

The Meeting Guide App



This is the first installment of a new Box 4-5-9 series on the technology that is changing the way Alcoholics Anonymous communicates to suffering alcoholics and interacts with its members.

Josh R., a web developer, did most of his drinking in New York City. In 2013, he decided a geographic would help and he moved to San Jose. Unlike most geographics, this one turned out to be fruitful — for both Josh and for Alcoholics Anonymous.

Once in San Jose, Josh got sober, found a sponsor and started going to A.A. meetings in the area. Only problem was, the local central office website — while it listed meetings — wasn't so user-friendly for someone using a mobile phone. Like most A.A. websites, the site had been developed before mobile design came into general use. Such sites work fine for someone on a computer, but these days, A.A. sites get more than twice as many visitors from handheld devices as from traditional desktops or laptops.

“Essentially what I did,” Josh says, “is take all the meeting listings and export them to an Excel file with links to directions, and then made my own little app, just for myself. That’s where the germ of the idea for the Meeting Guide app developed — just me trying to find meetings.”

From early sobriety, Josh has been a supporter of intergroups and central offices. The intergroup rep from his home group suggested that Josh develop his personal app into an app that all A.A.s in Santa Clara County could use. Josh agreed and conferred with the Santa Clara County central office. Eventually, Josh went further than originally envisioned. He came up with the idea to develop a WordPress plug-in that intergroup/central offices, areas and districts across the country (and the world) could use, so that the meetings they listed on their sites could be added to the app and automatically updated every 12 hours.

A turning point for Josh was making a presentation of his app to the National A.A. Technology Workshop (NAATW), where he received support and feedback. The free app was launched in November 2015 with seven connected A.A. websites — those in Austin, Mesa (Arizona), Oakland, Philadelphia, Portland (Oregon), San Francisco and San Jose.

Today, Meeting Guide is connected to 326 local A.A. organization websites. Getting connected wasn't easy for all of them. Some local sites had to find new web servants, while others had to draft new policies and procedures, sign up for new web hosting, and try new software. In several cases, group consciences were sought to settle concerns about the Sixth Tradition and the future of the app: Would it always be free? Does this represent affiliation with an outside entity?

In an era when smartphones dominate, Meeting Guide is a simple, useful tool for newcomers and oldtimers alike — one that standardizes meeting information so that it is always readily available and up to date. Recognizing this, Josh did something unusual, but which is also completely within the spirit of the Fellowship: he gave the Meeting Guide app to Alcoholics Anonymous, *for free*.

“I realized,” Josh says, “that the only way we could continue to grow was to pass it on.”

In the fall of 2018, A.A.W.S., Inc. licensed Meeting Guide and put together a working group of consultants, employees and trustees to help bring it to fruition, and an updated version was released in summer 2019. Lois L. is a member of the steering committee for the NAATW and an administrator on the Technology in A.A. (TIAA) online forum. As an A.A. member with 30 years sobriety

“Nothing matters more to A.A.’s future welfare than the manner in which we use the colossus of modern communication. Used unselfishly and well, it can produce results surpassing our present imagination.”

— Bill W.

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Note on anonymity: From time to time in this publication full names and/or pictures of G.S.O. employees, Class A trustees and other nonalcoholics are used. The anonymity of A.A. members is maintained, as they are identified throughout by first name and last initial only.

and a professional digital strategist and user experience (UX) consultant, she also advises G.S.O. on digital matters and technical strategy. She says, “What A.A.W.S. has done by acquiring and updating the app is to enable this vital piece of technology to live on forever, to be continually updated and improved upon. Providing the app is what G.S.O. is supposed to do — which is to disseminate public information on a national level for all A.A.s. It’s also important to point out that, although the app is provided to the end user for free, it costs money and time to maintain and update — money that comes from member donations to intergroup/central offices and G.S.O. itself.”

“Meeting Guide has multiple benefits,” says Clement C., staff member on the Communication Services desk at the General Service Office. “Professionals such as therapists and probation officers are able to use it to steer people to meetings very easily. Anytime anyone is traveling, they find the app extremely useful. One aspect I love is being able to text my favorite meetings to sponsees and to give them all the information they need to find them.”

Developed for iOS and Android, Meeting Guide is easily recognizable on G.S.O.'s website by its logo, a white folding chair on a blue background. The app clearly tells the user the name and address of a particular meeting, the time it is being held, how far it is from the user's current location, and what type of meeting it is. There are almost 110,000 meetings currently available on the app, and it currently has 186,000 monthly active users, increased from 84,000 in 2018.

“Meeting Guide is completely aligned

with A.A. and was designed with a full understanding of our Traditions and Concepts,” says Beau B., a Class B (alcoholic) general service trustee and a director on the A.A.W.S. board. “It’s a great example of the right use of new technology: not walking away from who we are as a Fellowship, while allowing us to do so much more.”

Clement C. agrees, and also sees another benefit of Meeting Guide: “Having licensed the app, G.S.O. is now seeking to collaborate with intergroup/central offices — the places where the meeting information resides, after all — to keep it fully updated and make sure it continues to be a vital Twelfth Step tool. It’s a true program-wide effort.”

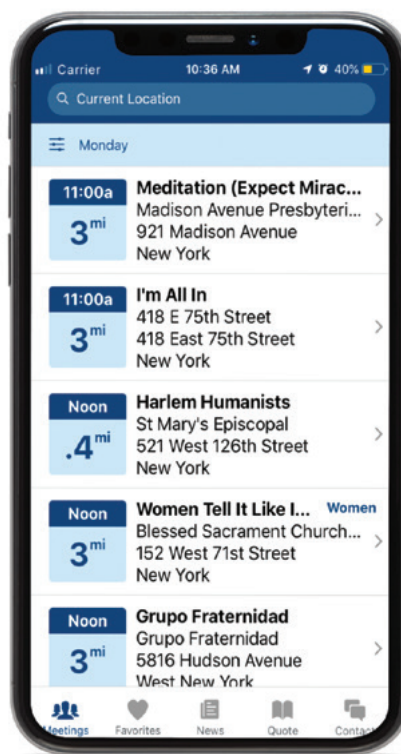
“I would hope that people are inspired by this and see it as a kind of service model — that you can create some technology on your own and then perhaps give it to the Fellowship,” Josh says. “I hope there are people out there who want to create, for instance, a Twelfth Step volunteer database to get out to groups who might need it. There’s a lot that we can do.”

Beau B. personally feels that A.A. is at a “tipping point” when it comes to the use of technology, of which Meeting Guide is only the first example to come to full fruition. Within a year, G.S.O. will have a new website to replace the 2014 version it currently has, one in which the search function is notoriously balky. The new site, Clement says, will “speak directly to people in a conversational way and make it easier for members and people coming to A.A. for the first time to find what they want.” Julie Gonzalez (nonalcoholic), Communications Services staff assistant, says that A.A. is “trying to do everything with current best practices. We’re listening to industry professionals and user feedback, and participating in the NAATW and Regional Forums.”

If so, it’s somehow fitting that people like Josh R., and those A.A.s who gather at NAATW conferences and online at the TIAA forum, may be the ones whose service at the local level can lead to effectiveness for carrying A.A.’s message to anyone, anywhere, who reaches out, or clicks, for help.

“After five years of attending NAATW conferences,” Lois L. says, “you start to see what people all over are doing and thinking about on their own. Much of what people are doing is experimental. Which is fine. The Traditions and Concepts support that. Let’s try new things, and if they don’t work, we’ll try something else.”

Part Two of this series will continue in the Winter 2019 edition.



■ Raising the Limit on Gratitude

One of the first mentions of a bequest — one that A.A. actually accepted — appeared in the January 1951 AA Grapevine. In it, Bill W. writes a farewell to his friend, A.A.'s co-founder, and recalls how he saw Dr. Bob the Sunday before he died. Just a month before, Bill writes, Dr. Bob had aided him in framing a proposal to create the General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous, A.A.'s Third Legacy. In the 1950 Third Legacy pamphlet (now out of print), Bill continues, "This bequest, in pamphlet form, was actually at the printers when he took his final departure the following Thursday. As his last act and desire respecting A.A., this document will be sure to carry a great and special meaning for us all."

Like kitchen-table meetings and laughter at A.A. gatherings, legacies are still very much a part of the fabric of A.A. Today, bequests are still made by members who have, like Dr. Bob, "passed out of our sight and hearing." Unlike the legacy written about by Bill W., the bequests made by today's A.A.s are financial. But just like that "bequest in pamphlet form," today's bequests entrust that our General Service Office can and will provide the services to carry A.A.'s message and make sure the hand of A.A. is there for anyone who reaches for it.

Up until 1967, the amount of money an A.A. could will to the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous was limited to \$100. At that year's Conference, it was raised to \$200. Over the years, that amount has increased. As Zenaïda Medina (nonalcoholic), Assistant Director of Finance at the General Service Office and Conference Finance Committee secretary, reports, "The maximum dollar amount of individual bequests by A.A.s is reviewed every two years at the General Service Conference. In 2019, at the 69th General Service Conference, the maximum amount of an individual bequest by members to A.A. was raised from \$5,000 to \$10,000." This is a one-time contribution and is *not* in perpetuity.

At the General Service Office, the A.A. Staff Coordinator is responsible for coordinating correspondence, legal documents and checks related to bequests or wills. Mary C., the current Staff Coordinator, takes calls from A.A. members who are drafting their wills and need more information, as well as from attorneys and executors with questions related to bequests and/or wills.

Mary says one of the suggestions she makes is to "include a note indicating that the person making the bequest is a member of A.A." In keeping with our

Tradition of self-support, no contributions or bequests are accepted from non-A.A. members. If a check is received, Mary's job is to ensure that the money is from an A.A.: "I'll first make an informal phone call to speak with someone." If the check is from an admirer, a grateful family member or another nonmember — even if it is in memory of an A.A. who has passed — the check is returned with thanks and an explanation of A.A.'s Seventh Tradition.



She also shares how to properly address the check: The General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous. "We also stress that no bequest can be accepted that is earmarked or otherwise designated to be spent with stipulations. All money received by the General Service Board is grouped into 'contributions' and goes into the General Service Fund."

Mary continues, "I speak with many attorneys about the amount of a bequest. I tell them that there is a limit on how much we can accept, though every dollar is precious. Often there is a baffled silence and then a question: 'Why?' So, I explain about A.A.'s principle of self-support and why we do not accept any contributions, great or small, from non-A.A. members. It turns into a great public information opportunity."

Finally, Mary says, "Each of those calls is rooted in the joy of sobriety. They are uplifting and happy calls from people who are grateful for their sobriety and have thought about how they want to contribute ... for some people, this is what being a responsible citizen looks like. There is also the spiritual value of honoring your sobriety in this manner."

For more information about bequests to the General Service Board, please contact the Staff Coordinator at the General Service Office at staffcoord@aa.org. For information about bequests to your intergroup/central office, please contact them directly.

■ The General Service Board Welcomes Two New Class A Trustees

Following the 69th General Service Conference, the General Service Board officially selected two new Class A (nonalcoholic) trustees to serve the Fellowship over the next six years: Sister Judith Ann Karam, Congregational Leader of the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine, of Cleveland, Ohio; and Dr. Al J. Mooney, a pioneer in the field of addiction medicine, of Cary, North Carolina. They will replace rotating Class A trustees David M. Morris and the Honorable Ivan Lemelle, who have served the Fellowship since 2013.

Chosen for their professional or business backgrounds and the unique personal experience they can bring to A.A., the seven Class A trustees on the General Service Board remain a rich source of wisdom and perspective, and, since they need not maintain their personal anonymity, are available to appear in public on behalf of A.A. Says A.A. co-founder Bill W. in a January 1966 article for Grapevine: “In the days when A.A. was unknown, it was the nonalcoholic trustees who held up our hands before the general public.... Their very presence on our board was quite able to command full confidence and the respect of many faraway groups. Meanwhile, they assured the world around us of A.A.’s worth.”



Sister Judith Ann Karam

Ann was there to accept it and found the energy at the Convention “an incredible thing.” When Bedient suggested she might think about becoming a trustee, she said she would.

Sister Judith Ann was at the Convention to represent her order, the same one to which early A.A. friend Sister Mary Ignatia belonged. In A.A.’s pioneering time, Sister Ignatia worked in tandem with Dr. Bob, caring for thousands of alcoholics at St. Thomas Hospital in Akron and later at Cleveland’s Saint Vincent Charity Hospital, in the ward she called Rosary Hall Solarium. A Cleveland native, Sister Judith Ann entered the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine as a novice in 1964 and knew Sister Ignatia slightly in the years before her death in 1966. She describes her as a diminutive figure striding through

the wards with a group of people trailing her. “She was what we would today call ‘high maintenance,’ but that was because she was so fervent about taking care of her patients,” Sister Judith Ann says.

This same fervor has become a central part of Sister Judith Ann’s life and career. She started as a pharmacy technician and then a pharmacist, working with patients at Rosary Hall. Throughout her career as a health administrator — she served as president and CEO of the Sisters of Charity Health System from 1998 to 2013 — she has believed in Alcoholics Anonymous. “A.A. has always been a part of my journey,” she says. “Alcoholism is a disease for which there is no cure, but A.A. provides a continuum of service in keeping alcoholics sober, and it has been concerned from the beginning with family members — a very important element in recovery.” Sister Judith Ann personally believes that the Twelve Steps function not only as a path to recovery of all kinds but also as a “beautiful spiritual life journey.”

In A.A., Sister Ignatia’s service to Alcoholics Anonymous has never been forgotten. When G.S.O. archivist Michelle Mirza (nonalcoholic) made a presentation at the 2015 International Convention about Sister Ignatia’s work, Sister Judith Ann could see tears in the eyes of the Sisters of Charity in attendance for the presentation because, she says, “They were so proud of their legacy.” Sister Judith Ann will now carry on that legacy as a Class A trustee, working with what she calls “the tremendous and caring community of A.A.”

The story of **Dr. Al J. Mooney’s** association with A.A. reads like a nonalcoholic’s drunkalog. Born in 1948 in Statesboro, Georgia, the oldest of three boys, Mooney is the son of a physician and surgeon whose wounding in World War II led to excessive use of alcohol and opiates. His successful practice destroyed, Mooney’s father was ultimately sentenced to prison for writing illegal prescriptions for narcotics, leaving his wife — herself a very active alcoholic also addicted to the sodium pentothal injections that accompanied her electric shock therapy — in charge of the three children.

But when his father returned from prison, Mooney says, “It was like a different person inhabiting the body of the dad I knew.” The reason was that his father had gotten sober in Alcoholics Anonymous. The 11-year-old Mooney became curious about



Dr. Al J. Mooney

what type of program could make “a new person move into an old body.” He would soon learn a great deal more about A.A. His mother got sober, and she and his father opened their home to alcoholics. At one point, there were as many as 25 people living there, some of them detoxing. (His parents paid Mooney minimum wage to keep an eye on them.) Mooney joined Alateen and began to travel with his parents to A.A. meetings, conferences and forums. Alcoholics Anonymous simply “became a part of the way I looked at the world,” Mooney says.

It’s no wonder that Mooney has devoted his successful career to addiction treatment and recovery. An addiction specialist and family practitioner in Cary, North Carolina, he has served as director of Willingway Hospital in Statesboro, founded by his parents to help alcoholics and addicts to recover, and is still on its board. He was one of the first physicians in the U.S. to be certified in addiction medicine and is also co-author of a book on addiction and recovery, *The Recovery Book*.

“I’m extremely grateful to have been given this honor of serving as a trustee,” Mooney says. “My parents always used to tell me that they were sorry that I was not qualified to be a member of this program, because I couldn’t experience all the gifts A.A. has to offer. I think they would laugh now to see that I finally found a way to get inside this Fellowship. I have always loved the term ‘friend of A.A.’ I’ve called myself that for years, and I hope during my time as trustee I can reach out to other friends of A.A. who are as passionate about Alcoholics Anonymous as I am.”

■ Three New Class B Trustees Join the General Service Board

Following their election in May at the 69th General Service Conference, the General Service Board of A.A. welcomed three new Class B (alcoholic) trustees: Trish L. of Vancouver, B.C., trustee-at-large/Canada; Francis G., of Chelmsford, Massachusetts, Northeast regional trustee; and Jimmy D., of Dallas, Texas, Southwest regional trustee. While all trustees represent the Fellowship as a whole and no trustee can be said to “represent” a geographical section, these newly elected A.A. members bring extensive service experience to the board’s deliberations and an invaluable regional A.A. point of view.

Patricia “Trish” L. spent five months in 2018 traveling across her native Canada from west to east and then back again (by a different route) and attending A.A. meetings wherever she found them. She was accompanied by her now-husband Arnie and two dogs. She calls the experience “revelatory,” and says, “Most of Canada is quite rural and remote, and A.A. is bound together by a thread, rather than a rope.”

Traveling around Canada isn’t new to Trish. She describes herself as a “Navy brat,” moving from city to city with her father, a functioning alcoholic and military man. Trish worked in performing arts administration for the early part of her career, but found that her heavy drinking was beginning to impact her jobs to the extent that it seemed advisable to work as a freelancer “because it was easier for me to drink that way.” Just as she was beginning to get sober in the winter of 1994, she got word that her father was dying of alcoholism; she rushed to his bedside, but he died without regaining consciousness. Trish was consoled by the unexpected gift of her uncle arriving “with a big A.A. hug.” He and her father were estranged, but her uncle had gotten sober, and he said to her, “Yes, your dad died. But did you drink today? You don’t have to drink ever again. And you don’t have to do it alone.” (She later discovered that her paternal grandmother had also gotten sober in A.A.)

“My big worry when I sobered up was that I would be bored,” Trish says. “Twenty-five years later, I have never been bored. Joyful, maybe, or despairing, but not bored.” Trish began following twin paths in her career and her A.A. service. She retired in 2015 as executive director of Charlford House Society for Women, a nonprofit charitable organization operating a 15-bed support recovery facility for women. She took on service positions at her Vancouver home group, Reflections (also the first meeting she ever attended), and also did general service. She has served as intergroup rep and GSR, BC/Yukon Area 79; alternate DCM and DCM; secretary, Area 79 General Service Committee; and Area 79 delegate, Panel 57 (2007-08), among other positions.

“It’s an incredible honor and privilege to be selected as Class B trustee,” Trish says. “I’m looking forward to this service as a way to help in whatever fashion I can. I think it’s our vital responsibility to pick up that thread and make sure it is as strong as possible.”

Born in Brooklyn and growing up on Long Island, **Francis G.** became a CPA first, then — gradually — an alcoholic. “The disease is cunning, baffling and powerful,” he says. “I tried to control it. My rule was two or three drinks the first hour, then one drink an hour after that. I was able to do that once!”

Francis tried other stratagems familiar to most alcoholics — taking a limited amount of money out to the bar with him, for instance — but nothing worked. He was ‘functioning,’ in that he was hanging on to his job. “But I was drifting. My life was being wasted. No direction. No goals.” Finally, inspired by a brother and an uncle who had gotten sober, he ended up in rehab at Smithers Hospital in New York City. Although initially he mistook A.A. for a “90-day only” program — “They kept talking about doing 90 meetings in 90 days, and I thought that’s all there was” — the program took hold, and he has a sobriety date of September 8, 1989.

Early in his sobriety, Francis was inspired by the Ninth Step Promises on pages 83-84 of the Big Book, especially where it says, "That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear." His home group in Merrick, Long Island, was Sobriety with Hope, and he became group treasurer. "As a CPA," he says, "I understood fiduciary responsibility. I was taught to follow the money. So, instead of mailing our checks off to G.S.O. and Nassau intergroup and Area 49, I went there in person with check in hand, to see if they were worthy of our group's money! Once I got there, I was fascinated by all of the workings of A.A. beyond the group level and I got deeper into service."

Francis advanced in his career, which took him to Chelmsford, Massachusetts, Area 30, where he retired after 32 years with the same company. Service is a large part of his life. He will serve as Northeast Regional Forum hotel liaison (2021) and has been ICYPAA member-at-large (2018); NERASSA hotel liaison; Area 30 delegate, Panel 57 (2007-2008); and Conference Archives Committee chair and Conference Finance Committee alternate chair, among many other positions. His natural talent is behind-the-scenes planning, but there is a great deal more he can offer as a trustee, he feels. Francis is a kidney transplant survivor and has other medical issues. "I wasn't supposed to live this long, and I can impart that to people who have been told the same thing, or who have accessibility setbacks and other types of issues they are dealing with. When I got into Alcoholics Anonymous, I found out, like a lot of people, that you don't have to be alone."

Trying to fight his way out of trouble after his second DUI, **Jimmy D.**, of Dallas, Texas, entered a treatment center, which brought him and all his fellow struggling alcoholics to an A.A. meeting — just what he had been trying to avoid. There he met a man with six months sobriety who "gave me everything Alcoholics Anonymous needed to give me in five minutes. He shook my hand, welcomed me to A.A., gave me his phone number and said he would be back the next night. And he was."

Not that it all worked out immediately. Jimmy describes taking on a commitment of putting out signs for his home group meeting on Thursdays. He was faithful to this job, except that he would stay drunk every other day of the week. "The conscience of the group was that when I lost my sobriety, I lost my commitment. And every week they'd take it away, only to give it back again."

Jimmy got sober for good in August 1997. He believes firmly in service as "sweat equity." On the group level, he started making coffee and working as the set-up person; when he had four months sober, he was asked to go to his area assembly, where he checked people in and got a look at the larger arena of service in the program. In his current home group, Chicago Group Dallas, which he helped found, he has been GSR and intergroup rep.

He has also served as Area 65 alternate chair; Area 65 alternate delegate, Panel 57 (2007-2008); Area 65 delegate, Panel 59 (2009-2010) and chair of the Conference Grapevine Committee; and Dallas Intergroup board trustee, among many other positions.

Jimmy adds, "In every area of my life, the principles of A.A. apply." He tells this story: "During my first 30 days in A.A., I came back to work at a job where I had alienated a lot of people. I can remember walking down the long hallway of my office, and people would get up and just shut their doors, because they thought I should have been fired. But my sponsor said to me, 'Show up at 8:30 every day, stay all day and do your job.' I prayed and held my head high, and, gradually, things turned around." He has continued to work for the same company for 25 years. Jimmy says this about his service as Class B trustee: "It makes me feel humility and also an appreciation of the fact that I have this great opportunity to help people and be of service."

Seventh Tradition Corner:

■ Meeting Our Obligations

"Fiscal responsibility" is not a term too many active alcoholics would have been able to apply to themselves before finding recovery. Yet, once sober and in A.A., many have undergone a transformation where money and responsibility are concerned and have come to recognize the importance of self-support in providing ongoing Twelfth Step services, particularly at the group level.

Rents must be paid, literature purchased, local meeting lists published. Without some money, these basic services — and others — would go unfulfilled, and alcoholics, searching for recovery, might never make their way to A.A.

As Bill W. put it, "Our spiritual way of life is safe for future generations if, as a Society, we resist the temptation to receive money from the outside world. But this leaves us with a responsibility — one that every member ought to understand. We cannot skimp when the treasurer of our group passes the hat. Our groups, our areas, and A.A. as a whole will not function unless our services are sufficient and their bills are paid." (*The Language of the Heart*, p. 221)

Says Cathy B., Southeast regional trustee and current chairperson of the A.A.W.S. Board, it's important for members to make the spiritual connection between their contributed dollars and helping the alcoholic they might never meet. "When you give that money, you give it on faith," she notes. "It's based on the principle of self-support — of accepting responsibility and giving back beyond the commitment of time."

“It all takes money,” she adds. “I was concerned with having enough money to go to the bar and buy a drink. Now, in order to give back, I want to provide access to another alcoholic.”

“Every single A.A. service is designed to make more and better Twelfth Step work possible,” wrote Bill W. (*The Language of the Heart*, p. 350), “whether it be a group meeting place, a central or intergroup office to arrange hospitalization and sponsorship, or the world service Headquarters to maintain unity and effectiveness all over the globe.

“Though not costly, these service agencies are absolutely essential to our continued expansion — to our survival as a Fellowship. Their costs are a collective obli-

gation that rests squarely upon all of us. Our support of services actually amounts to a recognition on our part that A.A. must everywhere function in full strength — and that, under our Tradition of self-support, we are all going to foot the bill.”

Many questions related to A.A. finances are covered in the pamphlet “Self-Support: Where Money and Spirituality Mix” (F-3). The A.A. Guidelines on Finance (MG-15) and the service piece “The A.A. Group Treasurer” (F-96) provide detailed information on group financial matters, such as opening bank accounts, procuring tax I.D. numbers, and obtaining insurance coverage for the group. These items are all available from G.S.O. at www.aa.org.

■ Service Animals and A.A. Meetings

For many A.A.s, a dog-eared Big Book is a welcome sight on meeting night. But if those dog ears belong to anything other than our basic text, unrest and “diversity of opinion” within the group sometimes follow. In recent years, the General Service Office has received many calls from members asking for sharing about service animals at meetings. Unlike guide dogs for those who are blind, service dogs that are trained to assist with (or perform) other tasks are not as well understood or as easily identified. Though service dogs do assist people who are blind, they are also trained to perform tasks for people with other accessibility issues — such as pulling a wheelchair; alerting and protecting a person who is having a seizure; or alleviating anxiety for someone with PTSD. Without service animals, many A.A.s could not safely attend meetings.

However, some members report being blocked from meetings because they are accompanied by service animals. Some insist that such groups are in violation of laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act. Of course, A.A.’s Twelve Traditions do not transcend the law, and G.S.O. neither offers compliance advice nor interprets law for members. In these cases, G.S.O. may suggest asking the group to have an informed group conscience discussion on how to extend the hand of A.A. across any barriers. Therefore, in the interest of being informed, some groups have decided to look into local and federal laws related to service animals. This way, they can ensure that they are not only complying with the law but are also remaining helpful to their fellow members and sharing A.A.’s message of hope and recovery.

Although shared group experience about service animals is not as plentiful as concerns and questions, a group member in California shared her experience:

“In our meeting, I had the ‘pet patrol’ commitment. We average four dogs per meeting, from chihuahuas



to wolfhounds. Our meeting is open to the public, and we welcome trained service dogs. [According to our research] we may ask if the dog is a service animal required because of a disability, as well as what type of work or task the dog has been trained to perform. We may *not* ask for documentation. ‘Comfort’ animals may be asked to leave.

“I volunteered because I wanted to serve as a buffer between the members who bring the animals and the members who are disturbed by it. My approach was to introduce myself, ask the names of the person and animal, explain my role, and ask if the animal has been trained to perform a task that supports a disability. If ‘yes,’ I respond: ‘Thank you. It’s nice to meet you.’ If ‘no,’ I welcome them to stay for the meeting, but ask them to please leave the pet at home when they return. Although some members are indignant that I have not effectively prevented an overrun of animals and some owners are hostile, it has worked. I have made new friends and I ask about the pets at home.”

This member also related personal experience about

“surprising” dogs being service animals: “A sponsee of mine was in a car accident. As a result of her injuries, she experienced seizures. She had a tiny little dog, like a teacup dog, that she trained to detect when she had a seizure coming. If I hadn’t seen it, I wouldn’t have believed it — but it was true.”

The pamphlet “The A.A. Group” reassures us that group problems are by no means uncommon, and that they “are often evidence of a healthy, desirable diversity of opinion among the group members. They give us a chance ... to ‘practice these principles in all our affairs.’” As with other group issues, A.A.s have often found that “a good sense of humor, cooling-off periods, patience, courtesy, willingness to listen and to wait — plus a sense of fairness and trust in a ‘Power greater than ourselves’ — have been found far more effective than legalistic arguments or personal accusations.” And, although a specific issue may not be printed in black and white, alcoholics are a resourceful crowd, and an informed group conscience can yield abundant solutions.

First Responders in Recovery:

■ Trauma and A.A.

Ray T. estimates that 80 percent of all police calls are alcohol or drug related, and that when it comes to family disturbances — the most common call of all — the percentage rises to 100. He should know, having spent 34 years (before and after getting sober) with the Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department, a 14,000-person operation contracted to serve 30 cities. Ray certainly saw more than his fair share of the destruction and chaos caused by alcohol-infused accidents and conflagrations.

When asked if dealing with so much trauma contributed to his alcoholism, Ray was adamant that it had not — even after his involvement in a 1968 fatal altercation in which he shot and killed a member of a motorcycle gang. Ray had always been a spiritual man, even before he got sober, and the taking of a life disturbed him a great deal. Still, Ray does not feel this was a primary contributing factor to his condition, and believes that claiming his job as the reason for his drinking — even one as saturated with violence, dysfunction and crime as his was — would be just one more excuse. He admits having drunk heavily after a rough day at work, but also after a great day at work — and, like so many alcoholics, after a day when nothing of any consequence happened at all.

Ray attributes the gradual increase in his drinking to something entirely different, something seemingly harmless: the sense of camaraderie and belonging he shared with his fellow responders. He suspects that that fraternity might have been what nudged him over the invisible

line. While working patrol and after graduating to detective in the ’70s, Ray was a regular at “choir practice” — getting together after work, debriefing in the most inappropriate of ways, and drinking to oblivion. Although L.A. bars close at 2 a.m., the officers were allowed to stay until 5 and were never charged for drinks after official closing time. It was the best of all possible worlds to Ray, and so it became a nightly affair. The critical circumstances he witnessed and coped with during the day faded in the glow of the identification and acceptance he felt from his peers: he was a cop — and a hero.

But in fact, before getting sober, Ray often found himself on the other side of police calls, thanks to his involvement in numerous bar fights and other melees. He remembers how uncomfortable it was to receive the very help he so often gave, and those moments stood out pointedly when he was getting sober. “It’s still difficult to ask for help,” Ray maintains, “but because of the program I’ve learned to accept it, and for that I am very glad.”

Ray’s first sponsor, Bob, was a cop on a mission. When arrestees were brought in and placed in the booking cage, Bob would walk up to the cage, take stock of those under the influence, and start Twelfth Stepping anyone who looked as if they needed it. Bob’s audacious efforts made quite an impression on Ray, and, years later, after making detective and nearing his bottom, Ray reached out to Bob, who took him to his first meeting.

Since then, Ray has in turn helped fellow detectives and, like his sponsor, is always open about his sobriety, feeling it is important to “let people know.” (Ray went so far as to tell his captain to fire him if he ever drank again.) During the five years he worked on sex crimes, Ray often dealt with the spouses of victims. There were many conversations about alcoholism, and he tried to get the message across whenever he could.

In retirement, Ray still goes to a recovery center once a month to share his story. When he reveals he is a retired cop, there are audible gasps from those who do not yet realize the indiscriminate nature of the disease. Ray also spent three years working with the Employee Assistance Program: anyone with an alcohol problem was required to see him. He says that because of his own experience, he could tell in the first few minutes if the candidate was serious or not — whether they would uphold or breach their EAP contract.

Once, at a funeral, a man came up to Ray and told him that he was the one who had, many years before the man actually got sober, instilled in him the idea that sobriety was a real possibility. The man said he hadn’t believed this at first, but he trusted Ray for some reason and never gave up trying. Humbled by the man’s profuse gratitude, Ray mused, “When I tossed my pebble in the water, the ripple *did* have an effect — it just took some time.”

David C. worked as an EMT for 20 years in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Prior to that, he had vol-

unteered for the fire department, and it was during his tenure there that he became a full-fledged alcoholic. As an ambulance attendant, he, too, saw his fair share of distress — cardiac arrests, automobile accidents, street fights, domestic violence. The local university generated the lion's share of the calls David received, and alcohol and drugs were almost always a factor. He agrees with Ray that what contributed to his alcoholism was not so much the nature of his work but the fellowship with other EMTs before and after calls. Once David got sober, alcohol-related emergencies never threatened his sobriety; rather, they strengthened it as he witnessed firsthand the wreckage and mayhem caused by the disease. Every episode reinforced the path he had chosen and deepened his gratitude for being graced with a new life.

Something that disturbed David, though, was that hospitals sometimes treated intoxicated victims as low priorities, not giving them the care he felt they deserved. The staff would pump stomachs and flush out systems, and then quickly discharge the patients without referring them to counseling or specialists in the field. David believed that some healthcare professionals not only lacked compassion, but even seemed to resent the EMTs for bringing these individuals in.

The last three months of David's drinking were horrible. His life was falling apart, and even though he didn't want to drink anymore, he couldn't stop. Although he had no DUIs or trouble with the law, his marriage was failing. Suicide was looking like a viable option. Fortunately, David's wife worked with a woman whose husband was in A.A., and he agreed to meet with David. He took David to his first meeting, and there he found hope.

After getting sober and while still working as an EMT, David broke his anonymity on a personal level when he felt it might help someone who had the same problem and who seemed to have reached a turning point. His only regret was that there was rarely an opportunity to follow through — he could only plant the seed. "Once you dropped them off," he says, "you had no more contact with them — unless they tried to find you."

Richard P. started working as a beat cop for the L.A.P.D. in 1964 and has been retired for 23 years. Unlike Ray and David, he feels he was profoundly affected by

the violence, trauma and dysfunction he witnessed in his early years. By 1969, after five years on the job, he knew he was in trouble. His work was intensifying his alcoholism, and he felt he had nowhere to turn, as few behavioral health resources were available to him at the time. The only way to cope with the disturbing things he witnessed was to go to the bar with his mates to commiserate — and to drink. And the tougher his job got, the harder he drank, and the more likely were the consequences.

Richard, meanwhile, knew nothing about A.A. before he got sober. In fact, at the height of his drinking, he had seen a psychologist who never even mentioned the life-saving program. Jack D., a member of the Peace Officer Fellowship A.A. group (started in 1974 and now worldwide) came to a supervisors' meeting at Richard's precinct and introduced himself as an alcoholic. Jack made it a habit to visit all the watches and tell everyone who thought they might have a problem to give him a call. Eight years after that supervisors' meeting, Richard did just that. Jack recommended the Peace Officer Fellowship meeting in Arcadia, and it was there that Richard heard what he needed to hear.

Richard has Twelfth Stepped other officers as well and done a lot of outreach. He remembers one incident when he was booking someone pretty far gone, and he involuntarily blurted out, "You don't have to drink if you don't want to." Richard said he "got the look," which was a solid reminder of where *he* had once been — when he didn't believe that he could actually live a successful, happy and alcohol-free life.

The American Addictions Center states there are unusually high rates of substance abuse, PTSD and suicide among first responders. They recommend Twelve Step programs — in which people surround themselves with others who have been through the same thing — as the most effective way to manage symptoms related to trauma and the best method for finding a solid footing in recovery. A number of special-interest A.A. meetings — including those for law enforcement, EMS workers and firefighters — provide a safe and supportive atmosphere that is critical for first responders. In addition to the traumatic aspects of their work, sober first responders tend to have erratic schedules that preclude the convenience

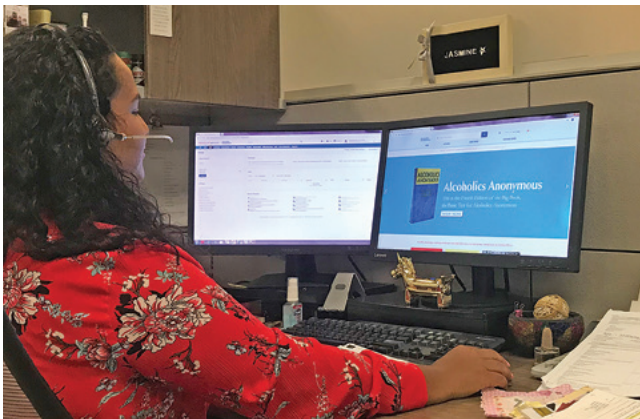


of scheduled treatment options, and so meetings, of any kind, can provide a readily available oasis of relief.

Although Ray, David and Richard may have varying opinions on how the intensity of their careers affected their drinking, they all seem to agree that it was the sense of belonging — of being able to relate to their peers — that on one side of the line intensified their drinking, and on the other steeled their sobriety. They demonstrate how this very human propensity — wanting to belong — can either harm or heal an individual, depending on the choices one makes.

But perhaps the most notable thing that alcoholic first responders share is the frequent interaction they have with active alcoholics. While they witness the ravages of alcoholism directly, they are often in a strategic position to reach out the hand of A.A. in a time of crisis — when the gift of desperation might allow a problem drinker to listen and accept help. And recovering alcoholics know all too well how helping someone else — or at the very least trying to — is how we help ourselves.

■ A Streamlined Way to Serve the Fellowship



Although it will not come as news to most A.A.s, the General Service Office (G.S.O.) is a busy place. Page S77 of *The A.A. Service Manual* captures the essence of it: “[G.S.O.] serves as a clearinghouse and exchange point for the wealth of A.A. experience accumulated over the years, coordinates a wide array of activities and services, and oversees the publication, all translations of, and distribution of A.A. Conference-approved literature and service materials.”

More specifically, every day, 14,000 booklets, pamphlets and miscellaneous items get shipped; nearly 5,000 Big Books and other A.A. materials are distributed; 40 phone calls from members or others interested in A.A. are answered; and more than 250 emails get a response.

Recently, in order to better serve the Fellowship and to continue with the goal of helping the still-suffering alco-

holic, G.S.O. decided to combine its existing operations under one new enterprise resource planning platform, or “ERP.” What an ERP does is integrate a company’s different operating systems (which may have been developed separately and sometimes don’t “speak” to each other) into one fluid system in which all users have access to the same data. In the case of G.S.O., the new system replaces the Fellowship New Vision (FNV) system many members had become familiar with.

Even though, as we know, alcoholics don’t always readily embrace change, there will be a learning curve both for G.S.O. employees and for the A.A.s who contact them as they implement this process. But with the new system finally in place, members interacting with G.S.O. will enjoy a much-improved experience, including an easier ordering process, a new self-service portal for updating group records, and more complete customer service.

“This is an exciting major project to modernize our office business systems and consolidate nearly all of our business functions onto a single platform,” says Greg T., G.S.O. general manager. “We are taking these measures with the goal of providing increased efficiencies, security and enhanced overall support of the A.A. community.”

The project was finalized in late July and went live in early August. Please let us know if you are still experiencing difficulties with any aspect of the new system. To contact the Contributions department, call 212-870-4700 or email contributions_info@aa.org; to contact the Records department, call 212-870-3132 or email records@aa.org; to contact the Order Entry department, call 212-870-3312 or email orders@aa.org.

■ 34th Annual Central Office/ Intergroup/A.A.W.S./AAGV Seminar

The 34th Annual Central Office/Intergroup/AAWS/AAGV Seminar will be held in Mesa, Arizona, September 27, 28 and 29, 2019, with the theme “Local Service with Mutual Cooperation and Harmony.”

The seminar is a weekend of sharing and learning about problems and solutions common to most central offices/intergroups: a wonderful opportunity to benefit from the experience, strength and hope of those who serve in similar positions throughout the United States, Canada and Mexico. A.A. World Services and Grapevine staff from the General Service Office in New York will be available during the weekend so that you can get acquainted and share information.

For additional information, contact Kim at (480) 827-1905 or Mike at ICOAA2019@gmail.com.



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. **Please note that we cannot attest to the accuracy, relevancy, timeliness, or completeness of information provided by any linked site.**

September 2019

- 5-8—*Detroit, Michigan*. 23rd National Archives Workshop Write: Ch., Box 66125, Detroit, MI 48066;
www.aanationalarchivesworkshop.com
- 6-7—*Lévis, Québec, Canada*. Congrès de Lévis. Write: Ch. CP 46059, Lévis, QC G6V 8S3;
www.aa89.org
- 6-8—*Sacramento, California*. Bridging the Gap Workshop Wknd. Write: Ch. 782 River Rd. #153, St. George, UT 84790;
www.btgww.org
- 6-8—*Dunnville, Ontario, Canada*. 53rd Dunnville Conv. & Campout. Write: Ch., Box 76, Smithville, ON L0R 2A0;
dunnvilleconvention@outlook.com
- 13-14—*Sainte-Ursule, Quebec, Canada*. 39^e Congrès District 89-17. Write: Ch., 215 rue Lessard, Ste-Ursule, QC J0K 3M0
- 13-15—*Laughlin, Nevada*. AZ State Conv. Info: www.area03.org
- 13-15—*Newbury, Ohio*. 104th Punderson Pk Conf. Write: Ch., Box 844, Chardon, OH 44024;
www.pundersonparkconference.com
- 13-15—*Gatineau, Quebec, Canada*. 21^e Congrès de Gatineau. Info: congres22@aa.90.org
- 20-22—*Wichita, Kansas*. 62nd Area 25 State Conf. Write: Ch., Box 82, Palmer, KS 66962;
www.kansas-aa.org
- 20-22—*Bowling Green, Kentucky*. Nat'l Tech Workshop. Write: Ch. Box 356, Munfordville, KY 42765; www.naatw.org
- 20-22—*Taos, New Mexico*. 36th Taos Mtn Fiesta. Write: Ch., Box 417, El Prado, NM 87529; www.taosmountainfiesta.org
- 20-22—*Memphis, Tennessee*. Soberpalooza. Write: Ch., 1829 Horseshoe Circle Hughes, AK 72348;
soberpaloozamephis@gmail.com

20-22—*Bellingham, Washington*. Mt. Baker Roundup. Write: Ch., 910 14th St., Bellingham, WA, 98225;
www.mtbakerroundup.org

26-29—*Myrtle Beach, South Carolina*. Fellowship by the Sea. Write: Ch., Box 860, Murrells Inlet, SC 29576;
www.fellowshipbythesea.org

27-29—*Mesa, Arizona*. ICOAA Seminar. Write: Ch., 1320 E. Broadway Rd., Suite 105, Mesa, Arizona; icoaa2019@gmail.com

27-29—*Crescent City, California*. Sobriety by the Sea. Write: Ch., Box 871, Crescent City, CA 95531; www.sobrietybythesea.com

27-29—*Cromwell, Connecticut*. 61st Area 11 Conv. Info: www.ct-aa.org

27-29—*Wakefield, Rhode Island*. Rhody Recovery. Write: Ch., 10 High St., Wakefield, RI 02880; www.rhodyrecovery.com

27-29—*Richland, Washington*. Three Rivers Big Book Weekend. Write: Ch., 3019 Duportail St. #108, Richland, WA 99352;
www.threeriversbigbookweekend.org

October

4-5—*Duluth, Minnesota*. 74th Duluth Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 16771, Duluth, MN 55816; www.duluthroundup.org

4-5—*Sherbrooke, Quebec, Canada*. Tends Les Mains. Write: Ch., 150 Ozias-Leduc, Sherbrooke, QC J1H 1M7;
www.aa-quebec.org

4-6—*Parsippany, New Jersey*. 31st Woman to Woman NE Conf. Write: Ch., Box 548, E. Orange, NJ 07019;
www.newomantowoman.org

4-6—*Independence, Ohio*. 36st Midwest Woman to Woman Seminar. Write: Ch., Box 181393, Cleveland Heights, OH 44118;
www.midwestwtw.org

4-5—*Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada*. Keystone Conf. Write: Ch., 1856 Portage Ave., Winnipeg, MB R3J 0G9; aambco@mts.net

10-13—*Biarritz, France*. Third Biarritz Internat'l EN Speaking Conv. Info: www.aaconventionbiarritz.com

11-12—*Louisville, Kentucky*. 28th Falls City Conv. Write: Ch., Box 37137, Louisville, KY 40233; www.louisvillehostcommittee.com

11-13—*Lewiston, Michigan*. Michigan Women's Conf. Write: Ch., 4700 N. Red Oak Rd., Lewiston, MI 49756; www.miwwca.com

11-13—*Houston, Texas*. Southwest Reg. Forum. Write: Forum Coord., Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163;
regionalforums@aa.org, www.aa.org

16-20—*Tossa de Mar, Costa Brava, Spain*. Costa Brava Internat'l EN Speaking Conv. Write: Ch., Box 8542, La Crescenta, CA 91011; www.costabravaconvention.com

18-19—*London, Ontario, Canada*. 66th Western ON Conf. Info: www.wocaa.ca

18-19—*Ottawa, Ontario, Canada*. Eastern ON Conf. Write: Ch., Intergrupp, 211 Bronson Ave., Rm 108, Ottawa, ON, K1R 6H5; www.ottawaaa.org

18-20—*Milwaukee, Wisconsin*. Area 75 Conf. Write: Ch., Box 70438, Milwaukee, WI 53207; www.eventbrite.com

18-20—*Puerto Peñasco, Sonora, Mexico*. Rocky Point Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 10756, Glendale, AZ 85318;
www.rockypointroundup.org

25-26—*St. Cloud, Minnesota*. St. Cloud Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 125, St. Cloud, MN 56302; www.stcloudroundup.org

25-27—*Bossier City, Louisiana*. 74th Tri-State Conv. Write: Ch., 2800 Youree Dr., Ste 362, Shreveport, LA 71104;
www.aa-shreveport.org

25-27—*Branson, Missouri*. Colors of Fall. Write: Ch., 5229 Fuller Drive, Kansas City, MO 64113; www.wamo-aa.org

25-27—*Buffalo, New York*. Buffalo Fall Conv. Write: Ch., 17 Gierlach St., Sloan, NY 14212;
www.buffalooany.org

25-27—*Greensburg, Pennsylvania*. 79th Laurel Highlands Conf. Write: Ch., Box 6, Bovard, PA 15619; apollo22@comcast.net

31-3—*Honolulu, Hawaii*. Hawaii Conv. Write: Ch., Box 23434, Honolulu, HI 96823;
www.annualhawaiiiconvention.com

November

1-3—*Fort Smith, Arkansas*. Border City Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 5800, Ft. Smith, AR 72913

1-3—*Rehoboth Beach, Delaware*. Bill and Bob's Book on the Beach. Write: Ch., Box 293, Rehoboth Beach, DE 19971; wearenotsaints@gmail.com

1-3—*Lancaster, Pennsylvania*. E. PA Gen. Svc Conv. Info: convention@area59.org

1-3—*Warwick, Rhode Island*. NE Woman to Woman Conf. Write: Ch., 3 N. Howard Ave, Unit 8, N. Providence, RI 02911; www.womantowomannewengland.com

1-3—*Houston, Texas*. 3rd Nat'l Corrections Conf. Write: Ch., Box 16393, Houston, TX 77088; www.nationalcorrectionsconference.org

1-3—*Repentigny, Québec, Canada*. 37^{ieme} Congrès de Repentigny. Write: Ch. 415-739 Rue Norte Dame, Repentigny, QC J5Y 1N1

8-9—*Houma, Louisiana*. 39th Bayouland Jamboree. Write: Ch., Box 2251, Houma, LA 70361; www.thebayoulandjamboree.org

8-10—*Alexandria, Louisiana*. CENLA Sobermania. Write: Ch., 3416 Mac Lee Dr., Alexandria, LA 71303; www.sobermaniaman.org

8-10—*Framingham, Massachusetts*. MA State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 1085, Mansfield, MA 02048; www.aaemass.org

8-10—*Lake Junaluska, North Carolina*. Southern States Svc Assembly. Write: Ch., Box 1368, Knightdale, NC 27545; www.area62.org

8-10—*Medford, Oregon*. OSYPAA. Write: Ch., Box 5296, Central Point, OR 97502; www.aa-oregon.org

8-10—*Montreal, Quebec, Canada*. Area 87 Conv. Write: Ch., 3920 rue Rachel Est, Montreal, QC H1X 1Z3; congres@aa87.org

15-17—*Asunción, Paraguay*. Primera Convención Sudamericana. Info: convencionsudamericanaaa@gmail.com

22-24—*Ardmore, Oklahoma*. 36th Red River Valley Rally. Write: 14192 Little Rd., Kingston, OK 73439; www.redrivervalleyrally.com

29-1—*Bloomington, Minnesota*. Founder's Day Wknd. Write: Ch., Box 8327, Minneapolis, MN 55408; www.foundersdaymn.org

29-1—*Gulfport, Mississippi*. Gratitude Roundup. Info: www.aagulfcoast.org

29-1—*Wilmington, North Carolina*. Conv. Estatal Hispana de NC. Escribir: 8138 Turkey Hwy, Turkey, NC 28328

December

6-8—*St. Michaels, Maryland*. Bill and Bob's Book Into Action. Write: Ch., Box 112, Crownsville, MD 21032; wearenotsaints@gmail.com

28-31—*Södertälje, Stockholm, Sweden*. SCANCYPAA. Info: www.scancypaa.org

January 2020

17-19—*Christchurch, New Zealand*. 57th National Conv. Write: Ch., Box 10139, Christchurch, NZ 8145; www.aaconvention.org.nz

24-26—*Springfield, Illinois*. 15th Journey Continues Conf. Write: Ch., Box 10244, Springfield, IL 62791; www.journeycontinues.org

24-26—*Galveston, Texas*. SETA Conv. Write: Ch., Box 301, Pearland, TX 77588; www.aa-seta.org

24-26—*Cambridge, Massachusetts*. Freedom Trail Conf. Info: bgbbwknd@gmail.com

February

21-23—*Nashua, New Hampshire*. NE Reg. Svc. Assembly. Info: www.neraasa.org

28-1—*Honolulu, Hawaii*. 27th Aloha Roundup. Write: Ch., 404 Kapahulu Ave., Honolulu, HI; www.aloharoundup.com

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