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BOX 459

News and Notes From the General Service Office of A.A.[®] VOL. 48, No. 6 / HOLIDAY ISSUE 2002

As our Fellowship enters its 68th year, may we continue
 to experience the miracle of sobriety, and the magic
 of sharing A.A. experience with others.
 All of us at the General Service Office
 wish you love, peace and spiritual
 strength throughout the
 holiday season.



Box 4-5-9 is published bimonthly by the General Service Office of Alcoholics Anonymous, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115, © Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 2002

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New York, NY 10163

G.S.O.'s A.A. Web Site: www.aa.org

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

One A.A.'s Holiday Memory

When I joined A.A. in July 1979, my sponsor told me the summer was the best time to come into the rooms of A.A. because I would “stick” to the seats. The first few months into the Fall were wonderful: the hangovers were gone, my wife was being civil to me — not quite friendly, but the silent scorn had dissipated — and the kids were getting some of my attention for a change.

But I was concerned. The “Holidays” were approaching; the gruesome trio. Someone in my home group joked that the definition of alcoholism was “Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year’s.” Very funny. My last Thanksgiving I was so hung over that I had gone and rested my head on the cool tile floor of the bathroom and had to be prodded out to dinner. My last Christmas Eve, I had sat in a bar until 3:00 a.m., hating myself because I knew my toddlers were home asleep looking forward to Santa bringing them toys, and what they would get in the morning was a nasty, half-drunk dad. My last New Year’s Eve, I went berserk because, at my local gin mill, amateur boozers took my favorite barstool — *my seat!*

The “Holidays” had always been special drinking days. Never mind that I was drinking everyday; I *had* to drink on holidays! What was going to happen to me now that I was sober? Everybody was going to ask me out for a drink — like I had any friends left. My pink cloud evaporated; the Holidays loomed — debt, depression and drunkenness. I was not a jolly elf.

Fortunately, I had a home group, and I found I was not alone in my fears. Even members with some time in A.A. expressed some anxiety about the season. One very stylishly dressed young woman, a newcomer like myself, stood up, and in near hysteria, asked what she was going to do at the annual holiday office party, where she knew she would be asked if she wanted a drink. She sat down, her eyes brimming.

A regular at the group, an oldtimer who always sat in the front row, got up and faced the group and said, “I’ve been to many office parties in my sobriety. Always had a good time. Learned I could dance sober. Always been asked if I wanted a drink. Always have had the same answer. I just smile and say, ‘No thank you... I’ve had *enough!*’”

I had *had enough* too, and I got through those first, sober holidays with the help of my A.A. group, my sponsor, my family, and A.A. humor. Happy Holidays!

Holiday Gift Ideas

Some A.A. members report that they never see *Box 4-5-9*, so a subscription to A.A.’s newsletter provides a year-long gift for your home group. A bulk subscription of 10 copies each of 6 issues is \$6.00.

Most A.A. members have the basic literature, but perhaps some on your list might not have the biographies of A.A.’s co-founders: *Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers* (B-8) \$7.50; “*Pass It On,*” *The Story of Bill Wilson and How the A.A. Message Reached the World* (B-9) \$8.00.

For years now, subscriptions to the A.A. Grapevine (as well as *La Viña*) have been a popular gift and one that may be “passed on” to others throughout the year.

New from the Grapevine: A gift edition of *The Best of Bill*. This popular collection of five essays by Bill W. is now in hardcover, with an additional article by Bill, “Why Alcoholics Anonymous is Anonymous.” \$6.95.

Most of these items may be ordered through your local intergroup or central office or from G.S.O. Grapevine books and other items are available by contacting the A.A. Grapevine: Grand Central Station, Box 1980, New York, NY 10163-1980.



Regional Forums — A Part of A.A. History

“The history of A.A. shows that whenever a great need arises, that need is always met,” wrote A.A. co-founder Bill W. in the April 1958 Grapevine. “In this respect, I’m quite sure that our history will go on repeating itself. Indeed, I can have no doubt whatever.” (*The Language of the Heart*, p. 170)

Back then Bill was relating the reasons for having delegates to the General Service Conference. Even as the roots of A.A.’s early groups multiplied and pushed into the remotest areas of the United States and Canada, it became apparent the founders wouldn’t be around forever to look after the membership. As Bill explained, the delegates were needed to bring to Conference deliberations the experience and viewpoints of their own areas, listen to all points of view, then vote in the best interests of A.A. as a whole. Bill’s prediction that “history will go on repeating itself” has again proved on target—this time in the form of A.A.’s Regional Forums.

Like the Conference itself, Regional Forums sprang from the need to expand communication among A.A. members, service workers, the General Service Board, A.A. World Services, and the G.S.O. and Grapevine staffs. By the early 1970s it was clear that, despite delegates’ best efforts, for A.A.s back home the Conference was a second-hand experience.

The concept of Regional Forums goes back to 1974, when the late John L. (“Dr. Jack”) Norris, Class A (non-alcoholic) chairman of the General Service Board from 1961-78, suggested holding weekend mini-Conferences periodically in different parts of the U.S. and Canada. After getting input from others in the Fellowship, he presented his idea at the 1975 Conference, which recommended that it be “further explored and developed.” The first experimental mini-Conference was held in Atlanta, Georgia, in December of that same year.

Comments G.S.O.’s Regional Forums coordinator Adrienne B.: “It’s surprising the concept didn’t die with that first gathering. People from one area in particular were feeling left out. The first day was marked by discord, but by Sunday morning the tone had changed to one of trust and unity.” In March 1976 a second mini-Conference was held by the West Central Region in Sioux Falls, South Dakota. It was well-attended, positive in tone and judged successful in improving communication.

In spring 1976 the Conference, after much debate, recommended “that we go forward with mini-Conferences and provide them as often as possible, that these be held [only] at the request of the region, and that their name be changed to ‘A.A. Regional Forums.’” The stipulation “as often as possible” was determined to be a maximum of four Forums a year. Since there are



Ivy Rivera and G.S.O.’s Shipping Dept. prepare and ship 30 or better cartons approximately three weeks prior to a Forum.

eight regions in the U.S./Canada, each region can schedule a Forum every two years if it so wishes. The Forums are intended to be sharing sessions; thus, no formal actions result. What Forums do provide are unique opportunities to share valuable experience, ask questions and spark new ideas.

Not long after the ’76 Conference Advisory Action, a delegate from Alaska pointed out that it was virtually impossible for service people there to attend a Forum in the “lower 48” in any significant numbers and requested that the board put on an additional “Special Forum” in connection with the Alaska State Conference in 1979. This was done using a format that called for a reduced number of speakers and a shortened agenda.

Other Special Forums were held at Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, in 1993; on four of the Hawaiian Islands, in ’94; in Buffalo, New York, in ’95; and at four sites in Alaska in ’97. These Special Forums quickly attracted groups that were isolated because of language, culture or geographic distance. Today provisions have been made for these additional Special Forums—no more than two a year—to be incorporated into the annual schedule.

Visionaries though Bill and Dr. Jack were, it is unlikely that they could have predicted the ever-expanding scope of Regional Forums. For sure, Dr. Jack would have been astonished by the sophisticated technology that is now

used so effectively at the Forums. In recent years, says Ivy Rivera, nonalcoholic Regional Forums staff assistant who has worked for 18 years at the General Service Office: “Three years ago we started using a software program called PowerPoint, which basically is a new-fashioned version of the familiar slide presentation, but allows far greater creative latitude—and we don’t have to worry ourselves with transparencies and the limits they impose.

“We can project photos of people and places onto a large screen,” Ivy explains, “as well as animated clip art, graphs, text and much more while the presentations are being given. On opening night, for instance, Adrienne B. sets the tone by taking attendees on a visual tour of the New York office.”

Noting that “we work hand-in-hand with the presenters,” Ivy recalls with a smile what happened at the Northeast Regional Forum in Rochester last year: “Trustee Tony T. suggested we create visuals that would make people laugh and feel good. Other than that, he was content to leave the rest to us. So, when Tony began to give his presentation, he didn’t know what would appear on the screen. As it turned out, we showed successive pictures of him as an infant, nerdy teenager, father, workaholic on vacation clutching his laptop and, finally, wearing a big grin and snapping his suspenders above a caption ‘Regional Forums,’ which read, ‘Let Go and Let God.’ Everyone loved it—the humor broke the ice and set a tone of camaraderie for the rest of the weekend.”

Another recent innovation is the six-page illustrated “early bird” Forum Report, complete with presentation excerpts and other information—in English, French or Spanish, depending upon what is called for—that is given to attendees at the close of the Forum weekend.

At the end of every Forum, participants also are given the opportunity to fill out evaluation forms. These are carefully reviewed by the trustees’ International Conventions/A.A. Regional Forums Committee as part of an ongoing effort to make each succeeding Forum even better than the last. Writing to G.S.O. after the Western Canada Regional Forum in June, Tom K., a member of the local host committee, spoke of the evident “energy and enthusiasm generated.” He added, “The immediate and long-term value of these Forums is, in my opinion, inestimable. This view was reinforced for me by the comments and reflections of attendees, particularly first-timers and people relatively new to general service.”

Since 1975 many thousands of A.A. members have attended Regional and Special Forums—more than 2,000 of them in 2002 alone. Also held in ’02 were two Special Forums: the “Inner City” Special Forum in Chicago; and the French-speaking Special Forum in Quebec, Canada. For more information about Regional Forums, log on to the G.S.O. Web site: www.aa.org.

2003 Regional and Special Forums

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

Special Forums are designed for remote, sparsely populated or urban areas.

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

Mailings regarding each Forum will be sent to G.S.R.s, area committee members, delegates, and central offices and intergroups, approximately three months ahead of time. On-line registration is also available. In 2003 Regional and Special Forums are planned as follows:

- Special “Hispanic Forum” — January 11-12: Bakersfield, California
- Special — May 17-18: Smithers, British Columbia
- Northeast — June 20-22: Holiday Inn Grand Island, Grand Island, New York
- East Central — July 18-20: Holiday Inn Conference Center, Columbus, Indiana
- West Central — September 5-7: Holiday Inn, Minot, North Dakota
- Southwest — October 3-5: Adam’s Mark Hotel, Kansas City, Missouri

Area Web Sites: As A.A. Lifelines Abound, Our Message Remains the Same

“The possibilities for communication locally and around the globe have exploded with the widespread use of personal computers,” said Minnesota delegate Christine C. “In *The A.A. Service Manual* (p. S1), A.A. co-founder Bill W. describes A.A. service as ‘anything whatever that helps us to reach a fellow sufferer—ranging all the way from the Twelfth Step itself to a ten-cent phone call and a cup of coffee, and to A.A.’s General Service Office for national and international action. The sum total of all these services is our Third Legacy of Service.’ In light of

recent surveys estimating that there are 102 million Internet users in the United States and Canada alone, our area Web sites provide a valuable Twelfth Step outlet with boundless potential to reach the still-suffering alcoholic.”

Speaking before the 2002 General Service Conference in New York City last spring on the topic “The Internet—A Part of or Apart From?” Christine affirmed that “since our Fellowship’s inception in 1935, the lifelines carrying A.A.’s message have evolved while its heartbeat remains unchanged.” The other speakers discussing A.A. online concurred and shared thoughts of their own. Said Northeast Ohio delegate Tina H., “Online meetings are meant not to replace face-to-face meetings or home groups but to enrich recovery and offer support to those who want to recover from alcoholism.” A.A. World Services director Ron G. pointed to the G.S.O. Web site, www.aa.org, which came into existence in late 1995. “The use of this site, which is presented in English, Spanish and French,” he reported, “has grown steadily, as evidenced by the 1,437,590 ‘visits’ to it last year.”

Christine said that in her own area (36, Southern Minnesota), “the Web site committee is comprised of district Web coordinators and a committee chair; it addresses the Traditions and policy-related issues, and provides recommendations to the area committee or assembly. The area’s web-master serves as a programming facilitator, since building a functional and attractive Web site requires some technical proficiency. Each service entity must grapple with the question of whether to employ a Web developer or use available A.A. volunteers.”

When managing a Web site, Christine pointed out, “a district or area can adhere to our Sixth Tradition of nonaffiliation by ensuring that there are no corporate banners or advertising running across its site. Prudence may be the watchword when a Web site posts active ‘hot’ links to other sites, as the user may infer affiliation.” Her area, she related, “provides hot links only to district sites, intergroups, the Grapevine and G.S.O. Hot links are reviewed periodically and may be discontinued if Tradition-related concerns are identified.” Here she put forth a caveat: “While cyberspace may feel anonymous, it should be remembered that the Internet is a public medium. Along with press, radio and films, personal anonymity must be protected at this level.” Many sites, she added, “choose to omit personally identifying photos, last names, addresses and phone numbers. Area 36 has Web-based e-mail addresses for all officers, committee chairs and D.C.M.s (district committee members) that transfer automatically to the trusted servant’s personal e-mail account. This protects members’ anonymity but allows anyone wishing to contact them to do so.”

At present, nearly 150 Web sites in the U.S./Canada, and some overseas, G.S.O.s, are listed with G.S.O. Area committees have generously shared their experience, now reflected in the service piece “Frequently Asked Questions About A.A. Web Sites,” available on G.S.O.’s A.A. Web site. As a British Web site committee has observed in the A.A. News, published by G.S.O. Great Britain, “Since G.S.O. New York . . . had experienced the problems associated with the initiation of a Web site, and because we did not feel the need to ‘reinvent the wheel,’ we asked for their help. . . . In the spirit and furtherance of Tradition One with regard to international unity, we have based our Web site on that of A.A.W.S. New York.”

In their letters and newsletters, A.A.s have spoken freely of their first halting steps out on the Web and what they’ve learned through trial and error. Herewith a sampling:

B.C. Yukon (<http://www.bcyukonaa.org>). “Even as the Web site is successfully fulfilling its purpose in helping to carry the A.A. message,” said Arnie G., former chairman of the Web site committee, “it also serves as a unifying force. You can’t imagine how many A.A.s in surrounding districts have worked together to make the Web site, particularly the district pages, a reality. Everything has been accomplished by people reaching out and helping each other . . . the essence of Twelfth Step work.” (*Bar* 4-5-9, Feb./Mar. 1999)

The area’s “Web Page History” reports that when districts were given their own space “to do with as they please,” most of them “elected to post their meeting lists. We find this effective because there would be too much work for it to be done centrally. Now each district is responsible for keeping its meeting list up-to-date.”

Southern California (www.aascaa.org). In its Web site guidelines, approved in 1999, the area noted, “Excessive use of graphic material should be carefully considered, as the Eleventh Tradition warns against the use of ‘sensational advertising.’ Intensive graphic, musical or video material that is not pertinent to, or supportive of, the site’s informational content could be viewed as ‘sensational advertising’ by those who view the site.” Moreover, the guidelines state, “In keeping with A.A.’s Seventh Tradition, a site placed on the World Wide Web to represent an A.A. area should be supported solely by that area.”

Southeast Michigan (www.aa-semi.org). “While many A.A. Web sites are simply a public information vehicle maintained by the P.I. committees,” the Web site guidelines state, “our site is also intended as a service tool for the area. Due to the broadened scope of our site, we felt it necessary to form a standing committee to maintain and administer the Web site.” Ideally, it continues, “the committee shall consist of a chairperson, secretary, treasurer, webmaster, district information coordinator and a committees’ information coordinator.”

Southern New Jersey (www.snjaa.org). The "Guidelines & Manual" compiled by the area's Web site committee states that there is no central authority in A.A.; hence, G.S.O. is not a "clearinghouse" for local Web sites: "Questions regarding the Traditions, contents, linking, etc. are determined by a local group conscience."

New Mexico (www.zianet.com/area46). In the beginning, the Web site committee wrote in the area newsletter of its concern "that while we in A.A. have worked hard to eliminate any form of elitism in our activities, [we realize] the ability to participate in the development of a Web site may be restricted by its nature to a privileged few. A popular suggestion is to have the content of the site overseen by the area's P.I. committee. Since any member can attend the committee's meetings and contribute ideas, the site truly can be a product of the area's A.A. community."

New York State-Interactive Meeting Lists (http://www.ny-aa.org/meetings/). This interactive Web site was started in June 1998 for the Hudson/Mohawk/Berkshire Area 48 (www.ny-aa.org). Its stated direction: "Some day we hope that every alcoholic who journeys to New York State will be able to find the Fellowship of A.A. through these [Web] pages. Much more of the state besides our own has been added. Other parts are welcome to join." In sharing its design philosophy, the Web site committee says, "It should be possible to use the site with a relatively old system and software. Nobody should have to 'Click here to download the latest gizmo.' We don't want someone trying to install a computer program when they really should be going to their first meeting."

Vermont (www.aavt.org). When the Web site was launched in 1998, the ad hoc Web site committee of the P.I. committee hewed to "items we felt were vital to the continued success of the site," a committee member

wrote G.S.O. These included "having two Web servants with long-time sobriety to oversee the site and ongoing maintenance. Each person should have at least five years of continuous sobriety and at least five years of computer, Internet and Web site experience."

Virginia (www.aavirginia.org). In the Virginia Area Newsletter, the Web site committee wrote that essential to the success of its Web site, started in late 1998, was, among other things, "allowing individuals to fully articulate their concerns freely, taking the time to fully answer all their questions and carefully explaining the details of how a Web site works. No idea can be implemented unless those who are asked to support it understand the concept on a personal level. Building a consensus is every bit as necessary as having a good plan."

Spirituality in A.A. Allows Room for All Religions—or None

"I read quite a bit of the A.A. information posted on your Web site [www.aa.org] and finally got up enough nerve to attend my first meeting," a newcomer named Ben B. e-mailed the General Service Office in July. "Although I have been sober since June 11—my first 24-hour period of sobriety—I believe I need the help and support of a group such as A.A. to make sure I stay sober and don't slip up.

"The question I have is: How do I reconcile the fact that A.A. seems to have a strong spiritual component while I happen to be a total atheist? Will I offend the other people if I don't say the Lord's Prayer with them? Would it be disruptive to have a

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nonbeliever in the midst of individuals with strong convictions about God?”

Responding to his query, a member of the G.S.O. staff wrote, “We can share with you, Ben, that many of our members were and are atheists and agnostics and have been able to stay away from one drink, one day at a time, by practicing the principles of the Fellowship as embodied in our Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. Sober A.A.s travel many different paths when it comes to faith. A.A. is not a religious program. We say in our Preamble that we are not allied with any sect or denomination, and the only thing that is asked of us is a desire to stop drinking.”

Here he notes that it is customary in many U.S./Canada groups to close meetings with either the Lord’s Prayer or the Serenity Prayer, but that this is a matter for each group to determine. Saying the Lord’s Prayer probably started back in the late 1930s, according to some earlytimers, and may have been a carryover from the custom of A.A.’s forerunner, the Oxford Group. In those days, according to the G.S.O.

In the early years, there was no A.A. literature; in fact, A.A. didn’t even have a name. So the early groups leaned heavily on Bible reading for inspiration and guidance. Later the religious slant faded as it became evident that A.A.’s program of recovery could cross any barriers, including all creeds, races and religions—and as the Fellowship developed literature of its own.

Yet the use of the Lord’s Prayer persisted in A.A., as it has almost everywhere else. It is likely that meetings continued to be closed with this prayer because, as A.A. co-founder Bill W. later explained, “it did not put speakers to the task, embarrassing to many, of composing prayers of their own.” Certainly, reciting the prayer has been a purely voluntary act throughout A.A.’s history. The leader of the meeting almost always asks attendees to join in “if you wish.”

In his letter to Ben, the G.S.O. staffer notes that “Bill W. was an atheist or agnostic at one time. He thought this was such an important subject to discuss within A.A. that an entire chapter in the Big Book [*Alcoholics Anonymous*, pages 44-57] is devoted to the subject. There are also stories by an agnostic and an atheist in the A.A. pamphlet ‘Do You Think You’re Different?’

“A.A.’s collective experience suggests that to get sober and stay sober, alcoholics need to accept and depend upon a spiritual entity, or force, that they perceive as greater than themselves. Some choose the A.A. group as their ‘Higher Power,’ some look to a God of their own understanding, and others rely upon entirely different concepts. Importantly, individual members are free to interpret these values as they think best—or not think about them at all. As for saying the Lord’s Prayer, or the increasingly favored Serenity Prayer—or engaging in any other group activity—the decision

rests with the majority, or group conscience.

“So, Ben, you do not have to participate in any prayers, and if someone is offended by this, it is really that person’s problem, not yours. The same goes for being a ‘nonbeliever’ in a group—that’s your affair. Hopefully you can connect with an understanding sponsor who can guide you through the Steps and help you with your doubts and fears. If you’re showing up at meetings on a regular basis and are willing to be of service to the group, you will find that members will respond very positively to you.

“I would further share with you that I believe in the idea of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts. At so many A.A. meetings the room seems to be filled with trust and love and mutual caring. I know these things in a way I don’t know other things, and although I can’t prove it, I know they are real. Some members I know have used the term ‘God’ to mean ‘good, orderly direction’ rather than a supernatural being, and this concept helped me get out of the debating club when it came to other people’s beliefs.”

Correctional Facilities

A.A. Inside Brings Hope and the Desire To Live Sober

Two A.A. members, one a former inmate and the other still inside, talk about the feeling of freedom that A.A. meetings behind the walls have given them. Writing in the April issue of *Just for Today*, a newsletter published by the Tucson (Arizona) Area Intergroup, Inc., they both stress the miracle of hope that has turned their lives around.

“I realize,” writes Dennis W., “that getting free in prison sounds like a contradiction, but for me it was the first freedom I’d had in many long years.” Dennis, who started drinking at 15, spent “23 more years of constant alcohol and drug use. I was finally arrested and sentenced to four years in prison.”

The good news, he says, is that by going to prison “I had finally reached the bottom I so desperately needed, and I was now ready to hear what A.A. had to offer. Many wonderful people came into the prison to bring us meetings. What they brought me most of all was hope. I am now sober almost 16 years. I’ve had a wonderful life and haven’t had to drink, use or go back to prison again except to carry the A.A. message. I owe my life to those

beautiful people who brought it to me, and today I freely give away what was given to me. I invite you to meet me at the upcoming Corrections Workshop. . . and find out how you can help carry the message that saved your life.”

Cathy W., who is still in prison, writes, “My experience covers 34 years of substance abuse that began with alcohol and prescription diet pills. Life became a big party and I the hostess. I blamed my unmanageable life on everything and everyone, including my children—everyone except myself.”

Sentenced to five years of imprisonment in 1999, Cathy began to attend A.A. meetings. “Sitting there, listening to others share,” she says, “I began to feel I wasn’t alone. Others were sharing the same experiences, shame and guilt I had. They also shared how they had learned to live without drinking or using. That got my attention.”

In April Cathy celebrated three years of sobriety. “I’m still incarcerated,” she says, “but I finally have a feeling of freedom I never had before. All it took was for me to become willing. . . . I can’t forget nor close the door on my past. I want and need to share those experiences with others and let them know that in A.A. they don’t have to feel alone. I’m no longer that person who thought her life was meant to be miserable. I like who I’m becoming, and this in itself is a miracle.”

C.P.C.

Oklahoma Workshop Informs Professionals And A.A.s Alike

“A.A. has a long tradition of cooperating with court programs for alcohol- and substance-abusing offenders,” says Ross D., alternate Oklahoma delegate and immediate past chairman of the state Committee on Cooperation With the Professional Community. “With the emergence of new drug and DWI courts and similar programs—established to provide a therapeutic approach to cases involving offenders with a drug- and/or alcohol-related problem—more effective introductions to A.A. have been developing both in our state and across the country.”

However, he points out, these approaches won’t work in a vacuum: “We can have pamphlets for A.A. groups about cooperation in general terms. But that works only in Manhattan, Chicago or in small town Ada [Oklahoma], when the *local* professionals know how to

refer people to *local* A.A.—when they know whom to contact locally to work out problems.”

In April the Ada A.A. Group, together with the state C.P.C. committee, hosted a day-long workshop to give A.A. groups the information and tools they need in order to cooperate fully with the professionals in their communities—and to inform the professionals themselves as well. “We were all too aware,” says Ross, “that there’s a lot of misinformation about the court system that can be turned about by clear communication. We are learning better ways to welcome the alcoholic offender.

“Once we decided to hold the workshop,” Ross relates, “we didn’t panic about how to go about it—that’s because in A.A. we needn’t do anything from scratch. We have the C.P.C. Workbook from the General Service Office and various pamphlets for reference and support, not to mention the collective experience of A.A. that’s also available from G.S.O. In addition to alerting A.A. groups to the day-long event, the C.P.C.s wrote to court personnel, inviting them “to explore the possibilities for cooperation in Oklahoma” and asking them to “pass the information along to your staff and others who might join with us.”

The invitation explained that “some innovative and effective approaches for introducing the potential alcoholic offender to A.A. and for verifying attendance at meetings are developing. In a couple of Oklahoma counties, some of these have been initiated successfully.” Before, for example, offenders generally arrived at their first meeting in the dark about A.A. and resentful and afraid. Now, in some areas, C.P.C.s go to drug-court classes twice a month to welcome the newcomers and tell them what the Fellowship is about. “This has made a positive difference in their attitude and behavior at meetings,” says Ross.

Continuing, the invitation said, “We look forward to exploring the possibilities for improving or establishing our cooperation with you. We do not purport to provide a substitute for any portion of the drug court or other programs that are proving so valuable in our communities. Nor do we claim to have a ‘cure’ for alcoholism. Our desire is simply to make our recovery program available to the potential alcoholic offender.”

On the morning of April 6, close to 100 A.A.s and professionals in the community were on hand. Topics covered included “C.P.C. Work: How it Started, What It Is, and Why We Do It”; “P.I. [Public Information] Work: What Is It? How is it Related to C.P.C.?”; “How Groups Can Cooperate With Professionals and the Public in Their Communities”; and “What Do A.A.s Doing C.P.C. and P.I. Work Need to Know?” At one workshop a local judge discussed “Understanding the Justice System so We Can Better Work with Them.” At another a drug court administrator offered “An Oklahoma Drug Court Perspective.”

In his discussion of “Firsthand Experience in Cooperating With Professionals at the Community Level,” Ross emphasized the need for ways to ease the transition of court-mandated “newcomers” into A.A. “It is not, and most likely will not be, a perfect environment,” he said. “Initially offenders cannot be expected to be at all happy about A.A., nor will most of them have a clear idea of their problem or which Twelfth Step program is right for them. Attending A.A. meetings does not guarantee sobriety,” he noted, “but sometimes magic happens and lives are changed.”

Reporting that “we’ve had wonderful feedback from people who were at the workshop,” Ross adds, “Among several good things that have happened since is that three groups in the Oklahoma Area have formed group-level C.P.C. committees. Additionally, I feel we’ve jump-started spirited dialogue, generated a lot of information flow and answered some important questions. We could not have pulled it off so successfully though, were it not for sharing from other area service committees—P.I. and Correctional Facilities, to name a few—that were already experienced in holding orientation meetings and workshops. Here in Oklahoma our committees cooperate not only with our professional friends in the community but with each other. That resonates amazingly in our efforts to help the suffering alcoholic.”

P.I.

Did I See An A.A. Commercial On TV Last Night?

No, Joanie, Norman, and others who have made similar inquiry. What you probably saw was the 15-, 20- or 30-second public service announcement (p.s.a.)—not to be confused with a commercial—called “Reach Out” that ends, “We’re Alcoholics Anonymous. If drinking is affecting your life, look us up. We’re in your phone book and on the Web. When you’re ready for a change. . . reach out to us. We’re here to help.” (*Box 4-5-9*, Aug.-Sept. 2002)

Approved in April by the General Service Conference, this is the latest in a long line of TV and radio p.s.a.s produced by the trustees’ Public Information Committee since 1966. They are neither to promote the Fellowship nor to say it is better than any other way of dealing with alcoholism or the only solution. The intent is simply to provide information about who we are and how to find us. It is estimated that p.s.a.s have been instrumental in

helping thousands of alcoholics and their families to become aware of A.A. as a resource for recovery.

Before making any decision concerning A.A.’s public relations, the Conference weighs every aspect in terms of Tradition Eleven, which states, “Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films.” Eyeing the delicate balance between attraction and promotion, one A.A., a district committee member, declared during an Ask-It-Basket sharing session at a Special Regional Forum in Chicago last spring, “In order to have attraction, you must have a presence.” Indeed, in 1956, when the P.I. Committee of the General Service Board was formed, the Conference established a clear overall policy. “In all public relationships,” it stated, “A.A.’s sole objective is to help the still-suffering alcoholic. Always mindful of the importance of personal anonymity, we believe this can be done by making [our experience] known to alcoholics and to those who may be interested in their problem. . . .”

“In A.A.,” explains General Service Office staff member Rick W., who is on the P.I. desk, “our goal is to share with the general public what A.A. is, what we do, and how to get in touch with us. Our hope is that an alcoholic, or a concerned friend or relative who hears about A.A., will understand that we offer a proven solution to alcoholism.” Rick notes that “approximately 700 P.I. committees across the U.S. and Canada are involved in P.I. efforts through activities such as giving talks at local schools, providing A.A. literature for local libraries, working with the media to offer accurate information about A.A.—and placing p.s.a.s.” And, he adds, “the more frequent and stronger the contacts that local committees establish with radio and TV stations, the thinking goes, the better our chances that the p.s.a.s will be aired frequently over time, thus expanding A.A.’s window of opportunity to reach the still-suffering alcoholic.”

A.A. co-founder Bill W. pointed out in a 1957 Grapevine essay that, “While word of mouth and personal contact have brought in many a newcomer, we can never forget that most of us are able to trace our chance of recovery back to our friends in communications—we read, or maybe we heard, or we saw.” (*The Language of the Heart*, p. 181) Bill further noted that “Good public relations are A.A. lifelines reaching out to the alcoholic who still does not know us.” (*ibid.*, p. 91)

Today a variety of radio and TV p.s.a.s are available from G.S.O., and may be viewed on G.S.O.’s Web site. The TV p.s.a.s are close-captioned for the hearing-impaired; some are available in Spanish and French as well as English. If you have questions or wish to place an order for the scripts or video cassettes, contact the Public Information desk or publicinfo@aa.org.

Twelve Tips on Keeping Your Holiday Season Sober and Joyous

Holiday parties without liquid spirits may still seem a dreary prospect to new A.A.s. But many of us have enjoyed the happiest holidays of our lives sober—an idea we would never have dreamed of, wanted, or believed possible when drinking. Here are some tips for having an all-round ball without a drop of alcohol.



1 *Line up extra A.A. activities for the holiday season.* Arrange to take newcomers to meetings, answer the phones at a clubhouse or central office, speak, help with dishes, or visit the alcoholic ward at a hospital.



2 *Be host to A.A. friends, especially newcomers.* If you don't have a place where you can throw a formal party, take one person to a diner and spring for the coffee.



3 *Keep your A.A. telephone list with you all the time.* If a drinking urge or panic comes—postpone everything else until you've called an A.A.



4 *Find out about the special holiday parties, meetings, or other celebrations*

given by groups in your area, and go. If you're timid, take someone newer than you are.



5 *Skip any drinking occasion you are nervous about.* Remember how clever you were at excuses when drinking? Now put the talent to good use. No office party is as important as saving your life.



6 *If you have to go to a drinking party and can't take an A.A. with you, keep some candy handy.*



7 *Don't think you have to stay late.* Plan in advance an "important date" you have to keep.



8 *Worship in your own way.*



9 *Don't sit around brooding.* Catch up on those books, museums, walks, and letters.



10 *Don't start now getting worked up about all those holiday temptations.* Remember—"one day at a time."



11 *Enjoy the true beauty of holiday love and joy.* Maybe you cannot give material gifts—but this year, you can give love.



12 *"Having had a . . ."* No need to spell out the Twelfth Step here, since you already know it.

BOX 4|5|9 BULLETIN BOARD

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

HOLIDAY ISSUE 2002

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.

December

November 29 – December 1—*Battle Creek, Michigan*. 24th MCYPAA. Write: Ch., Box 19234, Kalamazoo, MI 49019-0234

6-8—*Panama City Beach, Florida*. Celebration by the Sea. Write: Ch., Box 7457, Panama City Beach, FL 32413

6-8—*Puerto Vallarta, Jalisco, Mexico*. Sober Fest 2002. Write: Ch., 1705-1348 Barclay Street, Vancouver, BC, Canada V6E 1H7

24-26—*Copperas Cove, Texas*. Sixth Christmas Alkathon. Write: Ch., Box 1386, Copperas Cove, TX 76522

January

3-5—*Portland, Maine*. NECYPAAXIII. Write: Ch., Box 6673, Portland, ME 04103

10-12—*Montgomery, Alabama*. Alabama/NW Florida Area 1 Assembly. Write: Ch., 8121 Lillian Hwy., Lot 45, Pensacola, FL 32506-3771

10-12—*South Padre Island, Texas*. Island Jamboree. Write: Ch., Box 3844, Brownsville, TX 78523

11-12—*Bakersfield, California*. Special "Hispanic" Regional Forum. Write: Forum Coordinator, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163

16-19—*Raleigh, North Carolina*. 36th Tar Heel Mid-Winter Conf. Write: Ch., Box 18412, Raleigh, NC 27619

17-19—*Cincinnati, Ohio*. Pockets of Enthusiasm. Write: Ch., Box 43458, Cincinnati, OH 45243

18-19—*Alexandria, Minnesota*. Area 35 Service Workshop. Write: Ch., Box 227, Gilbert, MN 55741

23-26—*Fort Walton Beach, Florida*. 13th Annual Emerald Coast Jamboree, Inc. Write: Ch., Box 875, Fort Walton Beach, FL 32549-0875

24-25—*Tucson, Arizona*. Third Annual Corrections Conf. Write: Ch., 7830 E. Mary Drive, Tucson, AZ 85730

25-26—*Fort Dodge, Iowa*. Winter Rally. Write: Ch., Box 206, Fort Dodge, IA 50501

February

1-2—*Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada*. 16th Annual Round Up. Write: Ch., Box 742, Fredericton, NB, E3B 1G8

6-9—*Melbourne, Florida*. Spacecoast Round Up. Write: Ch., 720 E. New Haven Avenue, Suite 3, Melbourne, FL 32901

7-9—*Largo, Florida*. Largo's Step N Ahead. Write: Ch., Box 1273, Indian Rocks Beach, FL 33785

7-9—*Liverpool, New York*. 16th Annual Salt City Mid-Winter Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 3588, Syracuse, NY 13220-3588

14-16—*North Little Rock, Arkansas*. 21st Annual Winter Holiday Conv. Write: Ch., Box 26135, Little Rock, AR 72221

15-16—*Beardstown, Illinois*. Dist. 15 Alkathon at Merritt Hall. Write: Ch., 1301 Monroe, Beardstown, IL 62618

15-16—*San Juan, Puerto Rico*. Convención Anual del Area 77. Write: Ch. Box 363574, San Juan, PR 00936

21-22—*Sikeston, Missouri*. 22nd Annual Five Corners Conv. Write: Ch., Box 158, Sikeston, MO 63801

21-23—*Gulf Shores, Alabama*. 19th Annual District 19 Jubilee. Write: Ch., Box 1183, Foley, AL 36536

21-23—*Burlington, Iowa*. 13th Southeast Iowa Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 85, Keosauqua, IA 52565

27-March 1st—*Kansas City, Kansas*. 21st Annual Sun Flower Roundup. Write: Sec., 10604 Blue Jacket, Overland Park, KS 66214

March

14-16—*Portland, Maine*. Northeast Fellowship of the Spirit. Write: Ch., 71 Winter Street, Lewiston, ME 04240

14-16—*Sioux Falls, South Dakota*. 14th Annual Sioux Empire Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 76, Sioux Falls, SD 57101

14-16—*Toronto, Ontario, Canada*. Ontario Regional Conf. Write: Ch., Box 60010, 1032 Pape Avenue, Toronto ON, M4K 3V0

21-23—*Eveleth, Minnesota*. 24th Winter Rap Up. Write: Ch., 22 6th Street N.E., Cook, MN 55723

21-23—*Cherry Hill, New Jersey*. 39th Annual Area 45 General Service Conv. Write: Ch., Box 663, Pleasantville, NJ 08232

21-23—*Hood River, Oregon*. HOW-L Conv. Write: Ch., Box 1757, The Dalles, OR 97058

28-30—*Ames, Iowa*. Aim for Ames Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 2522, Ames, Iowa 50010

28-30—*Parkersburg, West Virginia*. Area 73 Spring Assembly. Write: Ch., Box 4471, Parkersburg, WV 26104

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 us:

Date of event: from _____ to _____, 200 _____

Name of event: _____

Place (city, state or prov.): _____

For information, write: (exact mailing address) _____

Contact phone # (for office use only): _____

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