

■ 18th World Service Meeting 'One Meeting—Many Languages—One Fellowship'

Delegates representing A.A. the world over, from Japan to South Africa, from Australia to Finland, gathered in New York City for the 18th World Service Meeting (WSM), October 24-28. Keynote speaker Keith K. of South Africa feels that: "never through the passage of time has there existed a design for living so perfect, so all encompassing, so inclusive as A.A. ...And so here we are this week, all unique in our diversities, yet so alike in our experiences. Separated from each other geographically yet unified in spirit. Different in our cultures, languages and origins, yet bonded by a common direction. And we speak with one voice, carry one message, transcend the barriers of many languages and represent one Fellowship."

Most of the delegates—48 of them, representing 35 far-flung countries—had journeyed far to the Crowne Plaza Hotel, where the meeting took place. The brainchild of visionary A.A. co-founder Bill W., the WSM was established in 1969 and is held every other year; the site alternates between New York and a country outside the U.S./Canada structure. There is simultaneous translation into Spanish.

The 18th WSM kicked off the afternoon of Sunday, October 24, with registration and a reception for delegates and their guests. This was followed by a "Twelve Traditions" play, performed by members of the General Service Office staff, and the traditional Red Ball A.A. meeting, where delegates had the chance to greet old friends and make new ones. Late that same afternoon Greg M., general manager of G.S.O. New York and vice chairperson, called the roll and provided a brief orientation. Maria F. of Spain

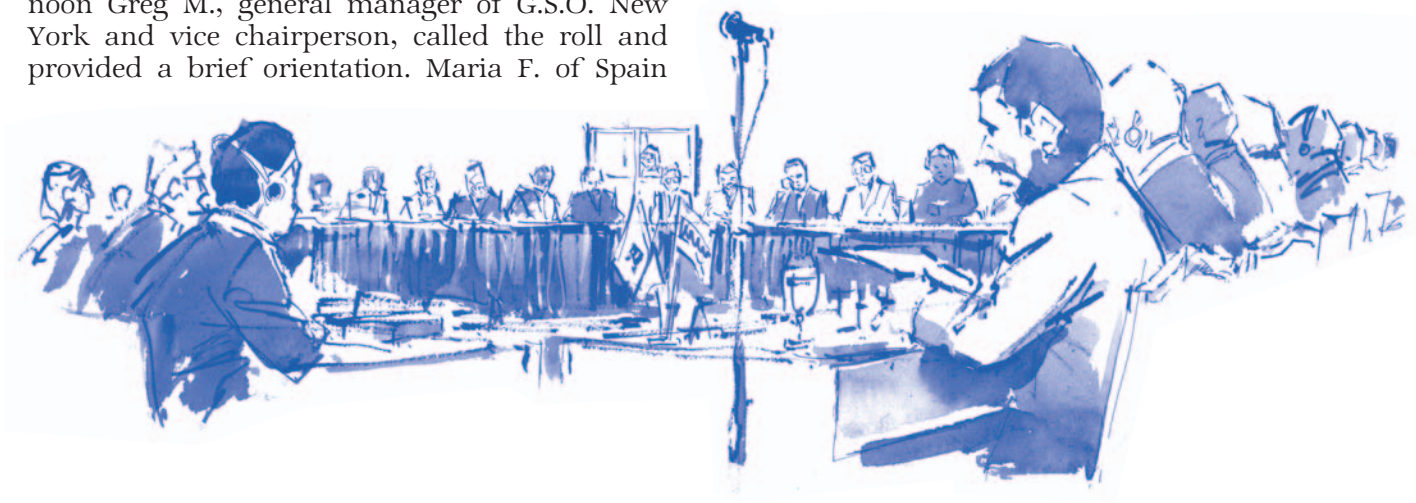
read the Statement of Purpose: "...to carry the message to the still-suffering alcoholic, wherever in the world he or she may be..."

The next four days were given over, with rarely a pause, to presentations and discussions, reports of interim zonal meetings, workshops and the meetings of the four standing WSM committees—Agenda, Literature/Publishing, Policy/Admissions/Finance, and Working With Others—and their respective reports and suggestions.

Some notable recommendations and reports of the 18th WSM committees: The Literature/Publishing Committee, after reviewing the draft of a service piece on sponsorship between countries, recommended that it be titled "Country-to-Country Sponsorship—Carrying the A.A. Message Worldwide," and that it be printed by A.A. World Services, Inc., and made available to the Fellowship worldwide.

The Policy/Admission/Finance Committee reported that requests by Lithuania and the Dominican Republic to participate in the 18th WSM had been approved.

The Working With Others Committee discussed the challenges and successes in carrying the A.A. message into correctional facilities. One delegate noted that because many of his country's early members came from correctional facilities, the prison administrators have a very good impression of the A.A. Fellowship and allow A.A. access to all facilities. Other delegates shared that access



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to correctional facilities is unpredictable, because it often depends upon whether correctional facilities personnel are willing to let the meeting happen. Clearance procedures pose a challenge in some countries.

The presentations, 27 in all, were the glue of the general sessions and covered a kaleidoscope of subjects dear to A.A.s in service across the globe.

The topic “Singleness of Purpose—Problems Other than Alcohol” elicited thoughtful sharing. John H. of Ireland felt that, “The single most important factor in creating unity is working together to solve our common problem—alcoholism. When a person in a meeting introduces himself as ‘an alcoholic and a something else,’ he is stating that he is somehow different from the others in the room.”

On “Reaching Ethnic Communities,” Goldie M. of New Zealand declared, “Maori philosophy is, ‘Show me, do not tell me,’ which of course brings us back to our own tradition of attraction rather than promotion. I honestly believe this to be the case in all ethnic communities.... The problems we face in Asia/Oceania today are roughly the same as those faced anywhere else in the world, but fortunately, like all other zones, we do not see a problem as a ‘problem’—simply as an opportunity to overcome a difficulty and further carry the message.”

Sharing on a matter uppermost in delegates’ thoughts, “Country-to-Country Sponsorship,” Antonio C. of Mexico said, “Today we have a formal sponsorship relation with Cuba. Since 1993, when the first group was established in Havana, Cuba has allowed Mexico to be its sponsoring country.... Every three months, Mexican trustees and delegates travel to Cuba to share experience

on the Three Legacies, agendas, mechanics, training workshops and materials. The Cuban A.A.s have worked hard, with great love and intensity, to help others achieve sobriety. Three months ago they celebrated the opening of group 200 in Cuba.”

During the general sessions of the WSM there were reports from individual countries. Some announced anniversary milestones: In 2004, it was noted, Icelandic A.A.s celebrated their 50th anniversary, as they did in Peru. A delegate from Japan said that in his country a 30th anniversary convention, themed “Hope,” would be held in Fukuoka in 2005. And the U.S./Canada delegate reminded delegates that the 70th anniversary of A.A. will be celebrated at the 2005 International A.A. Convention in Toronto, Ontario, June 30-July 3.

The Lithuanian delegate said that “after several anonymity breaks on national TV last year, our Service Conference decided to seek out nonalcoholic friends who could speak publicly in our behalf.” The upshot: “A highly respected TV journalist, after attending some meetings and reading our literature, dedicated three entire half hours weekly to the miracle of A.A. as seen through his own eyes. Since his is a much-watched show, the effects have been tremendous. Our phones are ringing, books are selling and newcomers are pouring into our meetings.”

Zonal meetings are held in the years between WSMs. Among the five zonal meeting reports presented was a brand-new one—the Sub-Saharan Africa Meeting—which had become a reality just this past June. There have been remarkable success stories, Jean G., of South Africa, related. “Uganda has managed to have a convention at which there were 50 people. Some groups have been ‘paying’ for their meeting venues by painting the hall, keeping the gardens tidy and, in one case, a group produced a play (written by one of the members) about alcoholism and recovery in A.A.” Jean said that “arrangements for the next meeting are already underway for the first weekend in June 2005, again in Johannesburg. The intention is that another country will host the 2007 meeting.”

The 18th WSM closed with a recitation of the Serenity Prayer in all the languages represented by the delegates. As recommended by the Site Selection Committee and approved unanimously by the delegates, the 19th World Service Meeting will be held in Dublin, Ireland, October 15-19, 2006. The theme: “Anonymous But Not Invisible.”

■ G.S.O. Staff Member—A Job Like No Other

The title—staff member—is unremarkable, and members who are unfamiliar with our General Service Office sometimes make the mistake of thinking the job is, too. But in reality, G.S.O. staff members are expected to undertake a range of responsibilities that at different times include (to name a few) corresponding with inmates, coordinating the development of books and pamphlets, informing the public about the Fellowship, and organizing one of the largest international conventions in the world. Staff members need to be both versatile and flexible; their assignments rotate every two years, and they are required to make a smooth transition from, for example, working with Loners and A.A.s in treatment facilities to organizing annual General Service Conference, or from handling public information to coordinating the work of the staff itself.

In most offices, employees with that kind of responsibility would have a good deal of power and prestige. Not so in A.A. Bill W. tells us in Concept XI that in the beginning, the office had “the conventional system of one highly paid staff member with assistants at much lower pay.” This became a serious problem when “suddenly she collapsed, and shortly afterwards one of her assistants did the same.” Bill reorganized the office and instituted “the principle of rotation in a considerably larger staff.” Under this system, every staff member learns to do every job, and making each person equal to the others in both position and pay scale removes the usual incentives of money and power. Bill wrote that doing so “really did not damage us at all. We A.A.s had what the commercial venture often lacks: a dedicated desire to serve, which replaced the usual ego drives. At the same time many of the temptations to destructive competition and office ‘politicking’ were also removed.”

Talk to most staff members, past or present, and they will probably acknowledge that, like A.A.s anywhere, they do occasionally fall prey to a bit of competition—G.S.O. is, after all, an office, and the people who work there are human. But they’ll usually mention human errors *after* talking at length about their appreciation for getting to know members all over the world, the great privilege of working for the Fellowship that saved their lives, how much they’ve learned since coming to G.S.O., or how their commitment to service has deepened. And when asked what they like most about their jobs, they invariably rank the support and friendship of fellow staff members right at the top of the list. “I couldn’t do my job without

my colleagues.” “Staff meetings are incredibly helpful—I would spend twelve hours doing research in the files department without them.”

Relying on others and listening to their experience is vital, because G.S.O.’s principal function is to keep the lines of communication open between the office, the trustees, and the membership as a whole. When Bill W. opened the first tiny office on Vesey Street, the daily workload was enormous. Bill tells us in *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age* (p. 16) that “Bobbie [at the time the only paid employee] for several years faced almost single-handed the huge aftermath of group problems” that followed publication of the Jack Alexander article in the *Saturday Evening Post*. “Writing thousands of letters to struggling individuals and wobbly new groups, she made all the difference during that time when it seemed very uncertain whether A.A. could hang together at all.”

Today’s General Service Office is of course much larger and more complex, as is the Fellowship it serves. In the 1940s there were only a few hundred struggling groups, and a small staff could handle the load. When Bill W. wrote the Twelve Concepts in 1962, there was “one paid helper to every 7,000 members.” Today, eleven staff members serve 60,000 groups in the U.S. and Canada, as well as overseas groups and members who do not have a national service office. (G.S.O. has a total work force of 84, including seven part-time, but the staff, along with a few other A.A. members employed there, are responsible for most of the communication about A.A. matters.)

Beyond communication with the Fellowship, the staff is also responsible for facilitating the work of the General Service Board and the General Service Conference. Each person has a subject assignment (for example, public information, literature, corrections, overseas, Conference, Regional Forums, and so on), and serves as secretary to the related Conference and trustees’ committees. In addition, staff members often travel, by invitation, to A.A. service events throughout the U.S. and Canada, and other parts of the world to represent the office.

While present-day groups have the Traditions for guidance, interpreting them isn’t always easy. A high percentage of calls, letters and e-mails to G.S.O. ask for help on local group problems, and many members believe, incorrectly, that the office will give them a definitive answer. Instead, staff members draw on group files and their colleagues’ wisdom, then share

the experience of other groups that have found solutions to the same or similar difficulties. They encourage people to look to the Traditions and find their own answers, and to involve their own district and area trusted servants. It frequently proves difficult to convince determined members that a local problem can be truly resolved only if it is addressed locally. One staff member says that “we are challenged to present a wide pool of experience, in spite of our own personal viewpoints. It can be very hard to put your own opinions aside.” Another put it this way: “Each group holds the truth inside them; the group conscience is the will of God for that group.” (For examples of some of the queries see following article).

Perhaps because the job of staff member has no parallel in conventional business, other common misconceptions seem to exist. One such idea—that men would not be able to do the job—actually began with Bill W. A man of his time, when Bill wrote the Concepts in 1962, he believed that men could not relate effectively to the Fellowship: “Of course not,” he wrote. “The women can handle this assignment far better, just because they *are* women.” By the late 1970s, when the first male staff member was hired, vestiges of that mind set still lingered and gave the first few men on the staff some awkward times. Today, of course, we take it for granted that anyone with the proper qualifications, regardless of gender, can apply and be hired, and the all-female staff of the early days is now a harmonious group of four men and seven women.

A fairly widespread misconception is that staff jobs are similar to those of area trusted servants. Although the practice of rotating assignments and parity among equals is unique to Alcoholics Anonymous, in all other respects the job is just that—a job. Staff members are not paid for doing Twelfth Step work. They are employees at the General Service Office, but their personal A.A. service takes place in their own home groups, districts, and areas. For the small minority of members who think that rotation should also mean limiting the time a staff member can stay at G.S.O., Bill W.’s discussion in Concept XI sheds light: “...we have found it impractical to set any fixed term of employment. A staff member has to have several years training. Are we then to throw her out, just as she is getting top grade? And if she realized that she could only serve for a fixed period, could we have hired her in the first place? Probably not. These posts are hard to fill because they require just the right ingredients of personality, stability, business and A.A. experience. If we insisted on a fixed term of

service, we would often be forced to engage A.A.s really not qualified. This would be both harmful and unfair.”

Other mistaken ideas include: “A staff member is somebody special.” Anyone who has done the job, past or present, would agree that “we are just a bunch of different people, doing a job.” Or, “Staff members sit around and talk on the phone all day”—in other words, the job is not particularly demanding. One longtime G.S.O. employee debunked that concept with the comment that when she started work there 20 years ago, she noticed that staff members worked from 9 to 5 and generally left the office on time. Today, she observes, they frequently work far into the night and spend hours at their desks on weekends.

In many ways, technology has made it easier to accomplish more work in less time—but it has a flip side. With the prevalence of home computers, for example, many members contact G.S.O. via e-mail. E-mails received at G.S.O. are treated with the same care and attention as communications received by post, courier or fax.”

On a “typical” day (a misnomer if there ever was one), a staff member may go from a planning meeting for the Conference, to catching up with phone calls, letters, and e-mails, to finding a contact for a member who slipped when he was away from his home group, to collecting material for a mailing, to doing research for a trustees’ committee, to sending out literature, to helping plan content for one of the regular bulletins, to planning a trip to an area event or Regional Forum. If it’s Wednesday, the weekly staff meeting is a welcome chance to bring problem letters or situations to the full staff for information, sharing, help, and support.

In reality, the only thing “typical” about any given day is that something unexpected is sure to come up—often one of those “coincidences” that happen almost routinely in Alcoholics Anonymous. One staff member tells the story of a wrong number that recently turned into an opportunity. The caller was a woman who worked for an international aid relief agency. She was looking for information on a shipment going to Haiti and, surprised to be talking to Alcoholics Anonymous, exclaimed that her agency was very concerned about the high rate of alcoholism in that country. As it happened, the staff member she reached had been hoping for a long time to find a way to get the A.A. message into Haiti—and an hour or so later, a package of A.A. literature was on the way.

It’s a job like no other. It’s hard work, long hours, challenges by the bushel. But you never know when a miracle is just around the corner.

Frequently Asked Questions & Answers

Q. Does A.A. sponsor spiritual retreats?

A. Based on Tradition Six, A.A. does not sponsor such gatherings.

Q. Why doesn't the General Service Office give me its opinion when I ask for it?

A. The role of the General Service Office is to share the collected experience of A.A., as expressed in our history and the Twelve Traditions. Pertinent information found in correspondence, A.A. literature and G.S.O.'s Archives is shared to help resolve group problems.

Q. Are raffles within A.A. Traditions?

A. Concerns about raffles seem to be most pronounced if (1) outsiders participate, (2) the prizes are large, (3) prizes are solicited from or donated by non-A.A.s, (4) the funds take the place of voluntary contributions or generate revenue on which A.A. groups or other entities come to depend. Some groups discuss and have concerns about the kind of example raffles are giving to the newcomer or visitor.

The General Service Conference, the closest thing we have to a group conscience for A.A. as a whole in the U.S. and Canada, considered raffles several times, but no Conference recommendations regarding raffles have been made. Some service people at the General Service Conference have tended to voice their dislike of raffles. Others shared their areas' acceptance of raffles. The final decision about raffles lies with the informed group conscience.

Q. What is the difference between an "open" and "closed" A.A. meeting?

A. *Closed* meetings are for A.A. members only, or for those who have a drinking problem and "have a desire to stop drinking." *Open* meetings are available to anyone interested in the A.A. program of recovery from alcoholism. *Open* meetings may be the only opportunity for a guest/observer to see how A.A. works. Whether *open* or *closed*, A.A. groups meetings are conducted by A.A. members, who determine the format of their meetings.

Q. Is the Grapevine a part of A.A.?

A. Yes, the AA Grapevine and La Viña (Spanish magazine), which are referred to as our "meeting in print," are a part of Alcoholics Anonymous. Both magazines have the full support of the General Service Conference of the

U.S./Canada. A.A. groups voted to adopt the Grapevine as the international journal of Alcoholics Anonymous before the Conference was fully established. To affirm the magazine's place in the Fellowship, the 1986 General Service Conference said: "Since each issue of the Grapevine cannot go through the Conference-approved process, the Conference recognizes the A.A. Grapevine as the international journal of Alcoholics Anonymous."

Q. Is there such a thing as an A.A. Club?

A. No. Many clubs act as a landlord for A.A. meetings. A.A. meetings remain autonomous and are not involved in club operations or policy. For more information, request A.A. Guidelines on Clubs from G.S.O.

Q. Does G.S.O. publish meeting lists/schedules, and how do I find a meeting?

A. No. G.S.O. does not publish meeting lists/schedules. G.S.O. publishes a complimentary "List of Central Offices, Intergroups and Answering Services in the U.S./Canada," and one for overseas offices. G.S.O. encourages anyone interested in finding current meeting information to contact the nearest Central Office or Intergroup. You can find the lists of local offices on G.S.O.'s A.A. Web Site at: www.aa.org by clicking on *Contact Local A.A.* or by checking in the local telephone book.

Q. Is a Central/Intergroup office A.A.?

A. Yes. Central/Intergroup offices provide vital local services and Twelfth Step opportunities. A central/intergroup office is an A.A. service office that involves partnership among groups in a community—just as A.A. groups themselves are partnerships of individuals. A central office/Intergroup is established to carry out certain functions common to all the groups—functions which are best handled by a centralized office—and it is usually maintained, supervised, and supported by these groups in their general interest. It exists to aid the groups in their common purpose of carrying the A.A. message to the alcoholic who still suffers. For further information you may request A.A. Guidelines on Central or Intergroup Offices from G.S.O.

Q. Did I see an advertisement for A.A. on television?

A. You may have seen one of the A.A. public service announcements (P.S.A.) for television that was approved by the General Service Conference. A.A. has been producing P.S.A.s to be aired on television as a Public Information tool for almost thirty years. These short spots are not intended to

promote A.A., to say that A.A. is better than any other way of dealing with alcoholism, or that we offer the only solution. Their purpose is to share with others who are going through some of the things we did, that they may find sobriety in A.A. as well. Public Service Announcements produced by A.A. do not offer opinions on outside issues. They are intended to share information about A.A. Our hope is that an alcoholic, or a concerned friend or relative, who hears about A.A. will know that we offer a solution to alcoholism.

Q. What are the criteria for listing A.A. conferences, conventions and similar events in *Box 4-5-9* and the AA Grapevine?

A. G.S.O. defines an A.A. event as one put on by A.A.s, for A.A.s, about A.A. These events must be two or more days long. There would not be enough room to list one-day events or group anniversaries.

Q. We are putting on an A.A. roundup, and some A.A. members are saying that since we are charging a registration fee for attendance at an A.A. function, we are not acting in accordance with A.A. Tradition.

A. There is a big difference between “no dues or fees for A.A. membership” and a registration fee for an A.A. roundup. The word “fee” is a strange one in a self-supporting Fellowship, but someone has to pay the bills! There are many, many A.A. roundups, conventions, and conferences (see the Bulletin Board Section of *Box 4-5-9* or the Calendar of Events in the Grapevine) and in most cases, registration fees are charged to cover the expenses of the event. Often a special event, such as a banquet, is put on for the purpose of raising additional funds to support a central office or the work of an institutions committee.

Depending on the situation, and in the judgement of the planning committee, sometimes special arrangements are made for A.A.s who would like to attend but cannot afford to. There are also events, such as a banquet, which only ticket holders attend, but after the meal the room is opened up to everyone, with or without a ticket, to hear the speaker. But again this decision is made by the planning committee.

Q. We are planning to hold a roundup in our city, and wonder if it's okay to ask the groups for seed money?

A. This can be answered only by the group conscience of the groups concerned. If the group agrees to take a collection at its meeting to support the roundup, a separate basket is often passed for those who wish to give, rather than taking money from the group funds.

■ Newest Staff Member Recalls Her Path

It's a long, winding road from Washington State to Montana, down to Florida and up again to New York. But, says Mary D., the newest staff member at the General Service Office, “that's the path my alcoholism — and then my sobriety — took me.”

Mary, who joined G.S.O. in August, has the literature assignment. “I'm delighted,” she says. “Since the day I got sober, May 5, 1988, I've been an A.A. literature sponge. In fact, the day I knew I was an alcoholic, I read *Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age* and fell in love with the Fellowship. Not long after, I became hooked on our Traditions, which have served as a beacon in every aspect of my life.”

It was not always so. Born in Tacoma, Washington, Mary had her first drink at 13. “By my late teens I was a daily drinker,” she says. “I was a cocktail waitress at 18, and a bartender at 21. My fantasy was to have dangling earrings, a cigarette in one hand, and a beer in the other.”

In the course of about a dozen years she moved 26 times, with new jobs and new boyfriends along the way. She drank through most of her 20s. It was then that her father, age 53, died of alcoholism. “He warned me before dying that alcoholism could be hereditary,” Mary remembers. She was not yet ready to listen, though.

Finally, in 1988, Mary realized she could not go on as she had been. As the Big Book says, “Some day he will be unable to imagine life with alcohol or without it.... He will be at the jump-off place. He will wish for the end.”

It was at this point, while home pacing in the middle of the night, that Mary pleaded out loud for help. Though she did not use the most polite language, and though she did not believe in God, she later realized her call for help was a prayer.

Shortly after, she saw a counselor who recognized the symptoms of alcoholism, and though she had some denial to overcome, it wasn't long before she became a member of A.A.

In Florida, Mary was active in service and, some eight years after sobering up in A.A., graduated from college with a B.A. in organizational communications. Before coming to G.S.O., she owned a local mortgage company in Montana.

At G.S.O., Mary says, “everyone has been so helpful. I love the people, the literature assignment, and the fact that we staff members rotate into new assignments every two years. I feel like the luckiest woman in the world.”

■ A Countdown to Toronto

There is intensive activity on various fronts in preparation for the 2005 International A.A. Convention in Toronto, which is only months away.

“We are at a critical stage,” says Gregg Talley, the convention manager. Gregg, a nonalcoholic, runs a convention planning company, and Toronto is the fourth A.A. Convention he has worked on.

“There is hospitality, registration, making sure everything is in order when people arrive. Basically, we need to make sure all the pieces are coming together,” says Gregg.

The number one issue is housing—ensuring that the tens of thousands of people converging on Toronto have a place to stay. This is complicated by the fact that attendees are very specific about the type of rooms they want, he says. “We’ve gotten through the initial burst of reservations; now we have to figure out how many more rooms we need—and then go contract for them,” he says. “We cannot come up short.”

The number of reservations is on pace with the Convention in Minneapolis in 2000, with between 40,000 and 50,000 expected for this once-every-five-year celebration. Registrations are coming in from every state and province in the U.S. and Canada, and from nearly 100 countries.

“There are a thousand details, and a thousand more,” says Doug R., the G.S.O. staff member on the International Convention assignment. “We work off lists,” he says. “I have a schedule that I have almost memorized.”

Doug is getting about 50 voice mail messages and as many as 50 e-mails every day relating to the Convention, from someone who didn’t get their room assignment to a vendor who has an item he knows everyone at the Convention will want.

Though necessary, it is hard to say no to people, says Lois F., a retired G.S.O. staff member who was on the International Convention assignment in 1990 for Seattle. “I remember how desperately I wanted to accommodate the people who called with requests for rooms closer to the Convention site,” says Lois.

One of Doug’s responsibilities is to make certain all the pieces for the Convention program fit together—not an easy task, given the number of events. For starters, there will be about 250 A.A. meetings, including three marathon meetings running 24 hours a day—one each in English, Spanish, and French.

Doug is sending letters to the 700 to 800 A.A.

members who have been lined up as speakers, letting them know where they are speaking and on what topic. He and his (nonalcoholic) assistant Sharisse Seabury also have to get this information out to the A.A. members chairing the meetings.

Also, says Sharisse, “crossing the border into Canada has been a big issue, and we have fielded a lot of phone calls from people with questions about that.” The A.A. Web site covers the subject in detail, she notes, “and that’s where we direct most of the callers.”

Meanwhile, Gregg is arranging in Toronto for such basics as chairs and tents for meetings and other events. Ten thousand chairs have been secured for seating on the stadium floor, for instance, but another five thousand are needed. In addition, he is working with the city of Toronto to ensure that the Toronto transit system can handle the spike in use that will occur during the Convention. There also are street closings to be arranged and permits to be obtained.

G.S.O. contracts with various companies to handle work related to putting on the International Conventions. A production director is creating a sixty-foot stage in the SkyDome, for instance. Other outside firms will construct the critically important systems for lighting and sound systems in the stadium. And an entertainment agency is employed to line up the music for Thursday’s entertainment.

Over four days in Toronto, from June 30 to July 3, logistics have to be worked out for such events as the Opening Ceremony, Flag Ceremony, four dances, and an Oldtimers’ meeting.

Everything associated with the Convention is on a grand scale, like, for instance, the luncheon for past delegates and past trustees, which will be attended by 400. “There is everything to do, from hiring the hall to sending out invitations to deciding the menu,” says Doug.

Meanwhile, back at G.S.O. New York, a heavily researched and illustrated souvenir book is in the process of being produced.

A.A.’s International Conventions have always depended on the thousands of volunteers from the local A.A. community. On January 23, Doug and Gregg will travel to Toronto for the all-important Volunteer Kick-Off meeting with the A.A. Host Committee. “At the Kick-Off Meeting, we want to explain to the three or four thousand folks who show up what we will need and to fire people up,” says Gregg.

Doug notes that he will be working directly – and very regularly—with the Host Committee up until the day of the Convention.

This meeting is the first opportunity for volunteers to sign up. Though the head of the Host

Committee, Barry W., sums up the job of the volunteers as simply “meeting and greeting,” this work is in fact highly organized.

“We now have our subcommittees in place,” says Barry. “There are 17 of them, including one on accessibility for the handicapped, committees for French speakers and Spanish speakers, an intergroup committee. We try to cover all bases. We want to make sure that everyone who comes to Toronto gets to where they are going.”

The A.A. volunteers, led by team leaders, will be there to greet and help people at the airport, and at the train and bus stations. They will be on the sidewalks, and at the stadium and convention center, and, if the ferry is operating, they will be there too.

“Those wonderful host volunteers are just like the greeters at the doors of an A.A. meeting, except that they are doing it for 40,000 to 50,000 members,” says Doug.

The registration subcommittee of the Host Committee will oversee work aimed at helping the A.A. members make it through the registration process. “We’ll be working the lines,” says Barry. “While a professional company handles the actual registration, our job is to keep people cool and on track,” says Barry. In general, the job of the volunteers “is to show the friendly face of A.A.,” he says.

Some A.A.s from 150 miles are putting together a bus to travel in for the January meeting. Though “there are absolutely no perks” for the work, notes Barry, people are very excited to get involved, to take part in this big event.

Says Doug at G.S.O.: “I cannot tell you how grateful we are that the host volunteers are there. They make it all work.”

In February, Doug and Gregg will travel to another Volunteer Kick-Off meeting—this one in Montreal—to attract French-speaking volunteers to help out with what is expected to be a large number of French-speaking attendees.

“All this preparation is to make A.A.’s 70th Birthday party run as smoothly as possible,” says Doug. “We want people to have a joyous experience, one they will remember the rest of their lives.”

■ Sadly We Report...

Elaine Soroka (nonalcoholic), supervisor of G.S.O.’s records department and support services, died October 24, 2004. Elaine, who came to G.S.O. 11 years ago, will be fondly remembered by many A.A. members, who met her via phone and

e-mail, and in person at Regional Forums.

Elaine’s energy, understanding and humor will be missed by all—especially her team in the records department. Reports one team member, “The last time Elaine [was in the office] she looked at us and as she turned the corner she turned back and said ‘I love you guys, be good and I’ll be back soon.’ We know she will always be watching over us and she will be in our hearts forever.”

■ Dear G.S.O.: You Never Responded to My Letter (or E-mail, or Voice mail)

Letters, e-mails, phone messages, and faxes pour into the General Service Office every day, with questions and comments from A.A. members all over the United States and Canada. Our job is to respond to every one of them, which we are happy to do except... when we can't. For all those wondering why they have not heard from us, the following letter may explain the lack of response.

Dear A.A. Member:

- I was very happy to get your e-mail and, after doing research on your question, I sent you a response. It bounced back, though. I tried several more times, but no luck. Your e-mail box was full, or maybe I got a message that no such e-mail exists. Though you supplied me with your name, you did not include your address or phone number.

(As noted on the A.A. Web site, “when communicating with G.S.O. by e-mail, please include a postal address and phone number, since the best or most complete response is not always possible by e-mail.”)

- Sadly, you neglected to include even your first name in the e-mail you sent us. The policy at G.S.O. precludes responding to anonymous communications, whether by email or post. Though an e-mail may contain a name, we cannot assume it is yours. Be assured, too, that all communication is kept confidential. In fact, the purpose of our policy is to protect your anonymity.

- The question you raise in your letter last week is intriguing. I very much looked forward to sharing with you the experience of other A.A.s on the

subject. Unfortunately, your return address was incomplete and you did not note your phone number. I hope you will write us again, so we can get back to you.

- You sounded very excited on your phone message and I wanted to return your call quickly. Your voice, though, broke up when you were leaving your phone number. Maybe you were calling from a cell phone. Right now, though, we have no way of getting in touch with you. I hope you call back.

At the General Service Office we are always happy to hear from you —and even happier when we can respond.

■ Intergroup Seminar Draws 137 to Denver

The 19th Annual Central Office/Intergroup/A.A.W.S. Seminar in Denver, Colorado, attracted 137 participants, including 47 attending for the first time.

Representatives from central offices and intergroups in the U.S. and Canada meet at the event to share their experiences on topics like budgets, online newsletters, insurance, pricing literature, online sales, and special needs.

The event, which ran from September 30 to October 3, included open mike and ask-it-basket sessions. Participants discussed the broad range of issues involved in running these frontline offices of Alcoholics Anonymous.

G.S.O. New York used to coordinate this event, but starting in 1992, the central offices and intergroups have run it themselves.

The next Intergroup Seminar takes place September 28 to October 2, 2005 in Charlotte, North Carolina.

C.P.C.

■ A.A. Members Show Doctors the Face of Recovery

One week a month, a new group of about a dozen primary care resident physicians in New York City takes a mandated course on alcoholism and substance abuse, which includes meeting

with A.A. members to hear first-hand about Alcoholics Anonymous.

Called the Physician Alcoholism and Addiction Training Program (PAAT), the program takes place over four evenings and pairs A.A. members with the physicians, who are from three major teaching hospitals.

The PAAT program evolved from an original 50-hour program, which was the brainchild of its directors, Dr. Nicolas Pace and Dr. Ed Rabinowitz. The current 20-hour program was developed over the last three years by Drs. Pace and Rabinowitz and clinical director Jan Meredith.

Dr. Pace says his experience has shown him that “doctors don’t believe you can do anything about alcoholism,” making the need for a program like PAAT acute.

“Young doctors, though, are the easiest to train, especially when they see people with long-term recovery from A.A.,” says Dr. Pace, associate professor of medicine at New York University’s School of Medicine and a former chairman of the New York State Governor’s Advisory Committee on Alcoholism,

The program aims to help primary care internal medicine physicians diagnose, treat, and case manage alcoholic and other addicted patients. PAAT operates under the auspices of the Alcoholism Council of New York.

“What we hope to put across to the doctors is that people can recover from this treatable disease, that the doctor can make a difference, that they can treat more than the liver or the body, and that they can help the patient spiritually,” says Dr. Pace.

Dr. Pace and Ms. Meredith contacted A.A.’s General Service Office in July 2003 to ask for help lining up recovering alcoholics for PAAT. G.S.O. contacted Mike L., the Cooperation With the Professional Community (C.P.C.) chairperson for Area 49, Southeast New York, who set up a meeting with Dr. Pace.

Dorothy D., of the C.P.C. Committee of Southeast New York, took on the job of finding A.A. members willing to act as so-called buddies to the physicians. Over the course of four evenings, the A.A. members tell their recovery stories to the doctors, take them to two A.A. meetings, and answer whatever questions they have.

“The goal of the week together is that the physician will be able to speak at length with an A.A. member and learn what A.A. is and how people find A.A. meetings,” says Dorothy.

A nurse educator, Dorothy follows some basic guidelines in choosing A.A. members to participate in the program. “I thought that anyone speaking with doctors should have long-term sobriety,

should be familiar with the Traditions, should know what A.A. is about and that the primary purpose of A.A. is recovery from alcoholism.”

Early in the three-year-old program, says Dr. Pace, “we had as buddies people who were fresh to recovery, thinking that these were people who were close to their bottoms and could make the best case for A.A. Then we saw the value in having people with longer-term sobriety. Rather than seeing chronically relapsing patients in their clinics, the doctors are able to see people with long-term sobriety who have put their lives together with the help of A.A.”

Dorothy aims for a representative cross-section of A.A. members, recruiting men and women, people of different ages, and makes sure to reach beyond the borough of Manhattan for volunteers.

The program runs for about four hours each evening and the buddies are there for two of those hours. On day one, the doctors and A.A. members meet on the premises of the PAAT program and are paired up at random. The doctor and the A.A. member get to know each other over dinner. Dinner is one-on-one with the doctor and the buddy for the four evenings. The physicians and their buddies then go to an A.A. meeting.

On day two, the physicians interview their buddies for a case study the doctors will write up by the end of the week. There is a group meeting of all the physicians and buddies on the third day, and on the fourth day, they attend another A.A. meeting.

The program, which is a mandated part of the training for the residents at a number of teaching hospitals in New York City, including Lenox Hill Hospital, Einstein Medical Center, and New York Hospital Cornell, adds to their already heavy schedules.

“Feeling overburdened, doctors may at first not be crazy about attending this program,” says Dr. Pace. “As far as they are concerned, they already know about alcoholism and alcoholics – they see them in the emergency rooms as unsolved problems.”

Dr. Soteri Polydorou, a second-year resident at Lenox Hill Hospital, went through PAAT in the spring. He agrees that his fellow residents “have a skewed view of alcoholism and addiction,” noting that medical students receive little training in dealing with alcoholics.

“The difficult, refractory alcoholic patients come to color your view as a doctor, so you may think PAAT will not be of much value. Your experience as a medical person may be that repeated interventions have not worked.”

As it turns out, he “enjoyed the process a lot, and found the experience very instructive.”

Hearing first-hand, for instance, about denial was valuable, says Dr. Polydorou. “Knowing about denial is something you can use in your practice, especially when added to the problem that patients suffering the effects of drinking are unwilling to give accurate information. These patients will sometimes talk about upset stomachs but not mention their heavy drinking. The result is you get off the track,” he says

Dr. Polydorou says his visit to the two different A.A. meetings opened his eyes to the scope of Alcoholics Anonymous. “That there are so many A.A. meetings and so many in recovery – it’s mind-boggling.”

Having gone through the weeklong program, he now can “explain to a patient what an A.A. meeting is, and what goes on in one,” he says. “The week at PAAT was a highly positive experience,” he says. He expects the experience will give him and the other doctors the confidence to offer help to their patients.

An A.A. member who has twice participated in the program is Zuben O., who says PAAT was an opportunity “to share his love and enthusiasm for the A.A. program.”

He says that the doctors, though they may have shown signs of fatigue at the beginning of the first evening, became engaged and showed increasing interest as the week wore on.

“My definite impression is that though the doctors were ignorant of alcoholism and of A.A., they were very interested in learning about the subject. It was great to talk to them,” says Zuben. After the A.A. meeting, especially, the doctors opened up and started asking questions, he says.

There were a couple of men at the meeting who obviously had been drinking, and the doctors wanted to know if that was usual. They also were curious about the number of young people they saw, people already in A.A. though still in their early 20s. The doctor who Zuben accompanied to the meeting also asked about the relationship between A.A. and religion.

“The doctors seem to finish the week convinced they could do more for their patients suffering from alcoholism,” says Zuben.

Dr. Pace says, “it is the intention of the PAAT team to expand the program nationally. It is our hope that local A.A.s in the communities where we establish programs will also offer their services as buddies.

“We want to show that alcoholism is a medical and not a moral issue,” says Dr. Pace. “It’s important these young doctors understand that relapses can be part of the disease. If a person has a second heart attack, does the doctor refuse to treat him?” asks Dr. Pace.

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.

February

- 4-6—*Dellroy, Ohio.* Atwood Mid-Winter Conference. Write: Ch., 6414 Fordwick Rd. Cleveland, OH 44130
- 10-13—*Melbourne, Florida.* Spacecoast Roundup. Write: Ch., 720 E. New Haven Ave. Suite #3, Melbourne, FL 32901; www.intergoup@aaspacecoast.org
- 11-13—*Imperial, California.* 15th Annual Imperial Valley Round-Up. Write: Ch., 845 Commercial Ave. #1, El Centro, CA 92243
- 11-13—*Liverpool, New York.* Salt City Mid-Winter Round Up. Write: Ch., Box 367 Syracuse, NY 13029. Email: syracusemidwinterroundup@yahoo.com
- 18-19—*Columbia Falls, Montana.* Into Action Weekend. Write: Ch., Box 83, E. Glacier, MT 59434
- 18-20—*Burlington, Iowa.* 15th Southeast Iowa Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 85, Keosauqua, IA 52565
- 18-20—*North Little Rock, Arkansas.* 23rd Annual Winter Holiday Convention. Write: Ch., Box 26135 Little Rock, AK 26135
- 18-20—*Virginia Beach, Virginia.* 29th Annual Oceanfront Conference. Write: Ch., Box 66173, Virginia Beach, VA 23466
- 18-21—*Mansfield, Massachusetts.* South Eastern Massachusetts Round-Up. Write: Ch., Box 8384 Warwick, RI 02888
- 25-26—*Sikeston, Missouri.* 24th Annual Five Corners Convention. Write: Ch., Box 158 Sikeston, MO 63801
- 25-27—*Honolulu, Hawaii.* Aloha Roundup 2005. Write: Ch., Box 88293, Honolulu, HI 96830; www.aloharoundup.com
- 25-27—*Kansas City, Kansas.* Sunflower Roundup. Write: Ch., 10604 Bluejacket, Overland Park, KS 66214
- 25-27—*Newton, Massachusetts.* 14th Annual Northeast Regional Service Assembly. Write: Ch., Box 373, North Andover, MA 01875;

www.aamass.org/nerassa2005

25-27—*Pattaya, Thailand.* 10th Thailand Roundup “Acceptance is the Key.” Write: Ch., Box 1551, Nana Post Office, Bangkok 10112, Thailand; www.aathailand.org

March

- 4-6—*Denver, Colorado.* Area 10 Spring Assembly. Write: Ch., 5977 S. Pierson St. Littleton, CO 80127
- 4-6—*Linclonshire, Illinois.* 2005 NIA Spring Conference “Spring Into Action”. Write: Ch., Box 591, Lake Villa, IL 60046; Email: NIASpring2005@aol.com
- 4-6—*Newport, Rhode Island.* Rhode Island’s 29th Annual Convention. Write: Ch., 52 Round Ave. 1st Floor Providence, RI 02907; www.rhodeisland-aa.org/ricc/
- 4-6—*Rapid City, South Dakota.* 2005 West Central Regional Service Conference. Write: Ch., Box 533, Black Hawk, SD 57718-0533
- 4-6—*Rochester, New York.* Flower City Fellowship Convention. Write: Ch., 10 Manhattan Sq. Dr. Suite D, Rochester, NY 14607
- 4-6—*Troy, Michigan.* March Round-Up 2005. Write: Ch., Box 44534, Detroit, MI 48244
- 11-13—*Brainerd, Minnesota.* Paul Bunyan Round-Up. Write: Ch., 1003 12th Ave. NE, Brainerd, MN 56401-3414

11-13—*Quebec City, Quebec.* Quebec Convention. Write: Ch., BCSQ 2350 Avenue du Colisee Local 2-16, Quebec, QC G1L 5A1; Email: congresdequebec@hotmail.com

11-13—*Tucson, Arizona.* P.R.A.A.S.A. Write: Ch., Box 373 Glendale, AZ 85311; www.praasa2005.org

18-20—*Charleston, West Virginia.* WV Area 73 Spring Assembly. Write: Ch., 111 Mallory Lane South Charleston, WV 25309

18-20—*Eveleth, Minnesota.* 26th Annual Winter Rap Up. Write: Ch., 4802 W. French Ave. Eveleth, MN 55734

18-20—*Lincoln, Nebraska.* Spring Fling 2005. Write: Ch., Box 30691, Lincoln, NE 68503

18-20—*Portland, Maine.* Northeast Fellowship of the Spirit Conference. Write: Ch., 42 Ryder Rd. Farmingdale, ME 04344; www.nefots.org

18-20—*Richmond, Virginia.* Serenity Weekend. Write: Ch., Box 832 Midlothian, VA 23113

18-20—*South Charleston, West Virginia.* Area 73 Spring Assembly. Write: Ch., 5129 Dover Drive Cross Lanes, West Virginia 25313

24-28—*Manduran East, Western Australia.* Australian National Convention. Write: Ch., Box 3045, Manduran East, Western Australia 6210

25-27—*Honolulu, Hawaii.* 2nd Annual Waikiki Hukilau. Write: Ch., 866 Iwilei Road #226 Honolulu, HI 96817; www.waikikihukilau.net

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 _____, 20 _____

Name of event: _____

Place (city, state or prov.): _____

For information, write: (exact mailing address) _____

Contact phone # (for office use only): _____

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

April

1-3-Cherry Hill, New Jersey. Area 45
General Service Convention 2005.
Write: Ch., Box 1602, Merchantville,
New Jersey 08109; www.snjaa.org

1-3-Columbus, Indiana. 2005 Indiana
State Convention. Write: Ch., 18272
Migro Lane, Goshen, IN 46526

1-3-Springfield, Illinois. 24th Annual
2005 Southern Illinois Spring
Conference "I Am Responsible."
Write: Ch., Box 7202, Springfield, IL
62791-7202

8-10-Merrillville, Indiana. 12th Annual
Calumet Area Roundup. Write: Ch.,
Box 180, Wheeler, IN 46393;
www.calumetararounidup.com

8-10-Cape May, New Jersey.
Southeastern Pennsylvania Intergrup
Association Roundup. Write: Ch., 444
N. 3rd St., Suite 3E, Philadelphia, PA
19123

22-24-Chipty, Florida. Chipley County
Round-Up. Write: Ch., Box 314
Graceville, FL 32440

29-1-Canandaigua, New York. 20th
Annual Conference of the Lakes.
Write: Ch., Box 982 Canandaigua,
NY 14424

May

6-8-Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. 63rd
Lauel Highland's Conference. Write:
Ch., 1470 Blossom Hill Rd.
Pittsburgh, PA 15234

6-8-Saarbrücken, Germany. 2005
International German Language
Convention. Write: Ch., Querstrasse
14, 66399 Mandelbachtal, Germany

13-15-Rhinelander, Wisconsin. Area 74
2005 Spring Conference. Write: Ch.,
Box 1241 Eagle River, WI 54521.

19-22-Peloponnese, Greece. 11th Inter-
national Convention. Write: Ch., Box
86002 18503 Eleftrikios Stathmos
Piraeus, Greece

27-28-Magog, Quebec, Canada. Open
Door. Write: Ch., 177 Victoria
Magog, QC Canada J1X 2J7

27-30-Daytona Beach, Florida. 15th
Daytona Spring Conference. Write:
Ch., Box 951903, Lake Mary, FL
32795

27-30-Harker Heights, TX. Memorial
Weekend Campout. Write: Ch., 10725
FM 2086 Box 900 Temple, TX 76501.