgot to attach it to a name—a bit too much anonymity perhaps? But, seriously, we quickly got it straight and I connected with John via e-mail. We sent him the most recent area newsletters and meeting lists, a copy of *LIM (Loners-Internationalists Meeting)* and much more. I took him to meetings in Anchorage, to the State Assembly at Homer and connected him with some other A.A.s. I think it helped John—for sure it helped me."

In his letter, John had voiced another concern: "We have received some donations of books, coins and literature from groups and individual A.A.s in Rochester, New York, and I'm wondering: Does that constitute a violation of the Seventh Tradition?" Reports Bill: "In my conversations with John, I have assured him that since A.A.s are doing the donating, and their contributions are well within the prescribed limits, nothing seems amiss."

Comments former Alaska delegate Ken K., the other A.A. contacted by G.S.O. regarding John's request for help: "It's always a celebration when a village or remote contact is made, since this is our greatest difficulty in reaching alcoholics. In our experience, these are often closed communities where 'outside' help is unwelcome. We have had contacts in Kotzebue, Nome, Barrow, Dutch Harbor and Unalaska that all flashed for awhile, then faded. However, we keep trying. There are many groups that meet but remain outside the service structure, and we hear little about them. With 650,000 square miles to cover, it's tough to keep up! Only through contacts, like this one with G.S.O., do we have a chance."

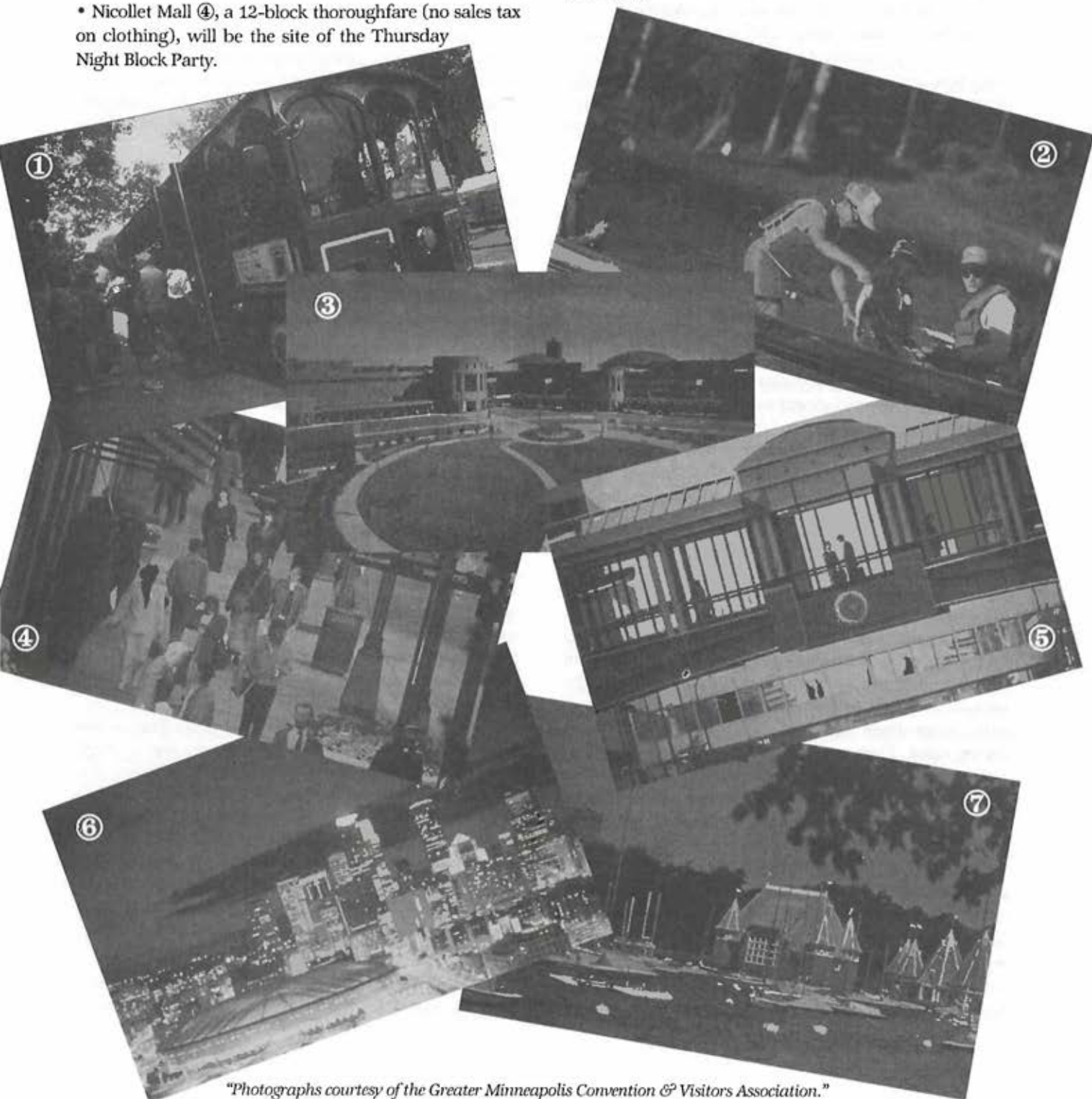
In asking for help, John painted a vivid picture of the plight of the Native Alaskans and the difficulties of carrying the A.A. message. "The region's unknown and untold suffering due to alcoholism can only be imagined," he wrote. "Couple with this the denial inherent in the Native Alaskan cultural and family system, as well as the suspicion and mistrust of outsiders, and one begins to understand the need to carry A.A.'s message to those who suffer. It takes a great deal of time to develop trusting relationships, and simply handing someone a Big Book, with all good intentions in the spirit of attraction rather than promotion, does not seem to be the way to proceed here. I believe we need to carry the message in person, by sharing our experience, strength and hope in A.A. meetings. That's what worked for me."

In conclusion John said, "I feel the same hope, and uncertainty, that I believe our co-founders Bill W. and Dr. Bob felt when they were first starting out. God brought me to Alaska for a reason, and I feel a need to see it through. I appreciate any suggestions, support, donations of books and literature—anything to help others find the 'Road of Happy Destiny' that was shown to me."

## Minneapolis, Minnesota—Did You Know That...?

- 22 of Minnesota's 15,291 lakes ② and ⑦ are in Minneapolis.
- Minneapolis ⑥ is a combination of the Dakota word "Minne," meaning "of the waters," and the Greek word "polis" meaning "city."
- Minneapolis Convention Center ③, 280,000 square feet of space, will be the headquarters for most Convention activities.
- Nicollet Mall ④, a 12-block thoroughfare (no sales tax on clothing), will be the site of the Thursday Night Block Party.

- The Skyway System ⑤ is a network (above street level) of more than 5 miles of pedestrian passageways.
- You can hop on and off the Downtown Trolley ①
- The Common Loon is the state bird (some A.A.s will find that interesting!).
- Rollerblades, Scotch tape, masking tape, Cream of Wheat, and the bundt pan all saw the light of day in Minnesota.



*"Photographs courtesy of the Greater Minneapolis Convention & Visitors Association."*

## Hurricane Irene Fails To Dampen Warmth of Intergroup/Central Office Seminar

Despite rising waters and plane delays and cancellations caused by Hurricane Irene, close to 150 intergroup/central office managers and employees gathered October 14-17 at the Riverside Holiday Inn in Bradenton, Florida, for the 14th Annual Central Office/Intergroup Seminar. Together with trustees of the General Service Board and directors and staff of A.A. World Services and the Grapevine, they explored key issues such as anonymity, Web site confidentiality, literature distribution, finances and much more.

Comments Phil R., manager of the Sara-Mana Central Office that together with the Sara-Mana Intergroup hosted the event: "The hotel was situated on the banks of the Manatee River, which kept threatening to overflow. At mid-morning Saturday, we were faced with a possible close-down, but what to do? Where to go? Fortunately we weren't flooded, and the seminar proceeded smoothly.

Having the people from the General Service Office in New York here was particularly helpful because they brought the collected experience of A.A. to the discussion of some key problems." He notes that local A.A. members hosted two hospitality suites—smoking and nonsmoking—that proved very popular. Many attendees started early with one of the several Fun in the Sun events: Shopping at St. Armands, swimming and taking a cruise around Sarasota Bay.

Pointing out that the theme of this year's Intergroup/Central Office Seminar was "I Am Responsible," Marcus E., chairman of the Sara-Mana Intergroup, says the event "serves as a symbol of our primary purpose: to be there always for the suffering alcoholic." A couple of weeks before the seminar, he relates, "a distraught woman called the Intergroup helpline talking about suicide. I knew there had been a response, but she stayed on my mind. Then at the final meeting of the seminar, which was open to our local members, a woman came up to me, quietly introduced herself as Carol, and offered thanks for saving her life. It was a wonderfully symbolic note to end on."

The seminar did not lack for scheduled workshops and impromptu sharing sessions. On Sunday morning, participants listened in fascination to presentations on "A.A. Around the World," spearheaded by East Central regional trustee Jack O. Past South Florida delegate Dick L. gave a moving account of his trip to Russia some years ago, and Abigail H., manager of the San Francisco

Intergroup, described her recent journey to China with 13 other A.A. members.

Speaking of the "extraordinary good these Intergroup/Central Office Seminars provide in helping us to carry the A.A. message," Phil says that the managers of numerous small intergroup/central offices want to attend but cannot afford the fare and miscellaneous costs. "It is important for A.A. members to realize that we are on the front line of help—it's to us that the suffering alcoholics and the public turn when they want to contact Alcoholics Anonymous. Understanding that, hopefully they will be more willing to contribute to the travel expenses incurred at these seminars."

To obtain a copy of the Final Report of the 1999 Seminar, write: Phil R., Central Office of Sara-Mana, 1748 Independence Blvd., Sarasota, FL 34234; call (941) 351-4818; or fax (941) 355-8932. A \$6 contribution is requested to help cover production and mailing costs.

The 15th Annual Central Office/Intergroup Seminar, to be hosted by the Arkansas Central Office, Little Rock, will be held October 6-8 at the Riverfront Hilton in North Little Rock. For more information, contact Sharon M., Arkansas Central Office, 7509 Cantrell Road, Suite 106, Little Rock, AR 72207; or call (501) 664-7303.

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## 2000 Conference Has A.A. Principles On Its Mind

The 50th General Service Conference—first of the new century—will be held at the Crowne Plaza Manhattan the week of April 30-May 6. On the minds of the 134 voting members—92 U.S./Canadian delegates, trustees and directors, along with members of the General Service Office and Grapevine staffs—will be issues relating to the Conference theme: "Trusting Our Future to A.A. Principles."

Contemplating that theme, some participants—and members in general—may draw clarity and strength from the final words of Concept III: "Our entire A.A. program rests squarely upon the principle of mutual trust. We trust God, we trust A.A., and we trust each other. Therefore we cannot do less than trust our leaders in service. The 'Right of Decision' that we offer them is not only the practical means by which they may act and lead effectively, but it is also the symbol of our implicit confidence." (*The A.A. Service Manual/Twelve Concepts for World Service*, p. 16)

Most of the presentation/discussion and workshop topics planned for the Conference relate to Recovery

("Trust the God of Your Understanding," "Clean House," "Work with Others"), Unity ("Our Common Welfare," "The Informed Group Conscience and Substantial Unanimity," "Practicing Genuine Humility Through Anonymity") and Service ("I Am Responsible...", "Our Primary Purpose," "Spirit of Rotation"). There also will be a "2000 Workshop" based on the Conference theme and including discussions of the Steps, Traditions and Concepts.

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## Minnesotan Rick W. Succeeds Richard B. On G.S.O. Staff

One day last August, while Rick W. was going about his work as manager of the Minneapolis Intergroup, he received a phone call from the General Service Office that would change his life. "Here I am just a few months later," he marvels, "living in New York City and serving at G.S.O. I can't believe I'm here. I can't believe it's me."

Rick succeeds Richard B., who retired in November after 11 years on staff. Today Richard and his wife, Susan, a member of Al-Anon, divide their time between Long Branch, New Jersey, and Stuart, Florida. When he arrived at G.S.O. in October 1988, Richard commented that he saw his job as an extension of service (*Box 4-5-9, Holiday Issue 1988*), and he feels similarly about his retirement. "I'm getting back to what I used to do, newspaper reporting and editing," he acknowledges from his Florida home, "but my first love has always been working with prison groups, and I am now an A.A. volunteer at the local jail. For me it is difficult to feel any better than I do when working with another drunk."

Richard, who celebrated 24 years of sobriety in January, finds it rewarding "to see the work of G.S.O. at a distance again. The highlight of my rotating assignments there was the last—the Overseas desk. A.A. in Africa and Southeast Asia appears to be on the verge of a huge explosion, and I am eager to see how it all unfolds. I miss my friends at G.S.O.—my time there was a blessing—but today there is a new group of staff members who bring fresh vitality and exciting dynamics to their assignments. New as he is, Rick already fits in. He is talented and personable, and I wish him a wonderful journey."

Rick himself says his work at G.S.O. is another of "the marvelous happenings in sobriety that have exceeded my wildest expectations." For sure, he adds, "it's a far cry from my drinking days," which started when Rick was 15 and growing up as the youngest of a family of

four kids in Minneapolis. After high school, he recalls, "I drifted into Moorhead State University, in the northern part of Minnesota, with no ideas, no ambition. Except for drinking and trying in fits and starts to control it all. Meanwhile I majored in everything offered, from computer science to math, English and German and, for good measure, hotel management."

Then, in September 1980, Rick sobered up in the Moorhead Thursday Night Group. "It was founded by a former A.A. trustee, Don N., who also was the sponsor of my sponsor's sponsor," he notes. "Don had been in A.A. since 1948, when he was 28, and he and his sponsees were still sober and carrying the message. The camaraderie in that group was tremendous, and sponsorship and service were not just suggested—when push came to shove, they were musts. I became an Intergroup Representative when I was 1-1/2 years sober."

Rick had been to Germany before joining A.A. In 1983 he made a return visit—this time sober—and taught English and German at the International School in Hamburg. "I attended A.A. meetings," he recalls, "and learned firsthand that as a member, I don't have to be alone anywhere in the world where A.A. exists. Which is almost everywhere."

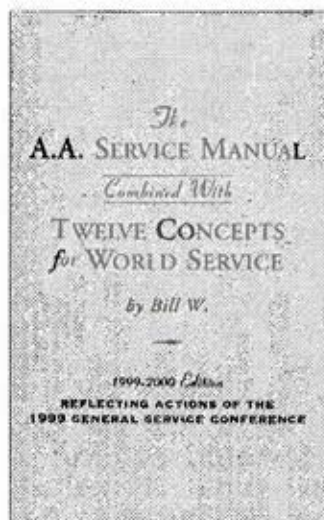
Returning to the States, Rick headed to Watertown, South Dakota, where he managed a fast-food restaurant. "After moving to Watertown," he relates, "I got active in the Watertown Monday Night Group, became a G.S.R. [general service representative] and a D.C.M. [district committee member]. That's when I started to feel for A.A. as a whole—as a worldwide Fellowship in which one could make a contribution."

In 1986 he went back to Minnesota and held successive jobs with two major booksellers. "I became immersed in local service," he recalls. "I chaired the district C.P.C. [Cooperation With the Professional Community] committee, did stints as district treasurer and secretary. It was my good fortune to gain much experience with the Traditions and in active service."

In spring 1995, Rick was named manager of the Minneapolis Intergroup. A year later, that intergroup, together with its counterpart in St. Paul, hosted the Eleventh Annual Intergroup/Central Office Seminar. "It was a lot of work, a lot of fun and a great time of sharing," Rick remembers. "Our intergroups do so much to help still-suffering and recovering alcoholics, often on a shoestring and a prayer. [A.A. co-founder] Bill W. hit it on the nail when he said of intergroups that 'heaven has surely reserved a special place for every one of them.'" (*The A.A. Grapevine*, June 1946; *The Language of the Heart*, p. 30)

The newly transplanted Minnesotan admits to "missing my friends, especially the guys I sponsored, back in Minnesota." However, familiarizing himself with his first, triple-headed assignment—Treatment Facilities,

Loners/Internationalists and Special Needs—is presently all-absorbing. “I’m incredibly grateful for the kindness and help I’ve been given by Richard [B.] and the others here,” he says. “Just thinking about it chokes me up.” When spare time does emerge, Rick will be ready. “I love to read and play bridge, am a part-time jogger and hope eventually to see every show on- and off-Broadway,” he says eagerly. “Most of all, I want to stay sober and help other alcoholics.”



The A.A. Service Manual/Twelve Concepts for World Service (BM-31; \$1.55) has a 'new look'—inside and out. The 1999-2000 Service Manual has been completely rewritten and reorganized as was suggested by the 1997 General Service Conference and approved by the 1999 Conference.

## Canadian Salutes Oldtimer with a Recipe for Sobriety

Late last year Georges L., of St. Albert, Quebec, read in the French edition of *Box 4-5-9* (Oct.-Nov. 1999) the story of Muir “Easy” E., who called himself “the oldest sober drunk who got sober in Florida” 57 years ago. Promptly Georges sent a letter to *Box 4-5-9*.

“I congratulate my friend Easy for celebrating 57 years sober,” he wrote. “By the grace of God, it is possible one day at a time. I want to tell you, Easy, that I, Georges, started to drink alcohol in 1917, when I was 10 years old, and drank for 64 years. I took my last drink on May 21, 1981. That is when the grace of God reached me, through A.A. members at the Easy Does It Group, here in St. Albert, and the spiritual way of life. Do we

call that a miracle? Since that time, my friend, I have been sober 18 years.”

Continuing, Georges offers his recipe for a comfortable sobriety in A.A.: “Make friends with the Steps, Traditions, Concepts and Slogans; learn to love each other despite differences of race, color or creed. There are happy days,” he observes, “but all days are not alike. On some, all kinds of problems arise—sickness, money worries, disappointments. But God is in each and every one of us, and we see Him not with our physical eyes but with the eyes of our heart.”

“Take a look at the Second Tradition,” Georges urges: “‘For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are trusted servants; they do not govern.’ All that I have received is from this ‘loving God’. . . and it is impossible for me to keep it for myself. I must give back what I have received freely—the wonderful, spiritual recipe for sobriety.”

Now 92, and sober 18 years, Georges salutes Easy and lauds *Box 4-5-9*, for its usefulness and importance to A.A. unity.” He emphasizes his belief that “A.A. is the most wonderful association in the world because it is a fraternity of love. We love each other here with all our shortcomings, and it is extraordinary. Nothing similar exists anywhere else in the world.”

## A.A.s ‘Share a Day’ To Give Voice to Their Special Needs

Last June the Southeast New York Area held its first Special Needs Share-a-Day—probably the first workshop of its kind. Many who were there later agreed the overriding message heard at this heartwarming assembly of recovering alcoholics was that, yes, considerations need to be made for A.A. members with special needs, but fundamentally the recovery process in the Fellowship is the same. The resounding conclusion: We are responsible for being as inclusive as possible and for offering these members an opportunity to experience all three of A.A.’s Legacies: Recovery, Unity and Service.

Approximately 100 people—a mix of some with special needs and others who are involved in carrying the message to them—participated in the event, sponsored by the S.E.N.Y. Special Needs Committee. It was held in Manhattan at a central location that was wheelchair accessible.

Naomi D., S.E.N.Y. Special Needs Committee chair, reports that “all the workshops provided for wonderful

exchanges of ideas, and many people said how happy they were that they no longer felt so apart from the Fellowship. Members felt free to ask questions as well as to share. An internet workshop, she noted, "was especially appreciated by many members who have difficulty leaving their homes or communicating in a more traditional way. A whole new world has opened to them."

Attendees with a wide range of special needs participated in a panel workshop on "How I Can Help—Illness/Disability in Sobriety."

A brain-injured A.A. shared on the difficulty of accessing meetings because of the often inaccurate listing in meeting books of wheelchair-accessible meetings. She explained that some people have multiple disabilities that make it that much more difficult.

Another panelist observed that the S.E.N.Y. Area has come a long way in the past decade. From practically nothing, she said, the area currently has one meeting for the developmentally disabled, another geared toward the needs of the visually impaired and at least one meeting each day that employs an ASL (American Sign Language) interpreter for the deaf and hard of hearing. It was noted that most groups come to accept the ASL interpreter not as a visitor but as a link between hearing-impaired members and the rest of the group. (Professional signers are subject to a strict code of ethics; like physicians they are bound to maintain confidentiality, even beyond the guidelines of the Traditions.)

During a workshop on "How the Message Reached You," a deaf member, whose sharing was interpreted from ASL into spoken English, spoke of yearning to be treated like any other alcoholic, and how it was the time and encouragement given to him by A.A.s that made the difference in his own life. He said that service has been a big part of his recovery and stressed the need for sponsorship. He encouraged hearing people to reach out more to deaf members by exchanging phone numbers, which are useful in communicating with those who may not know ASL but can be in touch by using a TTY or the Relay Service available in most places.

Still another participant recalled his years in shelters and on the street battling his problems. When in A.A., he said, he initially experienced great difficulty integrating but now has 10 years of sobriety; and though apprehensive at first, he became active in a home group and is known today as "the best coffee maker in A.A."

He also has served as a general service representative and a district committee member. He credited much of his success to members who had taken the time to explain the program and the vital role of service, saying, "You've got to give sobriety away in order to keep it."

The last speaker of the day was past delegate (Panel 43) Denise B., who expressed her gratitude for Share-a-Day. "The time was," she reminded partici-

pants, "when there was no committee and little interest from the Fellowship in trying to explore ways to reach those alcoholics who fall outside the regular means of A.A.'s communications." Explaining that she was a TAP (a temporarily abled person), she added that she was "somewhat selfishly laying the groundwork to assure that resources will be available to me down the road."

Then Denise thanked members of her own Support for Living Sober Group—geared to alcoholics who are developmentally disabled—for "their lessons of patience and tolerance and the Keep It Simple nature of how they practice the program." And she mentioned that some of A.A.'s recovery literature is now available from the General Service Office at a language level more accessible for those with limited reading skills, as well as in ASL, videotape and other formats for the disabled. (A complete listing may be found in the G.S.O. catalog "A.A. Literature and Audiovisual Material for Special Needs.")

"You know," Denise pointed out, "we are all TAPs. There is no telling when any one of us may require Special Needs material and services in order to stay sober in A.A."

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## When Carrying The Message Was Quite Enough

Sobriety comes in big and small packages, in all sorts of shapes, colors and sizes. If expected, it often fails to materialize, only to appear when we're not looking. As Jay M. of Akron, Ohio, found out, "God decides who will get sober, not us. Our job is to carry the message and leave the results to Him. In my experience, I am grateful to say, additional help came from an unexpected source."

Sharing his story at the East Central Regional Conference in Lansing, Michigan, last August, Jay said that it all started in July 1982. "I had stopped drinking," he said, "but was hardly sober since I had not changed how I was living. In early sobriety I'd committed a white-collar crime that finally caught up with me in 1995. And so, with 13 years' 'sobriety,' I was incarcerated in a federal minimum security prison for more than two years."

At the prison, Jay related, "we had one A.A. meeting a week. There was a gentleman in with me who had 10 years of sobriety, and the two of us ran the meetings. Ninety-nine percent of the people attending were forced to do so by the institution; most did not want to be there and were very disruptive, mocking and making fun of what was going on. One of the worst offenders was

Rico, from Akron. If you looked up 'punk' in the dictionary, his picture would have been there.

"There were 389 men in that institution, and no matter what the crime, alcohol and drugs were usually at the root. We had no literature, only my Big Book. We couldn't afford to buy literature, and my (former) home group refused to help, telling me we should be 'self-supporting.' So other than the sharing from Jim and me, we had nothing to give them. I felt like I was on an island, abandoned. In desperation I wrote to the General Service Office in New York for help.

"All I really knew about G.S.O. was we sent them some money once a year, and it was the A.A. headquarters, so I wasn't too hopeful. But about three weeks later, my floor counselor called me into his office and showed me a package that had arrived from G.S.O. filled with literature and paperback Big Books! Suddenly I understood that 'New York' was far more than some faceless monolith begging for money. They also told me that I would soon be contacted by the local Correctional Facilities Committee."

Released from prison in May 1998, Jay returned home to Akron. In December he was attending a meeting of his new home group when "suddenly there was Rico. He gave me a hug, saying, 'Man, you saved my life. I couldn't do nothing in the joint 'cause of my rep, but I listened to you. I read that book in my cubicle, by myself. I been sober for a month now. I love you, man; you cared about me.'"

Said Jay: "I was stunned. I realized that back in prison some of those men who were mocking on the outside were really listening to Jim and me on the inside. But we never could have carried the A.A. message without that saving box from G.S.O."

Largely because of this experience, Jay told attendees at the regional conference, "I have gotten very involved in service. I am now a D.C.M. [district committee member] and serve on the local Archives Committee. The Twelve steps saved my life, but service has saved my soul."

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## Oklahoma's Language Service Committee

With a little help from their fellow English-speaking members, Spanish-speaking groups in Oklahoma are feeling more and more that in A.A. they are family—with all the closeness, support and responsibility to other alcoholics the connection implies.

Until formation of the area's Language Service Committee barely more than two years ago, this was not always the case. Says co-chairman and past delegate (Panel 43) Gene B.: "For some time I had been troubled

about why our Spanish-speaking groups seemed to stay out of the A.A. mainstream. My friend Chino F. explained that many of the members do not understand English, and that they feel uncomfortable going to Anglo meetings even if they do know English because they don't identify with English-speaking members. As we all know, it was attraction that brought us back to our second A.A. meeting and finally to continuing sobriety. Chino and another Spanish-speaking member, Antonio M., both stressed the importance of finding a way to carry the A.A. message to the Hispanic community."

Gene further relates that, "while attending the 1995 Southwest Regional Forum in San Antonio, Texas, I watched the group of Hispanic members as they listened through their headphones to translators for the speakers. With the help of a bilingual member, the Spanish-speaking members were asking questions and participating in the general sharing sessions. They were an integral part of the Forum and contributed to its success. That," he says with a smile, "was when my wheels began to turn."

In formulating a plan of action, Gene points out, "the collective experience of A.A. was invaluable. After meeting with local Spanish-speaking groups to pinpoint their needs and start bridging the communication gap, some of us talked to delegates in other parts of the country, including New Mexico and Northeast and Southwest Texas. With strong support from the Oklahoma Area Advisory Board, we formed an ad hoc committee of seven members: five bilingual, Spanish-speaking A.A.s, a district committee member and me. We came up with some suggestions to present to the December 1997 area committee meeting."

Gene reports that "the area committee voted to establish the service committee, naming it somewhat generically the Language Service Committee in case we have other language challenges to deal with in the future. The area did not approve the purchase of translating equipment, but we later received sufficient individual contributions from the Fellowship to purchase it—that really warmed this old warhorse's heart! We obtained the equipment in time for the 1998 state conference and were gratified to experience a successful turnout of Spanish-speaking members."

Noting that the Language Service Committee now has an annual budget of \$400, Gene says that his co-chairman, Joe M., "is really the worker. He travels around the area, does a lot of the translating and attends all the area's functions and Regional Forums. He has encouraged many Spanish-speaking members to get involved in service and, thanks to his efforts, not only have the Spanish-speaking groups attracted more newcomers, but the number of groups also has grown—from three groups in 1996 to eight today."



Not one to toot his own horn, Joe is quick to praise “the many Spanish-speaking A.A.s who have worked tirelessly—members like Edgard A., of Grupo Serenidad, who never stops encouraging participation in A.A. service, and keeps informing people about all the A.A. literature in Spanish published by the General Service Office.”

Joe explains that four of the Spanish-speaking groups are in Oklahoma City: Grupo Nueva Viva (Joe’s home group), Grupo El Oasis, Grupo Latino, and Grupo Serenidad. The fifth, in Tulsa, is Grupo Renovacion. “The Spanish-speaking A.A. groups have attracted few women to date,” he observes, “but we’re making progress. At this time some of the bilingual women in Oklahoma City are forming a Spanish-speaking women’s group, which we’re hoping will attract those who are too shy to attend a largely male group.” Noting that many women are aware of the availability of help, he adds that many more women than men can be found in Oklahoma City’s Grupo Al-Anon.

Both Joe and Gene feel that the Language Service Committee is making a difference. “Our small efforts are paying off, just as we’d hoped,” Gene says. “More is yet to come!”

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## How Can We Build Better Communication Links Group to Group?

“The importance of effective communication with the A.A. groups and of their participation in service is reflected in Concept I, which states right off that ‘the A.A. groups today hold ultimate responsibility and final authority for our world services—those special elements of overall service activity that make it possible for our society to function as a whole.’” (*The A.A. Service Manual/ Twelve Concepts for World Service*, p. 6)

Speaking at a General Sharing Session of the Board of Trustees last July, Ron G., nontrustee director of A.A. World Services, went on to emphasize that “communication and participation are essential to our efforts to encourage the involvement of A.A. groups and to be a program of attraction.”

Expanding on the theme of the session, “How to Improve Communication with All A.A. Groups,” Ron noted that the General Service Office works directly with the groups to share information, respond to new groups, maintain group records, publish the A.A. newsletter *Bar 4-5-9* and report on group contributions to G.S.O. Through the years, he noted, “some key questions have arisen: (1) Why are some A.A. groups not involved in

general service or supporting the Grapevine? (2) How can we stimulate interest in service and encourage more group participation? (3) How can we ensure that information regarding A.A. as a whole is shared with all groups? (4) How effective are the communication tools used? (5) What are the best methods of distributing information?”

In considering these and other concerns, Ron contended, “an understanding of the number of A.A. groups and the recent changes in the growth of the groups is essential.” As of January 1999, he pointed out, “56,440 groups in the U.S./Canada were registered with G.S.O. and active. While the number of groups has increased by 13,510 over the past 11 years, growth over the past six years has consisted only of 840 groups (an average of 140 groups annually). This growth pattern contrasts sharply with the prior period from 1988-92, when the number of registered groups increased by 12,670 (an average of 2,111 annually).”

Furthermore, Ron added, “during the past four years the number of groups has remained relatively stable at 55,000 to 56,000 groups. While the average net increase was only 140 groups annually during this period, the number of new groups increased by an average of 2,458 a year, and the number of inactive or discontinued groups decreased by 2,318 groups. In other words, while the recent growth of U.S./Canada groups appears to be relatively stable, significant turnover has been occurring among the groups.” He then pinpointed several areas in which efforts are being directed toward strengthening communication links with the A.A. groups, as follows:

*General Service Representatives.* “In 1998 the number of G.S.R.s/alternate G.S.R.s was 38,714, representing 69 percent of U.S./Canada groups. In the same way that newcomers can bring new life to a group, having more new G.S.R.s could bring new life to our service work.”

*Bar 4-5-9.* “The informational material most often received by the groups is this newsletter. Present issues have a distribution consisting of 50,000 copies in English, 6,000 in Spanish and 3,000 in French. Given the wide distribution of this communication piece among the groups, consideration of ways to improve its usefulness to the groups—the inclusion of new service pieces in the mailings, for instance—could have significant impact.”

*Final Report of the General Service Conference.* “A different method is used to distribute this annual report, one that relies directly on the efforts of the delegates and their respective areas. Based on an Advisory Action of the 1988 General Service Conference that was reaffirmed by the ’91 Conference, the *Final Reports* are sent to all G.S.R.s, with the distribution method and quantity determined by the individual delegates. At the ’99 Conference, these orders totaled 46,780 copies in English, 4,918 in Spanish and 2,671 in French, with the goal of having each A.A. group receive one. Given the

variation in distribution methods used by the 92 delegate areas, questions exist regarding the effectiveness of this effort and whether we are actually carrying out the intent of the Advisory Action. How is the *Final Report* distributed in each delegate area? Does each group actually receive a copy? And to the extent that not every group receives one, does the Conference summary published annually in the June/July issue of *Box 4-5-9* meet the needs of groups that do not receive a copy?"

Then Ron added, "But what about the ways in which our means of communication have changed over time? In the early years, groups relied on letters; as technology advanced, we used the telephone and, more recently, faxes and e-mail. Since 1997 the use of G.S.O.'s A.A. Web site has increased rapidly, with inquiries averaging 1,821 per day in the first six months of 1999. While the means of communication have continued to change, though, the same operating principle—to provide responses on a first-come, first-serve basis as much as possible—is followed. On the Web and elsewhere, efforts are ongoing to strengthen communication links with the A.A. groups. As co-founder Bill W. said so forcefully, 'A.A. is more than a set of principles; it is a society of alcoholics in action. . . .' (*The A.A. Service Manual*, S1) Together we can do our part to support these efforts. What they're about is helping us to carry the message of sobriety to our fellow alcoholics."

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## Correctional Facilities

### A.A.s in Florida Celebrate Sobriety From the Inside Out

"I'm starting to learn it's important for alcoholics to help each other out, and I know that now because of the love and kindness you all showed us. . . ."

"It is truly inspirational to know the program really does work in the free world, and that it's not just another chain-gang hustle that we get involved with just to pass the time in here."

"I was surprised to see so many of you who are willing to take the time to come and share with us. It allowed me to realize the sincerity of Step Twelve."

These are just some of the expressions of gratitude sent by 36 A.A.s in a North Central Florida correctional facility to their fellow members on the outside after sharing with them at last year's annual banquet—which

started out years ago as an awards banquet but has evolved into an all-day event that includes breakfast, lunch and a speaker meeting. Says Jeri S., a member of the correctional facility's staff who serves as inside sponsor: "Every year we hold two separate banquets for our A.A., and N.A. [Narcotics Anonymous] people. The meals are provided by the institution, but our inmates, some of them culinary workers here, do the rest—from planning the menu to food preparation and the set-up and serving. This year close to 30 outside A.A.s came to the A.A. banquet in August, along with about 150 inmates. They all breakfasted on coffee cake, fried fruit tarts (they love those), juice, coffee and milk. For lunch there was fried chicken, ham, baked beans, coleslaw, assorted veggies, cake, cookies, beverages and more. The dishes were mostly disposable, so cleaning up afterward wasn't a hassle."

The A.A. banquet is always held on a Sunday, and there is nothing last-minute about it. Two months before the event, Jeri explains, "inmates are notified of the date. If they wish to participate, they may, but with the understanding that they also must attend all A.A. meetings held from that point on, at least until the big banquet day."

After the last banquet, some 36 A.A. members in the facility wrote individual letters of thanks to their outside A.A. friends. "It means so much to me," said one, "that there are people in the outside world who really care. Many of us are struggling to put our lives back together again, and with the help of people like you, we have a very good chance of making it. I am hopeful that you will continue caring about us because many of us were missing that in our lives before." Said another, "You showed us inmates that if we choose to stay sober, we too can become productive members of society." And yet another member summed up his feelings succinctly: "It's all about A.A. unity, isn't it?"

Area district committee member Christopher heartily agrees. "Having us outside A.A.s come in means as much to us as it does to the fellows inside," he says. "We just carry the message—let them know that A.A. is not a place where we go but a way of life we live. When the message takes and they get really sober and into the Steps and Traditions, well, that's a beautiful thing to see."

Jeri notes that in addition to the annual banquet, "marathon A.A. meetings are held on some of the major holidays, when it can be especially difficult to be incarcerated and feel so alone. The last one lasted 22 hours, from 6 a.m. New Year's Eve day until 2 a.m. the next morning. There was wonderful sharing of experience, strength and hope among the inside A.A.s and outside volunteers who made the time to be with them. As one of our guys wrote in appreciation, 'Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forward. Thanks, and wishes to all for a bright day.'"

Items and Ideas on Area Gatherings for A.A.s—Via G.S.O.

FEBRUARY - MARCH 2000

## 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.

### February

- 3-6—*Huntsville, Alabama*. Huntsville Roundup IX. Write: Ch., Box 662, Huntsville, AL 35804
- 4-6—*De Haan, Ostend, Belgium*. 11th TriBorders Intergroup North Sea Conv. Write: Ch., Grabenstrasse 1, Meerbusch, Germany 40667
- 4-6—*Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada*. Dist. 5 Mid-Winter Roundup. Write: Ch. Box 742, Postal Station A, Fredericton, NB E3B 5B4
- 4-6—*Brawley, California*. 10th Imperial Valley Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 393, El Centro, CA 92244
- 4-6—*Burbank, California*. San Fernando Valley Conv. Write: Ch., Box 7610, Northridge, CA 91327-7610
- 4-6—*Chicago, Illinois*. We Are Not Saints Conv. Write: Ch., Box 746, Tinley Park, IL 60477
- 10-13—*Atlanta, Georgia*. 36th Int'l. Women's Conf. Write: Ch., Box 723964, Atlanta, GA 31139
- 11-13—*Dryden, Ontario, Canada*. 22nd Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 601, Dryden, ON P8N 2Z4
- 11-13—*Greeley, Colorado*. Stampede Conv. Write: Ch., 3127 22nd Ave., Greeley, CO 80631
- 11-13—*Paducah, Kentucky*. 49th State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 3193, Paducah, KY 42002
- 11-13—*Huntsville, Texas*. Spirit of Recovery Conf. Write: Ch., 320 Market #5, Galveston, TX 77550
- 17-20—*Kailua-Kona, Hawaii*. Big Book Study. Write: Ch., Box 161271, Honolulu, HI 96816
- 18-20—*Pattaya, Thailand*. Fifth Annual Thailand Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 1032, New Petchburi Road Post Office, Bangkok 10311, Thailand
- 18-20—*Richmond, British Columbia, Canada*. Western Canada Regional Forum. Write: Forum Coordinator, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163
- 18-20—*Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada*. 33rd Annual Intergroup Round-Up. Write: Ch., c/o Saskatoon Central Off., 311-220 3rd Ave.S., Saskatoon, SK S7K 1M1
- 18-20—*Lilburn, Georgia*. Unity Weekend 2000. Write: Ch., Box 1333, Norcross, GA 30091

- 18-20—*Burlington, Iowa*. 10th South-eastern Iowa Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 298, West Point, IA 52656
- 18-20—*Coudersport, Pennsylvania*. 28th Annual Day of Sharing. Write: Ch., 102 N. Highland Ave., Wellsville, NY 14895
- 18-20—*Jackson, Tennessee*. 18th Annual TCYPAA. Write: Ch., Box 3228, Jackson, TN 38303-3228
- 18-20—*Virginia Beach, Virginia*. 24th Oceanfront Conf. Write: Rgstr., Box 66173, Virginia Beach, VA 23466
- 25-26—*Sikeston, Missouri*. 19th Annual "Five Corners" Conv. Write: Ch., 501 Maple St., Kennett, MO 63857
- 25-27—*Catalina, Arizona*. Third Annual Rodeo Weekend Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 8701, Catalina, AZ 85738
- 25-27—*Greenbelt, Maryland*. NERAASA. Write: Ch., Box 4785, Silver Spring, MD 20914-4785

### March

- 3-5—*Jersey Channel Islands, United Kingdom*. 25th Annual Jersey Conv. Write: Ch., Post Box 241, St. Mellier, Jersey C.I., UK JE2 4JN
- 3-5—*Ames, Iowa*. West Central Region Service Conf. Write: Ch., Box 661, Ames, IA 50010
- 3-5—*Toledo, Ohio*. NW Ohio & SE Michigan 18th Annual Mini Conf. Write: Ch., 4615 N. Holland Sylvania Rd., #7, Toledo, OH 43623-2560
- 3-5—*Lake Murray, Oklahoma*. 14th Annual Lake Murray Men's Conf. Write: Ch., Box 595833, Dallas, TX 75359
- 3-5—*Ogden, Utah*. PRAASA. Write: Ch., Box 150116, Ogden, UT 84403-0116
- 10-12—*Portland, Maine*. Northeast Fellowship of the Spirit Big Book Conf. Write: Ch., 4 Kurt St., Brunswick, ME 04011

## Closed Meeting Topics From the Grapevine

For more detailed suggestions, see the pages noted.

February (page 35): "Return to Forever"  
March (page 57): "From Fantasy to Fellowship"

- 10-12—*Troy, Michigan*. March Roundup 2000. Write: Ch., Box 2843, Southfield, MI 48037-2843
- 10-12—*Helena, Montana*. Fourth Annual Northern Rockies Pockets of Enthusiasm. Write: Ch., 331 State, Helena, MT 59601
- 11-13—*El Paso, Texas*. Jamboree 2000. Write: Secy., c/o El Paso Central Off., 3330 Douglas Ave., El Paso, TX 79903
- 17-19—*Salmon Arm, British Columbia, Canada*. 32nd Annual Roundup. Write: Ch., 2591-26th St. NE, Salmon Arm, BC V1E 3C8
- 17-19—*Columbus, Indiana*. 47th Annual State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 2504, Indianapolis, IN 46206
- 17-20—*Phoenix, Arizona*. Firebase Phoenix - State Capitol. Write: Ch., 2100 N. 90th Pl., Chandler, AZ 85224-1642
- 23-26—*Greenville, South Carolina*. 53rd So. Carolina State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 1116, Fountain Inn, SC 29644
- 24-26—*Newport, Rhode Island*. Rhode Island 2000 Conv. Write: Ch. Box 553, Portsmouth, RI 02871
- 24-26—*Rapid City, South Dakota*. Rushmore Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 594, Rapid City, SD 57709-0594
- 31-April 2—*Wichita, Kansas*. 25th Annual Spring Roundup. Write: Ch., c/o Central Office, 2812 E. English, Wichita, KS 67211

## Planning a Future Event?

Please send your information on April, May and June events, two days or more, in time to reach G.S.O. by February 10, the calendar deadline for the April-May issue of Box 4-5-9.

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 \_\_\_\_\_, 19 \_\_\_\_\_

Name of event: \_\_\_\_\_

Place (city, state or prov.): \_\_\_\_\_

For information, write: (exact mailing address) \_\_\_\_\_

Contact phone # (for office use only): \_\_\_\_\_

Flip this end of page - for events on reverse side

31-April 2—Butler, Pennsylvania. WPA  
60 Getaway Weekend 2000. Write:  
Ch., 2919 Grover St., McKeesport, PA  
15132-5358

## April

- 7-9—Sandusky, Ohio. 25th NE Ohio  
Mini-Conference. Write: Ch., Box  
608871, Cleveland, OH 44108-8871
- 8-9—Battleford, Saskatchewan, Canada.  
38th Annual Roundup. Write: Ch., Box  
2014, Battleford, SK S0M 0E0
- 14-16—Banff, Alberta, Canada. 27th  
Banff Roundup. Write: Ch., c/o  
Calgary Intgp., #2-4015-1 St. SE,  
Calgary, AB T2G 4X7
- 14-16—Lincoln, Nebraska. Spring Fling  
2000. Write: Ch., Box 30691, Lincoln,  
NE 68503
- 14-16—Grand Forks, North Dakota.  
Northern Spring Roundup. Write: Ch.,  
Box 14121, Grand Forks, ND 58208
- 20-23—Erie, Pennsylvania. GLRCYPAA  
X. Write: Ch., Box 8698, Erie, PA  
16505-0698
- 20-24—Canberra, Australia. 35th  
National Convention. Write: Secy., Box  
5179, Kingston ACT 2604, Canberra  
City, Australia

## May

- 4-7—Ermioni, Peloponnese Peninsula,  
Greece. Sixth International Conv.  
Write: Ch., Thiseos 22, Paleo Faliro,  
Greece 17562
- 5-7—Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada.  
34th Annual Roundup. Write: Ch., Box  
10073, Thunder Bay, ON P7B 6T6
- 5-7—Greensburg, Pennsylvania. 53rd  
Laurel Highlands Conf. Write: Ch.,  
Box 6, Bovard, PA 15619-0006
- 19-21—Kamloops, British Columbia,  
Canada. Kamloops Roundup. Write:  
Ch., 29-254 Royal Ave., Kamloops,  
BC V2B 3P3
- 26-28—Waycross, Georgia. Okfenokee  
Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 403,  
Waycross, GA 31502