

A.A.'s 55th Birthday Party Offers Fellowship and Fun In Spirit of Self-Support

As more than 40,000 A.A.s and Al-Anons finalize plans to join A.A.'s Ninth International Convention in Seattle from July 5-8, the Convention desk at the General Service Office is being deluged with questions concerning everything from hotel accommodations to transportation and wheelchair access. (One venerable gentleman wrote early on that in all his years of A.A. conventioning, he has never once been housed close to the convention center. So this time, he said, he would appreciate being where the action is. He asked for a room in Tacoma—which happens to lie about 30 miles south of Seattle.)



Muriel Elias (a long-time G.S.O. employee, called back from retirement to help out) and Lynda Ernst, staff assistant to G.S.O. Convention coordinator Lois F., handling phone calls and many details for A.A.'s 55th Birthday celebration.

A frequently asked question is, "What does my \$55.00 registration fee pay for?" The answer, direct but mind-boggling, is provided in large part by professional meeting planner Gregg Talley, whose management group is helping A.A. coordinate this event.

"For starters," Gregg says, "the registration fees will offset the cost of renting all the convention facilities,

including those at the new Washington State Convention Center, the Kingdome, and the Seattle Center. The rent for these areas alone is expected to total about \$100,000."

Transportation is also a mammoth expense. Reserving buses and drivers to shuttle A.A. attendees back and forth between their housing facilities and the convention centers will cost approximately \$400,000.

Another expensive but essential service at each Kingdome session involves arrangements for simultaneous translation into four languages—English, French, German, Spanish—and, depending upon the need, Japanese. Two translators are needed for each session, since they spell each other every 15-20 minutes.

Then there are the interpreters for the hearing-impaired, six in all. Throughout Friday and Saturday, two selective workshops or meetings will have signers, thus giving hearing-impaired attendees a wider range of topics to choose from. The two big meetings in the Kingdome will also be signed, as well as the Big Show Saturday night.

Less obvious are the costs of printing; data processing; mailings; insurance; entertainment; and travel accommodations for the invited non-A.A. speakers.

Unanticipated production costs inevitably surface, no matter how thorough the initial planning. One such occurred when it was discovered that, while the existent sound-and-light system in the Kingdome is adequate for sporting events, it won't do for the A.A. Convention with all its speakers. Therefore, architects and engineers have had to rig special hooks in the dome to accommodate additional equipment.

Other expenses are incurred by Seattle's Host Committee, which carries a lion's share of responsibility for the smooth functioning of this massive gathering. Says Burke D., a member of the Seattle core committee, "By Convention time we expect to have more than 3,000 volunteer greeters and other workers, each working in some capacity to make A.A.'s 55th Birthday a marvelous experience for everyone here."

These volunteers, he points out, "require orientation in order to handle their jobs successfully—assigning dormitory housing and RV (recreational vehicle) sites; steering people to buses and meetings; providing information about restaurants and tourist attractions; assist-

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ing the physically challenged; and generally moving the flow of A.A.s and Al-Anons smoothly. The hidden costs involved in communications, mailings and other services are tremendous.”

At present, adds another core committee member, Denis F., “more than 120 A.A. volunteers are busily sewing outfits for the greeters. In their green vests, varicolored neckerchiefs and broad-brimmed white straw hats (which they are paying for themselves), they will be easily spotted in a crowd.”

Asks Eric B., chairperson of the Seattle Host Committee: “What do you get for your fifty-five dollars? You get the right to participate in a celebration of your sobriety in A.A. with members from 60 countries around the world. It’s a momentous time of sharing, gratitude and joy.”

The theme of the 1990 Convention is “Fifty-Five Years—One Day at a Time.” For the thousands of A.A.s present, there will be a wealth of activities to choose from, including no fewer than 76 topic meetings, 37 workshops and 9 panel discussions. Not to forget the A.A. marathons and eight regional alkathons.

In his column, “Countdown 1990,” which is appearing as a regular feature of the *Washington Area Newsletter* until the conclusion of the Convention, Burke writes: “Just imagine forty or fifty thousand A.A.s and Al-Anons wandering around the Seattle Center, drinking coffee from espresso wagons while sitting by the Inter-



Lynda and Muriel, in Lois's office, checking out the schedule for the 250 meetings.

national Fountain with old friends, or perhaps introducing themselves to the new Russian A.A.s while shopping in the Pike Place Market or dancing under the stars by the Flag Pavilion, or saying the Serenity Prayer while holding hands with everyone in the Kingdome.”

Meanwhile, he adds, “all Seattle hotels and restaurants have been informed that we A.A.s consume huge quantities of ice cream and coffee—but no booze.”

Highlights of Convention Program—July 5-8

Attendees may select sessions from a total of more than 250 scheduled workshops, panels and meetings, which will include almost 900 speakers and moderators.

Thursday evening: Get-acquainted Dances in five locations—Big Band, Country & Western; Top 40; music from the '50s and '60s.

Friday evening: Big Meeting—Flag Ceremony; three-speaker meeting with participants from U.S., Canada and Europe; presentation of 10 millionth copy of Big Book to Nell Wing, former G.S.O. archivist and Bill W.'s long-time secretary; honored guests include Dr. Bob's son and daughter, Bob S. and Sue W.

Saturday evening: Big Show at Kingdome, with professional entertainment, including “Up With People,” a group of young singers and dancers from around the world.

Sunday morning: Closing Spiritual Meeting.

Throughout the week Convention-goers may select from:

Panels: A.A. as a Community Resource; A.A. and the Media; A.A. and the Medical Profession; and more.

Workshops: Is A.A. Reaching Minorities?; Twelve Concepts; Identification—Are We Losing It?; The Home Group; Our Primary Purpose; The Group Conscience—How and When; Why Anonymity Today; Anonymity—Our Spiritual Foundation; and many more.

Topic Meetings: Tolerance and Trust; Action and Patience; Ego Deflation; Living Sober; These Principles in ALL Our Affairs, Keep it Simple; and a host of others.

Special Meetings: Birds of a Feather (for airline personnel); Lawyers in A.A.; Recovery—Gays in A.A.; A.A. in Asia; A.A. in Africa; A.A. Meetings on Computer; and 26 more.

Foreign-language Meetings: French, German and Spanish.

PLUS—Regional Alkathons and Marathon Meetings (around the clock, from midnight Thursday to 8:45 a.m. Sunday). Three-mile **Fun Run**, 7:00 a.m. Sunday.

Today's Newcomer Is Tomorrow's Oldtimer

"There's a fellow I know in A.A. called Tim. He is 85 years old, has 38 years of sobriety, and attends as many meetings as transportation help allows. Things are different for the newcomer now than when Tim came around. Groups are larger and more numerous; so the newcomer is not as conspicuous or easily recognized. And yet, these days of 'now' will soon be the good old days of tomorrow—when the newcomers, if they stay sober, will be oldtimers like Tim."

Sharing her thoughts at last summer's Northeast Regional Forum in Portland, Maine, New Hampshire delegate (Panel 38) Lou G. expanded on a familiar metaphor: "The newcomer has been called 'the life blood of A.A.' If this is true, then the oldtimer is the heart that leads the newcomer through that set of arteries we call our 'program'—the slogans, the Twelve Steps of recovery, the Twelve Traditions, the Big Book, meetings, sponsorship, service, and so much more."

Even if newcomers are not spotted as such initially, she says, "they soon are recognized, and invariably some oldtimers thrust out their hands in welcome. The familiar words ring out—"We need you, we want you, we love you"—and the person who entered the meeting room almost furtively suddenly feels a spark of hope."

And how does the welcoming oldtimer feel? What thoughts flood his mind? "Perhaps," suggests Lou, "he (or she) had quietly observed the newcomer before proffering a friendly hand. Perhaps he saw in the new person a mirror image of himself as he had been when he first came to the Fellowship—and experienced anew the old anxieties, the hopelessness and helplessness he'd felt when he, too, thought a life without alcohol would be intolerable, if not impossible."

Thus, Lou pointed out, "the newcomer becomes the teacher, constantly reminding us of where we came

from—never letting us forget that we're alcoholics just one drink away from a drunk, no matter how many 24 hours we've been sober in A.A.

"This member has learned that if I want to keep my sobriety, I'd better keep giving it away. As my old friend Tim likes to say, 'I want to die sober—and, in order to die sober, I have to live sober.'"

1990 Conference Spotlights Importance of the Home Group

"The Home Group—Our Responsibility and Link to A.A.'s Future" is the theme and major focus of the fortieth annual meeting of the General Service Conference, which will convene April 22-28 at the Omni Park Central Hotel, New York City.

Says Jan W., director of A.A. World Services, "We expect this to be a very upbeat Conference, occurring as it does just before the Fellowship's 55th Anniversary celebration in Seattle this coming July. Everyone I've spoken to is in an enthusiastic frame of mind."

"Everyone" includes the 135 voting members—delegates, trustees, A.A. World Service and Grapevine directors, and members of the General Service Office and Grapevine staffs—who will go about the business of working toward substantial unanimity on matters vital to A.A.

The 91 delegates, who constitute more than two-thirds of the Conference, will discuss many topics of interest to the Fellowship. Much of the Conference work is done through the 11 standing committees that cover the broad range of A.A. services.

Right now, the delegates to the Conference have their hands full preparing for the week filled with presenta-

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tions, committee meetings, a workshop, and the election of two new regional trustees.

Says Iowa delegate (Panel 39) Jan P., a member of the Conference Public Information Committee: "There's a tremendous amount of mail from G.S.O. to wade through, but I have been prioritizing what to read and do first. The most important thing is to be as informed as I can be, so that I can participate in the Conference as fully as possible. From recent meetings of our area assembly, and from the West Central Regional Conference held in early March, I have obtained a real sense of the 'group conscience' in my own state of Iowa and six others: Montana, North Dakota, Nebraska, South Dakota and Wyoming. I'll go off to the Conference armed with *The A.A. Service Manual* and *A.A. Comes of Age* and, hopefully, be adequately prepared for the privilege and responsibility of taking part in the Conference."

Northeast Quebec delegate Serge F., a member of the Conference Treatment Facilities Committee, feels much the same. He says that his "very large area—about 1,000 by 500 miles—will hold four 'Delegate's Day' service meetings late in March to share their views on the home group." These meetings are being chaired by past delegates, who will give Serge summaries of the discussions afterward. "Thanks to so much input and support," he observes, "I'll have a clear sense of our area conscience at the Conference."

The week-long proceedings in New York will culminate with a number of recommendations from the standing Conference committees. Some of these will become Conference Advisory Actions, which reflect the collective conscience of A.A. in the U.S. and Canada, and serve as guidelines for A.A. groups and members.

Advisory Actions are reached through substantial unanimity, rather than by setting any rules. For, as Warranty Six from the Articles of our Conference Charter states, "Though the Conference may act for the service of Alcoholics Anonymous, it shall never perform any acts of government; and, like the Society of Alcoholics Anonymous which it serves, the Conference itself will always remain democratic in thought and action."

A Dream Some A.A.s 'Shouted About' In New Hampshire Is Coming True

Two years ago, New Hampshire's District 12, which includes the greater Manchester area, was mired in problems on every front. Today, thanks to the efforts of a few A.A.s who had a dream and shouted about it to anyone who would listen, the district is realizing its

full potential and bursting with a new vitality about A.A. and its message.

"You name the problem and we experienced it," says Karl L.-K., alternate district committee member and chairman of the Reorganizational Committee. "We were plagued by low meeting attendance, scarce donations, apathy, resentments, and maverick groups acting outside the best interests of the Fellowship. We had three parties a year and an answering service to refer Twelfth Step calls; that was the sum total of our services. Our G.S.R. meetings rarely drew 20 people, including the officers—hardly sufficient to represent 1,500 A.A. members in the largest metropolitan area of the state."

Realizing that something had to be done—that getting people excited and involved in service was their only hope—Karl and D.C.M. Ted K. sought help from the General Service Office and from oldtimers. They talked to the area delegate and the assembly people, and read any archival history they could find in their search for answers.

"My thought," explains Karl, "was to split our districts in two, starting new smaller and more manageable-sized districts. Ted's research, on the other hand, soon suggested that splitting the district would not work. Tried in the late 1970s, the experiment failed dismally."

Separately, the two A.A.s poured over *The A.A. Service Manual* and arrived almost simultaneously at the same conclusion: Reorganize!

As they began to develop their ideas verbally, and word spread, area A.A.s became interested. "When you threaten to upset the apple cart," Karl observes, "people stand up and take notice. Just by talking about change, we began to see our attendance climb at district meetings."

Then Ted distributed a letter to every G.S.R. and active contact person or secretary he could find. In it, he recommended that members of District 12 form a committee to study ways of restructuring the district to better serve the A.A. community and the alcoholic who still suffers. "By this time," Karl acknowledges, "Ted and I already had diagrams and text outlining a possible solution; but, in line with the Traditions, we knew it was vital to let the committee conscience validate our research or, for that matter, toss it out altogether and come up with something more workable."

The district voted unanimously in favor of the committee, which came together almost overnight. Its philosophy, says Karl, was: "If the oldtimer can show the way to the newcomer, then the district can show the way to the groups."

However, he adds, "the way was far from clear-cut. Many people still couldn't see that we were planning only to add to the existing service structure, not rebuild it. We were not tearing down in order to reconstruct; we were fortifying our existing network."

At its first meeting the new committee, which num-

bered 14 A.A.s, decided to send out a district-wide letter explaining what was going on, and what it was entrusted to do. "Incredible rumors had been flying thick and fast," Karl recalls, "but the fact was that we were only investigating changes; we were not empowered to make them." The response to the letter was "amazing," he says. "At our next regular district meeting, attendance was up to 30-odd people—more than we had seen in a year."

The plan as outlined by the committee was to subdivide the district into small clusters of groups of eight. Each cluster would be represented at the district meeting by a nonvoting committee person, elected by the cluster's G.S.R.s. This person's task would be to help educate the groups to the need for more active service people in the community, and to help individuals become involved.

Members of the Reorganizational Committee mailed dozens of letters, started a District 12 newsletter, and personally attended many group business meetings to let everyone know what was needed: help, and more help.

"Then a wonderful thing happened," says Karl. "While we were sure our ideas were on target, we nonetheless were concerned that perhaps we had missed or forgotten something important. About that time, G.S.O. sent out the revised 1988-89 A.A. *Service Manual*—and there, on page S-46 was our plan, neatly cited as the way in which another district had solved its 'over-size problems.' All the time we had thought our plan was original, that our situation was unique and uncharted. Much relieved, we felt that if the plan had succeeded in other communities, surely it could work for us."

It has worked beautifully. District 12 now has a full range of interlocking committees—Public Information, Cooperation With the Professional Community, Treatment Facilities, Correctional Facilities, Grapevine, Archives and Finance. All these committees were initially headed by G.S.R.s, many who had never before attended a district business meeting. "Some who had been the biggest critics of the old district now became champions of the reorganization," Karl reports.

Two years after the effort began, he notes, "we have become accustomed to 80 percent representation at our G.S.R. meetings. All our service committees are very active, and most of them are presently coordinated by non-G.S.R.s. In January 1988, we had 48 groups; today, we have close to 60, and attendance at meetings has increased dramatically. Our newsletter and our Special Service Committee's activity in and out of the Fellowship has made A.A. and service more accessible to our members as well as the community at large.

"Importantly, money need not be the boogey man it once was. Used appropriately and responsibly, our assets can be channeled into an ever-increasing service effort. Most district-wide Twelfth Step services require cash,

which is not always easy to come up with. But our concern should not be, 'How much money do we have?' It should be, 'Where should we spend it next in order to carry the A.A. message of sobriety farther and farther?' "

Available from G.S.O.

New items:

- *Alcoholics Anonymous* is now available in a large-print edition. The 7" × 10¼", soft-cover book is printed in 18 pt. type, the size suggested for the visually handicapped. (B-16) \$12.00.
- *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* in Russian (SR-2) \$2.75.
- *Alcohólicos Anónimos*, the Spanish translation of the Big Book, in a new edition containing personal stories. (SS-1) \$3.50.

Adjusted prices:

- "Your A.A. General Service Office" (F-6) Free of charge.
- "Circles of Love and Service," revised (P-45) .08 each.
- A.A. Guidelines. Set of 15 (MG-20) free of charge; one set per order. Individual Guidelines (MG-1 to MG-15) .15 each.

Tradition Four: Is Group 'Autonomy' an Invitation to Anarchy?

"The Fourth Tradition states that, 'Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.' But what does 'autonomy' mean? Does it mean that we can restrict group membership as we please? Is it autonomy or misinformation when a group posts notices about non-A.A. events—'sober softball,' 'sober ski trips' or 'sober clubs'? Are we forgetting the rest of the Tradition, which reminds us to evaluate the impact of our actions on A.A. as a whole?"

Annemarie M., Eastern Massachusetts delegate (Panel 39), had more thoughts on the Fourth Tradition to share at the Northeast Regional Forum in Portland, Maine last June. "I'm not a member of the 'Henny Penny-Chicken Little-Sky is Falling' school of gloom and doom," she said. "Nonetheless, I am genuinely concerned about whether we as groups—from home groups to meetings of general service representatives to groups of district committee members forming area committees—are exercising responsibility to each other

through our actions and, just as importantly, our frequent lack of action.”

“It is high time,” Annemarie told the listening A.A.s, “for us to measure our expressions of group ‘autonomy’ against the yardstick of our primary purpose: ‘to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety.’”

“Let us ask ourselves some basic questions,” she suggested. “What message are we really sending out to the newcomer, to the professional community that refers so many alcoholics to our Fellowship, and to the oldtimer? If you have spent any time lately with A.A.s sober 25 years or more, you will know that they are voicing similar concerns.”

Annemarie stressed that group autonomy and group responsibility go hand in hand. In order to fulfill our responsibility, she explained, “we need to understand that the financial support of each group is essential to work at the district, area, national and international levels of A.A. Unfortunately, however, too many groups have forgotten or misplaced their original commitment to have the hand of A.A. always there, anywhere, any time help is needed. ‘Each group is autonomous’ more and more sounds like ‘That’s not my job.’”

Fifty-four years ago, she concluded, “we lit the candle of hope for alcoholics everywhere. Let us not become so autonomous that the long-cherished flame flickers and dies.”

‘Pass It On’ Applies to Service As Well as Sobriety

Just as we “give away” our experience in sobriety in order to keep it, suggests Maynard Y., of Columbus, Georgia, “so ought we pass on what we’ve learned in a service position to the next person who may rotate in.”

A district committee member, Maynard believes that the same kind of sharing applies to those serving as alternates in A.A. offices. For example, he points out, alternate D.C.M.s can play an active role in their districts if they have access not only to the experience of the D.C.M.s but to the literature and service packets available from the General Service Office.

Stressing the importance of providing for an informed alternate in each key service post, Maynard says, “When I was selected to be my group’s general service representative, I was unprepared. I depended entirely on G.S.O. service material and G.S.R. workshops at our state assembly for information.” Maynard learned from his experience. “When I assumed the duties of state Hospitals and Institutions Committee chairperson, I immediately found an alternate and saw to it that he knew everything about what was going on. Consequently,

when the time came for me to rotate out, he was prepared to step in and carry on.

“Most A.A.s in service believe in the principle of rotation,” Maynard adds. “But believing is usually not enough. It’s necessary to prepare those who come after us, to share with them what we have learned in service. That’s as much a part of ‘letting go’ as the process of rotation itself.”

A Member Reflects on The Seventh Tradition

For each individual member, the full scope of A.A.’s Seventh Tradition often hits home as the consequence of seemingly unrelated happenings. Writing to the General Service Office, Arthur G., manager of the Emerald Valley Intergroup in Eugene, Oregon, relates how he came to fully appreciate A.A. co-founder Bill W.’s oft-repeated observation that “there is a place in the Fellowship where spirituality and money can mix . . . in the hat!”

Several years ago, Arthur flew to Chicago. He had been there only once before—on January 23, 1953, when he had what he hopes was his last drink—and his emotions were in high drive. “The first thing I did,” he says, “was to visit the hotel lobby where I had caused such a ruckus. I stood there a moment, remembering, whispered a quiet ‘Thank you, God,’ and left.”

Still keyed up, Arthur went on to the Museum of Art. Approaching the ticket booth, he saw a sign that read, “Adults, \$4.50,” and realized that, in his excitement, he had left his wallet in the rental car he was driving.

Explaining his situation to the admissions person, he asked, “May I send a check?” She smiled, asking, “How much money do you have?” He carefully placed a nickel, a dime and two pennies on the counter. “The woman briskly picked up a penny and pushed the remaining 16 cents back to me,” Arthur recounts, “and I’ll never forget what she said: ‘You see, you don’t have to pay \$4.50, but we want everyone to know that we are worth *something*.’ Then she handed me a ticket.”

This experience took on added meaning recently, in an unexpected way, at the adolescent lock-up care unit where Arthur leads some of the closed weekly meetings, and where he has sponsored four young clients aged 11 to 16.

One evening he was with them at a meeting, rejoicing in their year-long sobriety in A.A., when it came time to pass the basket. “My four miracles were sitting by themselves in the back row,” he relates, “I turned to give them the basket and, almost in rhythm, they all

