

■ A.A. in Cyberspace—G.S.O.’s A.A. Web Site Takes Another Step Forward

In August 2008, important new changes to G.S.O.’s A.A. Web site were launched, unveiling a more dynamic approach to delivering the vast array of A.A. information available online and offering visitors to the site greater ease of navigation, increased interactivity, and helpful new advances in Web technology. A year-and-a-half in the making, this latest evolution builds on previous enhancements to the site, which made its first appearance in late 1995 as a bare bones public information tool, and expands the site’s usefulness as a powerful adjunct to the Twelfth Step work done by A.A. members throughout the U.S. and Canada and, indeed, around the world.

The Web site can never replace the magic that happens when one alcoholic shares his or her experience with another face to face, or when a newcomer—shaky and unsure—is handed a warm cup of coffee and offered a pat on the back, yet, in the age of computers and electronic communication, the Web site exponentially increases the opportunities for alcoholics to get help. With a commitment to providing the most effective online environment for the wealth of A.A. information that has been added to the Web site over the years, G.S.O.’s latest reorganization incorporates a wide range of input, information, comments and “loving suggestions” from all corners of the Fellowship, resulting in a more positive experience for visitors to the site.

Recognizing, as Bill W. noted in a Grapevine article (“Leadership in A.A.: Ever a Vital Need,” April 1959), that “a fine plan or idea can come from anybody, anywhere,” input was encouraged from G.S.O. employees and staff, concerned A.A. members and service workers throughout the Fellowship, G.S.O.’s own Intraoffice Web site Committee (I.O.W.C.), and the Services Committee of the A.A.W.S. Board.

“This project has been a team effort from the start—a collective effort to identify what areas needed to be improved,” says Daniel O. Brown, G.S.O.’s nonalcoholic digital media manager, and the primary architect of the site’s reorganization and redesign. “And we’re going to keep looking at it over time to ensure that it continues to meet the Fellowship’s needs.”

Describing the process and procedure behind the reorganization, G.S.O. staff member Mary Clare L. notes “When we got additions, requests, and changes from the

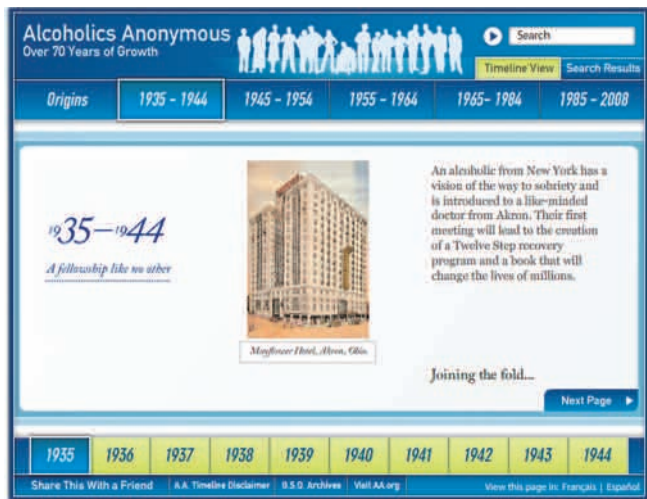
Fellowship, we would bring them to Daniel and they would be discussed in meetings of the Intraoffice Web site Committee.”

So, what are the changes and how will they impact users visiting the Web site today?

“Probably the area that the Fellowship will be happiest about,” says Mary Clare, “are the changes in how to contact local A.A. offices for meeting information.” Daniel agrees, citing the new Google map technology that has been adapted to fit the needs of those searching for local A.A. offices throughout the U.S. and Canada. Where all central offices and intergroups were previously listed simply by state and city, the map function now allows users to actually see where each office is in relation to where the user is, or is going to be, and can link directly to their Web sites, many of which often contain meeting times and locations. “Meeting lists and answering the call for help from the still-suffering alcoholic have always been the responsibility of the local central office or intergroup,” says Mary Clare, “but with the Web site’s new design, finding those local offices has become a whole lot easier.”

Another new option is the inclusion of an A.A. timeline, which can be viewed simultaneously in English, Spanish, and French, with available touch screen technology to facilitate navigation. Designed by Daniel, in consultation with the Archives staff, specifically for the Web site, the timeline makes A.A. history available in dynamic, digestible chunks that articulate the essence of A.A.’s incredible growth from its origins in the early 1930s.

The site has maintained its six principal portals: “Information on A.A.,” “For the Media,” “Is A.A. for You?,” “For Groups and Members,” “Archives and History,” and “How to Find A.A. Meetings,” yet within each portal the drop-down navigation bars have been streamlined to more effectively categorize the information available. Now contained in “buckets,” as they are called by Daniel and Mary Clare, information is available in the portal “For Groups and Members” that relates directly to G.S.O. staff assignments for Cooperation With the Professional Community, Corrections, Public Information, Treatment Facilities, Loners/Internationalists, and Special Needs/Accessibilities. Each “bucket” is filled with pamphlets, newsletters, guidelines, and forms specific to each assignment, with an e-mail connection to each specific desk.



Beginning of the new Timeline.

Finally, among the many other enhanced features, a “Navigate to Vital Info” option has been added to the home page, allowing users to go directly to the site’s most popular pages, as identified by an internal analysis. “We have software in place that tells us which areas of the site are most visited and how the site is used,” says Daniel. “This information helped us with decisions on the redesign, and will contribute to any changes we’ll make in the future.”

So, overall, what was the project’s biggest challenge? “Everything,” says Daniel. “This is going to be a work in progress for a long time because we’re going to be adding more to the site as we go forward.”

Like sobriety and spiritual growth itself, the Web site is an ongoing project, one that needs to be constantly nurtured, inventoried, and enhanced.

■ REMINDER! Résumés for Trustees Election due Jan. 1, 2009

Two new Class B (alcoholic) trustees from the Southeast and East Central regions and a trustee-at-large/U.S. will be nominated at the General Service Conference in April 2009. Résumés must be received at G.S.O. no later than January 1, 2009, and must be submitted by delegates only.

The new Southeast regional trustee will succeed Howard L., of Columbia, Mississippi; the next trustee from the East Central Region will follow Robert M., of Oak Creek, Wisconsin. A new trustee-at-large/U.S. will take the position currently held by Dorothy W., of Indianapolis.

A sound A.A. background is a basic qualification for Class B trustees. Ten years of continuous sobriety is desirable but not mandatory. Candidates should be active in both local and area A.A. affairs; and, because trustees

serve the entire Fellowship, they require the background and the willingness to make decisions on matters of broad policy that affect A.A. as a whole.

It is also important that trustee candidates understand the commitment of time required. Trustees are expected to attend three quarterly board weekends, with meetings often scheduled from Thursday afternoon through Monday morning, and the General Service Conference, which lasts for one week in April. Often trustees are asked to attend a Regional Forum weekend. In addition, regional trustees are usually asked to serve two years on either the A.A.W.S. or Grapevine Corporate Board.

Trustees-at-large are usually asked to attend Regional Forums in both the U.S. and Canada and to participate in the five-day World Service Meeting, every other year, and the Western Hemisphere zonal meeting, the Meeting of the Americas, in the years between World Service Meetings.

Please submit your candidates résumés to the Secretary, trustees’ Nominating Committee, General Service Office.

■ Please let us know...

G.S.O. frequently receives inquiries about groups, in the U.S. and Canada, who hold meetings in languages other than English, Spanish and French. We are aware of meetings/groups where the language of the heart is spoken in Japanese, Polish, Punjabi, and Russian, to name a few, but are sure this just scratches the surface.

If you or your intergroup/central office knows of such linguistic A.A. meetings, in the U.S. and Canada only, this information would be helpful in facilitating local Twelfth Step opportunities.

You may e-mail information to groupservicessa@aa.org, or fax to (212) 870-3003. Regular mail should be addressed to G.S.O., Attn: Group Services.

Box 4-5-9 is published bimonthly by the General Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115, © Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 2008

Mail address: P.O. Box 459, Grand Central Station
New York, NY 10163

G.S.O.’s A.A. Web Site: www.aa.org

Subscriptions: Individual, \$3.50 per year; group, \$6.00 for each unit of 10 per year. Check—made payable to A.A.W.S., Inc.—should accompany order.

■ Bern Smith: A Principal Architect of the General Service Conference

One late afternoon in 1944, three men arrived at the law offices of Bernard B. Smith, a prominent New York attorney who specialized in corporate and commercial law. Their purpose was to retain him to form a corporation to be known as the Alcoholic Foundation.



Bernard B. Smith

Smith, known to his friends as “Bern,” knew little about alcoholism or Alcoholics Anonymous. But he was immediately impressed by A.A. co-founder Bill W., one of his three visitors. Bern would later describe Bill as “a tall, gangling, beardless Lincolnesque figure, wearing a crumpled suit.” Bern said he felt intuitively that he would like to know Bill, and invited him to dinner that same evening. (Bill readily accepted, and Bern later thought the prospects of a good dinner might have appealed to Bill at that impecunious stage in Bill’s life!)

During dinner, Bern recalled that, in lawyer-like fashion, he proceeded to interrogate Bill on what there was about A.A. that brought sobriety to the alcoholic. “I learned that evening that A.A. was spiritually based,” he said. “I learned from him why an alcoholic who had quit drinking could help another who was still drinking. I learned that evening that it was not through science, or through the use of psychic energizers or tranquilizers that Alcoholics Anonymous was arresting the disease of alcoholism, but rather through the ageless precepts of humility, of honesty, of devotion and love that A.A. was beginning to succeed where all other efforts to resolve the problem of alcoholism had failed.”

This was the beginning of a close friendship that would last until Bern’s death in 1970. He would soon become a nonalcoholic trustee and eventually would become chairman of the General Service Board. He would also become Bill’s strong supporter on a board that was sometimes divided over certain issues. One of his most important contributions was to support Bill in establishing the General Service Conference. So much of Bern’s legal knowledge and practical understanding went into planning the Conference that Bill would even call him its “architect.” Yet Bern stayed behind the scenes much of the time and was known to the A.A. Fellowship at large only because Bill occasionally referred to him in talks and reminiscences.

Bern was a native of New York City, born in the Bronx on December 23, 1901. He grew up there and attended college and law school in the city, before launching his

highly successful legal career. He lived in Manhattan with his wife, Sylvia, and two daughters.

Bern’s parents had emigrated from Russia to the U.S., where his father worked in the garment industry. Their family was destined for success, with Bern’s older brother, Carl, becoming distinguished as a professor of clinical pediatrics at the Cornell University Medical College. Their sister Josephine graduated from Hunter College and became an elementary school teacher. Both Carl and Bern authored articles and books in their respective fields. Carl’s writings on blood diseases in children were highly regarded, while Bern wrote papers on international trade, the construction industry, and television. In 1957, Bern was made an Honorary Commander of the Order of the British Empire by Queen Elizabeth.

At first, it seemed strange that Bern should have been so attracted to A.A. There was no alcoholism in his family, and he would describe himself as a “one-fisted drinker” who never had a problem with alcohol. But he remembered a talented, sensitive friend who had died of alcoholism. The friend had been an artist commissioned to do a mural and special steps had been taken to keep him sober while the work was being completed. But he went on a fatal binge before completing the project. No replacement artist could be found with his special talent, and the mural was never finished. As Bern put it, the unfinished mural remained as “a monument to a supreme artist, and the other quarter blank space—the tombstone of an alcoholic.”

Even during his first meeting with Bill, Bern was caught up in what he saw as the A.A. miracle and what it was doing in the world, though the Fellowship’s 1944 membership was then only around 10,000 (but growing rapidly). He recalled other alcoholic friends whom he could not help, and learned from Bill why his feeble efforts had failed. “Rarely, if ever, can the nonalcoholic help the alcoholic,” he told a session at A.A.’s 1965 International Convention in Toronto.

“I knew as Bill talked to me that evening that something tremendously significant was taking form in human society,” he added, referring to his first meeting with Bill. “Indeed, it was one of the most stimulating evenings of my life. And so, as asked, I proceeded to form the Alcoholic Foundation as a corporation and not long thereafter began my twenty-one years service as a trustee.” (His total service to A.A. would comprise twenty-six years.)

Even at that beginning stage, Bill told Bern he wanted to provide that a majority of the directors or trustees of the Foundation be nonalcoholics. When Bern asked why such a distinction was necessary, Bill explained that recovered alcoholics in A.A. were only one drink removed from the gutter. Bern included this requirement in the Charter,

though he was obliged to refer to alcoholic members as “ex-alcoholics,” a term A.A. members do not use.

When Bern filed for the legal Charter on behalf of the board, the secretary of New York state noticed that some trustees were nonalcoholics, others alcoholics. Worried about this distinction, he asked Bern, “How can you tell the difference legally?” It took lots of doing, but Bern came up with this explanation that satisfied the legal experts: “Sit them all down at a table,” Bern said, “and put a Scotch-and-soda down for each man. The ones who don’t take it are the alcoholics.” The explanation worked, and the board got its Charter.

Bern’s service as a trustee had started when Bill was in the process of developing the Twelve Traditions, which would eventually be accepted at the 1950 International Convention, in Cleveland. While Bill wrote the Twelve Steps in 20 or 30 minutes, the preparation and acceptance of the Twelve Traditions would stretch out for years. And Bern would recall that he hadn’t been entirely in agreement with Bill about adopting the Seventh Tradition, which states that A.A. must decline outside contributions.

“Bill had to hammer home to us meeting after meeting the reasons why A.A. must be self-supporting and why it must not accept financial help from the nonalcoholic world,” Bern would recall, noting that Bill and Lois were then leading an “incredibly meager existence” and the board would have liked to have more money to help them live a more gracious life. Despite this need, Bill persisted and that Tradition, like others, finally took form, Bern remembered. But he would confess to moments of hesitation, when, as chairman, he had to sign letters declining thousands of dollars in legacies and gifts! Nevertheless, Bern would say later that Bill knew that a spiritually based society such as Alcoholics Anonymous must insulate itself from the materialistic pressures that, but for this Tradition, “could impinge on the unity of this great Fellowship.”

A.A. members tend to believe that there are no coincidences and that good things happen for the Fellowship under the guidance of God. It does seem providential that Bern was on the General Service Board in 1951 when Bill began to float the concept of a General Service Conference to represent A.A.’s membership at the grass-roots level. He believed, and Bern agreed, that there could be future divisiveness in the Fellowship if the General Service Office and functions were not linked to a body representative of all of Alcoholics Anonymous. A General Service Conference, they believed, was essential to the continuity of the Fellowship.



Queen Elizabeth presenting the Honorary Commander of the Order of the British Empire to Bernard Smith.

For various reasons, they met resistance to the plan. Some members of the board, as well as A.A. members in a few cities, opposed the formation of such a conference. Bern thought that some of the trustees enjoyed what he called “the proprietary right to serve” and would lose this to a General Service Conference. Winning their cooperation, Bern realized, “proved to be a far more formidable task than Bill or I had realized.”

“Finally, after exhaustive debate, by a majority of only one, a resolution was adopted to hold a single experimental conference,” Bern recalled in 1970. This conference “was little more than a clambake,” Bern said, and had no real authority. It was followed by three more “experimental” conferences, with Bern serving as chairman, until the 1955 International Convention in St. Louis, when Bill formally stepped down as A.A.’s *de facto* leader and the

General Service Conference became a permanent part of the A.A. structure and a major force in directing A.A.’s service functions.

Bern would note that it had required the three additional “experimental” conferences before proposing it be made a permanent part of A.A. Both he and Bill agreed that changes within A.A. should never be abrupt, that we must be sure we are right before any change is made. Bern felt that the inherent strength of the Fellowship is such that there will always be ample time for change.

The same principle was followed, years later, when the General Service Board make-up was changed to place alcoholic members in the majority. Bern had for some time supported such a change and even proposed on one occasion that all the nonalcoholic members resign. This proposal for abrupt change was rejected, though in time the alcoholic members became the majority on the board.

While Bern gave great service to A.A., he made it clear that he personally benefited from its spiritual program. In major talks he gave at International Conventions, he spoke as a nonalcoholic, but also showed that he believed in the A.A. program and followed its principles in his own life. His sister Josephine believes that A.A. met a deep spiritual need for him. In his major talks to A.A. assemblies, Bern seemed almost to be speaking as a member rather than a nonalcoholic. One of his finest talks was at the International Convention of A.A. in Miami Beach in 1970. Bill W., though appearing at the Convention, was too ill to take a major role in it. So Bern substituted for him and gave an inspiring talk on the need for unity and continuity in A.A.

This would be his last major talk at an A.A. gathering. Though he appeared vigorous and energetic at the

Convention, less than a month later he suffered a fatal heart attack at his New York home. He was 68 years old, and his sudden death came as a shock to his family and friends.

Bill W., who would himself pass away in January 1971, described Bern's death as a great personal loss "for I have leaned heavily upon him for many years. His wise counsel was always mine for the asking, the warmth of his friendship, mine from the beginning." He would add, "From the very beginning, Bern Smith understood the spiritual basis upon which the Society of Alcoholics Anonymous rests. Such an understanding is rare among 'outsiders.' But Bern was never an outsider—not really. He not only understood our Fellowship, he believed in it as well."

■ 2009 Regional and Local Forums

Regional Forums strengthen the Fellowship's Three Legacies of Recovery, Unity and Service by providing an opportunity for A.A. group and area representatives, as well as any interested individual A.A.s in a particular region, to share experience, strength and hope with representatives of the General Service Board and G.S.O. and Grapevine staff members.

Local Forums (like the Special Forums they are replacing) are designed for remote, sparsely populated or urban areas and are for A.A. members who do not have access to Regional Forums. G.S.O. will not coordinate or fund these weekend long events, but is available to share experience in planning them.

These weekend sharing sessions enhance and widen communication, and help spark new ideas in better carrying the message through service work.

Mailings regarding each Regional Forum will be sent to G.S.R.s, area committee members, delegates, and central offices and intergroups approximately four months ahead of time. On-line registration is also available.

The final Forum in 2008 is in the Southeast region, November 21-23, Crowne Plaza Knoxville, Knoxville, Tennessee. In 2009 Regional Forums are planned as follows:

- *Special (Remote)*—February 14-15: Cree Village Ecolodge, Moose Factory, Ontario
- *Northeast*—June 26-28: Doubletree Hotel, Somerset, New Jersey
- *Eastern Canada (Additional)*—August 14-16: Valhalla Inn, Thunder Bay, Ontario
- *West Central*—September 11-13: Holiday Inn, St. Cloud, Minnesota
- *Southwest*—October 9-11: Westin Dallas Fort Worth Airport, Dallas, Texas
- *East Central*—November 13-15: Radisson Plaza Hotel, Kalamazoo, Michigan

■ The 2007 A.A. Membership Survey Results—Now Available

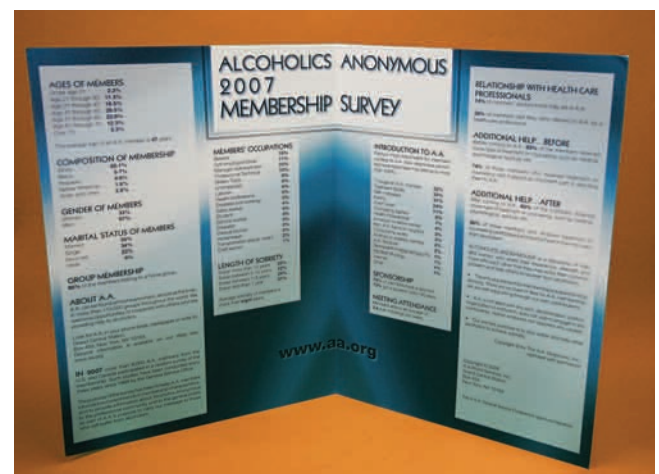
Results of the 2007 random A.A. Membership Survey were recently published and provide a snapshot of the A.A. Fellowship. Like the previous survey, published in 2004, the results reflect some interesting trends tracked over a three year period.

More than 8,000 members from the U.S. and Canada participated in the survey, helping to generate a composite picture of some of the key characteristics of A.A. and its members. According to an analysis of the survey, the average member is 47 years old, has been sober more than 8 years, attends two-and-a-half meetings a week, belongs to a home group, and has a sponsor (often getting that sponsor in the first 90 days of sobriety).

Anonymous random surveys of the Fellowship have been conducted by the General Service Office every three years since 1968 (except for 1995, when the survey was deferred for a year by an Advisory Action of the General Service Conference). Their main purpose has been to provide information about the Fellowship to the professional community and the general public as part of the continuing effort to help those who suffer from alcoholism. The survey also keeps A.A.s informed about current membership characteristics.

Survey questions cover personal statistics (age, gender, nature of job, dates of first meeting and last drink), A.A. activity (frequency of meeting attendance, group membership, sponsorship), factors that guide the individual to A.A. in the first place (A.A. members, family, etc.), and "outside" considerations such as experience with treatment facilities and the medical profession.

Highlighting the importance of one-on-one Twelfth Step work and carrying the message to professionals, the survey indicates that 39% of the respondents were referred to A.A. by a health care professional and that 74% of members' doctors know they are in A.A. Additionally, 33% of the respondents cited an A.A. member as being most responsible for their coming to



A.A., underscoring the importance of the personal touch in carrying the message to others.

The survey is available online in the “For the Media” section of www.aa.org, and in an updated version of the leaflet “Alcoholics Anonymous 2007 Membership Survey” (P-48; 15¢ each). The contents of the pamphlet are also layed out in a cardboard display, 27” high, 39” wide, with a double easle in back. (M-13; \$22.00). To order, write to the General Service Office, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163.

■ The Fellowship Celebrates Gratitude Month

“Gratitude should go forward, rather than backward,” wrote Bill W. in a 1959 letter. “In other words, if you carry the message to others, you will be making the best possible repayment for the help given you.”

For many A.A.s, these words, especially when combined with the quote referenced throughout the Big Book that “Faith without works is dead,” serve as a sure-fire recipe for love and service.

Gratitude is an integral part of sobriety—both on an individual and a group level—and for over 50 years the Fellowship has officially focused on gratitude in the month of November. This began in 1956 when the Sixth General Service Conference approved a motion asking the General Service Office to designate Thanksgiving Week each year as “A.A. Gratitude Week.”

Grateful for the sobriety they’ve been given and eager to pass it on, countless A.A. groups use the month of November to open the door of gratitude ever wider. Many groups hold Traditions meetings or topic meetings focused on gratitude. Many hold Gratitude Dinners, combining home cooked meals with A.A. speaker meetings and fellowship, renting halls, selling tickets for the meal, and sending any proceeds raised to the General Service Office or their local intergroup/central office. On a personal level, many A.A. members are busier than ever, reaching out to Loners, people with special needs, members of minority groups and previously unreached alcoholics, finding their own special ways to say thank you during Gratitude Month and, indeed, all year long.

Some groups like to take time in November to focus on A.A. history and remembering the vital strands of spiritual influence, information and help that A.A.’s nonalcoholic friends brought to the Fellowship in its early years—help and influence that they continue to provide today. By holding Big Book meetings and meetings centered on A.A. history, or having a group video night showing “Markings On the Journey,” A.A.’s critical legacy of service can be nurtured and expanded, giving newcomers a sense of connection to the Fellowship’s illustrious past.

A couple of Canadian members recently came up with

an innovative way to celebrate Gratitude Month (which is October in Canada), suggesting contributing the price of a bottle of beer for each year of their sobriety in order to buy subscriptions to the Grapevine for local institutions. “Many members thought it was a good idea,” wrote Jack S. of Sault Ste. Marie, “because when they were incarcerated the Grapevines they received helped to keep them sober.”

At least twenty members, from two months to forty-three years sober, donated money toward this goal and Jack was happy to report “we collected enough money for ten three-year subscriptions to the local institutions in Ontario, Canada.”

Gratitude can be expressed through actions big and small, and some A.A.s find November to be a good time simply to invite a sponsor or sponsee to lunch, or to reach out to oldtimers and out-of-towners who show up at their home group meetings. As noted in the essay on Step Twelve in *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, “We sit in A.A. meetings and listen, not only to receive something ourselves, but to give the reassurance and support which our presence can bring. If our turn comes to speak at a meeting, we again try to carry A.A.’s message. Whether our audience is one or many, it is still Twelfth Step work.”

Gratitude. It serves us best when it’s kept alive, in our individual lives and in our group conscience. A.A. is a program of action and while gratitude can’t possibly be confined to a single week, a particular month, or even a given year, a special investment of gratitude during November will often bring a full return.

“I try to hold fast to the truth that a full and thankful heart cannot entertain great conceits,” wrote Bill W. in a March 1962 Grapevine article. “When brimming with gratitude, one’s heartbeat must surely result in outgoing love, the finest emotion that we can ever know.”

■ Archives Renovation

Due to reconstruction the G.S.O. Archives will be closed to all visitors and researchers, beginning November 2008, for approximately three months. When completed, the renovation will double the Archives storage space, add a new workroom to process collections and add modified shelving, which will enable the staff to more efficiently store our holdings within existing fire code regulations.

During the closure, the Archives staff will be conducting limited internal and external research. Any inquiries received during this time will be addressed two to three months after we reopen.

While closed, the G.S.O. Archives staff will be working to update and refine our electronic records so researchers may more efficiently and effectively utilize the collection.

There will be limited displays in the G.S.O.’s Reception area for visitors to enjoy. We appreciate your patience during these months.

■ Get a Jump on the Holidays

Overheard at a “Meeting after the Meeting”: “When they published the 3rd edition Big Book, they dropped my favorite story: ‘Annie the Cop Fighter.’”

“I had the same thing happen. One of my favorites from the 3rd edition, ‘Home Brewmeister’ did not make it into the 4th edition.”

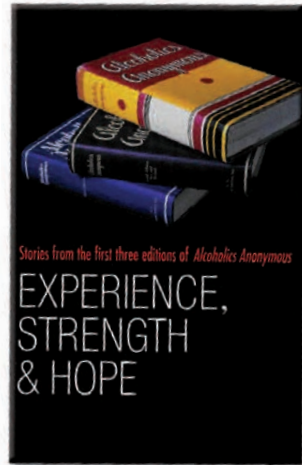
“I wonder what the stories were like in the 1st edition? I guess we will never know because I hear that if you ever find a 1st edition Big Book for sale the price would be prohibitive.”

One of the best kept secrets regarding A.A. Conference-approved literature is *Experience, Strength & Hope*, an anthology of stories from the first three editions. “Annie the Cop Fighter” is there. So is “Home Brewmeister,” as well as 53 other stories from the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd editions, which were dropped along the way.

Experience, Strength & Hope is a series of snapshots of A.A. history. The Big Book was originally published in 1939, thus many of the early A.A. members were born in the 19th century and stories span World War I, Prohibition, the Depression, as well as World War II.

It is probably a pretty good guess that a lot of members in your home group do not know about it—maybe even your sponsor or sponsees do not know of it.

In the interest of reducing inventory *Experience, Strength & Hope* (B-20), which sells for \$9.00, is being reduced to \$5.00, now through December 31, 2008.



■ The Twelve Traditions Play

Dateline: Papeete, Tahiti—Picture yourself in the crowd of A.A.s gathered in that lush, tropical locale to celebrate almost three decades of A.A. in Tahiti. Several psychiatrists, a journalist, a member of the French Parliament, a local government official, and several nuns who work with children and teenagers are all in the crowd. After a number of sobering sessions on topics such as the home group, the Twelve Steps, carrying the message to remote communities, local members put down their Big Books and picked up the greasepaint for the evening’s entertainment: a production of the Twelve Traditions Play.

According to G.S.O.’s Archives department, there isn’t a lot of history on the authorship of the Twelve Traditions

Play, but many remember that the play has been around since the 1970s and has become increasingly popular among districts and areas as an interesting and entertaining way to impart information about the Traditions.

Set in “Middletown, U.S.A.,” the play tells the story of the Middletown A.A. Group and how it finds solutions through the Traditions to the problems of money, property and prestige that seem to have overtaken the group’s effectiveness. Performed at countless A.A. conferences, conventions, workshops and assemblies, the play presents the essence of the Twelve Traditions and shows how accessible they can be to help guide groups and individuals through the difficulties that can often beset groups, both old and new.

So, how did the play go over in Tahiti? As reported by G.S.O. staff member Doug R., who happened to be in Papeete along with Eastern Canada regional trustee Robert P. to help Tahiti A.A. members get their service structure off the ground, “It was the best presentation of this play I have ever seen.”

And Doug should know. He’s performed in the play himself as a member of the G.S.O. staff, putting on the play in New York City—in fact, just off-Broadway—for delegates to A.A.’s World Service Meeting.

And for those aficionados of the Twelve Concepts? Fear not. There is a play for you, too!

The Twelve Tradition, Play Script (SMF-130) is available upon request from G.S.O.

■ Going to Any Lengths in Newport, Kentucky

How far should an A.A. group go in carrying the recovery message? In Newport, Kentucky, a group actually installed a closed-circuit television system to serve members whose physical handicaps prevent them from attending speaker meetings.

The challenge arose because the group was meeting on the second floor of a facility that is not handicap-accessible. (Under a “grandfathering” exception in the law, the building was not required to become handicap accessible.) Thus, certain members were excluded from attending the second-floor meetings and hearing the speakers.

But Rico H., chairman of the district’s Special Needs committee, came up with a novel solution that is working well. It’s a closed-circuit TV system that includes a camera, a sound system, and a TV monitor. It’s been in operation for more than a year and, according to Rico, “everybody loves it and it has improved our Fellowship.” One additional benefit is that parents who bring young children can see and hear the speaker from downstairs, while the kids can play without interrupting the meeting.

The TV project came about because members of

Newport's Sunday Morning Breakfast Meeting, which meets at the facility, wanted to bring its meeting to handi-capped persons. They sought assistance from the Special Needs committee, which proposed installing the closed-circuit TV system. The district committee approved of the project but could not financially support it. They suggested that it would have to be funded by donations from individual members.

At first, it appeared that the entire system would have to be acquired. But Rico studied the plan further and realized that both sound and a TV set were already available in the facility. "The only things that had to be purchased were the wiring and a camera." And the cost of the camera was about \$800.

Though Rico is usually assertive, he found himself surprisingly reluctant to make an open solicitation for funds. He discussed this with a few group members. One member took him aside and contributed the needed funds, on the condition that his gift should be completely anonymous.

Volunteers from the Sunday morning group were then able to install the equipment and soon had it off and running. It has since become so popular that other groups meeting in the facility offer closed-circuit televising of their own sessions.

Rico explains that no operator is needed to run the camera, other than to turn it on and off. It is positioned in a frame and is set to focus directly on the speaker at the podium. The sessions are not taped, of course, and no speaker has objected to the process.

Could a similar system be installed by other A.A. groups? Few would have the same challenge that confronted the Newport group, but it's good to know that such solutions are possible.

Rico also notes that the Special Needs committee for his district sets up visits for shut-ins and others who cannot attend meetings. "When alcoholics can't come to us, we try to take the meetings to them," he says. "We see that as part of our purpose to carry the message."

■ Concerns Regarding A.A. Talks Online

Browse the Internet and you will find all sorts of sobriety talks being offered to members online and from a variety of Web sites. Today we have instant access to listening to Bill W.'s last talk and our favorite speaker on the Internet.

Since the Cleveland Convention accepted A.A.'s Twelve Traditions in 1950, respecting the anonymity of A.A. members has continued to be the spiritual foundation of our Fellowship and has assured our members that their recovery will be private. Should a letter go out to taping professionals and resources every year from

the trustees' Public Information Committee asking cooperation in identifying A.A. members by first name only in tape catalogs, cassette inserts and displays? The trustees' Public Information Committee continues to look for cooperation in protecting the anonymity of A.A. members.

One member recently wrote a Web site asking them to remove his last name, including any labels on tapes or CDs. "I owe my entire life to Alcoholics Anonymous and enjoy a wonderful career as an executive with an international company. Like the oldtimers who started our Fellowship, I have learned that my anonymity is a prized possession. I have learned that breaking it is a very important personal decision and one that requires a great deal of thought. However, I have never broken my anonymity at the level of press, radio, film, or other public media technology such as the Internet." The answer to his e-mail was that his wishes would be respected and his last name would be removed. However, another letter from the same Web site reported that there were other Web sites listing the last names of A.A. speakers, and that the Internet needed to be uniform in protecting anonymity.

We interviewed a well-known taper who is an A.A. member who shared that he did not put his CDs, or catalog, on a Web site. He has been taping conventions, conferences and roundups for 25 years and only one person in all that time refused to be taped. The taper shared that CDs can be enormously helpful to shut-ins, those driving or traveling and those unable to get to regular meetings. Anonymity is respected by this taper on his CDs, on the labels and in the catalog. He has collected 14,000 CDs over the years, and said what is just as upsetting as last names being printed is to see tapers print labels on CDs that have A.A. on them, e.g., the Sobriety State A.A. Convention.

At International Conventions, hosted by the trustees of the General Service Board, which is held every five years, release forms are signed by every A.A. member (Al-Anon and Alateen) and professional speaking at the Convention, which gives the rights for distribution to the taper. A question to tapers of conventions, conferences, roundups and district gatherings and group meetings is how many ask speakers to sign a tape release form?

Anonymity online has not been carefully monitored. More individuals whose last names are revealed need to write to those Web sites that are not adhering to the spirit of the Anonymity Tradition. If one hears there is more posting of A.A. talks on the Web perhaps this will change the way A.A. members tell their story in the future. Alcoholics Anonymous members might also reconsider divulging personal information of themselves and their families, knowing that it could be plastered (forgive the pun) all over the Internet.

For more information see the A.A. Guidelines on Conference, Conventions and Roundups.

■ The Responsibility Declaration: An Enduring Theme

By most measures, Alcoholics Anonymous in 1965 had achieved success that seemed beyond the wildest dreams of its two co-founders thirty years earlier. Worldwide membership stood at an estimated 350,000, the Fellowship had become a well-known institution in North America, and many in the recovery field believed that A.A. was the clearest and best answer for alcoholism. With 10,000 members meeting in Toronto early in July for the fourth International Convention, it seemed a good time to bask in self-congratulation and gloat about A.A.'s achievements.

The achievements were noted, but the Toronto Convention was also devoted to serious inventory and, especially, the theme of Responsibility. The Responsibility Declaration was formally introduced there by Bill W. It states, "I am Responsible. When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there. And for that: I am responsible."

The author of the pledge was the late Al S., a former trustee of the General Service Board, who told the story behind the saying at the sixth International Convention in Denver in 1975. "A statement (on Responsibility) was wanted that would be emotionally gripping to A.A.s without imposing any musts," he recalled. He tried and discarded several approaches before finally arriving at the thought that it should be personal choice and responsibility—"I" instead of "we." Ten thousand A.A.s joined hands at the Toronto Convention to repeat the declaration, and it has since been distributed throughout the Fellowship

and is reprinted in A.A. pamphlets and *The Grapevine*. Wallet cards (M-21; \$7 per 100) and a heavy cardboard 19"x29" placard (M-10; \$8.65) carrying the declaration are available from G.S.O.

Why was the declaration written and accepted at that time? A probable reason is that Bill W. and other A.A. leaders had detected new problems that cast a shadow over A.A.'s future ability to help alcoholics. In 1963, a national magazine had published a highly critical cover story about A.A., suggesting that it was no longer working well. Nonalcoholic professionals in the field were disturbed by the attitudes and actions of some A.A.s, and one of them would even speak at the Toronto Convention. Some hinted that it was time for A.A. to "take its inventory."

Bill W. discussed this issue thoroughly in "Responsibility Is Our Theme," in the July 1965 *Grapevine*, (*The Language of the Heart*, p. 328). He noted how we might have alienated people through our arrogant conviction that we were always right and had the only answers. We needed to correct such attitudes and behavior in order to continue reaching the alcoholic who still suffers.

Bill, far from blaming the Fellowship at large, explained how mistakes of his own had often courted disaster. "If I inventory A.A.'s shortcomings, be also assured that I am also taking stock of my own. I know that my errors of yesterday still have their effect; that my shortcomings of today may likewise affect our future. So it is, with each and all of us."

Our next responsibility, he pointed out, was "that of intelligently and lovingly sponsoring each man or woman who comes among us asking help. The care and concern with which we individually and collectively do this can make all the difference."



This framed map, now hanging in G.S.O.'s lobby, is a reproduction photograph of Bill W.'s very large Rand McNally map; the original resides at Stepping Stones, Bill and Lois's home in Bedford Hills, New York. This reproduction was donated to the G.S.O. Archives in December 2007 by the Stepping Stones Foundation. The original map hung in the early Alcoholic Foundation office and was used from about 1940 to 1945 to mark new groups as A.A. spread throughout the country.

A letter from one G.S.O. staffer to a member in Kansas City, MO, dated July 25, 1940, provides a key to the colored pins impressed into many parts of the map: "...white pins indicate localities where weekly meetings are held; red pins indicate places where there are a few men and women working toward weekly meetings; and green pins indicate individuals working alone to date. There are 25 white pins, eight red pins and 15 green pins."

P.I.

■ One (Unity) Day At a Time

The Colorado Public Information Committee is trying something different. Hoping to get more people involved in public information activities and to provide clear opportunities for service workers across the state, the area has designed and implemented a series of Unity Days focused on different P.I. activities on specific days statewide.

The idea stemmed from the committee's participation in health fairs across the state where they found that members were quite enthusiastic about staffing the A.A. tables at these events. The volunteers, it seems, had a much easier time making service commitments if they were well defined and, while some volunteers had difficulty making long term commitments, they could much more easily commit to being at a certain place at a certain time to perform a specific task.

Building on this experience, the committee developed the idea of Unity Days where specific public information activities are undertaken on a very focused yet limited basis concurrently across the state. Not requiring any particular expertise or length of sobriety, the activities keep it simple, encourage participation from members, and offer potential help for the still-suffering alcoholic—the key element in all public information efforts. Additionally, the committee felt that the unity provided in knowing that other members across the state were doing the same thing at the same time would benefit the entire area—hence the name.

Each of Area 10's Unity Days focuses on making contact with a different segment of the community, and encourages members to contact a wide range of entities with information about Alcoholics Anonymous and the services it provides, while creating a personal contact through which ongoing communication can travel back and forth. Area 10's Unity Days focus on the following activities:

- “Hotel Day,” which consists of making contact and distributing meeting lists or informational brochures to hotels within each district.
- “Library Day,” where members contact and distribute donated Big Books and/or other literature to libraries within each district, including hospital or college libraries.
- “P.S.A. Day,” in which members contact district-wide local media (newspapers, radio stations, and television stations) about Public Service Announcements, to find out if they are running any about A.A.
- “High School/Teen Day,” which consists of making

contact with high schools, middle schools, and other teen programs (i.e., Boys and Girls Clubs), to see if they would like speakers or informational panels from A.A. for individual classes or all-school assemblies, or if there is any other way A.A. could be helpful, such as providing literature and meeting lists.

- “Hospital/Mental Health Day,” where contact is made with hospitals and other mental health facilities and counseling centers to see if they would like literature, speakers or anything else to help them serve their alcoholic patients.
- “Anonymity Letter Day,” in which members send out letters to local media discussing A.A.'s Traditions and thanking them for their cooperation.
- “Church Organizations Day,” where members make contact with local churches or religious organizations, offering meeting lists, literature, etc.
- “Police Stations Day,” in which members contact local police stations to see if they would like literature, speakers or anything else.

The Unity Days have caught on, says area P.I. chair Jennifer F. “They generate a lot of excitement among P.I. committee members and newcomers because it is something people feel they can do. From the positive feedback I have received, it seems that it gets people focused on a particular task, maybe something outside of their general realm of public information work.”

For instance, if a particular district's P.I. efforts in the past were primarily focused on making sure there was a Public Service Announcement in the community pages of the local newspaper, they are now checking with local schools to see if they would like speakers, or making sure the library has Big Books, and so on.

“So things are getting done that maybe haven't been done before,” says Jennifer, “and when a new person rotates into a P.I. position they have some clear ideas about what can get done as opposed to that sometimes nebulous and daunting ‘I have never done this before and I don't know what to do because the person in this position before me has dropped off the face of the earth’ feeling — something that has probably happened to most of us in the service structure at one time or another.”

So, excitement is high and enthusiasm bubbling for Colorado's new Unity Days. “Hopefully the momentum will continue to build and we can grow in our effectiveness in reaching the wet drunk,” says Jennifer. By making service a little less daunting, a little clearer and a little easier, the committee feels it has broadened the realm of P.I. work getting done across the state, which in turn has allowed a broader extension of “the hand of A.A.” Says Jennifer, “It's just an idea until people do it... and people are doing it.”

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.

October

- 3-5—*Troy Michigan*. Tri-County Conf. Write: Ch., 380 Hilton Rd., Ferndale, MI 48220
- 3-5—*St. Louis, Missouri*. 25th Midwest Woman to Woman Workshop. Write: Ch., Box 4041, St. Louis, MO 63136; www.midwest-woman-to-woman.com
- 3-5—*White Plains, New York*. NE Regional Woman to Woman Conf. Write: Ch., Box 2748, New York, NY 10027; www.newomantowoman.org
- 3-5—*Fond Du Lac, Wisconsin*. 57th Area 75 Fall Conf. Write: Ch., Box 591, Slinger, WI 53086; www.area75.org
- 3-5—*Stevens Point, Wisconsin*. Area 74 Fall Conf. Write: Ch., Box 606, Stevens Point, WI 54481-0606
- 10-12—*Morrilton, Arkansas*. ARKYPAA XXVI. Write: Ch., Box 250309, Little Rock, AR 72225; www.arkypaa.org
- 10-12—*Marshalltown, Iowa*. Area 24 Fall Conf. Write: Ch., Box 1312, Marshalltown, IA 50158
- 10-12—*Mackinac Island, Michigan*. 20th Fall Wknd. Write: Ch., 1915 E. Michigan Ave., Ste. D, Lansing, MI 48912; www.aalansing.org
- 10-12—*St. Louis, Missouri*. SW Regional Svc Assembly. Write: Ch., Box 31603, Des Peres, MO 63131; www.swraasa2008.org
- 10-12—*Bend, Oregon*. 14th High Desert Round-up. Write: Ch., Box 2399, Redmond, OR 97756; www.highdesertroundup.com
- 10-12—*Salt Lake City, Utah*. III Conv. Estatal Hispana. Inf: Com. Org., 3646 Redwood Rd., Ste. 301, West Valley City, UT 84119
- 10-12—*Sherbrooke, Québec, Canada*. AA Te Tend La Main. Écrire: Prés., 1305 Cousineau, Sherbrooke, QC, Canada J1J 3T2
- 10-12—*Balibago, Angeles City, Philippines*. 13th Internat'l Fall Round-up. Write: Ch., 13-13A Sarita St., Balibago, Angeles City, Philippines
- 17-19—*San Bernardino, California*. Inland Empire Conv. Write: Ch., Box 12056, San Bernardino, CA 92423
- 18-19—*Kalispell, Montana*. Fall Refresher. Write: Ch., Box 4622, Kalispell, MT 59937; www.aa-montana.org

- 23-26—*Augusta, Georgia*. 55th GA Prepaid Conv. Write: Ch., Box 204044, Augusta, GA 30917
- 24-26—*Santa Barbara, California*. 24th Santa Barbara Conv. Write: Ch., Box 91731, Santa Barbara, CA 93190-1731; www.sbaaconvention.org
- 24-26—*Saint Cloud, Minnesota*. St. Cloud Fall Round-up. Write: Ch., Box 125, St. Cloud, MN 56302
- 24-26—*Lincoln, New Hampshire*. Loon Mtn 12 Step Fall Fest. Write: Ch., Box 1058, Lincoln, NH 03251; stepfestival@yahoo.com
- 24-26—*Rapid City, South Dakota*. Area 63 Fall Conf. Write: Ch., 840 N. Spruce St., Lot 284, Rapid City, SD 57701; www.area63aa.org
- 24-26—*Sheridan, Wyoming*. Fall Conv. Write: Ch., Box 7312, Sheridan, WY 82801
- 30-2—*Ocean City, Maryland*. 24th Area 29 Fall Conf. Write: Ch., Box 701, New Market, MD 21774; www.marylandaa.org
- 31-2—*Branson, Missouri*. Colors of Fall Conv. Write: Ch., 12208 E. 62nd Terr., Kansas City, MO 64133; www.wamo-aa.org
- 31-2—*Albany, New York*. Area 48 Conv. Write: Ch., Box 188, East Greenbush, NY 12061-0188; hmbconvention2008@gmail.com
- 31-2—*Buffalo, New York*. 67th Buffalo Falls Conv. Write: Ch., Box 211, Gasport, NY 14067; www.buffalooany.org

November

- 7-9—*Anchorage, Alaska*. Alaska Area 2 Conv. Write: Ch., 6631 Stella Pl., #2, Anchorage, AK 99507; www.area02alaska.org
- 7-9—*Lake Havasu City, Arizona*. 21st Round-up of Lake Havasu City. Write: Ch., Box

- 1692, Lake Havasu City, AZ 86405; www.havasuaa.com
- 7-9—*Jekyll Island, Georgia*. 11th Gratitude Wknd. Write: Ch., 34 Glen Falls Dr., Ormond Beach, FL 32174; www.jekyllislandaa.com
- 7-9—*Newton, Massachusetts*. 45th MA State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 361, Weymouth, MA 02188; mastateconvention@aaemass.org
- 7-9—*Qawra, Malta*. 3rd Internat'l Conv. Write: Ch., 26, Triq Windsor, Sliema SLM1853, Malta.
- 7-9—*Nice, France*. Fourth Conv. of Nice. Info: www.aariviera.org
- 13-16—*Honolulu, Hawaii*. 47th Hawaii Conv. Write: Ch. Box 23434, Honolulu, HI 96823-3434; www.lava.net/~hconv
- 14-16—*Manitowoc, Wisconsin*. 6th Big Book Study & Action Wknd. Write: Ch., Box 308, Wayzata, MN 55391; www.Into-Action.com
- 21-23—*Jonesboro, Arkansas*. 55th Thanksgiving Program. Write: Ch., 4508 Peter Trail, Jonesboro, AR 72401
- 21-23—*Yosemite, California*. Yosemite Summit Conf. Write: Ch., Box 675, Mariposa, CA 95338; www.serenityyosemite.com
- 21-23—*Cape May, New Jersey*. Waves of Sobriety Round-up. Write: Ch., Box 905, Pleasantville, NJ 08232
- 21-23—*Knoxville, Tennessee*. SE Regional Forum. Write: Forum Coord., Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163; Regionalforums@aa.org
- 21-23—*Lake Geneva, Wisconsin*. 19th McHenry's Soberfest. Write: Ch., Box 717, McHenry, IL 60051-0717; www.soberfest.org
- 27-29—*Tampa, Florida*. XIII Conv. Del Estado de la Florida. Inf: Com. Org., 1936 W. MLK Blvd., Tampa, FL 33607

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 Editor: Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163 or literature@aa.org

Date of event: from _____ to _____, 20_____

Name of event: _____

Location: _____ CITY _____ STATE OR PROVINCE _____

Address to list: _____ P.O. BOX (OR NUMBER AND STREET) _____

CITY _____ STATE OR PROVINCE _____ ZIP CODE _____

Web site or E-mail: _____ (NO PERSONAL E-MAIL ADDRESSES)

Contact person: _____ NAME _____ PHONE # AND E-MAIL _____

Cut along dotted line, and post this page on your group's bulletin board

28-29—*Trois-Rivières, Québec, Canada*. 35ème Congrès de Trois-Rivières. Écrire: Prés., 487 Lacerte, Trois-Rivières, QC G9A 3C1

28-30—*Citrus Heights, California*. Premier Congreso Hispano California Norte. Inf: Com. Org., 2251 Florin Rd., Ste. 30, Sacramento, CA 95822

28-30—*Saint Louis Park, Minnesota*. Founder's Day Wknd. Write: Ch., Box 8327, Minneapolis, MN 55408; wwwFOUNDERS-DAYMN.NET

28-30—*Caracas, Venezuela*. X Reencuentro Internacional de Jóvenes y Veteranos. Inf: osg@anonimos.org.ve

December

5-7—*Mandeville, Louisiana*. Area 27 Corrections Conf. Write: Ch., 45484 Sciarra Ln, #14, Hammond, LA 70401

5-7—*Myrtle Beach, South Carolina*. Sandlapper Round-up XVI. Write: Ch., Box 15897, Surfside Beach, SC 29587

January 2009

2-4—*Reno, Nevada*. WACYPA. Write: Ch., Box 11911, Reno, NV 89510; www.wacy-paaxii.org

2-4—*Brighton, East Sussex, United Kingdom*. Brighton Conv. Info: www.brightonaaconvention.org.uk

9-11—*Dodge City, Kansas*. SW Kansas Conf. Write: Ch., 705 W. 8th St., Scott City, KS 67871

15-18—*Raleigh, North Carolina*. 42nd Tar Heel Mid-Winter Conf. Write: Ch., Box 18412, Raleigh, NC 27619-8412; ncconference@nc.rr.com

23-25—*Puerto Vallarta, Jalisco, Mexico*. Sobriety Under The Sun 7th English Conv. Info: www.aapvconvention.com

30-1—*Corpus Christi, Texas*. 55th Coastal Bend Jamboree. Write: Ch., Box 60664, Corpus Christi, TX 78466; www.coastal-bendjamboree.org