

Sponsorship Goes Two Ways

A.A.'s program of recovery is spiritual, but the hands-on action of two drunks—one sober, the other new or returning from a slip—helping each other is what glues it together, as our co-founders quickly found out. Looking back on their relationship some years later, Bill W. observed, "Dr. Bob did not need me for his spiritual instruction. . . . What he did need, when we first met, was the deflation at depth and the understanding that only one drunk can give to another. What I needed was the humility of self-forgetfulness and the kinship with another human being of my own kind." (*As Bill Sees It*, p. 212)

In the old days, in Akron, Ohio, sponsorship often began with the ill alcoholic's hospitalization and surrender—the latter induced sometimes by A.A.'s nonalcoholic friend Sister Ignatia, who encouraged her patients to bend their knees instead of their elbows. Other times it took off in Dr. Bob's kitchen with his home-cooked Rx: tomatoes, sauerkraut and Karo syrup stirred together in one big pot and simmered on the stove. "The men got to where it almost gagged them, taking it straight," pioneer A.A. member Ernie G. later recalled. "[Dr. Bob] did back down finally on the sauerkraut, but he kept up the tomatoes and corn syrup for years." (*Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers*, p. 105)

Today that mouth-twitching concoction has sometimes been replaced by milkshakes and honey and broth, and the handful of "prospects" has mushroomed into more than two million members worldwide. But the simple truism—that the best way to keep our sobriety is to give it away to the alcoholic who still suffers—remains the same. In his keynote address on the theme "Sponsorship: Gratitude in Action," at the 1991 General Service Conference, late trustee Webb J., of Western Canada, took this a step further: "You've got to give it away to keep it, but you can't give away what you haven't got." This he learned when, fresh out of a treatment facility, he tried to sponsor someone else and wound up "back in the bottle."

Fifteen months later, Webb recounted, "I came back to A.A. and stayed. And I got into service when the group made me a greeter, figuring that if you're going to shake anyway, you could put it to some use at the front door. I did all the menial tasks, like setting up chairs,

making coffee, picking up ashtrays—everything except sweeping the floor. We had one guy there, a former racketeer; if anyone else dared to touch that broom, he'd send a look that made you think of cement overshoes. . . . In time I found someone who agreed to sponsor me, on the condition that I not leave town for a year while cleaning up my mess, that I join a group, do the Steps and Traditions, and stay active. I did all of it and consequently have enjoyed an interesting, exciting and probably life-saving service life. As it says in our Third Legacy, 'A.A. is more than a set of principles; it is a society of alcoholics in action. We must carry the message, else we ourselves can wither and those who haven't been given the truth may die.' "

Speaking at the same Conference, then Southern Indiana delegate Dorothy M. said, "When a newcomer reaches for help, I want the hand of a member who's willing to be a sponsor right there." She emphasized that "our bonding stems not so much from having shared a common disaster as from our sharing in the common solution."

Experience shows that A.A.s around the U.S. and Canada are committing themselves anew to sponsorship. Letters received by the General Service Office contain a variety of questions (many of them answered in the pamphlet "Questions and Answers on Sponsorship"). Following, in capsule, is a sampling of these, and the responses to them from members of the G.S.O. staff:

Q. *Did Bill W. have a sponsor?*

A. Yes. In fact, Bill wrote on numerous occasions of the profound influence that his boyhood friend and drinking companion Ebby T. had on his life. "And there sat my sponsor Ebby, who had first brought the word that lifted me out of the alcoholic pit," he wrote in *A.A. Comes of Age* (p. 46). Bill forever referred to Ebby as his sponsor, even though Ebby had many alcoholic relapses. Throughout the years, Bill tried to carry the message to his friend, just as Ebby had given it to him.

Q. *While hospitalized after three months of sobriety, I developed a serious throat infection for which the doctor prescribed pain medication. My sponsor told me I should change my sobriety date to the day when I stopped taking the pain reliever. Do you agree?*

A. Some members say they do not trust their own decision-making processes and rely totally on their sponsors. I may have some residue of the typical barroom drinker, but I can share with you that I would not

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depend on my sponsor for legal or medical advice. As the pamphlet "The A.A. Member—Medications and Other Drugs" points out (p. 5), experience shows it is best that "no A.A. member plays doctor"; nor would my sponsor want to be put in this position. My sponsor did not give me my sobriety date either and, as far as I know, can't take it away from me!

Q. *Is there a "right" way for a sponsor to guide one through the program?*

A. A.A. experience shows that sponsorship is a very personal thing. Both sponsor and sponsee have a lot of latitude in making choices as to who their sponsor would be and how they would use the relationship. . . . I personally do not believe in a sponsorship tie that means a lot of babysitting. I feel it is my job to introduce the person to the A.A. recovery program, help him work the Steps to the extent that he's willing to do so, and try to introduce him to the higher power of his understanding. Then I feel it's important to work myself "out of a job" so to speak, and encourage the sponsee to rely more on his higher power than on me. Others have a completely different view, and I have no problem with that.

Q. *My sponsor and I had a falling out, and I no longer feel able to go to the same group. What should I do?*

A. Personality problems are often the hardest ones to try to solve, although in practicing the A.A. principles in all our affairs and putting principles before personalities, we are often able to master this to some degree. We do hope you will consider going to some other meetings right now and getting a new sponsor. It's often heard in A.A. that just because we have a particular sponsor in the beginning doesn't mean we're married to the person. Sometimes the relationship doesn't work out, and we move on to someone else. What's important is to have a sponsor you feel good about sharing with honestly who can help you through the Steps and Traditions.

Q. *I have taken Step One and admitted I am powerless over alcohol. Where do I go from here? What should I look for in a sponsor?*

A. Well, there is always Step Two. Regarding your second question: When I came to A.A., it was suggested

that I look for someone who (a) had been sober more than two years, (b) was female like me and (c) appeared to enjoy being sober. That's how I found a sponsor, and I shall always be grateful for that beautiful lady who was my first real friend in A.A. and through the years remains a dear friend.

Q. *I am sober two years and have just started to sponsor somebody for the first time. Do you have any suggestions?*

A. Perhaps the most important part of sponsoring is to be able to give without demand. As Bill W. wrote 40 years ago (Grapevine, Jan. 1958), "Watch any A.A. of six months working with a Twelfth Step case. If the case says, 'To the devil with you,' the twelfth stepper only smiles and turns to another case. He doesn't feel frustrated or rejected. If his next case responds, and in turn starts to give love and attention to other alcoholics yet gives none back to him, the sponsor is happy about it anyway. He still doesn't feel rejected; instead he rejoices that his one-time prospect is sober and happy. . . . But he well knows that his happiness is a by-product—the extra dividend of giving without any demand for a return." (*The Language of the Heart*, p. 238).

Almost Everything You Want to Know About A.A. Web Sites

It's here—a service piece that answers "Ten Frequently Asked Questions About A.A. Web Sites."

Available free of charge from the General Service Office, the double-sided flyer suggests ways to set up a local A.A. web site and determine its contents, policy and procedures. The response to the question "Who pays for a web site?" states, "In keeping with our Seventh Tradition, A.A. pays for its own expenses, and this applies in cyberspace A.A. as well."

In regard to posting A.A. material the service piece gives the following reminder: "Copyright restrictions apply to material displayed on the web site — just as copyrights protect A.A. literature. Permission must be obtained from G.S.O. prior to including A.A.W.S. material on your web site."

On the subject of anonymity, the piece is clear and succinct: "We observe all A.A.'s principles and Traditions on our web sites. As anonymity is the 'spiritual foundation of all our Traditions,' we practice anonymity on A.A. web sites at all times. An A.A. web site is a public medium which has the potential for reaching the broadest possible audience and, therefore, requires the same safeguards that we use at the level of press, radio and film."

Also included is information about G.S.O.'s A.A. Web Site (www.alcoholics-anonymous.org), which "is set up as a Public Information tool. Available in English, French and Spanish, it provides accurate and consistent information about A.A. to the general public, media and professionals." In 1997, the service piece notes, G.S.O.'s Web Site was visited 214,603 times; currently it averages approximately 900 hits daily.

Conference to Listen to Heartbeat of A.A.: 'Our Twelfth Step Work'

A.A.'s 20th Anniversary Convention in 1955 adopted a resolution authorizing the General Service Conference to act for the Fellowship and to become the successor to its co-founders Bill W. and Dr. Bob. In offering the resolution, Bill hailed the Conference as "the guardian of the Traditions . . . the perpetuator of the World Services of our Society, the voice of the group conscience of our entire Fellowship. . . ." (*A.A. Comes of Age*, p. 226)

It was a tall order, one that the thousands of representatives to Conferences since have faithfully filled. This year, as delegates from across the U.S. and Canada prepare for the 48th annual meeting of the Conference, to be held at the Crowne Plaza Manhattan the week of April 19-25, their dedication is as strong as ever.

The theme of this year's Conference is "Our Twelfth Step Work"—a deceptively brief title for a spiritually based principle that builds from our primary purpose and resonates in every area of A.A. life. Even as the 131 voting members—delegates, trustees and directors, along with members of the General Service Office and Grapevine staffs—first gaze up at the traditional blue-and-white banner inscribed with the Conference theme, they will be asking themselves and each other such questions as: Are we effective in reaching suffering alcoholics at home and around the world? Are we vigilant in maintaining a public relations policy based on attraction rather than promotion? With the professional community, are we careful not to let the messenger trip up the message? Is A.A.'s self-support system sturdy enough to support the far-reaching commitments of our Third Legacy of Service?

When put together, like the pieces of a giant puzzle, the sharing that goes on in general sessions, committees and workshops will form a true group conscience—one that offers a clear, broad picture of where A.A. is now and whether we are steering a sound and spiritual course into the future. But arriving at a group conscience

in matters big or small is a process that can take a long time. This is because the minority, or dissenting, view of each person is considered essential to the unity, effectiveness and survival of the Fellowship. Thus the Conference may act—or choose to postpone or not act at all—on various A.A. matters, many of them presented by one or another of the 11 Conference committees that labor not just during the week of the Conference but all year long. The same holds true of committed A.A.s in all the groups, districts and areas that make the work of the Conference happen.

Each Conference is as unique as a thumbprint, thanks to A.A.'s principle of rotation, and the cast of characters is everchanging: For instance, there are 92 U.S./Canada delegates; each year half rotate out and new ones come in. The 1998 Conference will include Panel 47 delegates who are serving their second and final year, along with Panel 48 delegates on hand for the first time. All of them, as *The A.A. Service Manual* states (p. S72), are expected to bring to the Conference "the viewpoints of their own areas on world problems or even such local problems as may affect A.A. as a whole."

Update: Proposed Fourth Edition

Interest has been running high over the possible issue of a Fourth Edition of *Alcoholics Anonymous*—the Big Book—A.A.'s basic text, ever since an Advisory Action of the 1997 General Service Conference recommended that a draft be developed and a progress report be brought to the 1998 Conference Literature Committee.

A subcommittee of the trustees' Literature Committee is working "to formulate a process to develop a deliberate and responsible procedure for preparation of a new edition. Attention has been focused on three general goals: (1) to identify stories in the Third Edition that may possibly be replaced in the Fourth Edition; (2) to identify new stories that may be considered for possible inclusion in a Fourth Edition; and (3) to discuss various suggestions from the Fellowship related to the publication of a Fourth Edition that have been forwarded to the trustees' Literature Committee.

The subcommittee reports that "we are particularly interested in identifying stories that reach out to the newcomer and focus on the solution [to alcoholism]: How it was, how the individual got to A.A., and what it is like now, are the basic criteria used in examining stories old and new. We are looking for as complete a sharing of experience, strength and hope as possible." Also, A.A. co-founder Bill W.'s writings on developing stories for the First and Second Editions are used as guidelines."

As they go about their task, the subcommittee members are mindful that the 1997 Conference Advisory Action repeated stipulations set forth in a 1995 Action; namely, that the first 164 pages—the Preface, the Forewords, the sections entitled “The Doctor’s Opinion,” the chapter “Dr. Bob’s Nightmare” and the Appendices “remain as is.”

To date more than 300 new stories by A.A. members have been submitted for possible inclusion in a Fourth Edition. A staff assistant records personal information and removes it from the submitted story, then substitutes an anonymous number before forwarding the story to the subcommittee. Every one is carefully read, and read again, as are the stories in the current Third Edition of the Big Book.

The subcommittee is quick to point out that “we are conscious of the magnitude of our responsibility to the Fellowship as we move deliberately ahead to develop this proposed publication.” The members report that “we are approaching consensus on certain aspects of the proposed revision. However, it is very important to emphasize that no decisions of any kind have been made.”

The deadline for receipt of manuscripts is June 1, 1998. The documents should not exceed 3,500 words, double spaced, and the words “Fourth Edition” should appear on the outside of the envelope and at the top of the first page. Your mailing address should also appear on the first page of the manuscript and you should keep a copy for your own files. Mail to: Literature Coordinator, General Service Office, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163.

Dr. Bob’s Plaque on Humility

A.A.’s co-founder Dr. Bob used to say, “I don’t believe I have any right to get cocky about getting sober. It’s only through God’s grace that I did it.” This attitude toward high praise and standing ovations had something to do with his search for humility—“a thing,” he observed, “with which most of us are not too blessed.” (*Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers*, p. 222)

On his desk in Akron, Dr. Bob kept a plaque that defined humility: “Perpetual quietness of heart. It is to have no trouble. It is never to be fretted or vexed, irritable or sore; to wonder at nothing that is done to me, to feel nothing done against me. It is to be at rest when nobody praises me, and when I am blamed or despised, it is to have a blessed home in myself where I can go in and shut the door and kneel to my Father in secret and be at peace, as in a deep sea of calmness, when all around and about is seeming trouble.” (*ibid.*)

Curious about the source of this unattributed quotation, the editors of *The Point*, a newsletter of the Intercounty Fellowship of Alcoholics Anonymous, San Francisco, asked Anne K., an A.A. member with library experience, to track it down. She did, with help from a friend, and the results appeared in the January 1998 issue of *The Point*. “The author of this passage is Andrew Murray, a South African religious leader and writer who lived from 1828-1917. A research librarian at the San Francisco Public Library found the citation in two publications of religious quotations.

“Interestingly a search for the quotation on the Internet elicited this: ‘Inscription from plaque on Dr. Bob’s desk.’ Our library investigator noted that ‘this site went on to provide the former address for Robert Holbrook Smith, M.D.; 28 Second National Bank Building, Akron 3, Ohio. A trail so cold that not even my guffaws and kneelapping could possibly warm it.’”

A Fond Goodbye

Raul M., Southwest regional trustee, a shining example of love and courage throughout his life and long A.A. service, died on Thursday, March 5, 1998 after a long illness. His funeral, March 9, in San Antonio, Texas, was attended by family, many A.A. friends, and current and past delegates from the region. Gary Glynn, nonalcoholic chairman of the General Service Board, Dean R., trustee-at-large/U.S., and former G.S.O. staff member, Pat R., also attended the service. The priest, who conducted the service, pointed out that “While we can see all the monuments that he had created as an architect in the City of San Antonio, the real monuments to Raul’s life were spiritual and not architectural.” Pat R. described the Requiem Mass “as simple and complete — a good solid and tender farewell to a man who has been a blessing for so many.”

Raul was elected Southwest regional trustee in 1995 and had long been active in the Southwest Texas Area as G.S.R., D.C.M., area chair and delegate (Panel 30). He was involved in starting bilingual Spanish groups, conferences and intergroups. He truly left a legacy to our Fellowship.

In a poignant letter sent to the General Service Office, Raul’s son, Al, shared, “Dad practiced his A.A. and lived it strongly.” His letter concluded, “I would like to leave you with this thought. The A.A. Fellowship is one of the strongest in the world — Dad showed me that when he went to Cuba and helped start a group there. You [A.A.] have made the tide of difference for one person, my dad.”

Montana to Host A Special Forum in August

Sprawling Montana is the fourth largest state, yet its population is less than that of tiny Rhode Island. Observes Bill McC. of Miles City: "Our 5 o'clock rush hour consists of having to wait at a stop sign for maybe 10 cars and a horse, and that's on a busy day." The state is so large, he adds, that "when you live out here, 100 miles is considered a leisurely drive to see the neighbors."

Which helps to explain why the General Service Board has green-lighted Montana's request for a Special "whistle stop" Regional Forum to be held August 15-16, with stops at Helena in the west and Miles City in the east. "We are part of the West Central Region, which has a Forum every two years," explains past delegate Robbie S., "but it means that usually we must travel enormous distances to Minneapolis, Sioux Falls or someplace near those two centers. Many Montana A.A.s simply cannot make the trip. Driving time requires them to take three or four days off work, and the cost of plane fares, and other transportation too, is prohibitive for many. Some districts even have trouble getting their D.C.M.s (district committee members) to these events."

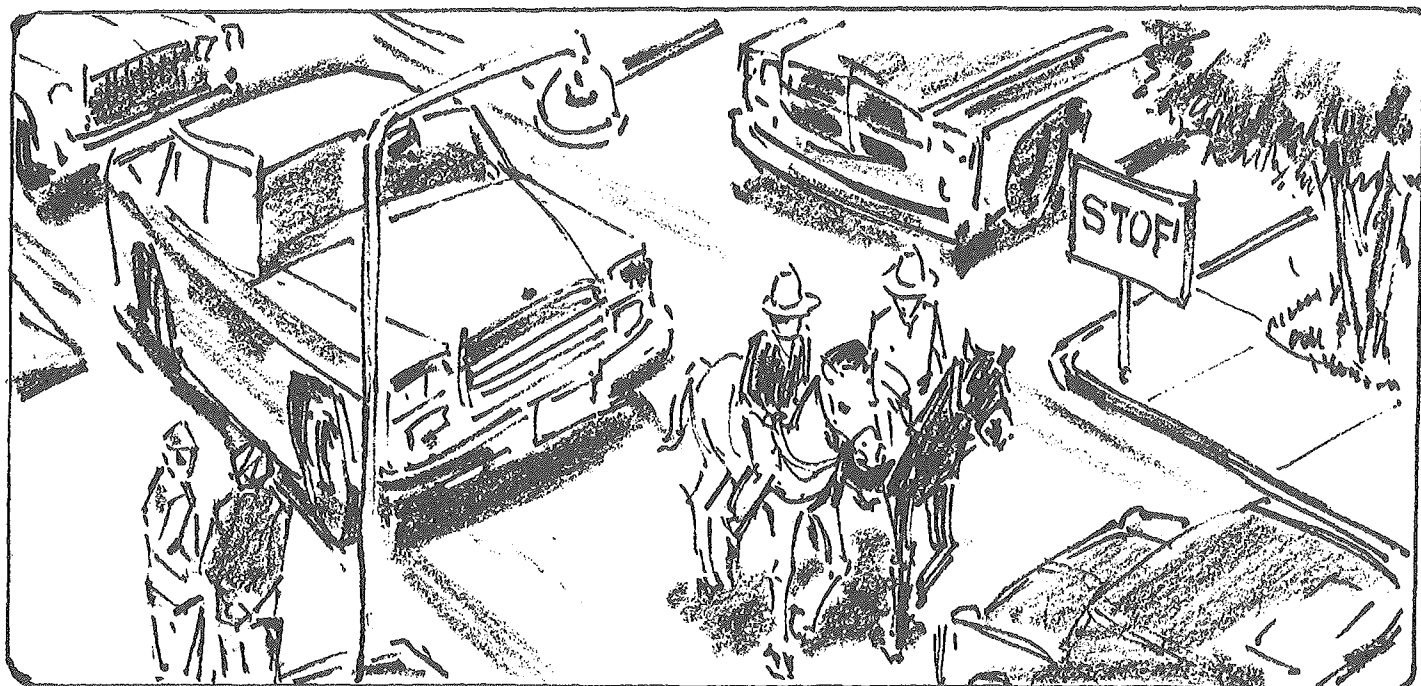
"So we're excited about the August Forum, which will bring together folks in our area with trustees and staff of the General Service Office and the Grapevine for fellowship and sharing. It will give us a chance to encourage new A.A.s in service and light a spark for some who have been around a while."

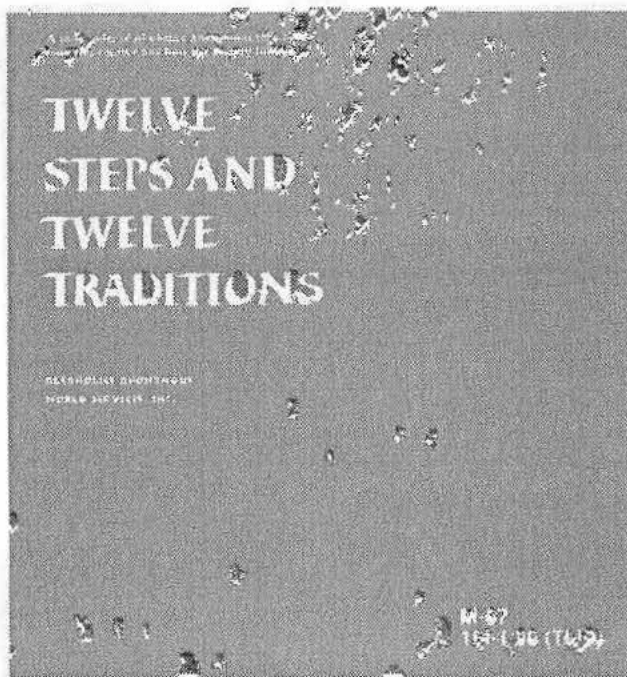
Bill and Louise McC. and Allison C. are serving as host

contacts for the Forum. "Everything at our end is coming together," Bill reports. "We have tons of volunteers across the state, and as you might guess, there won't be any transportation problems due to congestion. We're looking forward to this event and, most importantly, we're all staying sober and having a grand time in the process."

The special Montana Forum is the tenth of its kind. The first one was held at Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, in 1993; others have included four of the Hawaiian islands, and, recently at four sites in Alaska. In January 1994 a subcommittee of the trustees' International Conventions/A.A. Regional Forums Committee recommended that such events include both urban and remote and/or sparsely populated areas. "These Forums," the report stated, "could be scaled down, be made more mobile in approach and progressive, possibly with fewer people from the General Service Board and G.S.O., and perhaps for shorter periods of time. The Regional Forums coordinator could work with the host trustee in planning variations in the agenda, tailoring each a little more to the particular region." Eric D., the current delegate, has helped with planning the Montana program.

In Montana, says Robbie S., "we are anticipating another Special Forum with a wonderful sense of participation. We hope for a lot of input on the best ways to carry the message to our A.A. members living here in the 'Last Best Place'—and to the suffering alcoholics still out there."





Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions is now available on one 3.5" diskette (M-67); \$5.75, 20% discount applies. Disk runs in Windows™ 3.1 and Windows™ 95, with 2 megabytes free hard-disk space. Fully word searchable and hyperlinked. The Third Edition of the Big Book, Alcoholics Anonymous, is also available on two 3.5" disks (M-53); \$10.00, 20% discount applies. These disks run in Windows™ 3.1 and Windows™ 95, with 3 megabytes free hard-disk space. Word searchable and hyperlinked.

Getting to A.A. Via Cyberspace

"My name is Rolando. I suffer from the disease of alcoholism, and I'd like to testify that the computer is one of the many ways in which God makes his presence felt in human life."

Writing from New York City, Rolando says that after years of controlled drinking, suddenly he couldn't stop. "My marriage, my job, my whole life was in danger of falling apart," he relates. "Since I'd been able in the past to quit by myself and now could not, I realized I needed help but didn't know where to find it. I searched the Yellow Pages and didn't see an A.A. group listed. Then I looked on the Internet—and found a page with phone numbers. It was 4 a.m., and I was feeling desperate as I made the call. Amazingly a friendly, encouraging voice came on and gave me the address of the Dulces 24 Group. I went to a meeting the next day."

From that Wednesday on, says Rolando, "I've not had a single drink. I now understand the importance of having a support group, of knowing people with whom I share a problem in common and who can understand me. I am grateful to be able to speak without fear, to know that A.A.s are available around the clock to help. This is something that only divine intelligence could have inspired in the co-founders of this wonderful Fellowship that has been helping alcoholics of every class and kind for more than 60 years."

Lost and Found In the Hills Of El Salvador

In January, Danny M., who has the Spanish Services assignment at the General Service Office, set off on a trip to El Salvador that for him personally wound up tinged with "the magic of A.A. at work again."

The occasion was the 29th General Service Conference of A.A. in El Salvador, a country the size of Massachusetts, that sits high on the neck of Central America along the Pacific Ocean. The Conference theme was "The Function of the Structure—Group Responsibility." Danny looked forward to hearing Dr. Carlos Flores, Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee and chairman of the General Service Board, deliver his keynote address titled "Back to Basics." He also was eager to meet the widow of Eddie F., who first introduced the A.A. message into El Salvador, and their daughter, Patricia.

Eddie was a San Diego, California, member who had married his wife, Bertha, in 1947. Seven years later they traveled together to her homeland, and "Mr. Eddie," as he was affectionately known, began carrying the message there. He met with discouragement but kept trying. Finally, in 1955, Bertha told a friend about her husband's recovery and a little about the Fellowship, whereupon the friend asked if Eddie might help her Uncle Don, who spoke English. Eddie did just that, and Don A. became the first link in the still-growing chain of sobriety that spans El Salvador and its neighbors in Central America.

The 1998 El Salvador General Service Conference was scheduled to begin Saturday morning, January 20, in Colonia Altos de Guadalupe, at Loyola, "a very peaceful, hilly retreat center," Danny relates. "And I was ready, waiting at my hotel, about a 15-minute drive away, for the taxi driver who was to take me there. Only he failed to show up."

Armed with directions given hurriedly by a hotel clerk, Danny found another cabbie who said the charge would be \$12. "I thought it was a little steep but decided to go along for the ride," Danny recalls, "and what a ride it was! We were on our way to Zaragoza, then north to

Guatemala . . . we definitely were lost, and there was no destination to be found. After an hour's ride, we came upon the entrance to some retreat house—not in Loyola—on a steep, nearly impassable road. At that moment I realized I was powerless over the whole scenario and made up my mind to enjoy it. Which was wise, because upon reaching the top of the hill, we saw a huge gate guarded by two dogs. Then the door opened, and a smiling man came toward us. He offered his cellular phone, but he'd forgotten to reload the battery so it didn't work. Someone inside was familiar with the Loyola retreat, however, and gave us proper directions."

During the long drive, Danny says, he and the driver, whose name was Heberto, "chatted about life." Then, he says, "Heberto asked if I were very religious, inasmuch as I seemed to be going from one retreat center to another. When I told him candidly that I was attending an A.A. conference, he really opened up, saying he'd once had a problem with booze but . . . well, you can imagine the rest. When we finally arrived at Loyola, Heberto politely but quickly made himself at home. He stayed for lunch, and dinner. That evening he took me back to the hotel, and at 6:30 a.m. the next morning he was back with a wide grin. At the center he joined us for a breakfast of tortillas, plantains, queso and beans topped with black coffee and fellowship. After asking if he could stay for the closing of the conference, he sat in the front row with the wonder of a newcomer at his first meeting. I had to catch a 2 p.m. flight back home, but someone else drove me to the airport. Heberto? He lingered on, surrounded by all that A.A. love and gratitude, the stuff that miracles are made of."

Do We Do Enough To Make Newcomers 'Keep Coming Back'?

In A.A.'s first few years, the beginners meeting was an idea whose time had yet to come. Members counting their sobriety in days found themselves helping "prospects," as they were called, who were still drying out in local hospitals. Active alcoholics were definitely not welcome at meetings, so the idea was to detox them first. In Cleveland, Clarence S. pointed out in 1940, "several groups do not permit a rummy to attend unless he has been hospitalized or talked to by 10 men."

The idea of those early "counseling sessions," Clarence explained, was to "prepare a fellow and give him a pretty good understanding of the aims and principles of A.A. before he comes to meetings." (*Dr. Bob and the Good Oldtimers*, p. 263) Around the same time,

according to the A.A. Archives, the demand for help was so great that "under-six-months" meetings started up in Manhattan at the 24th Street Clubhouse. These early Twelfth Step efforts in Cleveland and New York City evolved into beginners meetings as we know them today.

With differences: Today, many an oldtimer fondly remembers when A.A. groups were smaller, newcomers were more visible, and a first-timer at a meeting was likely to be cocooned in A.A. concern and caring. This is still true in many places; but many groups are larger, their members more transient, and newcomers may often go unnoticed—especially those who are fresh out of treatment, sober and looking pretty good. Then there are the A.A.s who feel the average beginners meeting is going the way of the dinosaur: They say the basic message of how to stay sober one day at a time is diluted and skewed by talk of relationships, job woes and, as one member complained, "a spewing of expletives, sex talk and psychobabble."

How can we help newcomers more effectively? How can we plant the seed of hope that makes them want to "keep coming back"? And how can we be sure that we're even connecting with them in the first place?

Formats of beginners meetings vary: They range from small, informal discussions, with a different leader each time and the newcomers doing most of the talking, to large sessions, prearranged in a series, with one continuing leader who gives prepared talks on specific A.A. topics, such as the importance of good food and rest, early sponsorship and new habit patterns.

Some groups discourage anyone sober more than a year from participating in beginners meetings; others welcome oldtimers and consider them a must. One New Jersey A.A. wrote, "I have found that wisdom comes with time and experience, and that it's important to have people with time in every meeting—not only to share their experience, strength and hope but to show people that this program works." And a New York member recalls that when she attended her first beginners meetings 18 years ago, "the basket wasn't passed around. Instead, they'd announce that 'we have no dues or fees, but we do have expenses. If you're not staying for the next meeting, there's a basket on the literature table should you care to make a contribution.' Also, most of the beginners meetings I went to avoided closing with a prayer—the Lord's, Serenity, any prayer. Newcomers were assured that they didn't have to say anything or sign anything—just to sit back, relax and keep an open mind."

Numerous groups report that they have been helped by the "Guide for Leading Beginners Meetings" available from the General Service Office, (M-1), \$2.75. Included in the kit is a suggested guide and 10 helpful A.A. pamphlets. Another aid is *Living Sober*, a booklet that offers a nuts-and-bolts approach to sobriety.

Spotting shy, reticent newcomers at large meetings can pose a challenge. Experience suggests that it helps to:

- Ask anyone new to “please identify yourself—not to embarrass you but so we can get to know you.”
- Announce the date and time of the group’s beginners meeting, with a welcome to newcomers.
- Station greeters at the door to seek out and help the newcomer feel more at home.

Effective beginners meetings stick to the basics—explaining what A.A. is and isn’t and how to stay away from a drink. They give new people a chance to ask those nonexistent “dumb” questions and to talk about their fears. Many groups make up beginners kits of their own that include basic recovery pamphlets and a local meeting list. Some groups also include pocket phone books, some blank and others listing the numbers of group members with some sobriety who welcome calls from newcomers.

Whatever format is chosen should work out. For, as the Guide for Beginners Meetings states: “By receiving and giving A.A. help, every one of us becomes a link in a chain. . . . All of us cling to the chain to save our lives, and yet each of us is part of it—depending on all the others to help keep the chain unbroken.”

Bill W. On Voting at Business Meetings

Bill W. envisioned the Fellowship he had co-founded as a “benign anarchy” (*A.A. Comes of Age*, p. 224)—an ideal world in which group autonomy would free members to iron out individual differences and put their common welfare first. Back in November 1950, he sent Edward S. of Pass-a-grille Beach, Florida, a revealing letter—a gold nugget that came to light in December as the Records Department of the General Service Office was sifting through stacks of yellowed, dog-eared correspondence and scanning it into a computer database. The long-buried missive reflects Bill’s unwavering faith in human nature and the resiliency of the A.A. group.

“Dear Ed,” he wrote. “When you ask what are the voting qualifications of an A.A., you raise an interesting question. In most groups, special business meetings are held when committees are to be named or group service officers elected. Usually these are quite informal. Anyone present and sober is allowed to vote. But this is not always true. Some groups think newer people should not be bothered with our trifling business affairs. They also think a member should be sober a given length of time and be

somewhat experienced A.A.-wise before he is allowed to vote. Some groups set time limits. Often one year’s sobriety is a condition. Under the A.A. Tradition, groups have a right to make these conditions if they wish, as voting membership has nothing to do with A.A. membership.”

Characteristically upbeat, Bill concludes, “This is about all I can tell you concerning voting. Like everything else in A.A., the Tradition is a paradox. A group has a right to be wrong if it insists. This is safe enough, because things always right themselves in favor of the rest of the Tradition—eventually.”

Treatment Facilities

Contact Program Is On a Roll

Not for nothing is Montana called the Treasure State. A Bridge the Gap program that started out two years ago as the dream of three determined A.A.s is today a bright reality. “Thanks to teamwork and the shared experience of other such programs in A.A., the response has been phenomenal,” says Angie E., immediate past chair of the Treatment Facilities committee of Area 40, which comprises all but a small portion of the state. “Contacts have been made for more than 200 patients in just the past six months. Best of all, we are hearing the success stories of newcomers fresh out of treatment who are staying sober and becoming established in their home groups and communities.”

The committee system was implemented by the Montana Area as recently as 1995. “When the fledgling T.F. committee met for the first time,” Angie recalls, “something extraordinary happened that fired us with enthusiasm: We faced the pressing need to create a temporary contact program statewide, and the hair literally stood up on the backs of our necks as we saw that it was up to us to help coordinate the districts’ efforts if we were to realize our goal. The first step we took was to find out how many A.A. members were interested in serving as contacts. We sent out volunteer sign-up sheets, and more than 250 volunteers responded positively.

“We received much help from the General Service Office, which furnished us with collective experience generously shared by other areas that had trudged the road before us. Using G.S.O.’s T.F. Workbook as a guide, we also created our own reference workbook. It is presently being used by the districts to coordinate the program on a statewide level.”

The area T.F. committee started first with one facility—the large, state-run chemical dependency treatment center at Butte, in the southwestern part of the state. “People from all over Montana go there for treatment and then return home,” explains Angie, “so it seemed a good way to test the overall efficacy of our new voluntary contact system.” After a satisfying meeting with the administrator and staff of the facility, she says, “the local district T.F. committee introduced monthly A.A. orientation sessions for the patients. “We explain what A.A. is and isn’t, show the popular video *Hope: Alcoholics Anonymous* and answer questions.”

At the end of each session, any patient interested in being contacted by an A.A. member fills out a confidential contact card requesting basic information: name, age, gender, home address, phone number, language spoken, the name of the treatment facility and date of his or her release. Afterward the team begins by phoning the T.F. committee chairperson of the district in which the patient lives. The chairperson connects with an A.A. on the local volunteer contact list, the patient’s information is exchanged—then the card is destroyed.

“Many districts have begun using this approach at their local treatment centers with heartwarming results,” Angie reports. “The Veterans Administration Hospital, which recently made the transition from inpatient to outpatient treatment, has opened four offices around the state. After our presentation to the administrator and staff, they requested similar ones for outpatients at all of their offices.”

In January, Angie turned over the Area T.F. Committee chair to her successor, Mary K., and prepared to move with her family to Minnesota. “Mary’s doing a great job, and our little committee now numbers a baker’s dozen at least; I shall miss them,” Angie says. “We feel we’ve gotten back to the basics of carrying the message to alcoholics who still suffer. At the same time, this highly cooperative effort has breathed new life into our groups and service structure. And me? I’ve never in my life experienced such a sense of usefulness.”

P.I.

Sharing from Around the Areas

Public Information committees everywhere share their successes (and failures too) with each other through the General Service Office. This collective experience has proved to be good for A.A. unity and for the alcoholics out there who need help. Following are reports from some of the P.I. areas:

Southern California. All the Spanish districts now have a copy of the P.I. Workbook. District 54 recently made a presentation at a local church, took information to the Sheriff’s Department, and made half-hour presentations about A.A. on radio stations in Camarillo and Oxnard.

The west side districts sent letters and some pamphlets to local high schools; they also donated two films to high school libraries. The Hollywood-Wilshire-Downtown Districts showed six films at high schools and received requests for panels and foreign-language Big Books. District 30 held a panel discussion at a local high school and showed the video *A.A.—Rap With Us*.

Maryland. In Allegheny County, Luther W. says, “there are five public libraries, only one of which had a Big Book. With help from Paul T., of Corriganville, we placed copies in those that had none. We also were in contact with the Board of Education about the possibility of giving Big Books to the schools. They advised us that the Western Maryland Intergroup had already furnished Big Books, but that they would appreciate copies of *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*. We came up with 30 of them.”

Southern Minnesota. “We have been carrying the message via radio stations. Mark J. and Jane M. from District 16 were on morning talk shows in Northfield and Faribault. Frank, from District 22, is currently working with a Twin Cities TV station. Monte J. was on a half-hour program on KATE in Austin. Even our not-so-active districts have been getting involved with radio public service announcements. Additionally, we were able to put together a radio interview via telephone. Roy A. from District One was on a radio show in Willmar while talking from his home in Rochester.”

North Carolina. The Greensboro Intergroup placed the following insert in the *Greensboro News & Record*: “Alcoholics Anonymous is a voluntary, worldwide fellowship of men and women from all walks of life who meet together to attain and maintain sobriety. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking. There are no dues or fees for A.A. membership. For meeting locations and times, call 854-4278 anytime day or night.” Reports Fred T.: “We chose to do this instead of inserting a list of local meetings, which may be obsolete or inaccurate by the time it sees print. Much effort and prayer went into compiling the information, most of which came from the flyer ‘A.A. at a Glance.’”

Eastern Ontario. David M. of Kingston says, “Our District 36 P.I. committee is planning the distribution of recycled Grapevines to the offices of interested doctors and community agencies. A label on each copy will tell how to contact A.A. One of the most important tools the P.I. committee manages is the telephone answering service. In an effort to encourage and assist those A.A.s who volunteer to take Twelfth Step calls, our committee is compiling an informative pamphlet, using the P.I. Workbook as a guide.”

Tennessee. "The District 32 P.I. committee is currently providing local libraries with copies of Big Books and Twelve and Twelves," reports chairman Michael M. "We are trying to improve communications with the Health Department and the missions as well. Enhancing the literature and information collection of the local hospitals and treatment centers is an ongoing project. Meanwhile, we would welcome any information or literature you could send. As you know, in any Twelfth Step work it is vital for the messengers to be well-informed."

Vermont. In November a P.I. presentation was given at the Lebanon Senior Center in District 5. After a brief description of A.A., seven senior A.A.s shared their experience and thoughts regarding the benefits of sobriety at any age.

East Washington: Members of the P.I./C.P.C. in District 1 are giving a return presentation for students from other countries, to acquaint them with A.A. and how it works.

Correctional Facilities

Update: Teamwork Turns Wake-up Call Into a Success Story

Last spring the South Florida Area Correctional Facilities Committee was jolted to learn that a large communications gap existed between A.A. and staff in the state's Department of Corrections (D.O.C.), who apparently had only a foggy idea of what A.A. is all about (*Box 4-5-9*, Feb.-Mar. 1997, p. 9). This was bad news in a state that has approximately 350 facilities (including jails, prisons, juvenile centers and probation/restitution programs). "But thanks to the teamwork of service committees across Florida," says chairman Jim K., "we have established a vital connection with the D.O.C. that we intend to strengthen with time."

In October, Jim relates, "a letter we had sent to the D.O.C. asking for a meeting bore fruit. Several members of our South Florida district and area committees, along with representatives of two other area C.F. committees—North Florida and Alabama/Northwest Florida—met with the D.O.C.'s secretary of corrections. We were given only 40 minutes to make our presentation to about 135 people, but it went off like a charm.

"First, Bob M., who chairs our Clearwater-St. Petersburg (District 1) Committee on Cooperation With the Professional Community, explained what A.A. does

and does not do. That left each of the C.F. area reps just a few minutes in which to air significant points before the 20-minute-long question/answer session. We had set up a literature table and were glad we did—pamphlets such as 'If You Are a Professional' 'It Sure Beats Sitting in a Cell' and 'Memo to an Inmate Who May Be an Alcoholic' flew off the table." During their time together, Jim notes, "some of the officials asked for input on such matters as the building and staffing of halfway houses. These questions we firmly tabled, reiterating time and again that, in the spirit of Tradition Ten, A.A. 'has no opinion on outside issues'—that our only purpose is to carry the message of sobriety to the alcoholic who still suffers."

"Afterward we A.A.s met informally with two members of the D.O.C. secretary's staff in a private room off the main conference hall. In this meeting, which lasted almost two hours, we discussed many problems that had surfaced in the past for both them and us: clearances, inside/outside sponsors, availability of funds for the purchase of A.A. literature, personality clashes, and more. The thrust of the meeting, as we saw it, was to emphasize our common goals and encourage mutual trust and cooperation. Later the D.O.C. secretary thanked me graciously for A.A.'s commitment and gave assurance of his continuing interest and support."

'Inside' Group Counts Its Blessings

"Hello, my name is Timothy. I am an alcoholic, and I have just been elected the new G.S.R. (general service representative) of my A.A. group at this correctional facility in Collins, New York. Very recently we donated a check in the amount of \$15 to Buffalo Area service. Our current balance is \$30.45, and I am happy to inform you that in the future we will be sending a donation to the General Service Office."

Continuing, Timothy reports: "We are averaging 8-15 members at each of our meetings, which number four a week: Tuesdays, Twelve & Twelve study; Thursdays, Big Book study; Saturday mornings, literature; and Sundays, a speaker meeting that outside guests sometimes attend."

In the U.S./Canada today there are over 2,300 C.F. groups (and more than 62,000 individual members). Certainly, many correctional facilities groups may be unable to contribute to A.A. as a whole. However, Timothy's letter reflects what A.A.'s collective experience has borne out: The more a group, inside or out, takes responsibility for self-support and contributions to A.A. services worldwide, the stronger our collective recovery and sense of belonging to the Fellowship.

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.

April

- 3-5—Akron, Ohio. 23rd Annual Northeast Ohio Mini-Conf. Write: Ch., 3378 Washington Blvd., Cleveland Heights, OH 44118-2541
- 3-5—Richmond, Virginia. Serenity Weekend. Write: Ch., Box 832, Midlothian, VA 23113
- 6-12—San Juan Bautista, California. Sierra 98 Big Book Workshop. Write: Ch., 14640 Morelli Lane, Sebastopol, CA 95472
- 9-12—San Diego, California. 21st Annual San Diego Spring Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 82477, San Diego, CA 92142
- 9-13—Scarborough (near Perth), Western Australia. 33rd National Conv. Write: Ch., Box 6359, East Perth, Western Australia 6892
- 10-12—New Orleans, Louisiana. 30th Big Deep South Conv. Write: Ch., 4041 Tulane Ave., Ste. 301, New Orleans, LA 70119
- 17-19—Banff, Alberta, Canada. 25th Annual Banff Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 6744, Postal Station D, Calgary, AB T2P 2E6
- 17-19—St. Petersburg, Florida. Sobriety in Action Conv. Write: Ch., Box 2571, Pinellas Park, FL 33780-2571
- 17-19—Alexandria Bay, New York. Dist. 38 1000 Islands "Steps of Life" 33rd Anniver. Write: Ch., 741 Fulton St., Carthage, NY 13619
- 17-19—Grand Forks, North Dakota. Northern Spring Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 14121, Grand Forks, ND 58208-4121
- 17-19—Superior, Wisconsin. 53rd Annual Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 996, Superior, WI 54880
- 18-19—St. Joseph, Missouri. St. Joseph 55th Anniversary. Write: Ch., 3106 County Line Rd., St. Joseph, MO 64506
- 18-19—Norfolk, Nebraska. Norfolk Spring Classic. Write: Ch., 818 S. 7th, Norfolk, NE 68701
- 24-26—Athens, Greece. Fourth International Conv. Write: Ch., Parthenon Group, Box 52815, 14610 N. Erytlarea, Greece
- 24-26—Ridgecrest, California. IWV "Frontier of Hope" 11th Annual Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 6157, Ridgecrest, CA 93556
- 24-26—Canon City, Colorado. 11th Annual Colorado Corrections Conf. Write: Ch., 1101 E. Main J-8, Florence, CO 81226
- 24-26—Ames, Iowa. 11th Annual Aim for Ames Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 2491, Ames, IA 50010
- 24-26—Fairmont, Minnesota. Fourth Annual Sunlight of the Spirit Weekend. Write: Ch., Box 748, Fairmont, MN 56031
- 24-26—St. Louis, Missouri. 11th National Men's Conf. Write: Ch., Box 190288, St. Louis, MO 63119

- 24-26—Canandaigua, New York. 13th Annual Conf. of the Lakes. Write: Ch., Box 25261, Farmington, NY 14425
- 24-26—Orangeburg, South Carolina. Orangeburg Spring Round-Up III. Write: Ch., Box 2431, Orangeburg, SC 29116
- 24-26—Syria, Virginia. Heaven on Earth Day VII. Write: Ch., Box 31, Bowie, MD 20719-0031

May

- 1-3—Oliver, British Columbia, Canada. 14th Annual South Okanagan Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 392, Oliver, BC V0N 1T0
- 1-3—Edmundston, New Brunswick, Canada. Area 28 District 4 Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 474, Ft. Kent, ME 04743
- 1-3—Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada. Northwestern Ontario Area 85 Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 73, Thunder Bay, ON P7C 4V5
- 1-3—Keanae, Maui, Hawaii. Ninth Annual Maui Round Up. Write: Ch., Box 550, Kihei, HI 96753
- 1-3—Greenville, Mississippi. Dist. 51 Delta Roundup. Write: Ch., 110 N. Victoria Ave., Cleveland, MS 38732
- 1-3—Lincoln, Nebraska. Spring Fling. Write: Ch., Box 30852, Lincoln, NE 68503
- 1-3—Omaha, Nebraska. Pockets of Enthusiasm. Write: Ch., Box 55, Bellevue, NE 68005
- 1-3—Albuquerque, New Mexico. Fifth Annual Red Road Conv. Write: Ch., Box 9460, Albuquerque, NM 878119
- 1-3—Greensburg, Pennsylvania. 49th Laurel Highlands Conf. Write: Ch., 11470 Blossom Hill RD., Pittsburgh, PA 15234
- 1-3—Aberdeen, South Dakota. Area 63 Spring Conf. Write: Ch., 819 S. 11th St., Aberdeen, SD 57401
- 1-3—Brattleboro, Vermont. Vermont 1998 Conv. Write: Ch., Box 1998, Wallingford, VT 05773
- 1-3—Oconomowoc, Wisconsin. 47th Annual Southern Wisconsin Spring Conf. Write: Tr., Box 1094, Waukesha, WI 53187-1094

Closed Meeting Topics From the Grapevine

For more detailed suggestions, see the pages noted.

April (page 51): Along spiritual lines

March (page 21): The fine art of listening

- 14-17—Daytona Beach, Florida. Eighth Annual Spring Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 4911, South Daytona, FL 32121
- 15-17—Rehoboth Beach, Delaware. 38th Annual Delaware Conv. Write: Ch., Box 262, Middletown, DE 19709
- 15-17—Tulsa, Oklahoma. 57th Annual State Conf. Write: Ch., 7341 E. 75th St., Tulsa, OK 74133
- 15-17—Middletown, New York. Orange County Spring Conf. Write: Ch., Box 705, Middletown, NY 10940-0705
- 15-17—Holyoke, Massachusetts. 29th Western Mass. Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 10462, Holyoke, MA 01041
- 16-19—Eureka Springs, Arkansas. 22nd Annual Springtime in the Ozarks Conv. Write: Ch., 26 Eureka St., Eureka Springs, AR 72632
- 22-24—Bloomington, Minnesota. Gopher State Roundup XXV. Write: Ch., Box 6529, St. Paul, MN 55165-0295
- 29-31—Abbotsford, British Columbia, Canada. Abbotsford Roundup. Write: Ch., 33439 Huggins Ave., Abbotsford, BC V2S 2R8
- 29-31—Campbellton, New Brunswick, Canada. NB-PEI Area 81 Assembly. Write: Ch., 339 Notre Dame, Atholville, NB E3N 4T2
- 29-31—Aspen, Colorado. CCYPAA 98 Write: Ch., Box 8371, Aspen, CO 81612
- 29-31—Waycross, Georgia. Okefenokee Roundup. Write: Secy., 1707 Oconee Rd. Waycross, GA 31501

Planning a Future Event?

Please send your information on June, July or August events, two days or more, in time to reach G.S.O. by April 10, the calendar deadline for the June-July issue of Box 4-5-9.

For your convenience and ours — please type or print the information to be listed on the Bulletin Board page, and mail to us:

Date of event: from _____ to _____, 19____

Name of event: _____

Place (city, state or prov.): _____

For information, write: (exact mailing address) _____

Contact phone # (for office use only): _____

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

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



June

- 12-14—*Calgary, Alberta, Canada.* Gratitude Round-Up. Write: Ch., Box 954, Station M, Calgary, AB T2P 2K4
- 12-14—*Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.* Western Canada Regional Forum. Write: Forum Coordinator, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163
- 12-14—*Ft. Dodge, Iowa.* Area 24 1998 Spring Conf. Write: Ch., Box 155, Ft. Dodge, IA 50501
- 18-21—*Indian Wells, California.* Desert Pow Wow. Write: Ch., Box 10128, Palm Desert, CA 92255-0128
- 18-21—*Hagerstown, Maryland.* Area 29 Maryland Celebration of Sobriety. Write: Ch., Box 19135, Baltimore, MD 21286
- 19-21—*Marion, Illinois.* Little Egypt Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 44, Thompsonville, IL 62890
- 19-21—*Melville, New York.* Big Book Study 98. Write: Ch., Box 0764, Floral Park, NY 11002-0764
- 19-21—*Arlington, Virginia.* State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 893, Annandale, VA 22003-0893
- 19-21—*Casper, Wyoming.* 23rd June Jamboree. Write: Ch., Box 50071, Casper, WY 82605-0071
- 26-27—*Peterborough, Ontario, Canada.* Kawartha Dist. 37 Annual Conf. Write: Ch., Box 1233, RR #8, Peterborough, ON K9J 7H5

July

- 3-5—*Seattle, Washington.* Pacific Northwest Conf. Write: Ch., Box 39313, Tacoma, WA 98439-0313
- 8-12—*Naples, Florida.* 42nd State Conv. Write: Ch., 18533 Bradenton Rd., Ft. Myers, FL 33912
- 10-12—*Nanaimo, British Columbia, Canada.* Big Book Comes Alive. Write: Ch., 6105 Icarus Dr., Nanaimo, BC V9V 1B6
- 10-12—*Sacramento, California.* Pacific Regional Forum. Write: Forum Coordinator, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163
- 10-12—*Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.* State Roundup of Young People. Write: Ch., 17119 Sunny Hollow Rd., Edmond, OK 73003
- 16-19—*Lubbock, Texas.* 24th Annual Lubbock Caprock Conv. Write: Ch., Box 6511, Lubbock, TX 79493