

How L.A.'s First Spanish-Speaking District Came to Be

"It was 2 o'clock on a Sunday afternoon in November 1978, and the sun shone brightly on Los Angeles. The Assembly of Southern California, Area 5, voted to form a new district, District 33. It would be Spanish-speaking so we could take care of our affairs in our own language. Joy lighted up the faces of those around me, and a tear or two of intense emotion could be discerned. I thought of what I had thought before, that our people, my fellow members from all the groups, now had voice and vote in the Assembly. We had arrived at the place where we belonged, working in unity for all of A.A."

"Like every story," continues Mario R., "this one had a beginning. On August 13, 1966, I arrived at the El Salvador Group in Los Angeles with a terrible drinking problem and haven't had a drink since. Like me, most of the members of the group had emigrated from Central America—mainly from Guatemala, El Salvador and Mexico—and without realizing it, we were cut off from mainstream A.A. Then some members of another, older Hispanic group familiar with general service visited us and said that if we didn't make contact with the local Central Office and follow suggested guidelines, we would certainly fail as a group.

"Several years later, thanks to the help of some A.A. friends, I found the Central Office and was invited to the monthly meeting. When I walked in, I thought I'd made a mistake—there was a group of elegantly dressed people in sports jackets over white shirts and ties, and everything seemed highly organized. But I was in the right place, and that was my first of more meetings there than I can count. I began to see how a local office representing so many A.A. groups functioned—approximately 200 groups in the area (today more than 1,000)."

By 1973, Mario relates, "the growth of Spanish-speaking groups was at its peak. Among the new groups were Gran Familia, Unidad Hispana, Solo por Hoy, Garland, Armonia, Central de Hollywood and 17 de Octubre. By now I was the first G.S.R. (general service representative) to represent a Spanish-speaking

group in District 10, and I was welcomed. There were some six of us G.S.R.s then, and my idea was to bring more in from our Hispanic groups. It wouldn't be an easy job. Some groups grumbled that I was representing them without their consent, or that I was overstepping the Traditions, or that I was selling out to the Anglos. But once they understood what general service was about, their fears abated, group conscience pointed the way, and we moved on together.

"Around this time I met and developed a wonderful friendship with area delegate David H., who took me to my first general service assembly. I began to learn more about the scope of general service and studied *The A.A. Service Manual*. This took work to understand since it was written only in English, like most of the A.A. material. In those days such literature as we had was printed in Colombia, South America.

"I kept attending assembly meetings. At one of them David asked why the Hispanic groups weren't participating, and I explained that either they weren't even aware of the General Service Office or else didn't know how to make contact. Consequently the assembly made me a liaison, someone who would inform the Spanish-speaking groups about general service and help stimulate communication. I felt honored because I knew how important the task ahead was: At the time we—my folks, my people—had no voice and no vote in A.A. because we weren't present. We were practically invisible. Something had to be done."

By 1975 the Hispanic Central Office of Los Angeles had been established, and simultaneously, Mario was serving as the D.C.M. (district committee member) for District 10 of Area 5. "The need for a Spanish-speaking district had become urgent," he reports, "so we presented the motion at a G.S.R. meeting in July, explaining that the formation of such a district would enable us to take care of our responsibilities and carry the message of A.A. more effectively in our own language. There was opposition—some, for instance, felt that as a Spanish-speaking district we wouldn't participate in mainstream A.A. service. Then a young G.S.R. spoke with passion, his black eyes flashing. 'What the devil is going on with you?' he exclaimed. 'These A.A.s are knocking on the door of our house and we're not letting them come in. Are we going to let them come in? Let them come in!' These sensible words, rich with the spirit of unity silenced us all and the issue was tabled for discussion at

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the general service assembly in November.”

And so it was, Mario says, that “District 33 was voted into being at the assembly. Working together with faith and dedication and the support of English-speaking friends in the Fellowship, we had come far, but we knew that a great deal of hard work and vigilance lay ahead if we were to carry the message of love and service in A.A.”

Today A.A.'s Spanish-speaking members number more than 40,000; they meet in approximately 1,600 groups in the U.S., Puerto Rico and Canada alone. “More and more,” observes Mario, “Spanish-speaking members are becoming part of mainstream A.A., as we dreamed would happen. Increasingly we have simultaneous translations of English into Spanish at area assemblies and Regional Forums, and besides the considerable amount of literature and audiovisual material translated over the last several decades into Spanish, we now have translations of numerous service pieces and reports; the Spanish-language equivalent of our Grapevine, *La Viña*; and the newsletter *Box 4-5-9*. It all shows what sobriety and A.A. love and unity can do.”

Members Still Rely On Sponsorship, New Survey Confirms

The results of the 2001 random Membership Survey are tallied, and like the previous survey conducted in 1998, confirm the staying power of some positive and provocative patterns tracked over the past decade and more.

In most categories, variations span no more than two or three percentage points; these statistically have little or no significance but may confirm a past trend or foreshadow a new one. For example, the typical A.A. member seems to keep inching up in age at 46 (up from 45 in 1998 and from 42 in '92), attends an average of two

meetings a week, has been sober more than seven years (no change from '98)—and a full 85% belong to a home group (same as in '98). The percentage of members who are sponsored, after dipping from 78% in '92 to 75% in '98, has climbed back up to 77%; and of these, 71%—up from 68% in '98—said they had connected with their sponsors within the first 90 days of their recovery in A.A.

Anonymous surveys of the Fellowship have been conducted by the General Service Office every three years since 1968 (except for 1995, when the survey was deferred a year by an Advisory Action of the General Service Conference). Their main purpose has been to keep A.A.s informed about current trends in membership characteristics, and to provide information about the Fellowship to the professional community and the general public as part of the continuing effort to help those who still suffer from alcoholism. (In its February-March 1975 issue, *Box 4-5-9*'s lead article, on the '74 Membership Survey, stated, “if you were one of the thousands of A.A. members who filled out anonymous questionnaires at meetings . . . you did a true Twelfth-Step job, though you'll probably never see the full results.” Déjà vu! At the start of another century it's still true, most would agree.)

The 2001 questionnaires were distributed to U.S./Canada Conference delegates. More than 7,500 questionnaires were completed by members—from teens to nonagenarians—and returned to G.S.O. Questions covered personal statistics (age, sex, nature of job, dates of first meeting and last drink), A.A. activity (frequency of meeting attendance, group membership, sponsorship), factors that attracted the person to A.A. in the first place (A.A. members, family, etc.) and outside considerations, such as experience with treatment facilities and health care professionals. From the preparation and mailing of the questionnaires to tabulation of the results, all work was coordinated by G.S.O.'s P.I. staff member and its Electronic and Data Processing Department.

Interestingly, the survey reveals that the percentage of women in A.A., which climbed steadily from 22% in 1968 to 35% in '89, then dipped to 33% in '96 and back up to 34% in '98, is still within the same range at 33%. This means that there continues to be approximately one woman to every two men in A.A. and further confirms that the sharp increase of women in decades past has leveled off. Some other findings:

Length of Sobriety—There are some fluctuations here from the last survey: 48% of the respondents have been sober more than five years (up from 47% in '98); 22%, between one and five years (down from 26%); and 30%, less than one year (up from 27%).

Introduction to A.A.—In this category that notes the factors most responsible for members' coming to A.A.

(two responses permitted from each respondent), the largest differences from 1998 were cited by those who had been referred by a treatment facility, 32% (down from 34%); and through an A.A. member, 32% (down from 36%) family influence 23% (down from 25%). Other factors: self-motivated, 33% (down from 34%); court order, 12% (up from 11%); counseling agency, 8%; health care provider, 7%; other, 4%; employer or fellow worker, 4%; non-A.A. friend or neighbor, 4%; Al-Anon or Alateen member, 2%; correctional facility, 2%; A.A. Literature, 2%; newspaper/magazine/radio/TV, 1%; and members of the clergy, 1%.

Additional Help—These findings vary little from the '98 survey: 61% (up from 60% in '98) of the respondents said that *before* coming to A.A. they had received some type of treatment or counseling—e.g., medical, psychological, spiritual; and 74% (down from 75%) of those members who had received treatment or counseling said it played an important part in guiding them to A.A. Some 64% (up from 62%) received some type of treatment or counseling *after* coming to A.A.; and 85% (up from 83%) of those same members considered it vital to their continuing recovery.

Relationship with Health Care Professionals—Pretty much as they did in '98, 73% (down from 75%) reported that their doctors know they are in A.A., a figure that has remained statistically constant since the 1992 survey. And as they did earlier, 38% said they had been referred to A.A. by a health care professional.

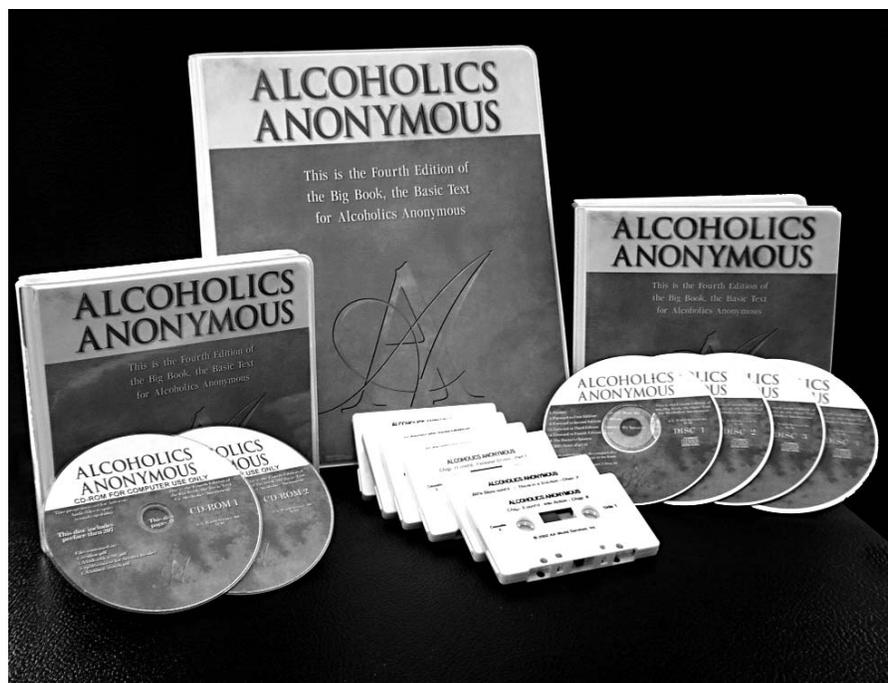
Ages of Members—The average age of members, reflecting the general aging of the population, seems to climb a digit or two with each survey and now holds at 46, as noted previously. The main shifts are among

members aged 31-40, 24% (down from 28% in '98); and 51-60, 20% (up from 18%). As in '98, those under 21 constitute 2% of the respondents; 21-30, 9% ; and over 70, 4%. Ten percent are aged 61-70, up one point since the last survey.

Marital Status—Statistics for this category have changed slightly since the last survey: respondents who said they were married, 37% (down from 39% in '98); single, 31% (up from 27%); divorced, 24% (down from 25%); and separated, 3% (down from 4%). As before, 3% said they were widowed.

Members' Occupations—These continue to cover a broad spectrum and reflect statistically insignificant changes from the last survey: professional/technical, 13% (same as before); other (including self-employed), 13% (up from 11% in '98) and retired, also 13%; manager/administrator, 10% (same); and laborer, 7% (down from 8%). Some other findings: health professional, 6%, and sales worker, 5%—unchanged, as were craft and service workers at 4% each; clerical worker, educator and student, all 3%, as in '98; homemaker, 2% (down one percentage point), and transportation worker (equipment operator), also 2% as before. A total of 7% described themselves as unemployed (up from 6% in the last survey); another 5% said they were disabled, (down 1% from '98).

Key findings of the 2001 survey are available in an updated version of the leaflet "Alcoholics Anonymous Membership Survey (P-48, 15 cents each). Also available is a tabletop display, 27" high by 39" wide (M-13, \$22), it has a double easel in the back and can be folded in half for storage. You can order from the General Service Office, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163.



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The Language of The Heart Can Be Heard Soundlessly

It is a Wednesday night in April, and at Manhattan's Oxford Group the regular open meeting is about to begin—with a difference: The group is celebrating its 44th anniversary, and excitement runs high. More people than usual mill about beforehand, setting up food for the celebration and greeting each other happily under handmade mobiles floating above with such A.A. homilies as “Keep coming back” . . . “Willingness, an open mind, surrender” . . . “Trudge the road of happy destiny.”

Taking their places comfortably on a front seat, deaf and hard-of-hearing A.A.s see and feel the joy of the occasion. While they can't hear the laughter, they can see the joy on the faces of their fellow group members, and some can lipread that which they can't hear. Then another, vital means of communication appears: non-alcoholic ASL (American Sign Language) signer Debbie Ciraolo. The chairman, Edwin K., who is deaf, opens the meeting. He signs his comments and announcements which Debbie speaks. When the speaker shares his or her story Debbie sits alongside, soundlessly signing and lip-synching at the same time for others who are hard of hearing. With her long dark hair swinging, she acts out the words of the speakers with dramatic flair. As Oxford member Doug R. has observed, “Debbie does a wonderful job. She is enormously animated as she does her signing, and often the hearing folks get so absorbed in watching her, they forget to look at the speaker.” (One time, at another group, looking turned into love, and an A.A. member and the nonalcoholic interpreter wound up marrying.)

Oxford has been Edwin's home group since he sobered up in September 1994. For six of those years the group has supported Debbie's services. “To me and other deaf members, Debbie is a lifeline,” Edwin says.

“Her presence has helped me to become part of A.A. like everybody else. I am grateful to the group for valuing what she does to carry the message, and I just wish all deaf A.A.s could have an interpreter as we do here.”

Debbie points out that “no matter how devoted deaf alcoholics are to A.A., no matter how much of the literature they read, they need to feel connected to the people in the Fellowship. An interpreter at meetings can help make that connection, and the group's willingness to provide one makes the deaf person feel validated as a member.”

If Debbie speaks with conviction, it's because she has been helping deaf people most of her life. “Signing got into me,” she says, “because I practically grew up with a deaf couple who lived next door. When Lorraine and Ron had a son, I would go over, sing lullabys and just help out.” Once out of high school, Debbie went off to college, then graduate school at New York University, where she earned an M.A. degree in counseling. “It occurred to me,” she recalls, “that working with the deaf was what I did best, and that help was much needed, so I got certified as a deafness rehabilitation specialist, with intensive study of sign language interpretation at the University of Arizona. One of the courses that Debbie, and all ASL interpreters are required to take relates to a code of ethics they must adhere to as signers. Debbie said it is very similar to what she has heard at meetings, “What you hear here, leave here.”

Since then the road Debbie chose has veered off in several directions. One, she says, has involved her being a “dula,” or assistant, at hospitals. “I've served with nurses, midwives and other health care professionals to deliver the babies of deaf mothers,” she explains. “The way it works is that I meet with the mother, and often the father, well before the birth so I won't be a stranger at the delivery. My role is to be a facilitator, a reassuring presence for her every step of the way—to keep communication between the mother and the medical staff clear as a bell.”

For a time, Debbie says, she was signing at meetings of several A.A. groups in Manhattan, but no longer. “Given that there is a need for an interpreter,” she says, “the upfront problem is usually money; the groups



can't or won't support having an interpreter. If they would only realize that it's about the surest way to carry the message to a deaf alcoholic, perhaps the effort would be greater." (Debbie is pleased to share her experience and for information about interpreting for the deaf you may write to the Group Services desk at G.S.O.)

Says the service piece, "Serving Alcoholics With Special Needs," published by the General Service Office: "A.A.s throughout the Fellowship are discovering that the common bond of recovery can transcend the barriers of physical disabilities . . . The most important fact . . . is that all alcoholics—whether deaf, blind, or with other disabilities—want to be part of the whole. The goal is to enable every alcoholic to be an active participant in the group, without emphasizing differences."

Certainly at an A.A. meeting, the presence of an interpreter plus a smile, a handshake and a cup of coffee, help to carry "the language of the heart," even to those minus their hearing.

Trusted Servants Step Into New Roles with Gratitude and Zest

This spring A.A. welcomed three new Class B (alcoholic) trustees—Robert "Bob" P., Eastern Canada regional trustee; Phyllis H., Pacific regional trustee; and Ronald "Ron" G., general service trustee. The Fellowship further welcomed two new A.A. World Services (A.A.W.S.) directors—Paul C. and Don M. All are seasoned service hands. All indicate that their commitment to service is a cornerstone of their sobriety.

Bob P., of Bellefeuille, Quebec, succeeds Marnie H. as Eastern Canada regional trustee. Sober 19 years, he recalls as if it were yesterday the way he was in May 1983: "My wife had died, my life was in shambles, and I sat looking out my bay window into the dark, crying hopelessly. I prayed for help that night and in the morning was given the gift of willingness to phone intergroup." Bob recalls with affection his first sponsor, Jacques — "a guy with a big, scruffy beard. When I'd ask him something, he'd look thoughtful, then drawl, 'If you will look in the Big Book (or Twelve and Twelve or other A.A. literature, depending upon my question), I think you'll find the answer.' He was right. I always did."

Bob, whose home group is Groupe des Hauteurs in Lafontaine, says that gradually his life turned around "thanks to A.A." In time he found and married Suzanne, who joined Al-Anon, and they proceeded to

raise the three sons whom together they had brought to their marriage. "We lost our son David in 1997, when he was only 21," Bob says sadly. "But with the help of our other two boys, Luc and Michel, and the support of the friends around us, Suzanne and I were able to take care of each other and find the strength to go on."

From the beginning Bob found service in A.A. a natural high. As an English-to-French translator on the Language Committee of the 1985 International Convention in Montreal, and later while serving on the Boards of Administration for French publications and *La Vigne* (the French-language equivalent of our Grapevine), he gained experience in the production of A.A. literature. He also was a Northwest Quebec delegate (Panel 46) to the General Service Conference in 1996-97.

After 24 years with a General Motors assembly division, he retired from his position as supervisor and personnel administrator in 1990, and since then he has become even more involved in carrying the message to the Inuit peoples of Canada. A sponsor at a correctional facility housing mostly Native Americans, Bob also is a member of a Remote Communities Working Service Committee—commitments he plans to continue as a trustee.

Bob is candid about his feelings in becoming a trustee: "I am honored and gratified and very excited, but I'm also nervous. I ask myself, 'Will I function properly? Will my experience be adequate to the challenges of the job?' That old ego—I may think it's cured but it lurks in the background, ready to take over." With a smile, he adds, "I guess the Steps and Traditions will take care of all that if I just get out of my own way."

Phyllis H., of Olympia, Washington, replaces Jim C. as Pacific regional trustee. "I am humbled and happy at the same time about being elected," she says. "Other trustees have told me it's a life-changing experience, and I'm ready." Sober since December 1980, Phyllis says "People thought I had just a slight problem, but I knew better," she explains. "In 1977 I saw the movie *Days of Wine and Roses* sitting on a barstool in Seattle. Then and there I picked up a phone and called intergroup. I went to A.A. but couldn't stay sober. During the next three years my marriage crumbled, I lost my daughter, my family disowned me, and finally I thought I'd hit bottom. But not quite. In fall 1980 I'd been dry a year, working the Steps with my sponsor and trying to make amends to my ex-husband when abruptly I went out and drank beer and wine. That I hope was my last drunk."

At first, Phyllis relates, "I was unable to give or receive love despite the warmth and genuine caring of the A.A.s around me. So my group made me a greeter at the meeting-room door, and a miracle happened. Being

of service to others—even if it meant just offering a smile and a hello—touched me to the depths of my soul, and the ice around my heart began to thaw.”

Rapidly Phyllis moved on to the job of coffee maker and other group responsibilities. “After a few years I got into area activities” she says. “I was a G.S.R. (general service representative), a D.C.M. (district committee member) and, among other things, was editor of the *Washington Area Newsletter*.” In 1997-98 she served as Western Washington Area delegate (Panel 47). “That experience,” she affirms, “helped me to reach beyond my own backyard and think in terms of A.A. as a whole—of all it does right now and all that needs to be done to ‘pass it on’ to the future alcoholics who need us.”

For more than 10 years Phyllis, who majored in human resources management at Evergreen State College, has been human resources director for a Washington State regulatory agency. From 1986-90 she was in personnel administration for the Washington State School for the Deaf and School for the Blind.

Ron G., of South Hamilton, Massachusetts, says he started drinking regularly in his early teens. “When I got to college,” he reports, “I spent the first half drunk, the rest sober.” Both his parents were in A.A. “In fact,” he says, “my dad, who recently passed away, was sober two-and-a-half years before I came to my senses in July 1975.”

For the first 10 years of his sobriety, Ron says, he was involved in service at the group level, then branched out into district and area activities. In 1991-92 he was the Eastern Massachusetts delegate (Panel 41).

More recently, from 1998 until this spring, he served as a director of A.A. World Services (A.A.W.S.), putting his 20 years of banking experience to work for the Fellowship. Despite the time he commits to A.A. work, Ron hasn’t given up his day job; he manages portfolios of real estate loans for a local bank.

“Being elected a trustee,” he says, “is a humbling experience beyond my wildest expectations—it is a tremendous honor, and I hope I can make a difference both as a member and as a trustee.” As a member of the trustees’ Finance Committee, he notes, “I’d like to help to be a part of the continuing effort to raise the Fellowship’s awareness of the spiritual principles underlying the Seventh Tradition of self-support.”

He and his wife, Laurie, have two sons, Andrew, 7, and Jonathan, 4. Since 1995 Ron has been active in Scouting; he also is assistant coach in soccer and basketball for Hamilton-Wenham Youth Sports. For years he has been involved in community projects and served on the Hamilton Historic District Commission.

Paul C., of Oceanside, California, has been elected as an A.A.W.S. director. “As I see it,” he says, “my role

is to help A.A. World Services run smoothly in order to provide the best possible services for drunks in the U.S., Canada and beyond.” It is important to “keep in mind,” he adds, “that as *The A.A. Service Manual* states, ‘Final responsibility and ultimate authority for A.A. world services should always reside in the collective conscience of our whole Fellowship.’”

Paul, who celebrated 28 years of sobriety in January, says he was exposed to A.A. at 19 after being arrested on drug charges. The seeds of recovery were planted then but took some time to sprout—not until two years later did he accept A.A. “My group was very active in service,” he says, “so the ethic was set for me early on. It was just something you did.” Especially active in young people’s groups, Paul chaired the Host City (San Diego) Public Information Committee for the International Convention in 1995. He was a delegate (Panel 42) to the General Service Conference in 1992-93. Currently Paul is a sponsor and on the Twelfth Step lists of his home group and intergroup; a Correctional Facilities panel member at a juvenile detention center; and a steering committee member of a men’s sponsorship workshop.

He has a B.A. degree from the University of California at San Diego and an M.S.W. from San Diego State University; he also is a licensed clinical social worker and a certified employee assistance professional. Since 1987 he has worked as an account executive for a behavioral health care/employee assistance firm. Paul and his wife, Mary L., who is active in Al-Anon, have a 12-year-old son, Kevin.

Don M., of Louisville, Colorado, is the second new member to join the A.A.W.S. board this year. He admits to being awed by his new responsibilities as well as honored and marvels at the directions in which recovery has taken him. Back in September 1987, he recalls, “I was at that point where I drank not because I wanted to but because I had to. One day I followed a parked truck with predictable consequences, and the judge packed me off to outpatient treatment. I hit my spiritual bottom, and that in turn opened me to all that A.A. offered.”

At first, Don says, “I picked a younger sponsor I could manipulate. But then I got into the Steps and Traditions in earnest. I also got into service early; it helped me to see that being a grown-up in the real world can be a positive experience.” In 1999-2000 he was the Colorado delegate (Panel 49); he also was treasurer for the 2001 Western Area Conference of Young People in A.A. An active member of his Sunday Night Men’s Group, he serves as a sponsor for both recovery and service and attends state prison meetings.

Don, who holds a B.S. degree from Central Missouri State University and an M.B.A. from

Denver's Regis University, is a private investor in companies attempting to serve market needs with software-based solutions. In addition to his A.A. commitments he serves on the board of directors of a non-profit organization, World Hope Foundation, which works with Native Americans.

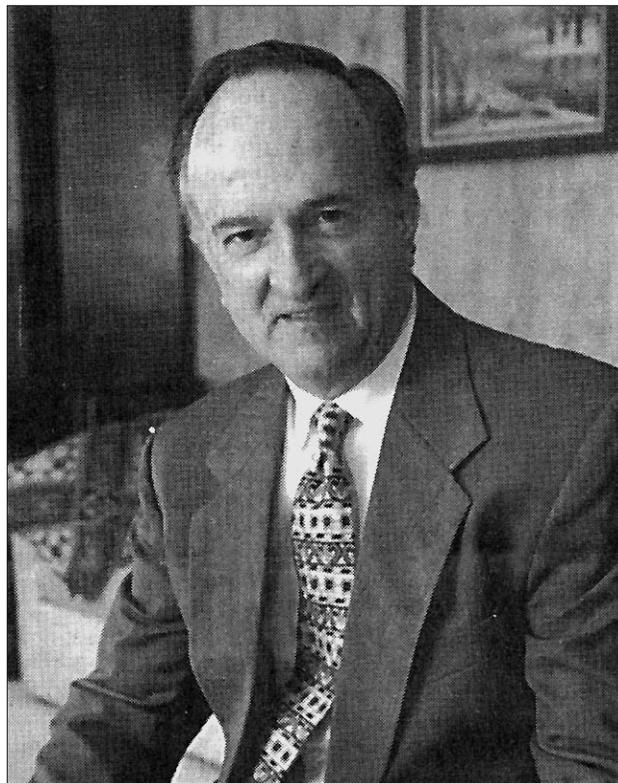
Nonalcoholic Trustee Sees the Big Picture Of Recovery in A.A.

"Anyone who can help A.A. is helping a lot of other people besides the alcoholic—family, friends, doctors, judges, counselors and many others. There is a strong ripple effect that can be seen all over the world, wherever A.A. flourishes." Adds Vincent E. Keefe, of Orland Park, Illinois, the newest Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee to join the General Service Board: "To be a part of this nonhierarchical fellowship of hope and healing is for me an enormous honor."

Vince, who succeeds fellow Illinoisan Arthur L. Knight, Jr. as a trustee, is familiar with A.A. Last year he served as a consultant—or what he calls "sort of an apprentice"—to the trustees' Finance & Budgetary Committee. Six years ago he retired as CEO, president and director of the Scholle Corporation, a Northlake, Illinois, leader in bag-in-box packaging of liquids, after being with the company for nearly 25 years. From 1996-98 he put his experience to work at TEC—The Executive Committee, based in San Diego, California—an international organization dedicated to enhancing the lives and effectiveness of CEOs. He holds his Bachelor of Business, with a major in accounting, and C.P.A. degrees from Western Illinois University, as well as an M.B.A. from the University of Chicago.

The eighth of 11 children, Vince remembers "growing up in a two-bedroom apartment on the South Side of Chicago." Although not an alcoholic himself, he vividly recalls "what alcohol did to my father and several siblings. When I was little, my father was a verbally abusive drinker, something that had very harmful repercussions within our family. So I am especially grateful for the miracle of recovery that A.A. can bring into the lives of alcoholics and their families."

To his new position as trustee, Vince brings years of financial experience to bear. He will chair the trustees' Finance & Budgetary Committee and serve on the Nominating and International Conventions/A.A. Regional Forums Committees. Additionally he will be



Vincent E. Keefe

treasurer of the General Service Board. "The continuing good health of A.A. as a self-supporting, nonprofit entity is of course vital," Vince says. "But at the same time I don't view it as I would a financial organization. What's tantamount, I believe, is the Fellowship's unwavering adherence to its Three Legacies—Recovery, Unity and Service. Because, you know, A.A. is still the only thing that truly works for alcoholics."

Come September, Vince and his wife, Kathy, who met on a blind date, will celebrate their 35th wedding anniversary. "Kathy has always been very supportive of my various activities," Vincent says. "We encourage each other. And we are blessed in having four wonderful children, now grown—Stephen, Vincent II, Susan and Timothy—and a lovely little granddaughter, Eliza, who was born last November."

In addition to his responsibilities at A.A., Vince serves on the boards of six companies. Although his workaday plate is full, he always seems to have time to help someone out, occasionally to go fishing and, as he puts it, "to become an amateur photographer." He has taken courses, installed a darkroom in his home, and particularly relishes taking black-and-white images of Chicago."

Experience has shown that for A.A.s, being in the public eye is hazardous to our sobriety—and to our collective survival if we break our anonymity at the public level, then get drunk. Yet "A.A. had to be publicized somehow," as co-founder Bill W. noted in

Tradition Eleven (*Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, p. 181), “so we resorted to the idea that it would be far better to let our friends do this for us”—none more significantly than our nonalcoholic trustees. Vince and the other six Class A trustees can face the camera head-on or use their last names without violating the Traditions and principles of the Fellowship, something the 14 Class B (alcoholic) trustees can’t do. In the process, they reach many a suffering alcoholic with the A.A. message, along with the professionals who treat them.

Grapevine Board Accepting Resumes For Nontrustee Director

A new nontrustee director of the A.A. Grapevine Corporate Board will be elected at the General Service Conference in April 2003. Potential candidates for the vacancy should submit the appropriate resume form, which is available from: A.A. Grapevine, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115, (212) 870-3409, or gveditorial@aagrapevine.org. Potential candidates should have substantial sobriety, relevant business or professional background, and A.A. service experience.

An important requirement for the position is the commitment of time. The new nontrustee director will be elected to serve on the board for a four-year term (i.e., four renewable one-year terms). A director is expected to attend three board weekends, often scheduled from Thursday afternoon through Monday morning; and the General Service Conference, which lasts one week in April. In addition, a director is often asked to attend a Regional Forum weekend.

Deadline for receipt of resumes is September 1, 2002.

Honolulu A.A.s Help Older Alcoholics Say Aloha to Serenity

“Serenity Not Senility” was the telling name of the workshop held in Honolulu last November, and it drew A.A.s like a magnet, along with some of the professionals who work with alcoholics. Says Marion B., who with her husband, Stan, co-chaired the event: “Our purpose was to encourage the participants to look at their efforts—as individuals, in groups, at

meetings, and in the district or area—to carry the message to older alcoholics. So many of them feel it’s too late to turn their lives around. Without hope they have just given up and are waiting to die. We want to show them that with A.A. as a lifeline, it’s never too late to cork the bottle and start living a full, rewarding life. And we help them to understand that in A.A. they do not have to do it alone.”

Marion, who sobered up in December 1988 at age 61, refers to herself and others who have come to A.A. in their later years as “chronologically gifted”—members such as Marianne and Jeff F., who served as panel members at the workshop. “These were people who, like Stan and me, found A.A. late in life,” Marion explains. “They generously shared their experience, strength and hope and expressed gratitude for all the Fellowship has given them.”

Attendees at the workshop were given a one-page handout, or suggested inventory guide, Marion explains, “to take back to their groups, district or area for exploration and potential involvement with older alcoholics.” Some of the questions to think about: Are there organized efforts in our community to extend the hand of A.A. to older alcoholics? Do our local committees arrange public information meetings about A.A. for people in senior citizen centers and other places where seniors gather? Are meetings taken to older members who are homebound? Does the group make literature in large print—such as the Big Book and the new pamphlet “A.A. for the Older Alcoholic—Never Too Late”—available to the older alcoholic?

“We hope,” says Marion, “that sharing these and other questions will raise the group conscience at each group, in each district and area, to the importance of reaching out to the oldsters in our midst. This in turn can have a positive, ever-increasing ripple effect.” In noting that there are “more older alcoholics than we realize,” Marion unwittingly confirms a finding of the anonymous 2001 Membership Survey conducted randomly by A.A.—that 14 percent of the membership is over age 60. “All around us,” she says, “there are people whom alcoholism has robbed of hope, dignity and the ability to cope. With a little stretching, we A.A.s hopefully can help some of them get a new lease on life.”

Marion, who is active in service, cites her own experience. “For years,” she recalls, “I lived in a jail of my own making. Finally in A.A. I found a home. These 13-odd years of continuous sobriety have given me the greatest joy and peace of mind I have ever known.” The idea for a workshop came about, she notes, after one she chaired at the 2000 International Convention in Minneapolis on “Carrying the Message to the Older Alcoholic.” “I was amazed,” Marion remembers, “at

the enthusiasm of the A.A.s, and how grateful the professionals there were for ideas and suggestions pointing to new ways to help.”

A member of the Mauka Wahini (Mountain Women) Group in Kalaoa on the big island of Hawaii, Marion says that she and Stan are planning more workshops. Meantime they keep carrying the message—at a new senior residence, at meetings, wherever they find them. “Sharing our sobriety with older alcoholics like us,” Marion says, “is how we say ‘Mahalo (thank you), A.A.’”

P.I.

New P.S.A. Stresses Kinship, Hope and Help in A.A.

A new TV public service announcement has been produced by the trustees’ Public Information Committee. Approved by an Advisory Action of the 2002 General Service Conference, the p.s.a., called “Reach Out,” emphasizes the kinship in suffering from alcoholism and the similarities in yearnings and hopes among A.A.’s diverse membership. Close-captioned for the hearing-impaired, the video also comes in Spanish and French translations.

Available from the General Service Office in Betacam or 3/4-inch video cassette, the p.s.a. comes in 15-, 20- and 30-second spots. It features four people varying in gender, race and age, with a voice-over saying, “We’re all reaching for the same things: approval . . . understanding . . . acceptance. The difference is how we choose to get there. If you find yourself constantly reaching for a bottle, reach out to us instead. 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.”

The Conference recommended that, “in addition to the work of local [P.I.] committees, the newly produced television public service announcement be centrally tracked and evaluated . . .” This means that nearly 800 TV stations and networks will be sent the p.s.a. in the appropriate format, along with a cover letter from G.S.O. and the flyer “A.A. at a Glance.” With this one-time distribution, the trustees’ P.I. committee reports, “we can reach more TV outlets than we did in the past two years combined [a total of 613 for the years 2000 and 2001].”

The committee was quick to point out that centralized distribution is not intended to replace the activities of local P.I. committees in cooperating with TV stations. Area P.I. committee chairs have received the list of stations to which the p.s.a. cassettes were distributed, so that committees can follow up with local stations that have been sent the p.s.a. Also, the distribution will cover only larger stations in the U.S./Canada, and committees will be able to take the p.s.a. to other stations as well.

Staff member coordinator Rick W., serving on the P.I. assignment, further points out that any committee wishing to deliver the p.s.a. personally rather than have it centrally distributed has been given ample opportunity to do so. He notes that “for six months after the distribution is completed, we will receive reports as to how often and when our p.s.a. is aired on TV. This information will be forwarded periodically to area P.I. chairs. Since this is the first time we’re using this system of p.s.a. distribution, we shall learn about how it works together.”

The creation and circulation of TV and radio p.s.a.s was approved by an Advisory Action of the Conference as far back as 1966. They are designed not to promote A.A. but to provide information about who we are and how to find us; and it is estimated that they have been instrumental in helping thousands of alcoholics and their families to become aware of the Fellowship as a resource for recovery.

If you have questions, or wish to place an order for the new TV p.s.a. “Reach Out” (price: \$12 each, 20% group discount applies), please contact the Public Information Desk at (212) 870-3119, or publicinfo@aa.org.

C.P.C.

G.S.O. and Grapevine Host C.P.C. Event

On June 11, G.S.O. and the Grapevine held an Open House for employees in the Interchurch Center, the building where G.S.O. is located. Susan U., who serves on the Cooperation With the Professional Community assignment, coordinated the effort. Susan said the purpose of the Open House was to “commemorate two events—A.A.’s 67th Anniversary and ten years in the Interchurch Center for G.S.O. and the Grapevine. We wanted to introduce A.A. to building employees (all working for nonprofit organizations), as well as to learn how we could cooperate with other agencies housed here.”

Months of planning preceded the event, which was divided into two parts. In the morning, Elaine McDowell, Ph.D. (nonalcoholic), chair of the General Service Board; Des T., executive director of the Grapevine; and Greg M., G.S.O.'s general manager, gave presentations on A.A., our history and worldwide scope. From noon until 2 pm, the Grapevine and G.S.O. offices were open for people to drop in. Refreshments and informal tours were offered, and a display of the Big Book in over 40 languages was available for visitors to see.

In addition to providing information about A.A., we visited with several professionals in the building. As a result of these contacts, Rick W., on the Public Information assignment, was interviewed for a short-wave radio program to be aired on Radio Africa. Bill A., on the International assignment, was introduced to professionals who travel and need information about A.A. overseas. Julio E., on the Correctional Facilities desk, connected with two professional connections with prison ministries, and will share A.A. information with them.

Susan shared, "We reached over 34 employees in the building who now know something more about Alcoholics Anonymous, who we are and what we do."

But success is never measured by mere numbers at a cooperation with the professional community (C.P.C.) event. Sometimes a single person who is reached through C.P.C. can have an enormous effect in helping us carry the message to any number of suffering alcoholics.

Correctional Facilities

Converting the Blues Into Love and Service, Both Inside and Out

"Last year on a Saturday night in May," writes Bill H. of Baltimore, Maryland, "I walked into the meeting I was sponsoring in the prerelease unit for women at a local correctional facility. Sitting there quietly was a young inmate, Angela M., in her late 20s. The oldtimers in A.A. had told me that if I wanted to carry the message to other alcoholics, 'Look in their eyes and you may just see their heart,' and how right they were. Angela's eyes told the whole story: They contained sparks of energy and hope—strong, positive feelings that were conflicted by traces of anger and depression."

At the time, Bill notes, "my wife was fighting breast

cancer, and life was confusing. I felt down and wondered if I were actually helping anyone. What happened now showed me that this was not my concern—my higher power would determine who needed whose help—and reminded me that I was but a piece of the sobriety puzzle."

As the weeks went along, he continues, "it became obvious that Angela wanted what A.A. offers. To recapitulate her story, she had committed an assault and battery in the Maryland area, then moved to California, where she sobered up in A.A. When it came time for amends, she wrote a letter to the person she had harmed, returned East and turned herself in. She received a prison sentence of 10 years, eight of which were suspended. When I met her, she was serving her time far away from the A.A. friends who had helped her get sober. Her dedication to the Twelve Steps brought her not accolades or joy but incarceration. Nonetheless, she fought the blues and threw herself anew into the program."

Bill and Angela became friends. "We helped each other," he says. "I suggested that she send a part of her story to the General Service Office for possible inclusion in the newsletter *Sharing From Behind the Walls* and it appeared in the Winter 2002 issue. In turn, Angela helped me deal with the pain and despair I was feeling about my wife's illness. When I left that meeting to start a new one at another location, two A.A. women, Maureen and Joselin, took over as the outside sponsors for Angela's meeting. They told me she had acquired a sponsor through G.S.O.'s C.C.S. (Correctional Correspondence Service), in which outside A.A.s correspond with fellow members inside jails and prisons (and wind up helping each other to stay comfortably sober). In addition, she had started sponsoring several women behind the walls."

This past April, Bill reports, "I was able to share in Angela's third anniversary celebration at her meeting. Later in the month she was released into a home-monitoring program that permits her to go out to work but not to A.A. meetings. So Joselin and other members have been taking meetings to Angela at her new residence. At the same time, Angela has made the local Home Monitor Center aware of the need for such meetings; and because of her persistence and caring, others like her will benefit from a new meeting especially for people like her that is sponsored by our Baltimore Institutions Committee.

"Thanks to a good foundation in A.A., instilled in her in California, Angela has touched the lives of at least 10 people she knows here in Maryland and of hundreds throughout A.A. whom she may never even meet. What an amazing program is this miracle called A.A. There is no limit to what we members can do in recovery and service if we only have the desire."

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.

August

- 1-4—*Mountain View, Arkansas*. 62nd Old Grandad State Conv. Write: Trsr., 9MC 5026, Yellville, AR 72687
- 1-4—*Cedaredge, Colorado*. 17th Annual International Serenity Run. Write: Ch., Box 1143, Colorado Springs, CO 80901
- 2-4—*Jamaica, New York*. Fellowship of the Spirit. Write: Ch., 91 Charles St., Floral Park, NY 11001
- 2-4—*Toledo, Ohio*. 46th State Conv. and 23rd East Central Regional Conf. Write: Ch., Box 6779, Toledo, OH 43612
- 2-4—*Carlisle, Pennsylvania*. Ninth State Conv. Write: Ch., 6377 Alderson St., Pittsburgh, PA 15217-2501
- 2-4—*Campbell River, British Columbia, Canada*. District 3 28th Annual Rally. Write: Ch., Box 814, Campbell River, BC V9W 6Y4.
- 8-10—*Charleston, West Virginia*. 58th Southeastern Regional Conf. Write: Ch., Box 20386, Charleston, WV 25362
- 9-11—*Erlanger, Kentucky*. Rule 62 Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 62, Covington, KY 41012
- 9-11—*Jackson, Mississippi*. 16th Old Timers Round Up. Write: Ch., Box 20664, Jackson, MS 39289
- 9-11—*Canandaigua, New York*. 23rd State Informational Workshop. Write: Ch., Box 39524, Rochester, NY 14604
- 9-11—*Wellsboro, Pennsylvania*. Campout in the Hills. Write: Ch., Box 302, Mansfield, PA 16933
- 9-11—*Red Deer, Alberta, Canada*. Red Deer Roundup. Write: Ch., #21, 6300 Orr Dr., Red Deer, AB, T4P 3T6
- 9-11—*Mattawa, Ontario, Canada*. Sixth Annual Camp-out & Fish Fry. Write: Ch., Box 448, Mattawa, ON, P0H 1V0
- 15-17—*Omaha, Nebraska*. Cornhusker Roundup XXV. Write: Ch., Box 425, Bellevue, NE 68005
- 16-18—*East Liverpool, Ohio*. 12th Beaver Creek Getaway Weekend. Write: Box 5174, East Liverpool, OH 43920
- 16-18—*Astoria, Oregon*. Youngs River Round Up. Write: Ch., Box 12, Astoria, OR 97103
- 16-18—*York, Pennsylvania*. Fifth Annual Sunlight of the Spirit Conference. Write: Ch., Box 3538, York, PA 17402
- 16-18—*Beaumont, Texas*. 21st Annual 9th District Conf. Write: Ch., Box 933, Beaumont, TX 77704
- 16-18—*Oshawa, Ontario, Canada*. Lakeshore Districts' Conf. Write: Ch., 168 Eastmount St., Oshawa, ON L1G 6K6
- 16-19—*Barranquilla, Colombia*. Bodas de Oro. Write: Com. Org. Carrera 54 #52-36, Edif. Sociedad de Mejoras Públicas, Ofic. 17, Barranquilla, Colombia
- 23-25—*San Luis Obispo, California*. 35th Annual District 22 Conv. Write: Ch., Box 13308, San Luis Obispo, CA 93406

- 23-25—*Grant Pass, Oregon*. Sixth Annual Sober on the Rogue Campout. Write: Ch., 6180 Monument Dr., Grants Pass, OR 97526
- 23-25—*Writing-on-Stone Park, Alberta, Canada*. Corn Roast. Write: Ch., 719 Birch Ave., Shelby, MT 59474
- 30-September 1—*Miami, Florida*. XXX Convención Hispana de EE.UU. y Canadá. Write: Ch., Box 52-2541, Miami, FL 33152-2541
- 30-September 1—*San Francisco, California*. Spirit of San Francisco Conv. Write: Ch., Box 423832, San Francisco, CA 94142
- 30-September 1—*Seattle, Washington*. Tenth Annual Sponsorship Conf. Write: Ch., Box 27545, Seattle, WA 98125-2545
- 30-September 1—*Billings, Montana*. WACYPAA. Write: Ch., Box 10264, Bozeman, MT 59718
- 30-September 1—*Reno, Nevada*. 25th Annual Sierra Nevada Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 5874, Sparks, NV 89432
- 30-September 2—*Lehigh, Florida*. FCYPAA 2002. Write: Ch., Box 60822, Fort Myers, FL 33906

September

- 6-8—*Tucson, Arizona*. Area Conv. Write: Ch., 7014 E. Golf Links Dr., #266, Tucson, AZ 85730-1064
- 6-8—*Oahu, Hawaii*. HIYPAA. Write: Ch., Box 1002, Kailua, HI 96734
- 6-8—*Park Rapids, Minnesota*. Heartland Round-Up. Write: Ch., 22623 Bass Lake Road, Osage, MN 56570
- 6-8—*Hackney, London*. The Cockney Conv. London's Residential Conv. Write: Ch., 76 Tudor Road, Hackney, London E9 7RZ
- 12-15—*Pensacola Beach, Florida*. Alabama/NW Florida Area 47th Annual Conv. Write: Ch., Box 17934, Pensacola, FL, 32533-7934
- 13-15—*Polacca, Arizona*. Ninth Hopiland Campout. Write: Ch., Box 241, Polacca, AZ 86042

- 13-15—*Carlota, California*. Pamplin Grove Campout. Write: Ch., Box 433, Eureka, CA 95502
- 13-15—*Pueblo, Colorado*. State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 366, Pueblo, CO 81002
- 13-15—*Lenox, Massachusetts*. Back to Basics Weekend. Write: Ch., 368 Congress St., Boston, MA 02210
- 13-15—*Bloomington, Minnesota*. 12th Annual Bridging the Gap Workshop Weekend. Write: Ch., 2618 Patee St., St. Joseph, MS 64507
- 13-15—*Taos, New Mexico*. 19th Annual Taos Mountain Fiesta. Write: Ch., Box 2255, Taos, NM 87571
- 13-15—*Kingsport, Tennessee*. State Conv. Write: Ch., 2809 Avondale Drive, Johnson City, TN 37604
- 13-15—*Quilmes, Argentina*. Congreso Intergrupar. Write: Com. Org., Corrientes 2020 C.P. 1879, Quilmes, Argentina
- 27-29—*Muscatine, Iowa*. Melon City Round-up. Write: Ch., Box 1244, Muscatine, IA 52761
- 27-29—*Somerset, New Jersey*. Area 44 Conv. Write: Ch., Box 1642, Paramus, NJ 07653-1642
- 27-29—*Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada*. Eastern Canada Regional Forum. Write: Forum Coordinator, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163

October

- 4-5—*St. Paul, Minnesota*. Dist. 26 Fall Workshop and 75th Anniversary Celebration. Write: Ch., Box 75980, St. Paul, MN 55175-0980
- 4-6—*Troy, Michigan*. Tri-County Conf. Write: Ch., Box 721172, Berkley, MI 48072-0172
- 4-6—*Cincinnati, Ohio*. Midwest Woman-to-Woman Seminar. Write: Ch., 86 Eagle View Lane, Ft. Thomas, KY 41075
- 11-13—*Montgomery, Alabama*. Alabama/Northwest Florida Area 1 Assembly. Write: Ch., 8121 Lillian Hwy #45, Pensacola, FL 32506

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 _____, 19____

Name of event: _____

Place (city, state or prov.): _____

For information, write: (exact mailing address) _____

Contact phone # (for office use only): _____

Flip up this end of page - for events on reverse side

- 11-13—*Petit Jean Mt., Arkansas*. ARKYPAA XX. Write: Ch., 97 Aliza, Little Rock, AR 72210
- 11-13—*Thief River Falls, Minnesota*. Harvest Festival. Write: Ch., 25359 110th St. NE, Strathcona, MN 56759
- 11-13—*Belleve, Washington*. Western Washington Area Assembly. Write: Ch., 10517, NE 151st St., Bothell, WA 98011
- 11-13—*Sudbury, Ontario, Canada*. E. Area Conf. Write: Ch., Box 911, Sm. "B", Sudbury, ON P3E 4S4
- 18-20—*Bellingham, Washington*. Mt. Baker Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 28231, Bellingham, WA 98228
- 18-20—*Spuce Grove, Alberta, Canada*. District 10 Unity Round-up. Write: Ch., Box 331, Falls, AB, T0E 0V0
- 18-20—*Donegaltown, Ireland*. Donegal Area Conf. Write: Ch., 109 South Circular Road, Dublin 8, Ireland
- 18-20—*Balibago, Angeles City, Philippines*. 1099 Manila, Philippines
- 25-27—*Lake George, New York*. 52nd HMB Area Conf. Write: Ch., Box 4175, Queensbury, NY 12804
- 25-27—*Greensburg, Pennsylvania*. Laurel Highlands Conf. Write: Ch., Box 6, Boverd, PA 15619
- 31-November—*Salou, Tarragona, Spain*. VII National Conv. Write: Com. Org., Apartado 170, 33400 Avilés, Asturias, Spain
- 31-November—*Salou, Tarragona, Spain*. English-speaking Conv. Write: Ch., 5 Abcuradors IB, 17004 Girona, Spain
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- 1-3—*St. Cloud, Minnesota*. St. Cloud Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 125, St. Cloud, MN 56302
- 1-5—*Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada*. Keystone Conf. Write: Ch., 208-323 Portage Ave., Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3C 2C1
- 14-17—*Honolulu, Hawaii*. Hawaii Conv. Write: Ch., Box 23434, Honolulu, HI 96823-3434
- 15-17—*Huntsville, Alabama*. Southeast Regional Forum. Write: Forum Coordinator, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163
- 16-17—*Buenos Aires, Argentina*. VI Convención y 50º Aniversario. Write: Com. Org., Loyola 1182 (1414) Buenos Aires, República Argentina
- 29—*December 1—Sacramento, California*. VII Reencuentro de Jóvenes y Veteranos. Write: Com. Org., Box 5450, Sacramento, CA 95817