

■ Anonymity and the 2015 International Convention

No doubt about it — a great deal has changed in the way many A.A. members communicate since 2010 when over 50,000 members gathered in San Antonio for our previous International Convention. Devices have changed. Platforms have changed.

However, our principle of anonymity has not changed.

Why has anonymity remained so vital to the well-being of our Fellowship? While the reasons are numerous, of particular importance is that anonymity provides a safe way for someone struggling with alcoholism to seek help from A.A. without worrying that anyone else will know. Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee Frances Brisbane has referred countless alcoholics to A.A. in her years working as a professional in the field of alcoholism, and insists, “Of all the things I tell them about A.A., it’s the principle of anonymity that most encourages them to venture to their first meeting.”

Of course, this does not mean that A.A. is a secret organization, and A.A.’s International Conventions are far from secret events! While A.A. members do not disclose full names or faces when sharing information about A.A. through public media, our members still find many ways to cooperate with our friends in the press, in order to let the world know that we have found a solution to the fatal problem of alcoholism. Our online Press/Media Room on the A.A. website, www.aa.org, offers a wealth of information for media professionals about our program of recovery, our worldwide fellowship, and how A.A. members are available to cooperate with the press.

Likewise, a fully staffed (and very busy) press room will be part of our International Convention in Atlanta. Let’s face it: a gathering of more than 50,000 formerly hopeless alcoholics who will come together in sobriety to celebrate 80 years of being happy, joyous and free is newsworthy. As Jim M., the Public Information coordinator at the General Service Office, explains: “We want the press to know that ‘we’ are in Atlanta to celebrate 80 years of A.A., without revealing through public media any personal identities that make up that ‘we.’ This is how we keep the focus on our message, rather than on any one messenger.”

As chairman of the General Service Board, (nonalcoholic) Terry Bedient sees anonymity not as an act of self-

restraint, but as an active demonstration of love and service. “Anonymity is a gift each member makes to the Fellowship. It is humility in action, a voluntary decision made by A.A. members to set aside personal recognition so that the A.A. principles and program can have center stage instead.”

Today, the ability to share photo and video content via handheld devices is almost instantaneous. And A.A. members are all about sharing, right? When it comes to decisions about the individual practice of anonymity, a slightly paraphrased line from our Big Book provides a helpful

suggestion: “It is not the matter of [sharing] that is in question, but when and how to [share].” (page 98) Many A.A. members are also familiar with the phrase in *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, “restraint of tongue and pen.” This principle of prudent reflection before communicating has served many an A.A. member well. As one member recently shared in an A.A. meeting, “I also need to practice restraint of ‘click and send!’”

While tens of thousands of sober alcoholics are expected to attend the Convention, approximately two million more members around the world will *not* be there. Those fortunate to be enjoying the Convention experience first-hand, caught up in feelings of deep gratitude, often want to “pass it on” to those faithful members back home who are making sure local A.A. phones are being answered, coffee is made and chairs are set

up, and other local services continue uninterrupted for any newcomers entering A.A. while some of us are away from our home groups.

Although posting photos and videos from one’s Convention experience on social media might seem to be the “easier, softer way” to tell others about it, posting anything that discloses one’s membership in A.A. in a publicly accessible area of the Internet is not in keeping with A.A.’s tradition of anonymity (see “Anonymity Online,” available on the aa.org website).

Fortunately, there are other ways members can share the experience. Members might share a photo via email with friends back home (see “A.A. Guidelines — Internet” for suggestions about using email and the ‘bcc’ function), or upload content to a password-protected file-sharing platform they maintain. And while it may seem down-



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right old-fashioned in the digital world, some members prefer to wait until they return home so they can share photos and stories in person with other A.A.s over a cup of coffee and fellowship.

A.A. members may wish to let others know about the anonymity-protected video of the Convention flag ceremony that is streamed through the A.A. website the weekend of the Convention.

Of course, no one in A.A. can enforce any “rules” about how another A.A. member practices personal anonymity at the level of public media. Authority in our Fellowship resides in our informed group conscience, often captured in Conference-approved literature like the pamphlet “Understanding Anonymity.” This pamphlet, and other resources mentioned here, can help A.A. members make the most-informed decisions. The great liberty enjoyed by A.A. members does indeed come with great responsibility.

Like so many of Bill W.'s writings, an article from the November 1960 issue of A.A. Grapevine offers principles that still ring true today. While Bill was writing at the time about television, the ideas he expressed are still wonderful guides for A.A. members sharing their experience in an increasingly digital world:

“A vast communications net now covers the earth, even to its remotest reaches. Granting all its huge public benefits, this limitless world forum is nevertheless a hunting ground for all those who would seek money, acclaim and power at the expense of society in general....

“Therefore nothing can matter more to the future welfare of AA *than the manner in which we use this colossus of communication*. Used unselfishly and well, the results can surpass our present imagination. Should we handle this great instrument badly, we shall be shattered by the ego demands of our own people, often with the best of intention on their part. Against all this, the *sacrificial spirit* of AA's anonymity at the top public level is literally our shield and our buckler. Here again we must be confident that love of AA, and of God, will always carry the day.”

We hope to see you in Atlanta — and if we do, we won't tell anyone!

Here are some helpful suggestions for practicing the principle of anonymity in Atlanta:

WHERE? Please do not take photographs or videos during any of the meetings at the International Convention...

WHO? Please be considerate so you do not capture images of A.A. members, family members and friends in or around Convention venues who did not give permission and may not wish to appear in your photos/videos...

WHEN? Please get permission first before taking photos — and consider having a quick conversation about how you'll protect everyone's anonymity...

WHAT? Please look around for Convention signs, logos, badges or other A.A. items that, if captured in your photo, might suggest A.A. membership...

WHY?

...because Anonymity is OUR responsibility!

2015 International Convention Countdown

Before you know it, thousands of A.A.s will gather together to celebrate A.A.'s Birthday in Atlanta, Georgia, July 2-5, 2015. Excitement continues to build and the local volunteer host committee is ready to roll out the mega welcome mat for members from around the world who will join in the celebration, “80 Years — Happy, Joyous and Free!”

There is still time to make plans. Registration for the 2015 International Convention remains open throughout the Convention. There is plenty of room at the Georgia World Congress Center to welcome all registered attendees for the hundreds of A.A. meetings that will occur and there is ample seating in the Georgia Dome for the Big Meetings that take place on Friday and Saturday evening, and the Sunday morning Closing Meeting. But don't forget the “Party in the Park” on Thursday night in Centennial Olympic Park to kick off Convention activities!

Hotel rooms are still available in Atlanta and outlying areas through the Convention Housing Bureau. There will be bus shuttles or access to a MARTA station from hotels booked through the Convention Housing Bureau. We continue to expand these to meet the needs of our attendees. Dorms have been added to our housing mix for those who are interested in lower room rates and information can be accessed through a link on the housing page from our website. These are available on a first-come, first-served basis, and reservations must be done directly through the dorm facility, *not through the Housing Bureau*. The dorm apartments are conveniently located at Georgia State University and Georgia Tech in Atlanta.

For information about the Convention and Atlanta, visit: www.aa.org.

■ General Service Conference Looks to the Future

April 19-25, 2015 will mark the 65th Annual Meeting of the General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous in the U.S. and Canada. Comprised of 93 delegates from across the U.S. and Canada, along with the 21 trustees of the General Service Board, directors and staff of A.A.W.S. and the Grapevine, the 2015 Conference will be the culmination of many months of hard work throughout the U.S./Canada Fellowship. Known as A.A.'s annual business meeting, the Conference will address a host of items of interest to the Fellowship as a whole and reflect on A.A.'s upcoming anniversary with the theme "Celebrating 80 Years of Recovery, Unity and Service — The Foundation for Our Future."

In session for just a single week, the Conference process is actually a year-round endeavor — a collaborative effort linking individual members, groups, districts, areas, regions, and A.A.'s service boards and General Service Office together in search of the collective voice and vision that will guide the Fellowship. Starting back in 1951 with the first General Service Conference and continuing this year with the 65th, the annual journey from one Conference to another touches all aspects of the Fellowship. From the election of new delegates and trusted servants, to the deliberation of groups, districts and areas across the U.S. and Canada, to the percolation of agenda items and background material throughout the service structure, the Conference process picks up steam over the course of a year, as each interconnected segment of the service structure does its part, building a bridge from individual group members and their G.S.R.s to area delegates and the Conference itself. From start to finish, the Conference is a team effort, "an enormous, fascinating and absorbing challenge," says one G.S.O. staff member and former Conference coordinator. "Like putting together the pieces of a giant puzzle."

Characterized by broad discussion, serious deliberation, and a heartfelt search to find A.A.'s group conscience, like each of the Conferences before it, the 65th and its 134 Conference members will be guided by the rich principles handed down to each new generation of A.A.s as an inheritance from the founders and early members: the Three Legacies of Recovery, Unity and Service.

Held at the Crowne Plaza Times Square, New York, NY, the 65th Conference will address this year's theme and the many agenda items submitted through the service structure, focusing presentation/discussion sessions on such topics as "Diversity in A.A. — Our Heritage of

Inclusion," "Safety and Respect — Practicing the Principles Begins in our Home Group," and "Safeguarding our Traditions through the Evolution of Technology." In addition, the Conference will also consider the topic "Inventory — Looking Back to Move Ahead," and will discuss a series of inventory questions as stipulated by the 2012 Conference, engaging Conference members in the final leg of a three-year inventory of the overall effectiveness of the Conference and the Conference process itself.

In an effort to garner as much input from the Fellowship as possible, while recognizing the realities of developing and distributing Conference materials in a timely fashion, the deadline for receiving potential Conference agenda items was moved to Dec. 15. Additionally, the process of making Conference material

available has expanded so that Conference members can receive agenda items and background material in three different formats: hard copy, CD, or electronically. This year's Conference will also experiment with electronic voting, introduced on a trial basis following a 2014 Conference Advisory Action. The trial will take place over two Conferences, in 2015 and 2016, with a report evaluating electronic voting to be submitted for consideration by the 2017 Conference Committee on Policy/Admissions.

As A.A. approaches its 80th anniversary, to be celebrated at the 14th International Convention in Atlanta, Georgia, July 2-5, 2015, the Three Legacies stand as familiar and durable guideposts to the Fellowship's future. Built on the experience of A.A.'s early years, these Legacies point the way from hopelessness to hope, from chaos to coherence. Articulated by Bill W. in *A.A. Comes of Age* (p. 49), "The chief inheritances of the first twenty years of Alcoholics Anonymous are the Legacies of Recovery, of Unity, and of Service. By the first we recover from alcoholism; by the second we stay together in unity; and by the third our society functions and serves its primary purpose of carrying the A.A. message to all who need it and want it."

So, as the 2015 General Service Conference grows closer, A.A. members throughout the U.S./Canada service structure begin to turn their attention to A.A.'s future. In the words of a past delegate from Alberta/N.W.T., "The strength of A.A. in the future depends upon our ability today to carry the message not just of recovery, but also of unity and service. I owe this program so very much. It has given me my life and a new way to live. I need to ensure that the doors are open for those yet to come, as they were kept open for me."



■ The Seventh Tradition Corner

"In 2006, my job took me to Nagoya, Japan for a three month period. At that time, I was 17 years sober, I was alternate chairperson for my area and had a good family life. In my bags, I had my A.A. literature, and I was confident that I could easily find an A.A. meeting there. There's only one thing that I forgot: I don't speak Japanese! After a while, even with my literature, my sobriety was jeopardized by not being able to talk to another alcoholic or to find a meeting place. I asked for help from the hotel staff where I was staying, but they spoke very little English. I explained to them that I was looking for an A.A. meeting. They all asked: 'What is A.A.?' I briefly explained that it is a fellowship of men and women who share their experience with each other and, in doing so, they do not drink. They all answered that they liked to drink with their friends and that A.A. was not for them.

"One evening, while attending a baseball game, I felt isolated, alone in the world and, not able to share that with another alcoholic, I ordered a large beer. I was scared; I didn't want to drink. The glass was about six inches from my mouth, and all of a sudden I thought of the friends with whom I served in Montreal and I told myself that I should call them before taking that first drink. I left the ball game, returned to the hotel, and called my delegate back home to tell her about my situation. I told her I couldn't find help and couldn't talk about my situation to anyone who would understand me. She listened to me and told me that she would send an email to the A.A. General Service Office in New York, asking for help.

"What a surprise I had the next morning. I found in my emails the names of 15 English members of Alcoholics Anonymous living in Japan! So I started to look for an alcoholic, as Bill W. had done in Akron, 79 years ago. I did not want to drink and I knew that if I took that first drink, I was done!

"After six unsuccessful calls (it is funny: the Seventh call and the Seventh Tradition!), I succeeded in speaking to an alcoholic. In fact, 'speaking' is a big word: Rather, I started crying, because hearing his voice gave me a sense of security that I had lost. One alcoholic, talking to another!

"With the help of this fellow A.A. member, I finally found a meeting. There was a literature display and coffee at that meeting, just like at home. I spoke with several alcoholics twice a week and came back to Canada with my sobriety. Without the Seventh Tradition, God knows what would have happened to me."

*Amour et Service,
Richard B., Quebec*

Note: This is the second in a series of articles on the Seventh Tradition. We welcome your Seventh Tradition/Self-Support experience. Please send to G.S.O. in care of the Literature coordinator.

■ Opening for General Manager of G.S.O.

The General Service Board has begun the search for a general manager of the General Service Office to replace Phyllis H., who will retire as of October 2015.

The qualifications for the position are:

- Ten years minimum sobriety.
- Demonstrated leadership ability in A.A. and in a business/professional career.
- Proven general management experience, preferably as general manager of a multifunctional organization: understanding of organizational issues, planning and controls, financial reporting, human resources practices, and information technology applications and trends.
- A.A. service experience: knowledge of the general service structure and A.A. history.
- Effective communication skills, both verbal and written; ability to report clearly and concisely on G.S.O. operations to the appropriate boards, the General Service Conference, and the Fellowship at large.
- Demonstrated understanding of the unique nature of A.A., the structural limitations and balances of authority in A.A. services, and the ability to work with and resolve conflicting viewpoints.

In seeking applications for all vacancies in Alcoholics Anonymous, the Fellowship is committed to creating a large applicant file of qualified persons, which reflects the inclusiveness and diversity of A.A. itself. All applicants will be considered by the Search Committee of the General Service Board. Applications will be treated with the utmost confidence.

To apply, both business/professional and A.A. résumés are required. To request an A.A. résumé form, please email Sandra Wilson, wilsons@aa.org. Both résumés should be sent to the attention of Terry Bedient at the General Service Office, 475 Riverside Drive, 11th Floor, New York, NY 10115, no later than April 15, 2015.

■ Opening for G.S.O. Staff Member

G.S.O. is pleased to invite candidates to apply for the position of staff member at the General Service Office in New York. G.S.O. staff are active members of Alcoholics Anonymous who have a minimum of six years sobriety. They are responsible for work that is specific to each of our 11 service desks, rotating to a new office and assignment every two years. Assignments include Corrections, Public Information, Treatment/Special Needs-

Accessibilities, Literature, International and Conference. Ongoing communication with A.A.s on all aspects of recovery and service is a vital part of this work. Staff also represent the General Service Office at A.A. functions throughout the U.S. and Canada and provide the primary staff support for the General Service Board and its committees as well as the annual General Service Conference.

Minimum qualifications include the following: excellent communication and organizational skills, good computer skills, the flexibility to travel and work flexible hours, the ability to work independently and as a team member, as well as willingness to relocate to New York City, if necessary. A.A. service knowledge and experience will also be taken into consideration. In addition, fluency in French and/or Spanish will be considered a plus.

To request an application form, contact: Staff Coordinator, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163, or by email: staffcoordinator@aa.org. The deadline for receipt of applications is May 1, 2015.

■ Literature Appointed Committee Member

The trustees' Literature Committee is seeking to fill the position of appointed committee member (ACM) and would appreciate any recommendations. Some of the qualities most desirable for an appointed committee member on the trustees' Literature Committee are:

- Strong experience in carrying the A.A. message through literature.
- Solid service experience and the ability to work within the A.A. committee structure.
- Expertise and familiarity with the use of current technology and communication tools.
- Availability for meetings of this trustees' committee held during General Service Board weekends (usually the last weekend in January, July and October), as well as one meeting during the General Service Conference in April and 5-10 evening conference calls throughout the year.
- At least five years of continuous sobriety.
- The ability to digest background documentation on a broad range of topics related to A.A.

In seeking applications for all vacancies in Alcoholics Anonymous, the Fellowship is committed to creating a large applicant file of qualified persons which reflects the inclusiveness and diversity of A.A. itself.

To obtain a résumé form for this opening please email literature@aa.org or call the Literature desk at G.S.O. at (212) 870-3019. Deadline for applications is April 15, 2015.

■ South Orange Group Turns 75

The South Orange Group of Alcoholics Anonymous — known as the “Mother Group” of New Jersey — recently held a special weekend-long celebration of its 75th anniversary. Weekend events included 40 meetings, presentations and the showing of the newly revised video, *Markings on the Journey*.

Held in November 2014, the anniversary celebration featured sessions on the growth of A.A. in New Jersey, history of the Big Book, a Grapevine play, and a buffet dinner with three A.A. speakers.

The colorful history of this pioneering group, originally called the New Jersey Group, was detailed in a Fall 2014 article of “This Day,” the Northern New Jersey (Area 44) newsletter: “It was both the best of times and yet the worst of times during the spring, summer and fall of 1939 as A.A.’s fourth group, The New Jersey Group, took shape in South Orange, N.J. On April 10, 1939, the fledgling fellowship had finally codified its program of action with the publication of *Alcoholics Anonymous*. The book boldly proclaimed, ‘We, of *Alcoholics Anonymous*, are more than one hundred men and woman who have recovered from a seemingly hopeless state of mind and body.’ Bill would later write of the pioneers: ‘Two-thirds were located in Akron.... Most of the remainder were located in or near New York City....’ Most of the ‘New York City’ members were actually from New Jersey. These pioneering members of the New York contingent would gather at Bill’s home at 182 Clinton Street in downtown Brooklyn and sign the first copy of the book which had just rolled off the Cornwall Press. This crowning glory would be short lived as dark clouds formed on the horizon.”

These “dark clouds” took the form of Bill and Lois’s eviction from 182 Clinton Street and the need to relocate the meetings that were being held there on a weekly basis — not to mention relocating Bill and Lois themselves!

Luckily, the New Jersey A.A. members took up the slack, and Bill and Lois temporarily moved into the Upper Montclair, New Jersey, home of Hank and Kathleen P. Hank was an early member and Bill’s partner in getting the Big Book written and published, and they shared A.A.’s first office space at 17 William Street in Newark.

Not long after, Horace C., a New York pioneer, would donate the use of his family’s Green Pond, NJ cabin, and Bill and Lois shuttled back and forth from Green Pond to the little office of Honor Dealers in Newark where Bill and Hank had written the book and were desperately trying to eke out a living selling automobile polish.

As Bill W. recalls it in A.A. *Comes of Age* (p. 11): “The weather was warm, and we lived in a summer camp on a quiet lake in western New Jersey, the gracious loan of a good A.A. friend and his mother.... The summer had been spent trying to repair the bankrupt affairs of the A.A. book, which money-wise had failed

so dismally after its publication. We had a hard time keeping the sheriff out of our little cubicle of an office at 17 William Street.”

On a Sunday afternoon, however, in May 1939, the very first meeting of what was to become the New Jersey Group of Alcoholics Anonymous took place in the home of Hank and Kathleen in Upper Montclair, and meetings that had been formerly held in Brooklyn were held in New Jersey for the next five or six weeks. “The meetings began at 4 p.m.,” notes the area newsletter, “and went most of the night. They rotated speakers for the first portion, according to Jimmy B. who was living at Hank and Kathleen’s home at that time. These were dinner meetings, with Herb D. of South Orange paying for a ‘big spread.’ The wives always attended these along with their spouses.”

Some months later, on October 22, 1939, the first-ever public meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous in New Jersey was held at the South Orange Community Center, with local A.A. members arranging the public meeting space to accommodate the growing fellowship.

“The Jersey Group now had 25 to 30 members attending on Sunday evening at 5:30 p.m.,” continues the newsletter, “marking the start of regular Sunday night meetings held at the Community Center. It was this group that would become the ‘Mother Group’ for all of New Jersey. Later this group would also be familiarly known as the South Orange Sunday Night Group.”

Reflecting the experience of the early members in New Jersey relating to the South Orange Group, an early attendee shared his experience in the story “Joe’s Woes,” a story that originally appeared in the second edition of the Big Book but was later dropped in subsequent editions before being collected in the book *Experience, Strength & Hope*: “Early in 1939, when the A.A. book was fresh off the press, I was called into the doctor’s office, the chief doctor of the State Hospital. One of the founders of A.A. was there with five other men from A.A., trying to get A.A. into the hospital. The way A.A. was put to me, this doctor says to me, ‘The medical profession has nothing for you. The clergy has nothing for you. There’s nobody in God’s world can help you. You’re a chronic alcoholic, period!’ Then he says, ‘Maybe these men and this book can help you.’

“I read the book. In the meantime they had meetings in South Orange, New Jersey. There used to be a group from South Orange that would come up to the hospital and take some of the boys down to a meeting and bring them back. I wanted to know what was going on at these meetings. I got one of the boys that was there and I says, ‘What are these meetings all about?’ He says, ‘It’s a bunch of people that get up there and swap stories. They talk to each other and you talk to them. They’re all a bunch of ex-drunks. And they’re all happy looking. They all have a lot of fun, they’re all dressed up, they have a collar and tie. Some are working and some are not, but they’re all happy....’

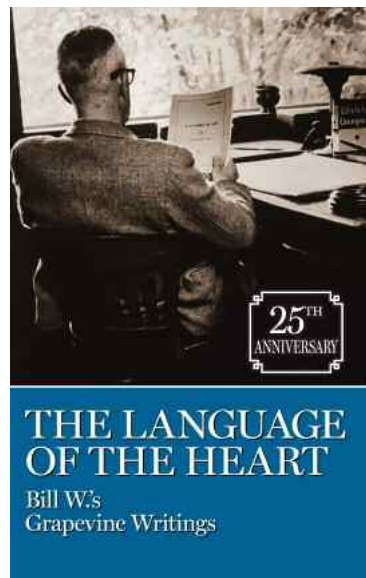
“I had never been to a meeting before in all my life where there was a bunch of alcoholics where nobody didn’t have a bottle! So I asked the doctor, and he let me go down to the meeting.... I went to A.A. meetings for about seven months and I lost the idea of a drink. I didn’t think of it anymore. I was amazed when I was called into the doctor’s office and told that I was going out on parole. I got a year’s parole, and on my parole card was ‘In the custody of your wife and A.A.’”

Membership of the New Jersey Group at that time represented more than twenty-three towns and in 1941, the Jersey Group began giving birth to its children. The second group in northern New Jersey was the Morristown Group, followed by groups in Englewood and Fairlawn, followed a few years later by burgeoning groups in Newark, Bloomfield, and Montclair.

Stemming from the “Mother Group,” the growth of A.A. in New Jersey led to the formation of the Intergroup Committee of A.A. of New Jersey, Inc., which became official in May 1945 when the Articles of Association were adopted by the delegates representing 16 A.A. groups in New Jersey.

From these humble beginnings, A.A. in New Jersey has grown today to more than 1,100 groups with over 1,800 meetings per week.

■ Grapevine’s Signature Book *The Language of the Heart*



Between 1944 and 1970, Bill wrote 150 articles for AA Grapevine, helping to unite the Fellowship’s new groups and hammering out the principles of A.A. These articles give us a living history of Alcoholics Anonymous and the story of Bill W.’s emotional and spiritual growth. 2013 marked the 25th anniversary of *The Language of the Heart*.

Coming soon as an audio book, *The Language of the Heart* comes in many formats: hardcover, softcover, large print and ebook. A limited quantity of the Commemorative softcover print edition is available.

To order go to: aagrapevine.org/books; phone: (800) 631-6025 (US/Canada), (818) 487-2091 (International).

■ C.P.C.

Carrying the Message: A Meeting for Newcomers and Professionals

Getting involved in C.P.C. work was one of the best things Tone F. of Detroit, Michigan, could have done for his sobriety. But he certainly didn't have to wait in line to get started.

After talking about service with a number of sober friends who were participating in a Big Book study he was deeply involved in, it was suggested that Tone talk to the Area 33 C.P.C. committee about his desire to get involved. There were some issues Tone felt needed to be addressed, about newcomers coming to A.A. and not getting involved with more than their own recovery and the judges who sent people to A.A. without necessarily understanding what A.A. is about.

"After a few half earnest attempts to contact the area C.P.C. committee, I found myself signing a contact form at an empty C.P.C. booth set up at our annual March Roundup Conference. When I checked back later there were no more signatures on the list and still no one to talk to. Finally the next day a gentleman was there in the booth. We talked and I expressed my concerns. He kindly explained that C.P.C. was the right committee to address these issues and convinced me to join up.

"A week or so later, I attended my first area C.P.C. meeting. I was thrilled to finally be a part of the solution and couldn't wait to get to the area offices.

"My new friend was sitting alone in a meeting room, waiting for the meeting to start. The two of us opened with a prayer, and he asked if I would like to be co-chair. It reminded me of the time I complained about the coffee at a meeting of my home group..."

Over time the committee slowly grew and they did some C.P.C. work with members of the local clergy after attending a community health fair. Tone's friend eventually rotated out of the position, a new area chair was elected, and Tone stayed on as co-chair. The committee began looking for new projects to get involved with, and while Tone had developed a rapport with a number of professionals throughout the area through his work on the C.P.C. committee, he was still interested in working with A.A. newcomers to help expand their knowledge of and commitment to the A.A. program itself, something akin to the Big Book studies he had been so involved with earlier in his sobriety, but with a C.P.C. slant.

He presented the idea to the committee and it was noted that this type of meeting could closely follow the ideas presented in the A.A. Guidelines on Cooperating With Court, D.W.I. and Similar Programs, offering a way for new members who might have been referred to A.A. by professionals to get immersed in the program.

"So, we assembled several A.A.s from surrounding

groups and had meetings where ideas were presented," says Tone. "What did we like about A.A. when we first came in? What did we dislike? Where would more information be necessary? Where had we been confused? These and many other questions were bantered about as we designed a new meeting structure."

Some ideas never made it when evaluated against the Traditions of nonaffiliation and singleness of purpose, but what most committee members could agree on was that it should be an open A.A. meeting, Big Book based, and very welcoming to newcomers. Overall, the timing seemed to be right, and the program took flight.

"In June of 2015," says Tone, "this open A.A. meetings will celebrate three years of existence."

Describing the meeting format that was developed and revised over time for this meeting — and which has been replicated in a sister meeting in a nearby community and provided to interested parties in other communities as well — Tone says, "We open with what we call the 'Spirituality Statement' excerpted from the Big Book and other A.A. literature, ending with '...when it comes to God or a Higher Power, A.A. members assure newcomers they are free to find their own.'"

"Then we say the Serenity Prayer (copies are available on the tables), and follow with a 20-25 minute open talking where our carefully selected speakers focus on their experience with sponsorship, working the Twelve Steps in dealing with personal issues, sobriety and the resulting rewards. Then we ask if there are any questions for the speaker, welcome newcomers, have potential sponsors raise their hands, and then take a five-minute break.

"It was noted while we were designing the format that like most alcoholics, newcomers generally have a short attention span, so time to get a coffee or have a smoke is welcomed."

"Then, when we return, we break up into three separate tables: an Introduction table; a table where the first three Steps and sponsorship are presented; and a table called a Floating Format table where the rest of the Steps are covered out of the Big Book.

"Our table leaders are usually experienced members of the group and familiar with the Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions, and our meeting goals.

"The Introduction table is by far the most innovative in our area, as it tries to explain what A.A. is and is not, and covers those mundane questions we all had coming in but were afraid to ask. Like how to read a directory, where to get a copy of the Twelve Steps (in the Big Book!), A.A. meeting etiquette, and the difference between this meeting and other open and closed meetings."

And the C.P.C. slant that Tone was interested in? "Our group is regularly visited by professionals and potential professionals in school seeking to gain knowledge about A.A.. After listening to our speakers they often sit at our Introduction tables taking notes.

"Almost every week we hear from a first timer telling us that they were sent by the courts and we have watched

many of these newcomers come in, get a sponsor, get sober, and in turn do service themselves. And among other A.A.s attending our group for the first time, an often-heard quote is ‘Where were meetings like this when I first came in?’

“C.P.C. has given me an opportunity to enlarge my service commitment in a fashion I could never have imagined on my own. Now, as chairperson of our C.P.C. committee, at our annual Area 33 Professional Event Luncheons I get to meet doctors, judges, educators, probation officers and others who earnestly want to help the alcoholic but don’t necessarily know how. We share our ideas, experience, strength and, most of all, hope for the still-suffering alcoholic.

“As my favorite quote from the Big Book states, ‘Life will take on new meaning. To watch people recover, to see them help others, to watch loneliness vanish, to see a fellowship grow up about you, to have a host of friends — this is an experience you must not miss!’”

If you would like to know more about the format used for this type of open A.A. meeting you can contact: area33cpchair@aa-semi.org.

■ Extending the Hand of A.A. to the Older Alcoholic

“I was alone. My children had finished college by then, and were working away from home, so my best friend became 80 proof alcohol. I worked every day, but when I got home, I drank. I began to have blackouts. I would talk on the phone to my kids and friends, and could not remember the next day what I had said. This went on for a few years, and one night I drove home from my best friend’s house and could not remember anything. I decided I must have a problem, so I called A.A., and a lady picked me up and took me to a meeting that same night. I was 62 years old.”

The experiences of this alcoholic, and many others, appear in the pamphlet, “A.A. for the Older Alcoholic—Never Too Late,” published by A.A. World Services, Inc. The pamphlet highlights the stories of a number of men and women from a wide variety of backgrounds who have had diverse experiences with alcohol. What they have in common is that all of them came to grips with their alcoholism over the age of 60.

The stories in the pamphlet illustrate that alcoholism comes in many different forms and in a variety of disguises. “Whether or not you are an alcoholic,” it points out, “is not determined by where you drink, when you started drinking, how long you’ve been drinking, with whom you drink, what, or even how much. The true test is in the answer to this question: What has alcohol done to you?”

There are currently an estimated 40 million adults ages

65 and older in the U.S., with another 5 million in Canada, numbers that are expected to double over the next 25 years, vastly changing the age distribution in both countries and posing new challenges for meeting the health needs of these older adults. [Figures derived from U.S. Department on Health and Human Services—Administration on Aging and Employment and Social Development Canada.]

In terms of the A.A. population of seniors, according to the 2011 A.A. Membership Survey, 27% of A.A. members are age 51–60, 15% are age 61–70 and 6% are over 70 — together making up nearly half of A.A.’s total population.

Alcoholism is no respecter of gender, race, religion or age and the problem of alcoholism in the elderly population has been growing in focus for many years. Many crises accompany the process of growing older, and almost all of them entail loss of some sort. The children grow up and leave home. You move to a smaller place. Friends are fewer and farther apart. You are obliged to retire from work. Physical health is less robust and faculties diminish. Your partner of many years dies.

The turning point for those elderly alcoholics whose stories appear in the pamphlet, however, came when they finally decided to face the problem — looked at it squarely, and became willing to do something about it: “The decision to ask for help was the all-important decision, and one that nobody else could make. But once it was made, the hand of Alcoholics Anonymous was there, ready to reach out.”

Whether extending the hand of A.A. to elders already sober in A.A. or to newcomers who have been touched by alcoholism later in their lives, A.A. members and committees throughout the U.S./Canada service structure have been helping to insure that A.A.’s program of recovery is available to anyone who has a desire to stop drinking, regardless of their age.

Alcoholics Anonymous has long offered special help to the elderly, holding meetings in nursing homes, offering transportation to frail members or even bringing meetings to the homebound. Often falling under the province of area, district or local Special Needs-Accessibilities Committees, as detailed in the Special Needs-Accessibilities Workbook available from G.S.O., carrying the message to the elder community can include such activities as coordinating schedules and member participation to providing home meetings — in person, by phone, or over the Internet — for elderly or infirmed members of A.A.; providing assistance and information to support transportation of the elderly to meetings, whether door-to-door or from the parking spot to a chair; gathering and passing on local shared experience for types of meeting formats used in elder care facilities, community senior centers, and home settings; passing on suggestions for working within elder care facilities; conducting workshops on any of the various topics which relate to this service area.

One group of A.A.s that has been carrying the message in this area is the Access Committee of the San Francisco/Marin Counties Intergroup, which has developed a number of programs to provide A.A. services to the elderly community in the Bay area. The mission of the committee, according to the current chair, Virginia M., is “to explore, develop and offer resources to make the A.A. message and participation in the program available to everyone who reaches out for it.” Recently, reports Virginia, a telephone service sprang up in response to a request from a 92-year-old member with over 40 years’ sobriety who was unable to make meetings regularly, and the Intergroup’s P.I./C.P.C. committee made a presentation to a local facility providing service for low income and homeless individuals over the age of 60 in the San Francisco area. The committee also has plans in 2015 to contact selected senior facilities in San Francisco and the Department of Aging and Adult Services with an offer to present information about what A.A. is and how it works to staff members working directly with the elderly community as well as to residents who are housed in such facilities.

Some of the other resources available to members in the San Francisco area are the Sunshine Club, which brings meetings to members temporarily unable to leave home or hospital, and the Sober Outside Services (S.O.S.) Group, which serves A.A. members whose ongoing circumstances keep them from attending regular A.A. meetings.

Working at the district level, Cynthia J., a D.C.M. in Virginia (Area 71), shares that her district developed a guideline for visiting recovering alcoholics, both the elderly and the homebound, that they have distributed throughout the state, suggesting that home groups take the lead in providing services for these members. “In my own home group,” she explains, “we have a contact person who calls if someone has missed a few meetings, whether they are elderly or not. If they are sick or incapacitated in some way, we offer help to get them to meetings or have a meeting brought to them.”

One of the earliest committees focusing specifically on the elderly was established in Hawaii (Area 17), which began a Cooperation with the Elderly Community (C.E.C.) committee in 2004 through the efforts of A.A. members in the Kailua-Kona area of West Hawaii.

A number of resources are available from the General Service Office in New York for service work aimed at the elderly community, and the G.S.O. staff member on the Special Needs-Accessibilities assignment maintains communication with members carrying the A.A. message to the elderly through Special Needs-Accessibilities Committees and Cooperation With the Elderly Community Committees and other local committees engaged in this service work. G.S.O. also provides introductory A.A. information to professionals serving the elderly who contact G.S.O. and pass their contact information on to the appropriate local A.A. committee for follow-up.

G.S.O. publishes the large print A.A. pamphlet “A.A. for the Older Alcoholic—Never Too Late,” and publishes a wide variety of other literature in various formats, including the Big Book and *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, to support carrying the A.A. message to the elderly. Additionally, for homebound elderly, G.S.O. provides information on telephone meetings and online meetings of Alcoholics Anonymous, and coordinates the *Loners-Internationalists Meeting (LIM) Correspondence Service* which includes “Homers” or members who are homebound and unable to attend regular face to face meetings, many of whom are elderly. Recently, the Special Needs-Accessibilities Workbook was updated to include a section of shared experience on “Suggestions for Working with the Elderly Community.”

Extending the hand of A.A. to older alcoholics can offer hope to a population that is all too frequently isolated and fearful. The support and recovery that membership in A.A. brings can be the doorway to a new life — regardless of one’s age. As described in “A.A. for the Older Alcoholic—Never Too Late”:

“Something happened to me one night, and no matter how much I drank, I could not feel it. Something told me to call an old friend in A.A. Two friends came quickly and talked with me, and I promised I would go back to a meeting, or even go to rehab if necessary. I kept my promise and went back — shaking, fearful, full of shame and remorse. All I remember of that first meeting is, ‘Try it one day at a time.’ I was willing and ready, but wasn’t sure about ‘able.’

“I started that day, at age 72, without drinking, and have just finished seven years of the greatest life I have ever known. I have found peace and serenity in this wonderful program of A.A., and a Higher Power who is doing for me what I could not do for myself.

“I saw a bumper sticker recently that said, ‘If you are on the wrong road, God allows U-turns!’ A.A. has been my U-turn.”

■ Opening Flag Ceremony Available on G.S.O.’s Website

One of the highlights of each International Convention is the parade of flags of those countries represented at the Convention, which takes place at the Opening Meeting on Friday evening.

Over the 2015 Convention weekend, unlimited access to an encrypted, anonymity-protected Internet broadcast of the 2015 International Convention Opening Flag Ceremony will be made available through G.S.O.’s A.A. website (www.aa.org).

Access to the broadcast will begin on Saturday, July 4, and end on Sunday, July 5, 2015, at midnight Eastern Daylight Time.

Keeper of the Flame:

Box 4-5-9

"I read it in *Box 4-5-9*..." is a statement uttered by A.A. members throughout the Fellowship in reference to any number of topics related to A.A. and its Three Legacies of Recovery, Unity and Service — topics ranging from information about the structure of A.A., to news of new A.A. books and pamphlets, to group, assembly and roundup reports, information on A.A. around the world, and articles sharing creative solutions to group problems.

Box 4-5-9 has been around almost as long as the General Service Office has existed. The first issue was mailed on November 11, 1940, typed in letter format on an 8 1/2" x 11" sheet of mimeograph paper with the heading *A.A. Bulletin*. It was created to fill the rapidly growing need for communication from what was then called the Headquarters office to the approximately 150 known groups across the U.S. and Canada.

Over the years, *Box 4-5-9* would undergo a series of changes and facelifts. In May 1956, its title became the *A.A. Exchange Bulletin*, and the format was expanded into a four-page newsletter complete with masthead, headlines, and articles. The first issue under the new title described its purpose in terms that still apply today: "The *Exchange Bulletin* was created to fill many requests for a concise, movement-wide publication that would combine Headquarters' news, basic information on A.A. as a whole, and brief accounts indicating how particular problems are being met by groups throughout the world."

With the 1966 Holiday issue, thanks to the suggestion of a member, the newsletter was renamed for G.S.O.'s postal box number, which was then, and still is, 459. Now an illustrated, two-color, 12-page publication with a clean, modern look, it is mailed to more than 65,000 groups the world over, and to thousands of individuals as

well, and is also available in Spanish and French editions.

Since its beginning, *Box 4-5-9* has mirrored the state of the Fellowship, and as A.A. has expanded, so has the content of the newsletter. Regular features currently include news of what's happening in A.A. service, especially in the areas of corrections, treatment, public information, and cooperation with the professional community. Articles share members' experience in the basics — sponsorship, working the Steps and Traditions, home group problems and solutions — and expand our experience with news of the Fellowship in the U.S. and Canada as well as informative articles on what's happening in the rest of the A.A. world. There are reports of district and area programs and projects that help carry the message to the suffering alcoholic, and information on the service structure for members who are just getting started in service (and of course, for old service hands as well). Readers meet incoming nonalcoholic trustees of the General Service Board and are introduced to new G.S.O. staff members. The annual Holiday issue begins with a message of gratitude from everyone at G.S.O., and features tips for keeping the holiday season serene and sober. A Calendar of Events keeps members up to date on conferences and conventions, and *Box 4-5-9* is the primary source of advance information on the International Convention that occurs every five years — notably this year, from July 2-5, in Atlanta, Georgia.

So, when was the last time you heard somebody say, "I read it in *Box 4-5-9*"? If it's been a while, you might want to pass this copy on to another alcoholic or encourage your group to get a subscription so others in the Fellowship can share in the exchange of information about our Three Legacies that takes place in each issue. Said one G.S.R. recently, "I never knew how much I missed *Box 4-5-9* until my term as G.S.R. was up and it was no longer being sent to me. I now have my own subscription and feel grateful to be a part of it."

box
459

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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.

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March

6-8—*Dearborn, Michigan.* March Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 2843, Southfield, MI 48037-2843; www.aa-semi.org

6-8—*Layton, Utah.* PRAASA. Write: Ch., Box 14, Springville, UT 84663; www.praasa.org

7-8—*Zurich, Switzerland.* Working The 12 Steps. Info: www.aazurich.org

13-15—*Columbus, Indiana.* 62nd IN State Conv. Write: Box 950, La Porte, IN 46352; 2015stateconvention@area22indiana.org

13-15—*Albany, Georgia.* Flint River Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 72007, Albany, GA 31708; www.flintriverroundup.org

20-21—*Québec, Québec, Canada.* Congrès de Québec. Écrire: congresbcsq@hotmail.ca

20-22—*Portland, Maine.* 16th NEFOTS. Write: Ch., Box 243, Bristol, MA 04539; www.nefots.org

20-22—*Cherry Hill, New Jersey.* Area 45 Gen. Svc. Conv. Write: Ch., Box 6, Hammonton, NJ 08037; www.snjaaconvention.org

20-22—*Lombard, Illinois.* IL State Conf. of YPAA. Info: www.iscypaa.org

20-22—*Morehead City, North Carolina.* Crystal Coast Roundup. Info: ccr@ec.rr.com

20-22—*Niagara Falls, New York.* 7th Cataract City Conv. Write: Ch., Box 2006, Niagara Falls, NY 14301; catractcityconv@gmail.com

20-22—*Tarrytown, New York.* 47th SENY Conv. Write: Ch., Box 5505, Miller Place, NY 11764; convention2015@aaseny.org

20-22—*Williamsburg, Virginia.* Serenity Wknd. Write: Ch., Box 832, Midlothian, VA 23113; www.serenityweekend.net

27-29—*Ames, Iowa.* Aim for Ames. Write: Ch., Box 2522, Ames, IA 50010; www.aimforames.org

27-29—*Independence, Ohio.* 40th Area 54 Mini-Conf. Write: Ch., Box 23388, Euclid, OH 44123; miniconference@area54.org

27-29—*Austin, Texas.* 2^{do} Foro Estatal Hispano de TX de Oficinas Intergrupales. Para Inf.: Com. Org., 8906 Wall St., Ste. 306, Austin, TX 78754; www.foro2015.intergrupalestx.org

27-29—*Brownwood, Texas.* SW TX Area 68 Pre-Gen. Svc. Conf. Info: www.aa-swta.org

27-29—*Blackpool, Lancashire, England.* 41st Northern Nat'l Conv. Write: Ch., 9 Claremont Ct., Whitley Lodge, Whitley Bay, Tyne and Wear NE26 3HN England; nccsecretary@gmail.com

April

2-4—*San Pedro Sula, Honduras, Central América.* XI Conv. De Centro América de Oficinas Centrales o Intergrupos. Para Inf.: xiconvencioncaintergruposaa@yahoo.com

2-5—*San Diego, California.* 38th SD Spring Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 12186, La Jolla, CA 92039; www.sandiegospringroundup.com

2-6—*Newcastle, New South Wales, Australia.* 50th Nat'l Conv. & 70th Birthday. Write: Ch., Box 196, Jesmond, NSW 2299; www.natconnew15.org

3-5—*Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.* North Shore Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 91086, West Vancouver, B.C., Canada V7V 3N3; www.northshorroundup.com

10-12—*Kearny, New Jersey.* 34th Garden State Young People's Conf. Write: Ch., Box 219, South Plainfield, NJ 07080-0219; www.gsyp.org

10-12—*Erie, Pennsylvania.* 40th Erie Area Swing Into Spring Conf. Write: Ch., Box 1357, Erie, PA 16512-1357; www.aakeriepa.org

10-12—*Vernal, Utah.* Area 69 Pre-Conf. Assembly. Write: Ch., Box 790241, Vernal, UT 84078; www.utahaa.org

16-19—*Eureka Springs, Arkansas.* 39th Springtime in the Ozarks. Write: Ch., Box 409, Eureka Springs, AR 72632; www.nwarkaa.org

17-19—*Sheffield, Alabama.* 8th Sweet Home Alabama Jubilee. Write: Ch., Box 3993, Muscle Shoal, AL 35662

17-19—*Perris, California.* 12^{vo} Congreso del Inland Empire. Para Info: Com. Org., 222 E. Highland Ave., Ste. 7, San Bernardino, CA 92404

17-19—*Dauphin, Manitoba, Canada.* Dauphin Roundup. Write: Ch., 21-4th Ave. NW, Dauphin, MB R7N 1H9

24-26—*Chipley, Florida.* Country Roundup. Write: Ch., 677 Chipley, FL 32428; chipley_countryroundup@hotmail.com

24-26—*Broken Bow, Oklahoma.* Beavers Bend Round Robin. Write: Ch., 141 W. Browning St., De Kalb, TX 75559; www.beaversbendroundrobin.org

May

1-3—*Albuquerque, New Mexico.* Red Road Conv. Write: Ch., Box 20292, Albuquerque, NM 87154; www.nm-redroad.org

1-3—*Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada.* 50th Blossom Time Conv. Write: Ch., Box 831, Niagara Falls, ON L2E 6V6; www.blossomtimeconvention.com

1-3—*Longueuil, Québec, Canada.* 33^e Grand Congrès de Longueuil Rive-Sud. Infos: www.aa87.org

Planning a Future Event?

To be included in the *Box 4-5-9* Calendar, information must be received at G.S.O. four 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 Editor: Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163 or literature@aa.org

Date of event: from _____ to _____, 20____

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8-10—*Shediac, New Brunswick, Canada*. Area 81 Spring Assembly and Roundup. Write: Ch., 21-442 Main St., Shediac, NB E4P 2G7; www.area81aa.ca

15-16—*Orford, Québec, Canada*. 34th Bilingual Townships' Roundup. Write: Ch., 8 rue Gagne, Sutton QC J0E 2K0; region@aa87.org

15-17—*Port Angeles, Washington*. Olympic Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 1081, Port Angeles, WA 98362; www.olympicroundup.org

15-17—*Fond du Lac, Wisconsin*. Area 75 Conf. Write: Ch., Box 925, Fond du Lac, WI 54936-0925; www.area75.org

15-17—*Manitoulin Island, Ontario, Canada*. 44th Rainbow Roundup. Info: www.rainbowroundup.ca

22-24—*Bloomington, Minnesota*. Gopher State Roundup XLII. Write: Ch., Box 390533, Minneapolis, MN 55439-2026; www.gopherstateroundup.org

28-31—*Wailea-Makena, Hawaii*. Mauifest XI. Write: Ch., Box 893, Kihei, HI 96753; www.mauifest.org

29-31—*Tampa, Florida*. FL Conf. of YPAA. Write: Ch., Box 13954, Tampa, FL 33681; www.fcypaa2015.com

29-31—*Albany, New York*. Northeast Reg. Forum. Write: Forum Coord., Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163; Regionalforums@aa.org

June

5-7—*Metairie, Louisiana*. 47th Big Deep South Conv. Write: Ch., 638 Papworth Ave., Ste. A, Metairie, LA 70005; www.bigdeepsouth.org

5-7—*Hobbs, New Mexico*. Area 46 State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 3059, Hobbs, NM 88241; area46convention@gmail.com

12-13—*Vernon, British Columbia, Canada*. Dist. 70 Roundup. Write: Ch., 323 – 3104 30 Ave., Vernon, BC V1T 9M9

12-14—*Akron, Ohio*. Founder's Day. Info: foundersday@akronaa.org

12-14—*Trogir, Croatia*. 15th Internat'l English Conv. Info: www.aahrvatska.hr

12-14—*Hagerstown, Maryland*. 45th MD State Convention. Write: Ch., Box 144, Crownsville, MD 21032; www.mgsconventions.org

July

17-19—*Austin, Texas*. SW TX Area 68 Summer Workshop. Write: Ch., Box 170232, Austin, TX 78717; www.district3b3c.org

24-26—*Aurora, Colorado*. Area 10 Summer Svc. Assembly. Write: Ch., 12081 W. Alameda Pkwy, #418, Lakewood, CO 80228; www.coloradoaa.org

24-27—*Eugene, Oregon*. Summerfest. Write: Ch., Box 11824, Eugene, OR 97440; www.aa-summerfest.org

30-2—*Raleigh, North Carolina*. 68th NC State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 1387, Knightdale, NC 27545-1387; www.aanorthcarolina.org

31-2—*Jefferson City, Missouri*. MO State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 29224, St. Louis, MO 63126-9224; www.mostateconvention.org

31-2—*Harrisburg, Pennsylvania*. 22nd PA State Conv. Write: Ch., 610 Race St., Harrisburg, PA 17104; www.aapastateconvention.com

August

21-23—*Rochester, New York*. Empire State Conv. Of YPAA. Info: www.escypaaii.org

21-23—*Casper, Wyoming*. West Central Reg. Forum. Write: Forum Coord., Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163; Regionalforums@aa.org