

## Gratitude Makes Waves In the Caribbean

Ron and Mary Lou R. say they have learned that "the only constant in life is change." Their story also shows, once again, that what goes around comes around. . . and that for us in the Fellowship, gratitude for our sobriety finds expression in the most unexpected circumstances.

Ron and Mary Lou are boaters. Five years ago, after losing their first boat on a reef near the Bahamas, they write, "we arrived in St. Thomas (U.S. Virgin Islands). A Mr. Allyn took us in. He gave us work. And he suggested we buy a boat in his marina that had been damaged by hurricane Hugo. We worked for him a year, and when we were able to put a down payment on the boat, *Cummaquid*, he acted as our cosigner."

Some 3½ years went by. The boat was paid for, "well ahead of schedule," according to Mary Lou and Ron. Then, last May, they found safe harbor from hurricanes Louis and Marilyn in Puerto Rico, where they helped start the Sailors Choice Group at Salinas. There they received a call for help from Mr. Allyn back in St. Thomas: "He wasn't so lucky. His marina was damaged extensively by hurricane Marilyn and required many months of work. We did not hesitate to go to his aid. A.A. has taught us to be better people and to take

responsibility—in our lives, and for our debts, financial and otherwise."

So the couple returned with alacrity to St. Thomas to help their friend; and the Sailors Choice Group, adapting just as fast, has gone mobile. "We fly our A.A. flag onboard our boat and hold meetings anywhere, anytime," report Ron and Mary Lou. "We hope sometime to meet you people at the General Service Office. We thank you for sending us literature, which we give out whenever the need arises. It is used well by those alcoholics who still suffer. The monies our floating Sailors Choice is sending—\$10 a month—is to help you all help others and also so that we can be 'self-supporting through our own contributions.'"

## '96 General Service Conference Has A.A.'s Future On Its Mind

A.A. is a child of the fast-waning 20th century; and as the General Service Conference prepares for its 46th annual meeting in New York City, April 21-27, the delegates will be paying special heed to this year's theme: "Preserving Our Fellowship—Our Challenge." Many may feel as A.A. co-founder Bill W. did in 1952, when he suggested in the January Grapevine that "clear vision for tomorrow comes only after a real look at yesterday. That's why we A.A.s take personal inventory."

Thus the Conference participants will ask themselves and each other some thorny questions at the general sharing sessions, and workshop planned: First of all, how well are we carrying the message to the alcoholic who still suffers? What are we doing and how are we doing in our home groups, districts and area assemblies to ensure the future of A.A.? Are we extending the hand of A.A. to newcomers at meetings, and do we work at providing good sponsorship? How many of our meetings are focused on the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions? Do we know our A.A. history? When put together, like the pieces of a puzzle, the sharing forms a group conscience that may help us to see a clear, broad picture of where A.A. is now and whether we are steering a sound



Meeting place of the Sailors Choice Group.



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and spiritual course into the 21st century, which is just around the corner.

Arriving at a group conscience in matters big or small is a process that can take a long time. This is because the dissenting voices are heard and the minority view is considered essential to the unity, effectiveness and survival of the Fellowship. Thus the Conference may act—or choose to postpone or not act at all—on various A.A. matters, many of them presented by one or another of the 11 trustees' committees.

This year, as the 134 voting members of the Conference—delegates, trustees and directors, along with members of the General Service Office and Grapevine staffs—go about the business of working toward consensus on subjects vital to A.A. today, they also will be working to help safeguard the future of the Fellowship for today's members and those to come.

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## Georgia A.A.s Infuse Olympic Games with Southern Hospitality

Let the Games—and the A.A. meetings—begin! For the past year, members of the Georgia State Service Assembly have been working overtime to make A.A. fellowship readily available to athletes and visitors at the 1996 Summer Olympics. Four million people are expected to attend the Games, which will be centered in Atlanta and encompass the neighboring cities of Albany, Athens, Augusta, Columbus, Macon, Milledgeville, Rome and Savannah.

Says Georgia delegate Joycie W.: "In 1995 the assembly appointed a Hospitality Committee, composed of members from Atlanta and all the other venue cities in the state, and asked them to think of ways in which A.A. might be of service. We have received enormous help from these enthusiastic people as well as from the vari-

ous intergroups and the Atlanta Central Office, and we are very grateful. We've also been encouraged by the example of the Norwegian A.A.s who did such a great job making the Fellowship available at the 1994 Winter Games in Lillehammer."

Early on, Joycie relates, the committee developed a "user-friendly" pamphlet printed in shades of coral, gray and white. The cover reads, "Alcoholics Anonymous: Finding the Fellowship During Your Stay in Georgia." Inside it continues with a warm "Welcome to Georgia and Our Southern Hospitality" and provides phone numbers, in easy-to-read type, that visitors can call for information about A.A. meetings in venue cities around the state. Footnotes below add: (1) that multilingual meetings will be available (as will some in sign language for deaf alcoholics); and (2) that the phone numbers provided "are for your information and convenience only. Our Sixth Tradition states: 'An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.'"

"The response to our call for volunteers has been wonderfully gratifying," Joycie reports. "Among other things, they will staff the phone to give information about meetings, along with directions on how to get to them. Transportation will be furnished by A.A. members whenever possible." A main concern, she notes, "is for the athletes participating in the Games who also may be A.A. members. They will be surrounded by security, and their movement could be restricted. We are very fortunate to have meetings at the Atlanta Central Office and on the Georgia Tech campus, which are within this heavily secured circle. However, it appears that we won't be able to hold meetings in the Olympic Village itself. We were informed that the Olympic Committee has had to turn down many similar requests owing to security and other factors. But we are still working with officials to see what can be done."

At the same time, Joyce points out, "nonathletes will have more mobility, and our doors will be wide open to them. We welcome this exciting opportunity to be of service to our members and prospective members from around the world, and to share Georgia's wonderful A.A. hospitality with love and fellowship."

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## We take the Tenth Step. . .

In the article "Fifth Annual A.A. Convention sponsored by Native American Indians" (Feb.-Mar. 1996 issue) we identified Area 42 as Mid-Central California. Area 42 is Nevada (in fact, there is no Mid-Central in California). Our apologies to Nevada.

## 'Greetings from a Jungle River...'

"Greetings from a jungle river": so begins a brief history of a new A.A. group which recently came across the desk of the G.S.O. staff member on the Overseas assignment. The history, along with a request to be officially registered, came from George M. and an anonymous member, who live near Tejax, a farm/ranch/marina/jungle resort on the Rio Dulce. Tejax is a few minutes by boat from Fronteras, Guatemala. The Sweetwater Group of Alcoholics Anonymous (Rio Dulce means "sweet river") had its first meeting on September 4, 1995, with just four people: "two sober, one slipped, and one drunk." It now has eight sober members and ten meetings a week and is helping to set up a Spanish-speaking group in the nearby river town of Fronteras.

The history opens: "Greetings from a jungle river. It rained today. Today is Wednesday so we had a 9 a.m. meeting and a 4 p.m. meeting. And today is the day Murphy showed up. There are now eight of us. Nine if you count Rebecca who was drinking a fifth a day holed up in her boat. She was Twelfth Stepped by two people who had four and seven days of sobriety. She is now back in Key West, sober and attending meetings."

The Sweetwater Group started when Barry, the manager of a small marina, asked some friends if they could start a meeting. Barry's psychiatrist had told him to stop drinking and go to A.A., but Barry wasn't yet sober. The little nucleus of the first group included Tom, who after more than three years' sobriety, was back out drinking heavily. When Tom was asked to come back in order to help Barry, he said, "Okay—but I'm not going to stop drinking!" to which the sober members replied, "That's okay, we need all the help we can get." At the first meeting, the two sober members each thought, "Do I really want to devote my time to

this seemingly futile effort?" But something told them to give it at least "an honest effort."

And soon the little

meeting began to turn around. Tom took his first desire chip, and when he was sober for a week, Jessica and Gene joined the meeting, and Barry sobered up a few days later. Jessica's mother, Jennifer, after observing the activity from the sidelines, decided to become number seven.

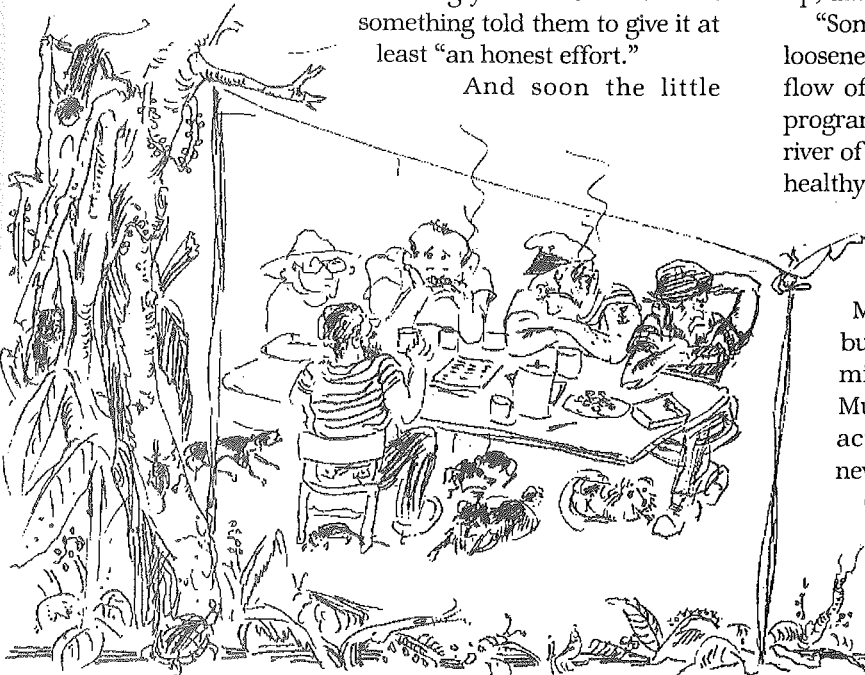
The history continues: "Jessica can't make all the meetings because she lives down the river, about an hour by outboard, so we've made a couple of trips in Barry's big cayuco to her house for some wonderful meetings. The second trip was a party to celebrate Tom's first month and give him his thirty-day chip. (Our chips are made by a famous anonymous river craftsman.) We've also enjoyed going to Jennifer's; her comfortable house over the water and her lunch after the meeting was pretty special."

There were so many meetings a week, and so few members, that sometimes everyone felt talked out. Then someone would say, "Well, Murph will soon be here!" So the meetings held on.

The history describes what they are like today: "We hold our meetings in Jessica and Gene's small thatched *palapa* with three sides open to the jungle. In addition to our regular members, there are four dogs and many cats and kittens who usually attend. They give us lessons in tolerance. Often our meeting is interrupted by someone saying, 'Hey look, there's a trogon on that limb with the vine hanging down!' or 'Look, there's one of those big neon indigo butterflies.' And after a few minutes of enjoying the wonders of nature, we are back to the meeting. In some meetings, the conversation may wander into the history of Guatemala or the spiritual practices of the Mayans. Yesterday we read a brief, well-written short story pertaining to alcohol. We gossip, drink coffee, laugh, and stay sober."

"Some oldtimers or hard-liners might frown on the looseness of our group, but sitting in the midst of such a flow of positive energy is one of the highlights of my program. These people made this happen. To be on a river of this beauty, to be aware and be sober, to see the healthy growth of new attitudes and personalities, to be so happy — I never thought it possible."

The history ends when Murphy, with 19 years' sobriety, comes back from Alaska. And who is Murphy? He's just another recovering alcoholic, but somehow the small, struggling group determined that it would survive to be there when Murphy returned. It's the Twelfth Step in real action: meetings are candles lit for everybody, newcomer and oldtimer alike, and the Sweetwater Group took the responsibility to keep the flame going, even in the rain.





# Conference Welcomes New Delegate Area: Washington State East

Ben B. is the first delegate elected to serve the A.A. area known as Washington State East (Area 92), which was created only last year by an Advisory Action of the 1995 General Service Conference. When Ben walks into the start-up session of the 1996 Conference, he will also be the first delegate to represent a new area in the U.S./Canada since Quebec gained a fourth delegate in 1973.

"This area is truly international in scope," says Ben. "It includes all of Washington State east of the Cascade Mountains and parts of northern Idaho and British Columbia, Canada, not to mention pieces of Oregon and Montana—in fact, our 1997 area assembly will be held in Libby, Montana. We picked the name Washington State East, instead of Eastern Washington, out of the hat; it came up probably because God didn't want our tongues to get twisted and create confusion between us and Washington, D.C."

The reapportionment has been a long time coming. In an application for a new delegate area submitted to the Conference Policy/Admissions Committee in December 1993, then delegate Burke D. said that the question "has been discussed by the Washington Area for more than 30 years." Burke sees the realignment as "an exciting development for the eastern side of the state. The mountain range dividing our former area was a very real boundary between two diverse A.A. communities," he points out. "In response to such problems as overcrowded state assemblies and transportation holdups caused by the mountains, we had tried a number of solutions, including the formation of independent standing service committees (Public Information, Correctional Facilities, etc.) for each side, but these

turned out to be mere Band-Aids." Now that the eastern part of the state is an area in its own right, Burke observes, "this is a challenging time for the A.A.s there as they shape their service structure and goals in line with their special needs."

As it does with most matters, the General Service Conference considers applications for new delegate areas the way porcupines make love—very carefully. As *The A.A. Service Manual* (1995-96, p. S72) states, the comprehensive application form "is designed to determine problems regarding geography and A.A. population," as well as whether the current area service structure is developed well enough to provide help for the delegate. When such a request came up at the 1961 Conference, the *Manual* says, a memo from A.A. co-founder Bill W. provided clarification on the subject.

"The Conference Committee on Admissions should weigh each application for a new delegate on its own merit, taking into consideration the primary factors of population, geography—and also expense," Bill wrote. "But this process of adding delegates ought to be gradual, aiming at the remedying of obvious and marked flaws in local communications. We should, our budget allowing, continue to remedy obvious flaws in local communications. . . and that is all." However, he noted, "It should be reemphasized that the Conference is not a political body, demanding a completely rigid formula of representation. What we shall need will always be enough delegates at the Conference to afford a reliable cross section of A.A. plus enough more to make sure of good local communications."

Washington State East's first delegate is a seasoned service veteran with 18 years' sobriety under his belt, and he has high hopes, "a day at a time," for his new area. "We started out with lackluster service participation of less than 40 percent," Ben says. "We had 157 voting general service representatives and 404 groups. What I'm hoping and working for is to see so many A.A.s here active in every area of service that we'll break 50 percent participation and climb even higher. There's no limit to what we can do to carry the A.A. message."



## Thank you for your patience. . .

As many of you know, New York City was hard hit by the Blizzard of '96. Your General Service Office was closed Monday, Jan. 8. It was also necessary to close early a few days to allow people (many who have a very long trip) to get home. As always, G.S.O. employees performed well during the difficult days surrounding the "big snow" and our mini-blizzard on Feb. 16. To those of you who tried to reach us and heard the taped message, thank you for your patience.



## Oldtimers Celebrate 2,000 Sober Years

"The Beltway had an unexplained gridlock, but they came, and the meeting was delayed for 15 minutes to accommodate them. The location was new to most, and it was hard to find the right doorway in the dark, but they looked for the light and listened for the laughter and found the right place."

Writing in the December 1995 issue of the *New Reporter*, the newsletter of the Washington (D.C.) Intergroup Association, D.C. delegate Sandy C. is talking about the annual Old Timers' Gratitude Night, "a one-of-a-kind event." The sobriety countdown at the November 1995 celebration, she reports, "revealed more than 2,000 years of collective recovery in the room"—ranging from three days to the 50-plus years accrued by "elder statesman" Julius S., 90, of the original *Cosmopolitan Group*.

One by one, Sandy notes, "the oldtimers spoke of the past, the present, the future. Of how it was in the Fellowship of 20, 30, 40, 50 years ago, and how it is today. Despite their ages and variety of experiences, the single theme of gratitude was painted in many colors throughout the evening. There were two husband-wife duos, a father-son team and two brothers among the presenters."

An annual fund-raiser for the Hospital & Institutions Committee, Old Timers' Gratitude Night draws both a large crowd and generous contributions to support the work of the committee, which brings more than 300 meetings a month to area hospitals and institutions.

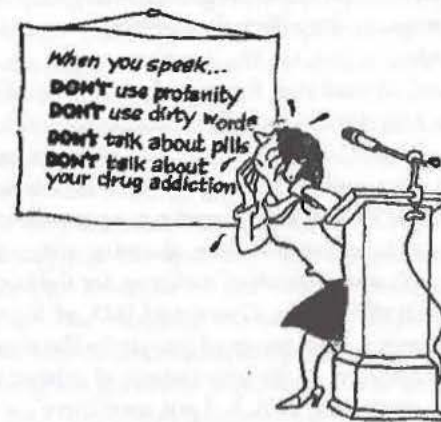
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## Does Profanity Belong in Meetings?

Some subjects in A.A. adrenalize almost everyone: smoking vs. nonsmoking meetings, court referrals, medications, and the "right" way to do the coffee refreshment detail, to name some. But if you want to see that red flag wave, just mention profanity at meetings. While it certainly isn't the top problem in recovery, cuss-and-tell sharing evokes a reaction that is immediate and colorful, running the gamut as it does from blue-nose pomposity to purple prose. On balance, however, most A.A.s lean toward good-natured humor and some three- and four-letter words that spell "Live and Let Live."

Over the years the Grapevine, that mirror of A.A. experience and thought, has published stories and letters on what one A.A. described as "rampant cursing" at

meetings. Back in 1970, in response to a letter from a member determined to "do something about profanity," several readers wrote in voicing agreement and suggesting that signs be put up at meetings to remind attendees: "No vulgar or profane language." However, there were those who concurred with J.C. of Rockland, Massachusetts that it's the message that counts. "At any meeting," J.C. declared, "my antennae are tuned to catch the message, whether the speaker shovels it, bludgeons it blue, or proffers it in demitasse cups."



Sixteen years later, in 1981, the February-March issue of *Box 4-5-9* carried an article that aired a South Florida group's hassle over profanity. But there the problem was two-fold, as shown by the group's unanimous decision to place a sign at the podium stating, "Please refrain from using profanity, and do not discuss your drug problem during your talk."

A group member explained: "Our area has had its share of A.A.s who hardly mentioned alcoholism but discussed their drug addiction at length. And then we have those whose talks are a constant outpouring of profanity. I voted with the other members to put up the sign; yet I felt a nagging sense of unease."

Later, the A.A. related, "a young woman with a dual-addiction qualified at our meeting. In the beginning, she glanced at the sign and said she would try to clean up her act. She then referred to those 'other drugs' in a vague, almost humorous manner; several of us laughed at her awkward grammatical gymnastics as she struggled to comply with the sign. Again I felt uneasy."

"A few weeks later, I had the opportunity to talk about this problem at a Regional Forum. Returning to my group, I shared what I'd heard about compassion and tolerance and asked that the sign be removed. As Bill W. said in *A.A. Comes of Age* (p. 82), '...alcoholism is a quest for survival in which the good is sometimes the enemy of the best, and that only the best can bring the true good.' If we begin to set up rules and regulations as to how A.A.s are to tell their stories, where will it end? Will some groups go on to forbid the word 'God'? What about say-



ing we got sober in a 'drug-treatment center'? The A.A. program gives us our freedom, and part of that freedom is to grow as individuals at our own pace." Seeing that, the A.A. reported, "our group conscience was unanimous: Down with the sign and up with freedom!"

Several years later "the sign" again reared its head when a reader wrote to the Grapevine advocating the display of a placard reading, "This group does not condone foul language" or "Leave the barroom language back in the bar." The writer also suggested that announcements be made at group, intergroup and service meetings to the effect that profanity would not be sanctioned.

The rash of mail that followed publication of this letter in the May 1986 Grapevine was, as before, both pro and con. From California, G.R. observed, "In our open meetings we usually have newcomers who are hoping to improve their lives. What incentive are we offering them if, with our language, we are showing them that we really haven't made much of a change for the better?"

Many felt differently. Countered D.D. of Manhattan, N.Y.: "If there is one group of people in the world that should be tolerant of the expressions of others, it is the alcoholics recovering in A.A. I am sure there's room for all kinds of people in our program."

From Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas, B.S. explained: "For this alcoholic, my first weeks in A.A. were very shaky. About the only words I could speak were four-letter ones of the profanity persuasion. I knew nothing of the other ones like 'fear' and 'hope' and 'love' and 'care.' I'm very thankful today that I was allowed to share with the only words I had in my first days of sobriety. Your caring and understanding kept me coming back."

R.W. of Miami, Florida, told a similar tale. "Sixteen months ago," he wrote, "it didn't seem I could fit into any group due to my leather jacket, tattooed arms, motorcycle and, most of all, my trashy mouth. Then I found my home group where they understood that was the only way I knew how to express what I felt inside. What I shared was trash—and that's what I felt like. Today I no longer feel like trash and my language isn't half as bad, though not being a saint, I fall short often. I thank the oldtimers who showed tolerance for this newcomer. And I pray that one day at a time, I will do the same for those who come after me."

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## A Home Group Away from Home

Back in 1988 some enterprising A.A.s in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, took a flyer, literally, and it succeeded beyond their happiest imagining. The unlikely catalyst

was the town's Experimental Aircraft Association, which every year hosts an international Fly-In that attracts aviation enthusiasts from around the world. "Tens of thousands of people converge on our small community of 50,000 residents," says Carole T., "and excitement fills the air."

Watching the Fly-In, she relates, four local A.A.s had an idea: "Where so many people are gathered, they reasoned, there must be at least a few who are recovering alcoholics. . . and wouldn't it be wonderful to have a regularly scheduled A.A. meeting available on the E.A.A. grounds to accommodate them! The Fly-In committee was contacted, and the idea became a reality."

Exactly 12 people were on hand for the first meeting of the 12-Step High Group in July 1988. Morning meetings would be held daily during the Fly-In, at 8 a.m., in a tent beside a lagoon in the Nature Center of the E.A.A. grounds. A special speaker meeting would be held on Tuesday in the nearby chapel.

With every succeeding Fly-In, the meetings grow, Carole says. "Each summer, visiting A.A.s from the year before return, bringing new visitors with them. We are a real group—registered with the General Service Office. We have a secretary, treasurer, general service representative and liaison to facilitate communication and harmony between the group and the Fly-In committee. The 'meeting before the meeting' is replete with hot coffee, warm hugs and great conversation. We open in the usual manner, then break up into smaller groups for discussion. The basket is passed according to the Seventh Tradition. (At the conclusion of the Fly-In, the donations are counted and divided between E.A.A. and G.S.O.) We close with the Lord's Prayer."

By 1995, Carole adds, "we had grown to include A.A. members from as far as Australia, as near as California. It is wonderful to welcome old friends from previous years and to greet those who are with us for the first time. Our 12-Step High Group is indeed the largest family in the world. We who host it are truly grateful to be a part of this family, of this home group away from home."

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## In Ethiopia, A.A.'s Message Is New Again

He didn't know it, but last summer, Berhanu D. of Western Ethiopia, took the First Step: "We admitted we were powerless over alcoholic—that our lives had become unmanageable."

"I am 18 years old," he wrote to G.S.O. "I am addicted to alcohol, and I drink like a fish. I would be grateful if you could depart me from alcoholic drinks."

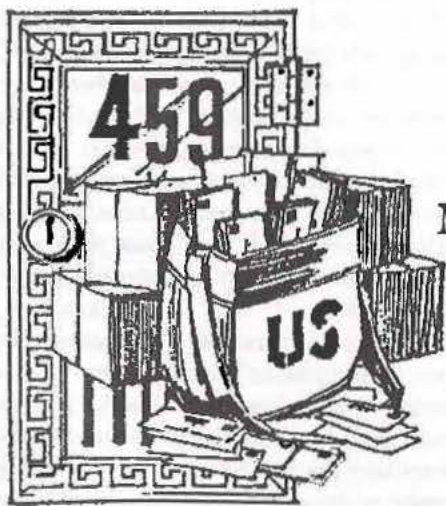
A junior in high school, Berhanu explained that he



"had been an abstainer from birth until 1993. Then I went to a party where I took a drink that a friend had doctored with vodka and got very drunk." Ever since, Berhanu says, "I have been unable to stop." He also indicated in his letter that apprehension over university entrance exams had caused his drinking to accelerate. "My parents, relatives and best friends all advised me to stop," he relates, "but I couldn't; it is beyond me why. Finally, a fellow I met told me that if I wrote to you, you could help me."

In response, Joanie M., who has the International assignment at G.S.O., sent Berhanu a variety of A.A. literature, including the International A.A. Directory, which lists two A.A. contacts in Ethiopia. "Please do not wait to get in touch with the member closest to you," she urged. "If, after some time has passed, you find there are no A.A. members in your immediate area, please write to us again, directing your letter to the Loners desk. You might ask to be added to our Loners/Internationalists list of A.A.s who are isolated and can't attend meetings very often. They work our program by writing to each other, and by sharing their letters, their experience in sobriety, with the Loners desk here.

"Your desire for sobriety is most important, Berhanu. I shall be thinking of you while you begin to reach out for A.A. help in Ethiopia. All at G.S.O. join me in sending you our warmest wishes, one day at a time."



## From the Mailbag

Several of the numerous A.A.s responding to the article "How Does Your Group End Its Meetings?" (Holiday issue 1995) were concerned that the General Service Office might be advocating a substitute for the Lord's Prayer. In fact, we were just sharing information and the experiences and views of members. When it came to commenting on this article, responding readers were

overwhelmingly in favor of continuing to end meetings with the Lord's Prayer—"If It Works, Why Fix It?" wrote Bill M. of Peoria, Ill. In the same issue, "The Minority Voice: Watchdog of A.A.'s Democratic Process" elicited thoughtful reflections. . . as did the *Viewpoint* story "Out of Respect for the Program" (Oct.-Nov. 1995), and more.

"How Groups End Meetings"—Frank F., of Venice, Florida, wrote "All the groups I got to regularly close with the Lord's Prayer. The consensus of my group is that we in A.A. need a Higher Power, one most of us refer to as God, and that the Christian origin of the Lord's Prayer is, for practical purposes, irrelevant to its virtue as a concise and beautifully simple expression of a good way of life."

John T., from Carolina Beach, North Carolina, said he was "appalled with [the article]. Please remove my name from the mailing list. . . . It is the (final) icing on the cake of the secular humanism all 'your' publications are touting and the apostasy that is fomenting within A.A. Another example of self-will run wild and power corrupts! The 'Russian closing' so enthusiastically endorsed has its foundation in the 'we'—well, 'we' could do nothing but get drunk together. . . . The Lord's Prayer is the most beautiful, profound, humble way to seek [God]."

"Since most of our meetings open with the Serenity Prayer," Dick S., of Neosho, Missouri, wrote, "it is seldom used as a closing. Meeting leaders can elect to close any way they choose as long as those attending don't object, and I have never witnessed an objection. Presently, about half of the meetings close with the Lord's Prayer and half close with the Responsibility Pledge."

Responding to the article on the Minority Voice, John S., Enfield, Connecticut writes: "Your article really hit home for me. In my home group, many members are trying to stress the importance of making sure the minority voice is heard. Like so much else in life, it is a process, and so far we are grateful for progress, not perfection."

On "Respect for the Program" one of the letters said, "I believe that much of the loss of respect in A.A. rooms is the result of our own get-well-quick therapy. Through our decisions we have allowed ourselves to alter and minimize the very tools that enabled us to begin to live sober and healthy lives. . . . In our group the only literature read routinely is the A.A. Preamble. The Steps and Traditions are displayed for easy reading, and we have a supply of A.A. Conference-approved literature. But we do not read How It Works at any of our meetings because we believe it inappropriate to encourage anyone to begin reading any textbook at the fifth chapter. . . . I believe that the General Service Office contributes to the problem by printing excerpts of How It Works. — Sue L., Plainview, Nebraska.



Addressing the article "How We Behave in Public Mirrors A.A. as a Whole," *Michael M., of Montreal*, has this to say: "During my term as a district committee member in 1991-92, a group that hadn't had representation at the district level closed its doors while owning the landlord two months' rent totaling \$100. Thankfully, not without letting me know of this and giving me the landlords phone number. When the matter was brought up at the next general service representatives' meeting, there was an expected reaction: 'Why didn't they say anything?' 'What will the renting institution think of A.A.?' My service sponsor suggested that some of us A.A.s split the debt. Then we wouldn't put money in the hat for however many meetings it took until our share was paid off. That's what we did, and the appreciative landlord (a theological college) said to contact them if ever they could be of help.

"How the debt was paid was a decision made in good conscience. I felt that to belabor the now defunct group's irresponsibility in the forum of one district meeting gave it the importance it deserved; to continue putting it on the agenda at future meetings did not. Also, I feel it is important for the district to be in some kind of contact with groups having no connection with the rest of A.A. It would be well for the district committee to hear the members' concerns and see what support might be offered."

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## Correctional Facilities

### N.Y. State C.F. Committees Explore New Ways to Carry the Message

A.A. members sometimes talk about the isolation and terror of active alcoholism as if it were a cage and they were locked inside it, separated from the rest of humanity. This sense of being imprisoned by one's craving for alcohol is more than a metaphor for many thousands of men and women who are incarcerated. For these people, the journey of recovery may begin at the most difficult point of their lives.

Carrying the message to this population was the goal of a one-day conference on "Recovery in Prison," held in September 1995, and hosted by A.A.'s Central New York Area, in cooperation with the Department of Corrections. Over 150 people—40 state correctional personnel and 100 A.A. volunteers—attended the conference, which was organized by Gene K., Central New York's Corrections chair, and Amy B., Central New

York's C.P.C. chair. The conference had two purposes: to increase participation by A.A. members in corrections Twelfth Step work, and to further develop a mutual understanding and cooperation between state corrections workers and A.A.

Participant Bob H. said, "The conference really opened up lines of communication. We A.A.s didn't know who to contact in the prison system and the state treatment people didn't know who to contact in A.A. I've been in service work for a number of years, and this is the most productive meeting I've ever been to."

The day's events included presentations made by corrections personnel on prison treatment programs, explanations of the basics of security, clearance requirements, and rules and regulations affecting visitors to prison facilities. Regional coordinators of prison programs spoke of the great impact A.A. has on prison morale and commented on the need for more A.A. meetings.

Joanie M., G.S.O. staff member who formerly served on the C.P.C. assignment, was one of the day's speakers. Joanie reports that she was impressed by the talk given by Dr. William R. Williford, the director of the state's Alcohol and Substance Abuse Treatment services, a talk "which seemed aimed at inspiring the counselors and supervisors."

Another conference presentation came from Roy D., appointed member of the trustees' Correctional Facilities Committee. Roy talked about what happens when inmates are mandated to A.A. meetings in order to meet requirements for earned eligibility or some other internal program. Afraid of "losing face" with other inmates, some may just swap war stories instead of truly sharing their experience, strength and hope. Roy described some solutions that facilities have come up with to address this issue: at one facility, for example, the A.A. group met for an hour and then attendance cards were signed. After a coffee break, those who wanted to stay could participate in a closed sharing meeting. Those who were there only to increase their chances with the parole board left after the coffee.

One of the serendipitous outcomes of the workshop was the awareness on the part of the corrections people that A.A.s were not "just a bunch of drunks" but a mature, competent, well-organized Fellowship of dedicated and hardworking people, wishing nothing more than the opportunity to share their gift of sobriety.

One of the concrete results of the Conference was the mailbox drop program, a way to improve A.A. contacts for the inmate upon his or her release. Modeled on a successful program that's been used by Michigan A.A.s for several years, the program is simple: The four A.A. areas in New York State provide a request form for inmates to fill out and send in if they want to establish an A.A. contact to help them make A.A. connections upon release. Requests from prisoners at state facilities



anywhere in the state are addressed to a single post office box. Bob H., SE New York Corrections chair, then reroutes these to the appropriate local contacts. The mailbox is centrally located in Manhattan, because 83 percent of all inmates released come to one of New York City's five boroughs.

Bob says, "The mailbox drop is a way for us to give faster service. It used to be that requests for A.A. help (literature, meeting lists, etc.) might go to different places: G.S.O., the area, or a local intergroup. By the time the Corrections committee got the letter, the inmate might be out. Now, inmates have one address. It cuts our response time in half. We're still ironing out the bugs, but it's a great program." Previously, there were perhaps 20 requests a year for help from the Bridge the Gap program. "Now," Bob says, "we're getting 80 to 100 requests a month."

Does it ever happen that when an A.A. makes the contact and extends the invitation to go to a meeting, a former inmate says no? "Of course!" Bob says. "But we don't worry about that. We just carry the message."

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## T.F./C.F.

### Bridging the Gap Makes the Difference

"Often we're in the dark about the results of the Twelfth Step work we do, so we smile when we hear that someone we've tried to help has made it from treatment or prison to A.A. on the outside and stayed sober," says Bonnie N., of San Jose, who chairs the Bridging the Gap (BTG) committee of the California Northern Coastal Area (CNCA). "These stories encourage us to trudge on, and to be grateful to a Higher Power for the happy endings we do get."

One such story concerns Mark, a patient in a local 30-day treatment facility in Sonoma County. Just prior to discharge, Bonnie explains, "he attended an orientation session presented by BTG volunteers and decided he would indeed welcome help when he returned to his home several hours' drive away in Santa Clara County. So the Sonoma BTGs arranged for Frank, a fellow volunteer in Milpitas, to help Mark make the transition between treatment and A.A. Frank felt a bit rusty—he hadn't had a call for almost a year, he said—but he went off to meet this strange newcomer, only to find an old friend from his boyhood! The two men renewed their ties, went to meetings together and, as Frank has said, did wonders for each other's sobriety."

Bonnie also likes to tell about Mike, a prison inmate.

In a letter addressed to the BTG committee's P.O. Box, he said that he had already written to 200 churches and county agencies asking for help upon release. "I heard from just one, a church," he explained, "but when I wrote back saying I was an alcoholic, they didn't contact me again." Chuck C., immediate past chairperson of the BTG committee, "answered Mike's letter," Bonnie relates. "He arranged to meet him the day of his release, took him to meetings and introduced him to other A.A.s. Usually our BTG volunteers serve just as temporary sponsors, but in this case Chuck became Mike's 'permanent' sponsor—and reports that he is sober and adjusting well to life in his community."

Then, says Bonnie, "there's the story that began when my husband, Wayne, attended a meeting in nearby Milpitas. A newcomer named Ron said he wouldn't be sober were it not for the BTG program, and of course Wayne was pleased. But that's not the end: A year and a half later, I was looking for someone to round out a six-member panel at a Sunday morning BTG conference in Fresno, but with no luck. A few days beforehand, Wayne and I happened to go to a local restaurant, and there was Ron—two years sober and pleased to serve on our panel. That's serendipity for you!"

Bonnie also recalls the time Juan G., the CNCA Spanish Community Representative, received a letter from a Spanish-speaking woman we'll call Maria, who was about to be released from prison: "She needed to get to Riverside, in Southern California, and was terrified of going, afraid she'd drink. Juan made sure that a Spanish-speaking BTG contact met her at the prison and put her on a bus to Riverside. There to meet her, by previous arrangement, was a temporary A.A. sponsor, who immediately whisked her off to a meeting."

Planning BTG strategy and making certain that there are no slip-ups is exacting and time-consuming, Bonnie points out. "But each time we know that the alcoholic's very life is at stake," she says, "and we try to leave nothing to chance. In the case of Maria, we know she has stayed away from the bottle, and we're thrilled. But even when our efforts initially seem to flop, we figure that at the very least we're planting a sobriety seed for the future. And we're letting these alcoholics know they don't ever have to go it alone again."

To help BTG contacts carry the message effectively to alcoholics in hospitals, treatment facilities and correctional facilities, CNCA's BTG committee has developed brief, clearcut guidelines, published in pamphlet form. Also of help is a card that the A.A. volunteers can mail or hand out personally to those "inside." After telling what Bridging the Gap is about, the card ends on a sharing note: "Being alcoholics ourselves, we know the people you will meet in your first days out could make all the difference. We hope we will hear from you."



## C.P.C.

### A District Project Bursts Its Seams In Western Missouri

"In the beginning, I guess we thought small," says Ron S. "Our goal was to open up a district-level dialogue between A.A. and local probation officers and counselors. But it turned out that the officers gather monthly for regional training that covers roughly the northern quarter of the state. In A.A. terms, that's seven whole districts and part of another—about half of Missouri's Western Area. So it quickly became apparent that our modest district-level project would require strong area input to succeed."

Ron chairs the committee on Cooperation With the Professional Community for District 7, which embraces the eastern part of the Kansas City metropolitan area. "Probation officers and counselors here must attend two sessions a year for extra training," he explains. "When approached, the administrators were receptive to our idea of an orientation session and offered full cooperation." Planning began last March for a late-fall presentation, and Ron's first task was to enlist the support of the area assembly in view of the large region to be represented.

Reports District 7 chairman Jim P., who was there: "Ron stressed the importance of the project at the area, district and group levels. 'We can't do anything when we are yelling at each other,' he said. 'A.A. has a loyalty to the drunk, but the probation officers have no loyalty to us. We needed to be careful not to try to dictate what the officers should do. The main thing is, we want to be helpful.' The assembly agreed and pledged full support." The regional directors reserved three hours for A.A.'s Nov. 28 presentation. The first half featured three A.A. speakers—experienced in C.P.C. and Correctional Facilities work. Their topics: What A.A. Is and Is Not, Anonymity, and Affiliation vs. Cooperation. Then the group broke up into A.A. district meetings to get acquainted and provide names and numbers of local A.A. contacts.

Approximately 60 probation officers and counselors attended the session, says Ron. "The interest level appeared to be high, and afterward several hard-hitting questions came from the audience. Some people said they had experienced clients who were turned off by the 'God thing.' Then an A.A. explained that 'We don't force anyone to believe in God. All that's necessary is to realize that "I can't do it by myself, but maybe there's something stronger that can keep me sober."' It's not uncommon for newcomers to use the group as their higher power."

Each attendee was given a packet of A.A. literature, paid for by the districts involved in the meeting. Included were a listing of open meetings and group phone numbers in the greater Kansas City area, the fliers "Information on A.A." and "A.A. at a Glance" and an order form for *About A.A.*, the newsletter for professionals. Additionally, Big Books and copies of the Twelve and Twelve were available for purchase. "Now I know whom to contact when I have clients needing help with a drinking problem," one officer said. "I've been in probation for three years, and this is the first time I've had any contact with A.A. folks," said another.

The regional leaders are already making arrangements to have A.A. back. "But," says Ron, "since the turnover rate among officers is fairly low, it was decided for now to hold our meetings every other year instead of annually."

Ron admits that he and his C.P.C. committee members are still amazed and gratified by the scope and success of the project. "I've learned," he comments, "that jump-starting communication—not just in the community but inside A.A. between the various service entities—is all-important. That and being ready, to match the professionals' needs with what A.A. has to offer." Adds D.C.M. Jim P.: "In an endeavor of this kind, we need to work together. I mean all of us, both A.A.s and our professional friends. We need each other to reach the still-suffering alcoholic."

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## P.I.

### Hawaiian PSAs

The West Hawaii District Public Information Committee has produced and distributed six new radio public service announcements—including one specifically directed to the female alcoholic that was approved by the local Women's Group. (According to the P.I. committee's December 1995 report, "the Men's Group declined the opportunity to run announcements at this time.")

The psa for women says: "Are you a woman who is questioning her relationship with alcohol? If you want to talk with another woman about this, then you are invited to attend the Honalo Women's Group of Alcoholics Anonymous on Tuesday evenings at 5:30 p.m. For more information about this or other Alcoholics Anonymous meetings for women, call (808) 329-1212."

The other psa's address both sexes. Content ranges from the friendly—"If you live up Mauka and wish to stop drinking, try A.A.! Feel free to join us at our regular meetings"—to the blunt but reassuring: "If you drink, that's your business. If you want to stop, that's our business!"



## 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.

### April

- 4-7—*Franklin, Tennessee*. National Agape Weekend XVI. Write: Ch., 3313 SW 16th St., Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33312-3638
- 4-8—*Canberra ACT, Australia*. 31st National Conv. Write: Secy., GPO Box 1464, Canberra ACT 2601, Australia
- 5-7—*Scottsdale, Arizona*. Spring Break Roundup (sponsored by gay & lesbian members). Write: Ch., Box 36366, Phoenix, AZ 85067-6366
- 5-7—*Jacksonville Beach, Florida*. Spring Break Round Up. Write: Ch., Box 51255, Jacksonville Beach, FL 32240
- 5-7—*Indianapolis, Indiana*. GLRCYPAA VI. Write: Ch., Box 441524, Indianapolis, IN 46244-1524
- 5-7—*Metairie, Louisiana*. 28th Annual Big Deep South Conv. Write: Ch., 4041 Tulane Ave., Ste. 301, New Orleans, LA 70119
- 6-7—*Lewiston, Idaho*. Flng in the Spring. Write: Ch., Box 52, Kendrick, ID 83537
- 12-14—*Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada*. Southern Alberta Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 212, Lethbridge, AB T1J 3Y5
- 12-14—*Kailua-Kona, Hawaii*. Eighth Annual Big Island Bash. Write: Ch., Box 390727, Kailua-Kona, HI 96739
- 12-14—*Rockford, Illinois*. 1996 NIA Spring Conf. Write: Ch., Box 4134, Rockford, IL 61110
- 12-14—*Fort Wayne, Indiana*. 16th Annual NE Indiana Conv. Write: Ch., 7531 Mill Run Drive, Fort Wayne, IN 46819
- 12-14—*Buffalo, New York*. GSA Spring Conv. Write: Ch., Box 501, Ransomville, NY 14131
- 12-14—*Tarrytown, New York*. SENY Conv. Write: Ch., Box 1688, Madison Sq. Sta., New York, NY 10159
- 12-14—*Grand Forks, North Dakota*. Northern Spring Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 14121, Grand Forks, ND 58208-4121
- 12-14—*Tulsa, Oklahoma*. The Trail of Hope Sixth Annual OK Indian Conv. Write: Ch., 5181 South Vandalia, #9H, Tulsa, OK 74135
- 12-14—*Lancaster, Pennsylvania*. Fourth Annual Tristate Conv. Write: Ch., Box 4142, Lancaster, PA 17604
- 18-21—*Island of Poros, Greece*. Second Conv. Write: Parthenon Conv. Group., 13, Eratosthenous St., Pangrati, Athens 11635 Greece
- 19-21—*Banff, Alberta, Canada*. Banff Round-up. Write: Ch., 128 Riverglen Dr. S.E., Calgary, AB T2C 4G2
- 19-21—*Eureka Springs, Arkansas*. Springtime in the Ozarks. Write: Tr., Box 1261, Rogers, AR 72757

- 19-21—*Fresno, California*. 24th Annual Northern CA H&I Conf. Write: Ch., 2812 N. Blackstone, Fresno, CA 93703
- 19-21—*Kansas City, Missouri*. 55 Years in the Heart of America. Write: Ch., KCMO #1, 311 W. 80 Terrace, Kansas City, MO 64114
- 19-21—*Erie, Pennsylvania*. Erie Area Spring Conf. Write: Ch., Box 3833, Erie, PA 16508
- 19-21—*Superior, Wisconsin*. 51st Annual Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 996, Superior, WI 54880
- 20-21—*Scottsbluff, Nebraska*. Panhandle Jamboree. Write: Ch., Box 553, Scottsbluff, NE 69361
- 25-28—*Killarney, Co. Kerry, Ireland*. 1996 Jubilee All Ireland Conv. Write: Ch., G.S.O., 109 South Circular Rd., Leonard's Corner, Dublin 8, Ireland
- 26-28—*Chipley, Florida*. Country Roundup '96. Write: Ch., 2374 Suggs Rd., Chipley, FL 32428
- 26-28—*Lincoln, Nebraska*. Spring Flng. Write: Ch., Box 30785, Lincoln, NE 68503
- 26-28—*Tamiment Resort, Poconos, Pennsylvania*. 29th Annual Round-Up. Write: Ch., Intergroup Off., 1218 Chestnut St., Ste. 1004, Philadelphia, PA 19107
- 26-28—*Orangeburg, South Carolina*. District 40 Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 1974, Orangeburg, SC 29115
- 26-28—*Clarksburg, West Virginia*. 24th Jackson's Mill Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 825, Clarksburg, WV 26302-0825

### May

- 3-5—*Golden, British Columbia, Canada*. 29th Annual Round-up. Write: Ch., Box 1405, Golden, BC V0A 1H0
- 3-5—*Victoria, British Columbia, Canada*. Victoria Rally. Write: Ch., #8-2020 Douglas St., Victoria, BC 8T 4L1
- 3-5—*St. Joseph, New Brunswick, Canada*. Area 81 Spring Assembly & Round-Up. Write: Ch., R.R. #1, Box 637, Memramcook West, NB E0A 2C0

## Closed Meeting Topics From the Grapevine

For more detailed suggestions, see the pages noted.

April (page 20): Spiritual awakenings

May (page 51): A.A. in the computer age

- 3-5—*Grand Rapids, Minnesota*. 26th Annual Iron Range Get-Together. Write: Ch., Box 469, Grand Rapids, MN 55744
- 3-5—*Greenville, Mississippi*. Fifth Annual Delta Roundup. Write: Ch., 308 Lakeview, Leland, MS 38756
- 3-5—*Laughlin, Nevada*. 12th Annual Tri-State Round-Up. Write: Ch., Box 21809, Bullhead City, AZ 86439
- 3-5—*Greensburg, Pennsylvania*. 45th Laurel Highlands Conf. Write: Ch., 60 Greenbrier, Pittsburgh, PA 15220
- 3-5—*Richmond, Virginia*. Fourth Annual Primary Purpose Spring Conf. Write: Ch., PPSC, Box 12475, Richmond, VA 23241-0475
- 3-5—*Milwaukee, Wisconsin*. 45th Annual Spring Conf. Write: Tr., Box 71322, Milwaukee, WI 53211
- 10-12—*Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada*. 32nd Annual Blossom Time Conv. Write: Ch., Box 851, Niagara Falls, ON L2E 6V6
- 10-12—*San Antonio, Texas*. Weekend in SA. Write: Ch., Box 1996, San Antonio, TX 78216
- 17-19—*Courtenay, British Columbia, Canada*. 45th Annual Comox Valley Rally. Write: Ch., Box 1337, Comox, BC V9N 7Z8
- 17-19—*Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, Canada*. Annual Round-Up. Write: Ch., Box 5277, Whitehorse, YT Y1A 3T3

## Planning a Future Event?

Please send your information on June, July, August events, two days or more, in time to reach G.S.O. by April 10, the calendar deadline for the June-July 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 up this end of page - for events on reverse side





- 17-19—*Rehoboth Beach, Delaware*. 36th Annual Delaware Conv. Write: Sec., 379 Angola By The Bay, Lewes, DE 19958
- 17-19—*Clearwater, Florida*. Seventh Annual Conv. Write: Ch., Box 2571, Pinellas Park, FL 34664-2571
- 17-19—*Daytona Beach, Florida*. Sixth Annual Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 4911, S. Dayton, FL 32121
- 17-19—*Hammond, Louisiana*. Spring Roundup. Write: Ch., 23036 Barnum Rd., Springfield, LA 70462
- 17-19—*Holyoke, Massachusetts*. 27th Western Mass. Round-Up. Write: Ch., Box 6161, Springfield, MA 01101
- 17-19—*Lake Sebago, New York*. Sixth Orange County Spring Conf. Write: Ch., OCYPAA, Box 210, Middletown, NY 10940-0210
- 17-19—*Tulsa, Oklahoma*. 55th Annual State Conf. Write: Ch., Box 700212, Tulsa, OK 74170-0212
- 17-19—*Bolton, Vermont*. Area 70 State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 1996, Wallingford, VT 05773
- 17-19—*Shawano, Wisconsin*. Area 74 47th Annual Spring Conf. Write: Secy., 247-A W. 15th Ave., Oshkosh, WI 54901
- 23-26—*Waycross, Georgia*. Okefenokee Round-up. Write: Ch., Box 403, Waycross, GA 31502
- 24-26—*Kerwood, Ontario, Canada*. Strathroy-Watford Camp-out. Write: Ch., Longhorn Ranch, RR3, Strathroy, ON N7G 3H5

- 24-26—*Laval, Quebec, Canada*. 18th Congress of the Dist. of Laval and Surrounding. Write: Ch., C.P. 1502 Station, Chomedey, Laval, PQ H7V 1A0
- 24-26—*Renfrew, Scotland*. 40th Scottish Convention. Write: Scottish Service Office, Baltic Chambers, 50 Wellington St., Glasgow G2 6HJ Scotland
- 24-26—*Bloomington, Minnesota*. Gopher State Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 65295, St. Paul, MN 55165-0295
- 24-27—*Boston, Massachusetts*. Boston Roundup - B.G.L.R.U. Write: Ch., Box 1009-6MF, Boston, MA 02205
- 31-June 2—*Flagstaff, Arizona*. Flagstaff Round-up. Write: Ch., 46 Toho Trail, Flagstaff, AZ 86001

## June

- 7-9—*Calgary, Alberta, Canada*. Fifteenth Annual Gratitude Round-Up. Write: Ch., Box 954, Station M, Calgary, AB T2P 2K4
- 7-9—*Binghamton, New York*. 45th Annual Central NY Area Conv. Write: Ch., Box 837, Johnson City, NY 13790-0837
- 7-9—*Akron, Ohio*. 61st Founders Day. Write: Ch., Box 12, Akron, OH 44309
- 13-16—*Hagerstown, Maryland*. 26th State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 105, Phoenix, MD 21131
- 14-16—*Cedar Rapids, Iowa*. Area 24 Spring Conference. Write: Ch., Box 71, Cedar Rapids, IA 52406-0071

- 14-16—*Springfield, Missouri*. Heart of the Ozarks. Write: Ch., Box 1607, Springfield, MO 65801
- 21-23—*Bronx, New York*. BOTWCYPAA. Write: Ch., Box 243, Westchester Sq., Sta., Bronx, NY 10461
- 28-30—*Moodus, Connecticut*. Soberfest '96. Write: Secy., 46 Brookside, Ave. Naugatuck, CT 06770
- 28-30—*Salt Lake City, Utah*. Pacific Regional Forum. Write: Forum Coordinator, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163

## July

- 4-7—*New York, New York*. 10th NYSCYPAA "Soaring Spirit." Write: Ch., 331 West 57 St., Box 116, New York, NY 10019
- 5-7—*Quimby, Iowa*. District 15 Campout. Write: Ch., 301 N. 2nd St., Cherokee, IA 51012
- 12-14—*Eugene, Oregon*. Summerfest '96. Write: Ch., Box 11824, Eugene, OR 97440
- 19-21—*Edson, Alberta, Canada*. 36th Dist. 5 Roundup. Write: Secy., #206, 5238-5th Ave., Edson, AB T7E 1R6
- 19-21—*Martinsburg, West Virginia*. 44th West Virginia State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 560, Martinsburg, WV 25401