

■ Hurricane Katrina — One Year Later

A year after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, A.A. groups are recovering in ways that reflect how the region in general is shaking off the effects of the storm. Some A.A. groups rebounded quickly. For others, it's been slower. Some meeting places were destroyed, some damaged to the point where they are still not available.

Attendance at A.A. meetings in New Orleans is down due to the drop in the city's population. Some groups have merged and some are sharing meeting places. At some meetings, according to A.A. members in the region, people still talk about little other than the fallout from the storm. At other meetings, it's back to A.A. as usual—though that may be relative.

"Lots down here is back to a state of normal, though now we've got a new definition of normal. We are learning to live in this world," says Howard L., Southeast Regional trustee.

In the aftermath of the storm, which hit Aug. 29, a group called the Little Yellow House, in Ocean Springs, Mississippi, met in the parking lot outside its normal meeting hall, which lost its roof in the storm. "Since there was no cover from the shade, the group's noon-time meeting was cancelled. So was its 8 p.m. meeting, because of the curfew," says Howard. Now that group is back in its original meeting place with its previous meeting schedule.

Along the Gulf Coast of Mississippi, says Howard, "a lot of areas that looked devastated in December look good now. But where they have to, people are making compromises, they're adjusting, adapting."

Glenn H., the delegate from Mississippi, says "the devastation was so widespread, cut such a wide swath, that it was beyond belief. There were towns along the coast, like Waveland, that were essentially wiped out. A storm surge of 26 feet or so came in and took everything.

"It's all going to come back, but it will take time. And A.A. will be there."

He notes that the Gratitude Round-Up, which is the main event for the South Mississippi Intergroup, came off as planned at the Long Beach Clubhouse the weekend after Thanksgiving last year. "There was surprisingly good attendance, something like 100 [down from the usual 600-700]. I applauded the people for their efforts. I'm not sure I would have been able to do it so soon after the storm."

New Orleans had a population of half a million people when the storm hit. That dropped to 100,000 in the storm's aftermath, and now is back to something over 200,000. Three of the city's five parishes sustained major damage and recovery has been slowed by the dimensions of the rebuilding effort.

"Something as simple as roof shingles have been in short supply, not to mention roofers," says Don M., the delegate from Louisiana, who was able to move back into his house only last April.

"As people came back, the groups came back, but a lot of places were destroyed," says Don, "and some areas are still in bad shape. Our Monday night group is still not back; the church where we met got pretty banged up."

The Boulevard Club, a well-known meeting place, was under eight feet of water, according to Don. "It was early November before people could return to it. Then they had to shovel out a few feet of muck. I saw one volunteer wearing a full hazard suit,



This meeting space in Chalmette, Louisiana, which was home to A.A. groups like "Ladies Night" and "Arabi We Share," shows the effects of the surging waters that inundated the area in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Visible high up on the wall and the Twelve & Twelve shades—just under Step One—is a water stain line indicating the reach of the flood.

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while another was in shorts and a flannel shirt and eating a jelly donut.”

Many groups around the country sent A.A. literature to the New Orleans Central Office. “We had more than we knew what to do with,” Don said. “We had offers of donations of funds, which we turned down. The central office did accept offers of money from A.A. members, but at the end of the year they make a donation of excess money to G.S.O. and the Area Assembly.”

A couple of weeks after the storm the office rented a room in a major hotel on Canal Street and made it available to A.A. groups for meetings.

As Greg H., who was chairman of the New Orleans Central Office Service Board at the time, remembers it, “at that point, to our knowledge, there were no meetings being held in New Orleans. There was discussion about the costs involved and then we decided to go ahead and rent a conference room. For the next six weeks, we had A.A. meetings there every day at noon and 6 p.m.”

According to Greg, “a good number of groups in New Orleans—probably about half—were up and running within a couple of months of the storm, and since then it’s been slow, a trickle even. I know of one meeting that just came back last week. Some probably will never come back.”

Nevertheless, as an indication of progress among A.A. in New Orleans and the surrounding areas, three big A.A. events have come off this year: the International Conference of Young People in Alcoholics Anonymous (ICYPAA) meeting, the Big Deep South Convention, and the 48th Annual Louisiana State Convention, which took place in Slidell, about 30 miles outside New Orleans.

“Even as late as March the organizers didn’t know if there would be facilities for these events. You can’t host big events like these in a parking lot, the way you can hold a meeting there,” says Greg.

Overall, though, he calls the last year “a time of great spiritual growth. If I just stay out of the way, things are taking care of themselves.”

The chairman of this year’s Big Deep South Convention, Jimmy H., says attendance dropped to 500 for the three-day event in June, from the usual 800. The Convention has been meeting for 38 years. “About three months before the Convention, we found out the hotel where we normal-

ly meet had been damaged, and was not going to be ready. Some were for canceling the event, but we found a high school gym to hold it, which worked out better in some ways. The kitchen facilities were right next to the main meeting space, unlike in the hotel, and so it made our Cajun hospitality easier.”

Jimmy says the meeting space rented by the New Orleans Central Office held at the hotel on Canal Street “became my interim home group.

“I’m a homebuilder, and nine of 11 homes I had under construction were damaged. At the same time, I was working on my own residence. I was driving 80 miles each way every day from Baton Rouge to New Orleans. But I couldn’t wait for it to be 5 p.m. so I could stop what I was doing and head over to the hotel to make coffee for the 6 p.m. meeting. The hotel didn’t even have potable water at first, so I’d bring along a gallon of distilled water.

“You know, though, reflecting on it, it shows me that God runs A.A. If we didn’t worry about anything and just went out and helped drunks, the rest of our lives just fell into place.”

■ Conference-approved Pamphlets Get a Facelift

Over the next few months, you will begin to see a new design for our Recovery, Unity and Service pamphlets. The new look includes a large initial —R, U, or S— so members can identify the category of each pamphlet. The colors of the new pamphlets are intended to be more eye-catching, and the design more current. We hope to renew interest in the pamphlets and attract more people to read the A.A. message.

The first four pamphlets to come off press with the new design are “This is A.A.,” “44 Questions,” “The Jack Alexander Article about A.A.” and “The A.A. Group.” Pamphlets will get the new cover design as they go back to press for reprint. Most pamphlets will have the updated look by Fall 2007.

■ Pamphlet Discontinued

In keeping with an Advisory Action of the 2006 General Service Conference, the pamphlet “Letter to a Woman Alcoholic” (P-14, .25 each) will be discontinued at the end of 2006, or when the current inventory is depleted. This pamphlet was a reprint of a 1954 article in *Good Housekeeping* magazine, and since there was no other literature for the women at that time, it was thought this would be helpful. However, since that time “A.A. for the Woman” was developed, containing the shared experience of A.A. members. After January 1, 2007, any remaining pamphlets will be distributed to service committees free of charge, upon request.

■ Sister Ignatia: The Frail Nun Who Became a Tower of Strength

More than forty years after her passing, Sister Ignatia is being honored anew for the great service she gave to alcoholics in two Ohio hospitals. On April 2, 2006, a portion of East 22nd Street in the vicinity of Cleveland's St. Vincent Charity Hospital received a secondary naming as Sister Ignatia Way. And on June 9, 10, 11—Founder's Day weekend in Akron—the new Sister Ignatia Heritage Center was unveiled in the Summa St. Thomas Hospital Chapel and was open for hundreds of visiting A.A.s.

The petite nun is lovingly remembered by the thousands of alcoholics she aided at St. Thomas Hospital between 1939 and 1952 and at St. Vincent's Rosary Hall from 1952 until shortly before her death in 1966. Ignatia, virtually a legend in A.A., worked with Dr. Bob, A.A.'s co-founder, in establishing at Akron's St. Thomas Hospital the first alcoholic treatment center in a religious institution. She then set up Rosary Hall at St. Vincent Charity Hospital. It is estimated that more than 15,000 alcoholics passed under her care during her 27 years in the field. The example set by Sister Ignatia and Dr. Bob certainly paved the way for general recognition of alcoholism as a reputable diagnosis for hospital treatment.

Sister Ignatia, often referred to as a "frail" nun, was an unlikely candidate for this demanding role. But it's possible to see today that Providence prepared her for this splendid healing mission and guided the events that helped it succeed.

She was born Della Mary Gavin on January 2, 1889, in Shanvilly, County Mayo, Ireland. The family emigrated to Cleveland when she was seven, and she grew up as a precocious, loving child who showed an early aptitude for music, both in piano and voice, and later gave piano lessons in her parent's home. She also had a strong faith that led her to become a religious, and in 1914 she joined the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine. As a member of the community, she continued her musical education as well as her teaching.

With that background, she might have grown through the years as a highly respected musician in her diocese, serenely obedient and sought out for the most favored assignments. She was certainly loved and accepted by other members of her community and by her pupils.

But she found herself being drawn into a conflict that was not of her making. Her interpretations of the

Gregorian chant drew criticism from the bishop in her diocese, and she began to wilt under his harsh criticism. By 1933 she had a serious physical and mental breakdown that almost took her life. Her doctor decided she could not carry on under the stress of her work as a music teacher, and advised her to take it easy.

Bill W., in writing about this following Sister Ignatia's death in 1966, said that she accepted a much quieter

and less distinguished assignment with "great good cheer." She became the admissions registrar at St. Thomas Hospital in Akron—an institution then administered by her Order. "At the time it was wondered if she could manage even this much," Bill wrote. "That she would live to the age of seventy-seven was not believable; that she was destined to minister to 15,000 alcoholics and their families in the years to come was known only to God."

It was meeting Dr. Bob that changed her life's mission. Early in 1939, he stopped at her desk at St. Thomas Hospital to seek admission for an alcoholic named Walter B. Using diagnoses other than alcoholism, Dr. Bob had been quietly slipping men into other hospitals, including City Hospital, where he had

interned and still practiced. But the hospital administrators' patience with alcoholics was wearing thin and he thought that St. Thomas—as a religious institution—might be more charitable and welcoming.

It was, although Sister Ignatia and Dr. Bob had to work carefully to win over her superior and hospital administrators. According to Bill, they "bootlegged" a shaking alkie into a tiny two-bed ward as a terrible case of indigestion. But the man was so drunk they needed a private room, so he was hustled into the hospital's flower room. (One humorous report was that the man may have thought himself deceased and in a mortuary when he woke up surrounded by flowers!)

Realizing that they were bending hospital rules, Sister Ignatia and Dr. Bob then took their case to the hospital's Superior, Sister Clementine. "To their immense delight she went along, and a little later she boldly unfolded the new project before the St. Thomas trustees," Bill wrote. "To their everlasting credit they went along too—so much so that it was not a great while before Dr. Bob himself was invited to become a staff physician at St. Thomas, a bright example indeed of the ecumenical spirit.



*Sr. Mary Ignatia, Sister of Charity
of St. Augustine*

“Presently a whole ward was devoted to the rehabilitation of alcoholics, and Sister Ignatia was of course placed in immediate charge,” Bill added. “Dr. Bob sponsored the new cases into the hospital and medically treated each, never sending a bill to any.”

Ignatia and Bob also used the newly published book *Alcoholics Anonymous* in presenting the A.A. approach, and visiting A.A.s were always welcome. Ignatia, though retaining her position as hospital admissions director, spent as much time as possible on the ward.

Compassionate caring (for the alcoholic) was, Bill felt, the chief ingredient of Sister Ignatia’s unique Grace. He said “it magnetically drew everyone to her, even the most rough and obstinate. Yet she would not always stand still for arrant nonsense. When the occasion required, she could put her foot down. Then to ease the hurt, she would turn on her delightful humor. Once, when a recalcitrant drunk boasted he’d never again be seen at the hospital, Sister shot back, ‘Well, let’s hope not. But just in case you do show up, please remember that we already have your size of pajamas. They will be ready and waiting for you.’”

Sister Ignatia believed completely in the A.A. approach and saw to it that each person admitted to the ward received the information and encouragement needed for a life without alcohol. She had a parting interview with each patient, cautioning him to guard against pride, self-pity, resentment, intolerance, and criticism. She gave each man an inspirational book and a small religious token called a Sacred Heart badge, and the acceptance of the small badge represented an agreement between the two; he agreed to return the badge to Sister (before picking up another drink) if he decided abstinence was not for him.

Dr. Bob and Ignatia worked together at St. Thomas for more than ten years, until his illness and passing in late 1950. Her Order transferred her to Cleveland’s St. Vincent Charity Hospital in 1952, where she established a unit for treatment of alcoholics along the same lines followed at St. Thomas. She also contrived to have the unit named Rosary Hall Solarium (RHS)—Dr. Bob S.’s initials.

By the early 1960s, hard work and exhaustion were taking their toll, and she became increasingly frail and even had some brushes with death. During these episodes Bill W. came to Cleveland and was allowed to sit by her bedside. “Then I saw her at her best,” he recalled. “Her perfect faith, and her complete acceptance of whatever God might will were somehow implicit in all she said.... Fear and uncertainty seemed entire strangers to her.”

In her final year, Sister Ignatia lived at Mount Augustine, her Order’s mother house in Richfield, Ohio. Shortly after nine o’clock on the morning of April 1, 1966, Sister Ignatia’s spirit quietly slipped away.

At her funeral Mass, the Cathedral at Cleveland could barely seat its congregation. “It was not really a time for mourning,” Bill wrote, “it was instead a time to thank God for His great goodness to us all.” It was, like many A.A. funerals, a celebration of her life and her ministry to thousands of alcoholics.

■ AudioGrapevine Available Online

The AA Grapevine, the international monthly journal of Alcoholics Anonymous, also known as “Our Meeting in Print,” is now available online in an audio format, which can be listened to through a computer, a CD, or downloaded onto an MP3 player like an iPod. AudioGrapevine offers all the stories from two months of the AA Grapevine magazine—stories of personal recovery, spiritual growth, and hope, plus PO Box 1980, the Editor’s Note, and jokes.

AudioGrapevine is a portable meeting that members can listen to on the road, in the gym, or when they cannot get to a meeting. It’s also helpful to A.A.s who have difficulty reading or who don’t have much time for reading.

Access to the AudioGrapevine is available at www.aagrapevine.org. The cost is \$4.95 for one issue, or \$44.95 for a year’s subscription of 12 issues (or \$31.95 for current subscribers). For \$49.95, subscribers get a year’s access to the online audio version and copies of the printed version in the mail.

■ International News

- A popular morning talk show in Turkey had as a guest the chairman of the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous in the U.S. and Canada. Leonard Blumenthal, whose status as a nonalcoholic trustee enables him to publicly speak about A.A., was invited on the show with two psychiatrists and a police officer to talk about the problem of alcoholism in the country. One of the psychiatrists spoke knowledgeably and favorably of the A.A. program. At the end of the segment, Leonard, who worked for 40 years in the field of alcoholism treatment before retiring, had the last word, saying: “If you think you have a problem with alcohol, call Alcoholics Anonymous.” Viewers were supplied with the phone number and address of A.A.’s central office in Turkey, which is based in Ankara, the capital. The phone in that office reportedly rang steadily following the broadcast.

- During that same week, Leonard and Doug R., the G.S.O. staff person on the International assignment, attended the A.A. National Convention of Turkey in Urgup, the country’s equivalent of the annual General Service Conference of the U.S./Canada service structure. About 150 attended the gathering.

- A steady growth in A.A. among the Greek population has enabled home-grown members to take on the work of running the Athens Intergroup, the country’s central service office. The Intergroup was started years ago by English-speaking A.A.s. In another example of the progress A.A. is experiencing in Greece, the office expects

that soon it will no longer need to rely on complimentary material from the General Service Office in New York. The treasurer at Athens Intergroup says he expects that before long the office will be in a position to pay in full for any literature it needs from G.S.O.

- Bahrain, located in the Persian Gulf, was the site of a public information workshop for non-A.A. professionals, which was organized by local A.A. members. Notable among the attendees at the two-hour meeting were the country's minister of health, the head of Bahrain's prison system, and a top religious leader. An Arab-speaking and an English-speaking A.A. member were among those who addressed the meeting. The program included a short film explaining the basics of A.A., and ended with a question and answer session.

■ Special Native American Forum

The Special Native American Forum in Banning, California—which was held on an Indian reservation—was an opportunity for Native American A.A. members to share their thoughts about reconciling the principles of Alcoholics Anonymous with their tribal cultures. There were 201 attendees from 16 states and one Canadian province, and local Native American A.A.s had significant input into the agenda and format.

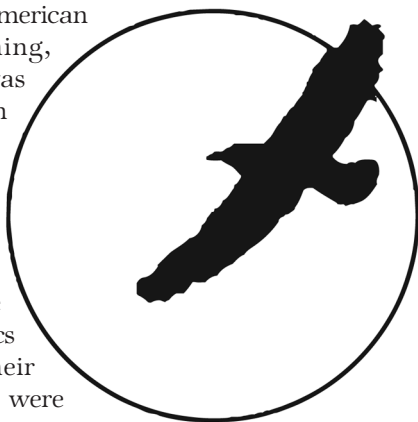
“I think A.A. is the only way to go, though I may be biased,” says Sam E. from New Mexico, a Native American who has been sober in A.A. for 24 years. “Among Native Americans, though, A.A. can be perceived as a white man's organization,” says Sam. “There are historical hurdles which can't be denied, and there can be a lack of understanding on both sides.”

The Forum, he says, was an occasion to air concerns. “Getting folks to talk about issues, about how they can feel isolated and not a part of A.A., starts the healing process. We are all human beings, and when we begin to understand each other, we have a chance to really communicate.”

Sam notes that the problem of alcoholism among Native Americans is “substantial.”

“We in the Indian community—no matter what the issues—need to take care of our side of the street and find a way to stay sober. We need to reconcile, and after that we can go out and share this wonderful program.”

Forums were created in 1976 to bring together A.A.



members from around the U.S. and Canada with representatives from the General Service Board, A.A. World Services, Inc., the Grapevine Corporate Board, and Grapevine and General Service Office staff members. There is no registration fee for a Forum, and no formal actions are taken.

The Forum in Banning was held on the weekend of May 20 and 21, and included a workshop on reaching alcoholics on reservations and another on how an area started A.A. meetings on a reservation. As at all Forums, there were presentations from members of the G.S.O. staff, the General Service Board, and the A.A. Grapevine, in addition to those by local A.A. members.

Also attending the Forum was Ken S. from South Dakota, a Native American who has been sober in A.A. for 20 years. “There can be a lot of confusion about A.A. in the Indian community, so it was good to have something like this gathering to discuss the basics of what A.A. is and what it does,” says Ken.

He acknowledges that there are issues particular to being a Native American and a member of Alcoholics Anonymous: “We not only have to deal with being alcoholic, we have to deal with the Indian and white issues. But my feeling is that the spirit of the whole Forum experience was good, and the fact that the Forum was held on a reservation helped. It put people at ease and set the foundation for good interaction.” says Ken.

“At the end of this gathering, people wanted more. They felt empowered by being able to interact with members of the board and G.S.O. staff,” he says. “Most of us in the Native American community believe in A.A. just as it is, and the message at the Forum was that the power in A.A. comes out of the A.A. groups.”

Barbara A. from Escondido, California, an A.A. member and Native American who helped with input to the agenda, says “issues were addressed head-on at the event. There are some in the Indian community who insist that the only way to get sober is the traditional way.... My life was changed by non-Natives who, like me, had one foot in the grave.”

Some of the questions discussed were:

- Do we teach A.A. newcomers that living A.A.'s Traditions is in keeping with our culture?
- How can we make it easier for people to come into A.A. and to overcome their problems with the religious aspects of A.A.?

Note: Forums remaining in 2006:

- *Hispanic Special*, November 11-12, Radisson Hotel & Convention Center, Kenosha, Wisconsin.
- *Southeast*, December 1-3, Westin Atlanta North Hotel, Atlanta, Georgia.

■ Revision of “A.A. for the Native North American”

The 2006 General Service Conference has approved a recommendation for a revision of the recovery pamphlet “A.A. for the Native North American.” This pamphlet, first printed in 1989, shares the recovery stories of Native American A.A. members.

If you would like to share your experience, strength and hope so that other Native Americans can identify, please send your manuscript by December 15, 2006. Stories should be approximately three pages (or 800 words), typed double spaced. Attach your name and address on a separate piece of paper, and be assured that the anonymity of all writers will be observed.

When writing your story, please keep in mind the quote from the Big Book “Out stories disclose in a general way what we used to be like, what happened, and what we are like now.”

Please send your manuscript to: Literature Coordinator, P.O. Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163.

■ Gratitude Month

On May 14, 1940, when the Fellowship had only a few hundred members, an A.A. member in Akron sent a message to his sponsor, whom he called Willie. He referred to the fact that they had met five years earlier and added, “I shall never cease to be grateful to you and am very glad I have been able to pass the good word along.”

This was Dr. Bob writing to Bill W., expressing gratitude for the historic meeting on Mother’s Day, 1935, that led to his own sobriety and to the founding of Alcoholics Anonymous. Dr. Bob never lost his gratitude to Bill, though both knew that Bill had sought him out in 1935 primarily to maintain his own precarious sobriety.

The premium that A.A. members put on gratitude led to the custom of designating November as “gratitude month.” (In Canada, it’s October.)

This practice started in the 1940s, when the General Service Board held small “gratitude dinners,” which were replaced in the 1960s by bigger and more elaborate “gratitude luncheons.” These affairs, which Bill W. would address, were occasions for A.A. members to express their appreciation for the program. More important, it was A.A.’s opportunity to meet with members of the media to thank them for their cooperation and support.

According to a G.S.O. memo at the time, the aim of the functions was, “to advance A.A.’s public relations by bringing editors, publishers, writers and broadcasters in personal contact with sources of reliable information on the movement.” The luncheons, which were later deemed too expensive, ended in 1968.

Why November became Gratitude Month in the U.S. is uncertain. It may have something to do with Bill W.’s mistaken notion for a time that his sobriety began in November, instead of its actual start date of Dec. 11. Then again, it might have had something to do with November being the month when Thanksgiving is celebrated.

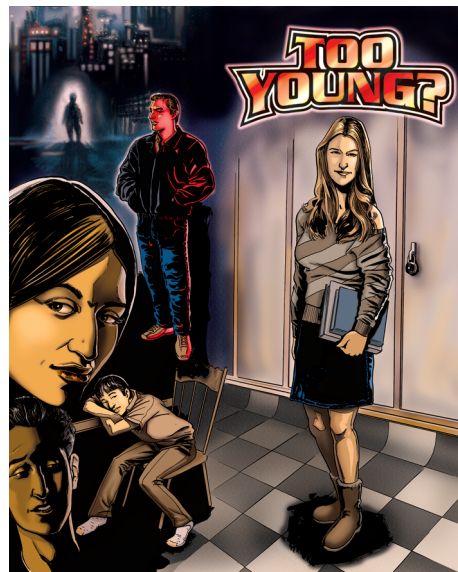
Some groups will hold Traditions meetings in November to remind themselves of the rich heritage of A.A. Others conduct topic meetings on the various aspects of gratitude, such as “gratitude is not passive” or “giving it away.” A few groups take this opportunity to hold a “movie evening,” showing films like *Markings on the Journey* or *Bill’s Own Story*. During the year, many members of the Fellowship send a gratitude gift of one or two dollars for each year of sobriety on their anniversaries to their local intergroup or to the General Service Office.

A look at the amount of written material dedicated to the subject of gratitude underscores its importance to A.A. members. Typing “gratitude” into the search engine of the A.A. Grapevine Digital Archive will produce close to 1,600 articles related to it. As *Bill Sees It* has 17 items listed under the heading of gratitude. The personal stories in the Big Book also reflect the grateful feelings of their authors.

But few expressed it as well as Dr. Bob in his last major talk, given in Detroit in 1948. With more than 13 years’ sobriety, he must have awed the members who came to hear him. There’s little doubt that they went out of their way to praise and thank him. But he took little credit for his recovery. “I don’t believe I have any right to get cocky about getting sober,” he said. “I can feel very thankful that I was privileged to do it. I may have contributed some activity to help, but basically, it was only through His kindness. I should never cease to be grateful for whatever blessings come my way. And I have been blessed in very large measure.”

When he gave that talk, Dr. Bob had less than two years to live. But we can believe that he was grateful up to the moment of his last breath.

Revised
pamphlet
(P-37, .25 each).
“Young People
and A.A.” has
also been revised
(P-4, .30 each).



Seniors in Sobriety Becoming a Focus

The issue of A.A. and the older alcoholic—both those in the Fellowship and those still drinking—has been discussed for decades. Nowadays, though, more attention is being paid to the subject.

Discussions revolve around two main points: how A.A. can be a resource for older active alcoholics, and how older A.A. members may have particular issues relating to their sobriety.

As an indication of growing interest in the subject, the First Annual Sober Over Sixty Conference took place in Kona, Hawaii, this past May. The four-day event had sessions on “Finding Sobriety After Sixty,” “Coping with Chronological Challenges,” and “Senior, Sober a While, Now What?” There is planning for a second conference next year and a third in 2008.

Attendance at the conference was 140, including 39 speakers. “We had nurses and other health care providers who were looking for information about A.A.’s program of recovery for patients who might have drinking problems,” says Marion B., who chaired the event.

“Sometimes it’s only after someone retires that the problems with alcohol come on,” says Marion. “I joined the program of Alcoholics Anonymous at the age of 61. In the past 17 years I have experienced the greatest joy, peace, serenity and happiness, despite coping with the challenges of being chronologically gifted.”

She and others active in this area of service bring A.A. meetings into retirement communities and assisted-living facilities. “We’ll start a meeting anywhere. People at the conference were hungry for information on how to get such meetings going.”

Marion points to the general denial surrounding drinking problems among the elderly. “Alcohol problems among older people are often mistaken for other conditions associated with the aging process. Uncle Joe is taken to the hospital with a broken arm, but nobody bothers to wonder whether Joe might have hurt himself because he’d been drinking,” she says.

“Some family members may say of their older relations, ‘oh, let them drink.’ But it’s a grave mistake to believe that older persons have little to gain from alcoholism treatment.”

Marion points to an A.A. member she knew who passed away at 89, after six years of sobriety in Alcoholics Anonymous. “He had shared that his years in A.A. were the best in his life.”

Marion, who started a sober over sixty meeting in the town where she lives in Hawaii, says that “people sober for many years may drift away from meetings when meetings don’t address issues they now care about particularly.”

Wayne G., an A.A. member in Sedona, Arizona, is the chairman of next year’s Sober Over Sixty Conference, which will be held in Sedona. “I am 65 and don’t consider myself old, though they say that old is always 10 years

ahead of where you are.” Nevertheless, he says, “the SOS Conference in Hawaii was very comfortable. There were people there from their 50s to their 80s. There are issues particular to those who are older in Alcoholics Anonymous. If you are retired, for instance, you have more time on your hands, and you have to acclimate.

“How do we deal with our mental and physical limitations as we get older, and how does that affect our sobriety? How do we ask for help, which is always difficult for some alcoholics, and it may get more difficult as we get older. Someone in a wheelchair at a meeting said he had a hard time asking when he needed someone to push that wheelchair.”

In both Phoenix and in Prescott, Arizona, several A.A. meetings for seniors in sobriety have recently been started, says Wayne, and “they are doing very well.”

According to the 2004 A.A. Membership Survey, 16% of A.A. members are at least 61 years old. Twenty-three percent are age 51 through 60.

Response to the growing interest in the subject of A.A. and the elderly is showing up in A.A.’s service structure. According to Michael M., an A.A. member from California who chairs a standing committee for Cooperation With the Elder Community for Area 9 (Mid-Southern California), evidence of this increased interest is undeniable.

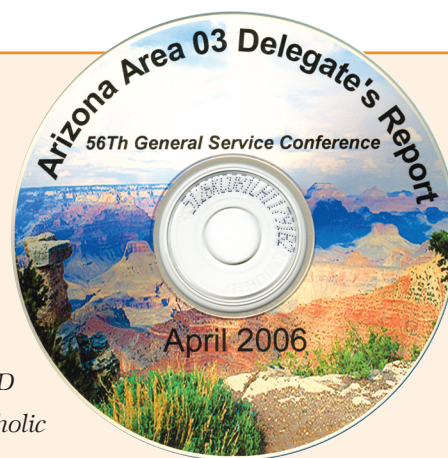
“In addition to the Cooperation With the Elder Community standing committee (in Area 17 Hawaii), which was the first, there are approximately eight district-level Cooperation With the Elder Community committees within Area 9, and that number is increasing all the time,” says Michael. “Area 3 in Arizona just voted in an area level Cooperation With the Elder Community Ad Hoc committee. There are Seniors in Sobriety and Sober Over Sixty meetings springing up all over the country, from Colorado to New York to Florida.

“A large number of people at our area level believed that elders should come under the auspices of the Special Needs Committee. We said that the process of aging was not a special need but a ‘universal phase of life,’ with its own blessings and challenges. We believe we’re here to stay.”



Revised pamphlet (P-39, .25 each).

Area 3's novel approach to its delegate's report was to put it on this compact disc. Smoothly narrated by the Arizona delegate, John S., the account of his trip to the General Service Conference in New York last April contains photos, graphics, and printed headings. The 20-minute PowerPoint® presentation also makes spare use of sound effects. The aim of producing the report on a CD was to broaden the audience for it and provide a richer sense of what goes on at the annual Conference. The photos in the CD were chosen with anonymity in mind. As John says in his narration, "no alcoholic was harmed in the making of this presentation."



■ Pink Cans: Small Change Brings Big Results

A large number of inmates in correctional facilities in the U.S. and Canada are in prison because of alcohol, and the flip side is that many of these alcoholics have found the Fellowship in prison. But the quest for sobriety doesn't come easily behind the walls. Most incarcerated alcoholics have just one meeting a week available to them, and many others are on waiting lists and can get to none at all. That reality underlines the need to send literature into prisons to carry the message in print through the Big Book, other A.A. books and pamphlets, and the A.A. Grapevine.

How to raise enough money to keep a supply of literature flowing? Corrections committees throughout the service structure make raising money for literature a priority, and one idea that has become popular in some areas is having a pink can (or perhaps a blue or green one) prominently displayed on group literature tables as a way of collecting money for literature for prisons.

The concept originated (as far as we know) in the Northern California Area in 1957. The area Hospital and Institutions committee (H&I) was rapidly expanding its work in prisons, and the need for literature was increasing by leaps and bounds, to the point where it could no longer be met by individual contributions. Someone came up with the idea of passing around a can at group meetings, explaining that the pennies, nickels, dimes, and quarters dropped into the can were intended for alcoholics in prisons and hospitals. How to make the cans stand out? Paint them pink. The idea caught on, and eventually groups throughout North America began displaying pink cans on their literature tables. In Northern California, the original one-quart paint cans have been replaced by plastic containers with screw-on, slotted tops. In the beginning, some members were afraid that donations to the pink cans would decrease group contributions, and mindful of that possibility, the committee has always emphasized the importance of providing clear information. They send each group a flyer explaining what the cans are for, print

information in local A.A. newsletters, and always suggest that the secretary emphasize the importance of contributing to group expenses first.

Some areas have come up with variations on the basic concept. Northern New Jersey, for example, implemented the idea of having jail boxes, and the area corrections committee sends each group a letter of introduction describing the need and the purpose.

In the Southern Minnesota area, one of many that have embraced the pink can plan, an article in the area newsletter summed it up: "The pink can is not intended to detract from your group's normal Tradition Seven contributions. We look only to collect spare change from as many groups as possible. If your group already sponsors a facility with literature, your participation in the pink can insures that literature is reaching all facilities, not just one or two. Does your group have a pink can? What a positive way to turn pocket change into the promises of the A.A. message."

Corrections

■ Corrections Personnel Rub Elbows With A.A.s at Arizona Conference

The Arizona Area Corrections Conference, which had its sixth annual meeting in January, brings together A.A. volunteers and corrections personnel from around the state. The aim is to give the two groups an opportunity to mix and get to know each other. One hundred and thirty-four attended, including 44 corrections personnel.

"It was the largest turnout of any conference we've had so far, and it came closest to doing what we have always wanted, which is to promote good relationships between corrections personnel and Alcoholics Anonymous," says Dennis W., chairman of the conference.

“The idea of the conference is to allow those of us who go into correctional facilities to get better acquainted with the professionals who are running the facilities. Just about every prison in the state was represented, and, if we have a problem, we have people who can help us,” he says. “For one thing, we have made progress in getting clearance procedures streamlined.”

Corrections professionals in various capacities were represented, and there were three from the Arizona Department of Corrections who drove seven hours to reach the event.

“We had wardens, captains, upper level corrections officers, and various administrators and coordinators,” says Dennis. “We had professionals from both federal and state prisons, state and county juvenile facilities, the state attorney general’s office, the county jails, and even a couple from a tribal correctional facility on a nearby reservation.”

The area corrections committee started the event six years ago, patterning it after a conference some of the committee members had attended in Colorado. The first couple of conferences were attended mainly by A.A. member volunteers, with corrections personnel as speakers.

“As we progressed, we got more and more professionals to attend, and they were getting to know our volunteers,” says Dennis. “During one break I spoke with a corrections officer who confided that his father had been an active alcoholic and talked about what it was like growing up in his home. At one point, he wistfully said, ‘I wish my father could have gotten this program.’ That officer cannot help but interact differently with our volunteers in the future.”

Each year the conference is put on by a local host committee and rotates around the state. This year the conference was held at the Federal Correctional Facility in Tucson.

The program included a special “Focus on Youth,” with addresses by Michael Branham, director of the Arizona Department of Juvenile Corrections, and Rob Evans, director of the Governor’s Division of Substance Abuse Policy.

After lunch, Dora Schirro, director of the Arizona Department of Corrections, spoke. There were also two speakers from A.A., while the keynote speaker was Doris James from the United States Department of Justice.

The organizers make an effort to attract the kind of speakers who will make the conference attractive to corrections personnel.

Another speaker, John Carey, the administrator of the Addiction Treatment Services for the Arizona Department of Corrections, says that after he came to the job last year, “I quickly realized the collaboration between A.A. and our prison system was strong and needed to be stronger.

“A.A. plays a vital role in prison treatment, and the volunteers,” he says, “who take the time to spread the message of A.A. This does not go unnoticed by the inmates.

“The least I can do as an administrator is try to open some of the gates, ease the A.A. members’ way, and ensure that the gift of recovery lights as many rooms in our modern dungeons as possible. It is not easy, but it is happening.”

P.I./C.P.C.

■ The Service ‘Road Show’

At the southern end of Puget Sound in Washington State, the chairs of two committees, both covering the same sprawling districts—Tacoma, Lakewood and Puyallup—echo each other when talking about their “labors of love” for the Fellowship. Using near-identical words, both Vicki H., chair of the Public Information committee, and Georgia P., chair of the committee on Cooperation With the Professional Community, emphasize that “we encourage service that goes beyond making coffee, putting out literature and folding chairs. We try to encourage our members to explore the wide realm of A.A. service outside their home groups.” Both are quick to note that the P.I. and C.P.C. committees not only work closely with one another but with other service entities, such as the Corrections and Treatment Facilities committees, as well. The activities of all the committees are coordinated by the Tacoma Central Service Office, which acts as sort of a holding tank and contributes to the exceptional communication and cooperation that exists among the committees.

“Together we can do in some areas what each of us would be unable to do alone,” says Vicki, pointing for example to what is known as the Road Show. This, in effect, she explains, “is one-stop shopping. About a dozen chairpersons will visit a group to share about service. Since our various groups hold about 250 meetings a week, there’s a lot of ground to cover as best we can. We talk about what our committees do. We toss about the challenges and try to come up with effective solutions.” People will ask questions: “If we take a meeting into a prison, how much time is allotted?” (It varies, the Corrections committee chair says.) “Can an A.A. who also is a felon volunteer to go?” (Sometimes, yes.) “The Road Shows go back a long way,” Vicki relates, “but five or six years ago they fell by the roadside, you might say. Then P.I. member Bob B. revived them. Now we get to meetings we might never have gone to.”

The Road Show feeds into a C.P.C. committee project called “Take a Professional to Lunch,” which has expanded since its beginnings more than 13 years ago, says Georgia: “The groups are very involved. We send them flyers early on that say in part, ‘Take a Professional to Lunch. Think! Plan! We depend on us/you to invite any person who may come into contact with an alcoholic in their work or professional life for a free lunch.’” Here Georgia explains that “the guests’ lunches are free, while the A.A.s pay for their own. We try to keep the cost down to about \$10 a person.” Attached to the flyer is a sheet for group members to list the names, addresses and phone numbers of prospective invitees; the C.P.C. committee members take it from there and do the actual inviting.

Now in the planning stages of an upcoming luncheon

Georgia says, "At the last Road Show, members of the group were asked, 'How many people here have a job?' Most everybody raised their hands. 'You all have a boss?' Answer: 'Yes.' 'Your boss didn't know you had a drinking problem?' Answer: laughter. Many people thus became more aware of the importance of the luncheon and were eager to participate."

Continues Georgia: "At the luncheon we read the A.A. Preamble, 'How It Works' [Chapter Five, the Big Book], the Traditions, and talk about what A.A. can and cannot do. Then we put on our 'No Name' skit, about Willie who works for Wonkermakers. There are four actors involved: the narrator, the boss, Willie the employee and his supervisor. The boss complains that productivity is falling and Willie often is late to work or absent. Willie counters with a litany of excuses—his wife doesn't understand him, his supervisor doesn't cooperate, he hasn't been well. Then the boss says, 'I have a friend who belongs to Alcoholics Anonymous. Why don't I ask him to give you a call?' " After one luncheon, Georgia notes, "a local judge bought a box of Big Books from our central office that he then handed out from the bench to people up on D.U.I. charges." After the skit, she adds, "we have a member of A.A. share about recovery."

The P.I. committee also has several other irons in the fire, among them the Bus Sign Project. Reports Vicki: "In Seattle the P.I. committee was successful in placing Public Service Announcements on city buses. We started to do the same a year ago. First our P.I. committee members asked their home groups for financing and managed to collect \$1,400 for start-up costs. The P.S.A.s—in black and white and showing a triangle representing Recovery, Service and Unity—reads: 'If you want to drink, that's your problem. If you want to stop, that's ours.' The phone number of our central service office is listed below. The project requires continuing self-support, in the spirit of Tradition Seven. We do the legwork, keep communicating the need to our groups, then turn over the outcome to our Higher Power. And it's coming to fruition. More than 100

buses are carrying the A.A. message of hope."

The P.I./C.P.C. committees also hold training workshops on "Speaking at Non-A.A. Functions" three times a year. "This," says Vicki, "is so that when our A.A. members speak at schools, colleges and elsewhere, they don't launch into a drunkalogue but, rather, explain what A.A. is, what we can and cannot do, and how to reach us. We tell them, 'Remember, you're a walking, talking example of the Big Book.' We do role-playing, with sharing of individual stories, but say to be mindful of what's appropriate. At a local high school one fellow spoke at length about the affairs he'd had when drunk, and much more. To say the least, he was not welcomed back. So a little advance training is very important. We've also found that the pamphlets 'A.A. at a Glance' and 'A Message to Teenagers,' available from the General Service Office are useful as giveaway items."

Both Vicki and Georgia underscore their "willingness to go to any lengths" to keep their sobriety and help other alcoholics. Adds Georgia: "We are not into publicity. What we are doing is giving information about A.A. and providing a bridge for those who want to come and join us in sobriety, or, for nonalcoholics, to gain a greater understanding of how we cooperate but don't affiliate with outside organizations or institutions. When one alcoholic gets well because of what we do, we rejoice. Right now, we're doing a workshop on the Concepts—how these figure into the Traditions and into the Steps, all combining into an amazing circle of recovery. Going over the Concepts, I'm impressed anew that A.A. co-founder Bill W. had the unique ability to say the same thing in 20 different ways. I get new insights into the miracle of the Fellowship every time I read them."

Looking at the work of her P.I. committee, Vicki comments, "We've had our setbacks, but as Bill W. said, 'Pain is the touchstone of progress,' and we feel we really are helping to reach the sick alcoholic. We are dynamic, and we have the best time."

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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

- 5-8—*Amarillo, Texas*. 60th Top of Texas Round-up. Write: Ch., Box 412, Amarillo, TX 79105
- 6-7—*Montréal, Quebec, Canada*. 45e Congres de la Région 87. Write: Ch., 3920, rue Rachel est, Montréal QC H1X 1Z3; congres87@aa-quebec.org
- 6-8—*Chico, California*. NCCAA 59th Fall Conf. Write: Ch., 2416 Inglewood Dr., Lodi, CA 95242
- 6-8—*Boise, Idaho*. Idaho Area 18 2006 Fall Assembly. Write: Ch., Box 50058, Boise, ID 83705; www.idahoarea18aa.org
- 6-8—*Tacoma, Washington*. Western Washington Area Assembly. Write: Ch., Box 731431, Puyallup, WA 98373
- 6-8—*Prince George, British Columbia, Canada*. 50th Primary Purpose Round-up. Write: Ch., #301 - 1448 6th Ave., Prince George, BC V2L 3N2
- 6-8—*St. John's, Labrador, Canada*. Area 82 Assembly. Write: Ch., 27 Beachy Cove Rd, Portugal Cove, NL, A1M 2H1
- 6-8—*Osijek, Croatia*. Croatia Conv. Write: Vrbnicka #35, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia; aamir@net.hr
- 7-8—*La Bastide de Sérou, France*. 15th Conv. Midi-Pyrénées. Write: B.P. 170, 09102 Pamiers, France; contact31@alcooliqes-anonymes-mp.org
- 13-15—*Petit Jean Mountain, Morrilton, Arkansas*. Arkansas Konference by Young People. Write: Ch., Box 250309, Little Rock, AR 72225; www.ARKYPA.org
- 13-15—*San Francisco, California*. The Spirit of San Francisco. Write: Ch., Box 423832, San Francisco, CA 94142; www.spirit-sf.org
- 13-15—*Pueblo, Colorado*. Ocoberfest. Write: Ch., Box 2247, Pueblo, CO 81004
- 13-15—*Waterloo, Iowa*. Area 24 2006 Fall Conf. Write: Ch., Box 1055, Cedar Falls, IA 50613-0048
- 13-15—*Wichita, Kansas*. SWRAASA. Write: Ch., 10604 Blue Jacket St., Overland Park, KS 66214; www.ksarea25aa.org
- 13-15—*Mackinac Island, Michigan*. 18th Mackinac Island Weekend. Write: Ch., 1500 E. Michigan Ave., Lansing, MI; www.aalansingmi.org

- 13-15—*Columbus, Ohio*. The Keys To Freedom. Write: Ch., Area 53 CFC, Box 1201, Columbus, OH 43216-1201; www.area53aa.org
- 13-15—*Salt Lake City, Utah*. Primer Conv. Hispana del Estado Utah. Write: Ch., 3646 Redwood Rd., Salt Lake City, UT 84119.
- 13-15—*Angeles City, Philippines*. 11th Fall International Round-up. Write: Apt. A 1996 Marlim Ave., Diamond Subd, Angeles City 2009, Philippines
- 14-15—*Kalispell, Montana*. 12th Fall Refresher. Write: Ch., 1132 4th Ave West, Columbia Falls, MT 59912
- 20-22—*Santa Barbara, California*. 22nd Santa Barbara Conv. Write: Ch., Box 91731, Santa Barbara, CA 93190-1731; www.sbaaconvension.org
- 20-22—*Panama City Beach, Florida*. Tenth Celebration By The Sea. Write: Ch., Box 18726, Panama City Beach, FL 32417
- 20-22—*South Beloit, Illinois*. 55th Area 75 Fall Conf. Write: Ch., Box 423, South Beloit, IL 61080; www.area75.org
- 20-22—*Austin, Minnesota*. 18th Hiawathaland Get-Together. Write: Ch., 611 E. Blue Earth Ave., Fairmont, MN 56301
- 20-22—*Rapid City, South Dakota*. 2006 Area 63 Fall Conf. Write: Ch., 9301 Main St., Silver City, SD 57702
- 21-22—*Mixco, Guatemala*. 37a Conv. Nacional de Guatemala. Write: Ch., 11 Avenida "A" 7-62 Zona 2, Ciudad Nueva, Guatemala
- 27-29—*St. Cloud, Minnesota*. 24th St. Cloud Round-up. Write: Ch., Box 125, St. Cloud, MN 56302; scr@rte-cyber.com
- 27-29—*Branson, Missouri*. Colors of Fall Western Area of Missouri Conv. Write: Ch., Box 903, Grandview, MO 64030; wamo-aa.org

- 27-29—*Lincoln, New Hampshire*. Loon Mountain 12 Step Fall Fest. Write: Box 1058, Lincoln, NH 03251; stepfestival@yahoo.com
- 27-29—*Latham Springs, Texas*. 29th Brazos Riverside Conf. Write: Ch., Box 5624, Laguna Park, TX 76644; www.brazosconf.org
- 27-29—*Bellingham, Washington*. Mt. Baker Round-up. Write: Ch., 7439 Sunset Dr., Birch Bay, WA 98230; Tallblondeguy22@hotmail.com
- 27-29—*St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands*. 20th Caribbean Conv. Write: Ch., Box 307556, St. Thomas, VI 00803-7556; www.promisesin-paradise.com

November

- 3-5—*Jekyll Island, Georgia*. Jekyll Island Gratitude Big Book Study. Write: Ch., 34 Glen Falls Dr., Ormond Beach, FL 32174; www.jekyllislandaa.com
- 3-5—*Mt. Vernon, Illinois*. 46th Tri-State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 132, Carmi, IL 62821; trista-te2006@yahoo.com
- 3-5—*Manitowoc, Wisconsin*. Big Book Study Weekend. Write: Ch., Box 308, Wayzata, MN 55391
- 3-5—*Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada*. 62nd Keystone Conf. Write: Ch., 208-323 Portage Ave., Winnipeg, MB R3C 3C1
- 3-5—*Repentigny, Québec, Canada*. 24e Congrès AA de Repentigny. Write: Ch., Box 160, Repentigny, QC J6A 5J1
- 10-12—*Framingham, Massachusetts*. 43rd Massachusetts State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 1820, Westfield, MA 01086; altdelegate@aaemass.org
- 11-12—*Kenosha, Wisconsin*. Special Forum. Write: Forum Coordinator, Box 459, Grand

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

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

16-19—*Joplin, Missouri*. District 13 Winter Holiday. Write: Ch., Box 158 Neosho, MO 64850

17-19—*Desert Hot Springs, California*. 23^{avo} Congreso Del Valle de Coachella. Write: Ch., 45100 Birch St, Indio, CA 92201

17-19—*Yosemite, California*. 23^{td} Yosemite Summit. Write: Ch., Box 675 Mariposa, CA 95338; www.serenityyosemite.com

17-19—*Greensburg, Pennsylvania*. 66th Laurel Highlands Conf. Write: Ch., Box 6, Bovard, PA 15619-0006

17-19—*Lake Geneva, Wisconsin*. 17th McHenry's Soberfest. Write: Box 717, McHenry, IL 60051-0717; www.soberfest.org

23-26—*Las Vegas, Nevada*. 40th Las Vegas Round-up. Write: Ch., Box 14743, Las Vegas, NV 89114-4743; www.lasvegasroundup.com

24-26—*Waterbury, Connecticut*. CSCYPAA. Write: Ch., Box 362, West Simsbury, CT 06092-9998

24-26—*St. Louis Park, Minnesota*. 66th Founder's Day Weekend. Write: Ch., Box 8027, Minneapolis, MN 55408-0027; www.foundersdaymn.org

24-26—*Biloxi, Mississippi*. Gulf Coast Round-up. Write: Ch., 24140 Standard Dedeaux Rd., Kiln, MS 39556

24-26—*Raleigh, North Carolina*. Primer Conv. Hispana del Estado de North Carolina. Write: Ch., 705A Rosemary St, Carrboro, NC 27510

December

1-3—*Atlanta, Georgia*. Southeast Regional Forum. Write: Forum Coordinator, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163; Regionalforums@aa.org

2-3—*Ciudad de León, Guanajuato, México*. VIII Congreso del Área Guanajuato Bajío. Write: Ch., Blvd. A López Mateos N°428 1er Piso, C.P. 37000 A.P. 5-78 León, Gto., México; gtobajio@aamexico.org.mx

January

12-14—*Dodge City, Kansas*. 37th Southwest Kansas Conf. Write: Ch., 220 N. Springfield Ave., Anthony, KS 67003

26-28—*Springfield, Illinois*. The Journey Continues "Big Book Study" Conf. Write: Ch., Box 10244, Springfield, IL 62791; www.aaspringfield.org