

■ La Viña Celebrates 25 Years of Service to A.A.'s Spanish-speaking Community

La Viña, A.A.'s Spanish-language meeting in print, turns 25 this year, and its ability to connect Spanish-speaking members in the U.S. and Canada to each other and to the A.A. service structure has grown since its very first issue appeared in June of 1996. "La Viña is about community," says Karina C., the magazine's associate editor. "We reached out to members recently to see if they wanted to share their thoughts with us about what the magazine has meant to them for our June/July anniversary issue and we received over 100 messages. The community has realized how important it is to have this opportunity to share experiences with each other and to connect with people halfway around the world."

"La Viña has become an important tool for Hispanic members to come together and share their stories," says Irene D., the magazine's former editor and a current G.S.O. staffer. "If you imagine the early days of A.A., when alcoholics were first forming groups and discovering others like themselves, that's the service that La Viña facilitates."

The idea of a Spanish-language publication modeled after Grapevine began in the late 1980s as a direct response to the fact that the Spanish-speaking Fellowship in the U.S. and Canada had grown exponentially in the previous few decades. For some time, Spanish-speaking members of A.A. in North America had wanted to be able to read and submit articles to Grapevine as original stories in their own language. And, while local bulletins and magazines — such as AKRON 1935, in Spain; Compartimiento, in Guatemala; and Plenitud, in Mexico, just to name a few — have appeared in Spanish-speaking countries over the years, these have generally been geared to their national service structures.

In 1991, the General Service Conference issued a recommendation that Grapevine begin publishing at least one article in Spanish every month. In 1995, the Conference gave its approval to a five-year trial run of a Spanish-language edition of Grapevine. Ames S., currently G.S.O. executive editor, was managing editor of Grapevine at the time, and he remembers how it all began. "We did a pilot issue completely in Spanish and brought it to the International Convention in San Diego that year. At this point the proposed magazine had no name and consisted of Grapevine stories translated into



The inaugural issue contained a mixture of stories translated from Grapevine, along with a few Spanish-language originals. Today it is comprised of all original stories submitted in Spanish.

Spanish. Along with the pilot issue, we passed out a form asking, 'Is this something you would be interested in?' And we received back a considerable number of names and addresses of potential subscribers — both English- and Spanish-speaking."

At this point, Ames says, "It was time to give the magazine a name." Wanting to echo the Grapevine theme, they came up with La Viña — "the Vineyard." Jaime M., a Colombian writer, teacher and translator, was hired as the magazine's first editor. In June of 1996, 7,000 copies of the initial issue came off press. La Viña was published

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

on a bimonthly basis, as it is today, and at first contained a mixture of stories translated from Grapevine, along with a few Spanish-language originals.

In 2001, the General Service Conference recommended that La Viña continue to be published by AA Grapevine, Inc., and to be supported by the General Service Board as a service to the Fellowship. As the result of this action, reaffirmed by the Conference in 2011, La Viña is unique in its hybrid status as it seeks to be self-supporting through the sale of subscriptions and content-related items, with any difference in revenue and expenses provided by the General Fund of the General Service Board.

Hernán M., the magazine's editor from 2001 to 2007, recalls how the magazine grew. "Hispanics were and are very attached to La Viña. They had really high subscription rates compared to the size of their population. When we asked them for support, they responded." There were challenges, of course, he notes. "Migrant workers didn't stay in one place, so it was hard for their subscriptions to reach them, and overseas postal services don't always work as well as we would like."

At the same time, Hernán began to see that La Viña was a catalyst for the Spanish-speaking A.A. community in the U.S. and Canada — often separate from the main A.A. service structure and community — to come together. "When I started to attend A.A. events hosted by the Hispanic Fellowship, I realized the value of face-to-face communication in terms of carrying the message for Alcoholics Anonymous."

The 2010 General Service Conference's request for spiritual parity between Grapevine and La Viña and the expansion of the magazine to 64 pages with a black-and-white interior and four-color cover marked a turning point in the magazine's history, and in the decade since, it has made enormous strides. Its website, redesigned in early 2020 (along with that of Grapevine),

became a vibrant and welcoming place for members to read stories and gather information online. Grapevine and La Viña web coordinator Niurka Melendez-Vasquez (nonalcoholic), a native of Venezuela, remembers that when she arrived at Grapevine/La Viña in May 2017, the La Viña website itself was black and white. "Because the magazine's pages were black and white, the vendor was just loading them that way — a two-color website! Even so, my connection with La Viña was immediate. I was so excited to find everything in Spanish, and the recognition of that language on the website made me feel good. It's good to know that people are taking care to deliver the message in our own language."

Karina C. speaks of the hope she sees for La Viña's future. There has been some fear during the Covid-19 pandemic that La Viña members — who often meet at La Viña writing workshops at Regional Forums and other service events to craft La Viña stories (many of them submitted as handwritten documents) — might stop sending in their stories. But, says Karina, "Reader submissions are up. Last month, sales went up 84 percent on the website store. We have meetings and an anniversary event happening in July and the National Convention in September. And our new book *Mujeres en AA* is out." All but two of the stories in the new book were written expressly for La Viña by Spanish-speaking women A.A. members. "Ten years ago, Spanish-speaking women weren't being included in A.A. meetings. We started a special section for women in A.A. and always included two or three stories in every issue. We look through the issues and see women from all over the world sharing this same experience."

Janet Bryan (nonalcoholic), director of operations at Grapevine, has always been a La Viña fan. She doesn't read Spanish, but she finds the magazine "attractive and colorful." As a sort of informal focus group, she takes one of her free copies of the magazine and puts it out on a giveaway table in the laundry room of her apartment building. "It disappears right away. I also put out *Mujeres en AA* and the same thing happened." At the same time, despite the popularity of La Viña, she recognizes the need for more La Viña reps in groups to shore up subscriptions and for more delegates to share news of La Viña in their areas.

Chris C., interim Grapevine publisher, understands the importance of La Viña not just to Spanish-speakers, but to A.A. as a whole. "We want our Spanish-speaking members to feel part of greater A.A. There is a growing population of Spanish-speaking people in the U.S. and Canada, and if they are like any population that size, maybe 10 percent of them need help from Alcoholics Anonymous. If we find the right way to engage with groups and members, they'll benefit from the magazine and the books, and they'll see La Viña as a real resource and Twelfth Step tool. Twenty-five years is a good start, but we still have a lot of ground we want to cover."

Reflections on La Viña's 25th Anniversary

- ▶ "Congratulations to La Viña on its 25th anniversary. My name is Joaquín and I came to Alcoholics Anonymous on February 3, 1995. I discovered the existence of La Viña. I am grateful that the stories from La Viña were made available for free in those first difficult months of the pandemic. I assure you that it nourished me and a fellow member of the group, that it made us feel good and helped us. My friend is blind, but I was able to read the experiences to him. We appreciate this gift."
- ▶ "Thank you for doing the enormous and important work of editing and sharing the pages of La Viña with us. After reading the issues that have been sent to me, I have shared them with other alcoholic women who have been in hospitals, or simply in their homes recovering after having been drinking in secret from their families. I have been able to help them identify with some of the stories. Thank you for helping me and a world of women who, like me, were being destroyed by this great disease of the soul."
- ▶ "I do A.A. service work in Corrections and have seen how powerful and useful a few copies of La Viña can be. Oftentimes, our members in custody do not know English and may not be able to read the Big Book of *Alcoholics Anonymous*. But once we put the chairs in a circle and the meeting begins, maybe a couple of men will come, so we say to them, 'Take one of the La Viña magazines, read a few lines and join us.'"
- ▶ "During this pandemic, which has forced us to be distanced from the A.A. community, we have not been able to hold face-to-face meetings. Being a subscriber to La Viña filled that void. So today I am sober one day at a time."
- ▶ "La Viña has become my identification for emotional, spiritual and physical sobriety. Along with my experience, I use La Viña for my Twelfth Step work, in the hope that others will also discover that they are not alone in facing the truth about themselves, and that they can also find a solution to their alcohol problems."

General Service Board Selects Linda Chezem as New Chairperson



Linda Chezem

Linda Chezem, a past Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee, has been selected as the new chairperson of the General Service Board following the 71st General Service Conference in April, replacing outgoing Class A chairperson Michele Grinberg.

Of the 21 members on A.A.'s General Service Board, seven are designated as Class A (nonalcoholic) trustees, friends of the Fellowship specifically selected for their professional expertise and the unique skills they bring to the board's work of carrying the message of Alcoholics Anonymous. Additionally, and importantly, A.A.'s seven Class A (nonalcoholic) trustees can do certain things that the 14 Class B (alcoholic) trustees cannot do, such as showing their faces on camera or using their last names without violating the Traditions and principles of anonymity that are

designed to keep A.A. members out of the public eye.

Born, raised and still living on a southern Indiana farm that has been in her family since the 19th century, Linda is professor emerita of Youth Development and Agriculture Education at Purdue University. Trained as a lawyer, she spent 22 years serving as a judge, beginning as the first female Circuit Court judge in Indiana, followed by a decade on the Indiana Court of Appeals.

Linda became acquainted with Alcoholics Anonymous as a newly minted jurist in 1975. As she tells the story, "I had these people who kept coming back to court because they couldn't afford their fines for getting drunk and in trouble. It was the same problem, over and over again. To a large extent I didn't know what to do with them. One day, my bailiff came to me and said, 'There are three gentlemen who want to see you.' They came in wearing coats and ties, and introduced themselves as A.A. members from the local community. They said, 'We know you don't know what to do with these alcoholics, but we're alcoholics and we can help.' They said they had a seven o'clock meeting Tuesday nights around the corner from the courthouse."

"After that," Linda says, "when someone came in

with a drinking problem, I'd suggest they go to that meeting. I didn't think a whole lot about it. It worked for some people. Sad to say, it didn't work for everyone, but I did see a lot of people for whom it did work."

One thing Linda's experience as a judge taught her is that "a person who has issues with alcohol doesn't just have to show up on the criminal docket to need the hand of A.A. to be there. Bankruptcy, divorces, child custody cases, business failures — I bet if you took a look at 100 cases, you could find any number where alcohol had been part of the problem."

While still a circuit court judge, Linda spearheaded the first certified court alcohol and drug program in Indiana, serving on a state substance abuse advisory council along with state legislators and A.A. members. In the mid-1990s, she served on the board of an Indianapolis treatment center where the chief executive was also in A.A. One day in 1995, two A.A.s, Art C. and Don W., invited her to breakfast. They suggested she might like to serve as a Class A trustee on the General Service Board. Initially, she demurred. "I had no idea that G.S.O. even existed at that time, nor even that there was a service structure." But then Don pulled out a book "that looked like its binding and wrapper were leftover grocery store material." The book turned out to be *The A.A. Service Manual/Twelve Concepts for World Service*. She read it and was hooked.

"Bill W. wrote in the most marvelous, byzantine language in the world," she says. "It is very evocative of writers like Robert Greenleaf and E.B. White. I liked the language — I liked the way Bill would find three or four ways to say things — so I filled out the form that Don gave me."

Linda served the Fellowship as a Class A trustee from 1997 to 2003. Following her tenure on the board, she was a special assistant at the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) from 2003 to 2007. While Linda will bring a great deal of experience with alcoholism and treatment to her role as chair of the General Service Board, she believes her most important contribution will be her ability to listen, honed by years on the bench. "You can't be a good judge if you don't listen," she says. "I was born with hearing loss and have had to work hard to listen, even with hearing aids, so you learn to listen to what people are saying in between the words and in between the sentences."

Linda understands that in a world redefined by Covid-19, "A.A., like the rest of society, is trying to work things out" as it moves forward into the future. "I think Bill intended to say things in as many ways as he could so as many people as possible could understand that A.A. is not just an organization or a fellowship or a movement. He taught that to have A.A., all you need is two alcoholics talking to each other — two people sharing with each other and finding ways to help each other stay sober."

■ The General Service Board Welcomes Two New Class A Trustees

Following the General Service Conference, the General Service Board also selected two new Class A (nonalcoholic) trustees who will serve the Fellowship over the next six years: Kevin Prior, of St. Louis, Missouri; Senior Director of Finance for the Catholic Health Association of the United States; and Molly Anderson, of Williamsville, New York; Executive Director for the Center of Leadership and Organizational Effectiveness at the University of Buffalo. They will replace rotating Class A trustees Leslie Backus and Peter Luongo, who have served the Fellowship since 2014.

Born in New York City, **Kevin Prior** moved to Champaign, Illinois, for high school and college, and finally to St. Louis — where he now lives with his wife



Kevin Prior

and two children — to start a career in public accounting. "I am among the strange minority of people for whom alcohol does nothing. I barely drink," he says. "Yet alcohol was the most powerful force in my life as I was growing up." This was because of his experience with the alcoholism of a close family member. Kevin remembers being four years old and going to a detox center to visit his relative. Asked to write his "autobiography" in fourth grade, he began, "My family was torn apart by alcoholism."

The family member eventually got sober through A.A. "I firmly believe alcoholism is a family disease and I feel a debt to A.A."

Kevin is Senior Director of Finance for the Catholic Health Association of the United States, a nonprofit very similar in size and scope to Alcoholics Anonymous; like A.A., it is funded by its own members, with what Kevin describes as a "parallel financial structure." Thus, when Class A (nonalcoholic) trustee Sister Judith Ann Karam called the organization seeking someone who might be interested in serving as a Class A, Kevin fit the bill.

Assuming his role as trustee, Kevin is naturally aware that there has been what he calls "a tidal wave of change" because of Covid-19. "I happen to believe that in-person meetings are still the best way to receive the program. But virtual meetings offer a new channel that we can't ignore. The main point is that the Traditions have steered the Fellowship for 86 years, and you have to find a way to keep these tenets secure even

as you adapt.” Ultimately, Kevin says, “I want to make sure I listen and learn from the wisdom of those who came before me and then use my professional experience, perspective and gifts to help the Fellowship in any way I can.”

Molly Anderson has worked with people and organizations around the world in the areas of leadership development and organizational effectiveness. Since



Molly Anderson

2016, she has been Executive Director of the Center for Leadership and Organizational Effectiveness at the University of Buffalo. She finds A.A.’s model of governing its organization with a focus on service “fascinating.” She notes, “I loved learning about the history of service leadership. The author Robert Greenleaf [who wrote extensively about leading through service] was a

friend of Bill W.’s and contributed some of his writing to Grapevine. The foundation of A.A. is to listen to others. To me, leadership is all about listening and humility, and you can use those same words to describe Alcoholics Anonymous.”

Molly’s fiancé James has 26 years of sobriety in A.A., and it has been through him that she has had what she calls a “front-row seat” to what is happening in A.A., especially “the 24/7 A.A. meetings on digital platforms and the tremendous impact these meetings are having.” For James’s 25th A.A. anniversary, the couple traveled to Hawaii, where they were able to attend in-person outdoor meetings, and where, as a nonalcoholic, Molly felt the “warmth, compassion and love of the Fellowship of A.A.” Over the course of her work, she has traveled widely and had the same experience in Singapore, Haiti and Russia, getting to know a culture “through the lens of A.A.”

When James told her that there were opportunities in A.A. for Class A trustees, Molly was interested and decided to apply. “I knew it was maybe a one-in-a-million chance, but I felt compelled to put my name out there and go where I could do the most good.” Her experience and perspective are well suited to serving on the General Service Board. “I have served on a number of boards and have spent a good deal of time learning about their challenges. I’ve worked with diversity, equity and inclusion issues, and how these impact organizations. I’ve learned it’s wise for boards, every few years, to look at their purpose and mission. I want to underscore the history and Traditions of A.A. People describe me as someone who builds and creates things, and that’s what I hope to help accomplish as I serve Alcoholics Anonymous.”

■ Five New Class B Trustees Arrive at A.A.’s General Service Board

Following their election in April at the 71st General Service Conference, the General Service Board of A.A. welcomed five new Class B (alcoholic) trustees: Cathi C., of Indianapolis, Indiana, East Central regional trustee; Tom H. of Marietta, Georgia, Southeast regional trustee; Marita R. of Mesquite, Nevada, trustee-at-large, U.S.; Paz P. of Tucson, Arizona, general service trustee on the AA Grapevine board; and Deb K., general service trustee on the A.A.W.S. board. [Editor’s note: Due to space considerations in this issue, we look forward to publishing Deb K.’s profile in the Fall 2021 edition.] While all trustees represent the Fellowship as a whole and no trustee can be said to “represent” a geographical section, these newly elected A.A. members bring extensive service experience and invaluable regional and professional points of view to the board’s deliberations.

Cathi C. calls herself a “perpetual student,” having gone to four different colleges (while actively drinking) and finally graduating in sobriety. “I began drinking young and I started college young, and I was just not prepared,” she says. Changing colleges became a kind of “geographic cure” for her that didn’t cure anything at all; eventually, she quit school, got a job in a music store in her hometown of Indianapolis, worked her way up to a managerial position, and “absolutely loved” what she was doing. But then her drinking caught up with her: “I just couldn’t hold it together. I had panic attacks, anxiety attacks.” She went into treatment and got sober in A.A. in 1998. She was introduced to service as a newcomer because there were a lot of people in her home group who were active in local and area service. “I could hear something in their voices — they sounded so sure of themselves, so happy and serene, and I just knew I wanted what they had. They all became mentors to me.”

Cathi held numerous service positions — including group secretary, alternate intergroup rep, Grapevine/La Viña rep, G.S.R. and alternate G.S.R., and D.C.M. and alternate D.C.M. — before becoming Area 23, Panel 64 delegate (2014-2015). “Being a delegate was transformational for me,” she says. “I remember being at the Conference and breaking down in tears because I was so moved by the sense of connection I felt with A.A.s around the world.”

Cathi’s sense of connection extends to remote communities, where people have difficulty attending meetings because of geography or culture or lack of access. Prior to the 2015 General Service Conference, she co-chaired a meeting on remote communities. “I was just fascinated with the lengths to which A.A. will go to bring meetings to this community,” she says. She has spent time working with homeless populations, which can include alcoholic veterans isolated and suffering

from PTSD. “I think all of us can feel we are in a ‘remote community’ at one point or another.”

As a trustee, Cathi says that her focus will be on “how A.A. stays relevant and keeps its Traditions and Concepts in a world where communications are changing so rapidly.” She adds, “Bill W. said, ‘Let us never fear needed change.’ I like that quote a lot.”

Born and raised in Miami, Florida, but now a long-time resident of Marietta, Georgia, **Tom H.** has spent his adult life helping people: he is a retired firefighter and paramedic. Tom began drinking at the age of 13 and got arrested while still in middle school; by the time he was 18, he had been court-ordered into a locked psychiatric facility, after which his father threw him out of the house. Tom recalls, “He said to me, ‘I love you, but I can’t take it anymore. But if you ever need help, I’m here.’” Tom made his way down to South Florida, where he began drinking even more heavily. Desperate, he finally reached out to his family for help. Arriving back at the airport in Georgia, he was met by his mother, the woman who had once described him as “the best little boy you could ever want.” Now, he says, “I was so underweight, with this attractive grey color, that she didn’t even recognize me.”

It took a long stay in rehab, a relapse, and then another, even longer stay before Tom got sober for good in 1988. He was 23 years old and began studying to be a firefighter. “I did some work. I began to like the new Tom and to realize that he was worthy of self-esteem.” He was introduced to service on the group level and became active in the International Conference of Young People in A.A. (ICYPAA). “There was a bid committee for ICYPAA, and I jumped on board and traveled around the country. I really loved the enthusiasm I saw in people.” When Atlanta received the bid for the 37th Annual ICYPAA convention in 1994, Tom became Outreach Chair.

Attending the International Convention in Minneapolis in 2000, Tom encountered Greg M., G.S.O.’s recent past general manager, who had a suggestion for him: “A.A. has invested a long time in you. Maybe it’s time to give back in general service,” which Tom did, ultimately becoming Georgia (Area 16) Panel 62 delegate (2012-2013). He hasn’t neglected other types of service, either, allowing men who are recovering from alcoholism to stay in his home. “It’s really important for people to have a safe place to stay that is also a non-drinking place.”

Upon hearing he had become a trustee, Tom says, “I really was in disbelief. God has fitted me for so many things in my life. It’s almost surreal, to some degree, for a blue-collar guy who has worked as a firefighter and a paramedic.” He feels inspired and guided by the example of Albin Z., newly retired Grapevine publisher, who visited Tom’s area in Georgia and impressed Tom with his caring and concern for everyone he met. He also believes Bill W.’s 1965 General Service Conference talk, “What Happened to Those Who Left,” collected in *Our Great Responsibility*, is an important read for anyone, inside

and outside of General Service. “When he talks about responsibility, it says a lot about what I hope to be and do as a Class B trustee.”

Like Tom H., **Marita R.** started drinking at 13 and finished at 23 — “just enough time,” she says, “to miss out on some important life lessons.” Marita, of Mesquite, Nevada, was born outside of Philadelphia, but moved around a great deal while young. (She’s lived in eight states and four foreign countries). It was while working for the Illinois Secretary of State’s office that she got

“It’s really important for people to have a safe place to stay that is also a non-drinking place.”

sober. The reason? “Sheer embarrassment,” she says. “I handled drunk drivers — those who’d lost their driver’s licenses through DUIs and were trying to get them back. I used to hand out the ‘20 Questions’ list for people to see if they were alcoholics. Finally, one of my clients and their sponsor invited me to a meeting. ‘You might want to check this out.’ I had so totally compartmentalized my work from my drinking that I didn’t even realize I needed A.A.”

This was the beginning of almost 40 years of sobriety for Marita, who stopped drinking on August 1, 1981. She got sober in Chicago, with a home group that was very active in service. “They didn’t believe in newcomers waiting a year to do different types of service. They dragged me hither and yon, and I was grateful for it.” Marita has done general service work in eight different Areas — 19, 38, 10, 5, 93, 9, 42 and 49 — possibly some kind of general service record. She served as Panel 49 delegate (1999-2000) and created and chaired the first Native American intertribal/G.S.O. meeting in Southern California.

All the while, Marita was pursuing three distinct careers. First, she traveled throughout Southeast Asia while working with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, managing staff as they made economic development presentations to member nations. Back home in the States, she became a K-3 elementary schoolteacher for children with special needs. After that, she finished her professional career in the financial services industry, with a specialty in helping recently widowed women manage their finances.

“The fact that I’ve been chosen a trustee-at-large really matches my life experience,” Marita says. “I’ve visited over 60 countries and talked to A.A. members all over the world; I’m comfortable with many different cultures. I am excited about the sharing aspect of being a trustee, of being ready for the people who need me, including the person who hasn’t gotten here yet. I think the place of the board is to think about our future and to be ready to have a conversation about what the groups are going to do and what they’ll need. I feel incredibly grateful to

Alcoholics Anonymous. It allowed me to be the best that I can be, and now I am being the best I can be for A.A.”

Paz P.'s decision point when it came to stopping drinking was unforgettable. A native of Mexico, she was working in Mexico City at the time. As she tells the story, “Before A.A., I was unable to hold a job for longer than a year; it might have been just three months. One time, I was working in an office where I was the only employee. I was in this room where the walls were covered with mirrors. I was drinking so much my skin was green and yellow, and I'd had my hair cut really short because that way when I threw up I didn't smell bad. I heard an A.A. guy on the radio doing an interview with the host of the show — talking about how bad his drinking had been and how alcoholism was a disease. I expected the host to say, ‘Oh, drinking isn't so bad.’ But instead he agreed with the guy.

“It stuck with me, too, to hear that alcoholism was a disease — that it wasn't the alcoholic's fault. So, when the show was over, I called the radio station to ask where I could find A.A. There I was, sitting in this room covered with mirrors, with my skin green, and I disguised my voice! There are 20 million people in Mexico City, but I thought I needed to.”

Paz got the address of a meeting and found the courage to go to it that very day. “I had gotten to the point where it was physically painful for me to keep drinking, and yet I did. With my family, I was like a stray dog barking. I couldn't retain money or a job. I desperately needed A.A.”

Paz got sober in 1997 and moved to Tucson, Arizona, in 2000. She was surprised to find only three sober women in the entire Spanish-speaking A.A. community, at the time comprised of about 50 members. “And they had all received the A.A. message in another country,” as Paz herself had. “It was a challenge to be the only woman present the first time I attended a meeting in the U.S.,” even though, she says, the men were supportive. Although things have gotten better in the years since, Paz feels that there is a continuing need for engagement and communication with women in the Spanish-speaking community. Her service work includes being Area 3 newsletter editor and Grapevine coordinator; she has also spent time on La Viña's Editorial Advisory Board. From 2014 to 2018, she was a nontrustee director on the AA Grapevine Board: “It was an amazing adventure, and I feel like I have come full circle,” she says.

Professionally, Paz works in the nonprofit world as a human resources assistant for an organization that provides legal aid and social services to adults and children detained along the border. With this experience and her work in A.A., she understands the need for empathy and inclusion.

“When you learn another language,” she says, “all your feelings stay with your first language. It took me almost 10 years to feel in another language, so to speak.” As a trustee, Paz wants to connect the Spanish-speaking community with A.A. as a whole. “I think my main goal is to let groups know what is happening outside their own groups. Some people lack the right language for say-

ing that they believe something may no longer be working in A.A. or that they don't understand something — how do you ask about that without the right language? I want to be the conduit for that kind of communication.”

■ Résumés for Trustee Elections Due January 1, 2022

Two new Class B (alcoholic) regional trustees, one each from the Pacific and Eastern Canada regions, will be elected at the General Service Conference in April 2022. Résumés must be received at G.S.O. no later than January 1, 2022, and must be submitted *by U.S./Canada area delegates only*. In seeking applications for vacancies in Alcoholics Anonymous, the Fellowship is committed to creating a large file of qualified applicants that reflects the inclusiveness and diversity of A.A. itself. Please email submissions to the secretary, trustees' Nominating Committee, G.S.O., at nominating@aa.org, or post in the mail: Attn. Secretary, Trustees' Nominating Committee, c/o The General Service Office, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY 10115.

The new Pacific regional trustee will fill the position currently held by Kathi F. The next trustee from the Eastern Canada region will follow Jan L.

A sound A.A. background is a basic qualification for Class B trustees. Ten years of continuous sobriety is desirable but not mandatory. Candidates should be active in both local and area A.A. affairs, and because trustees serve the entire Fellowship, they must have the background and the willingness to make decisions on matters of broad policy that affect A.A. as a whole.

Since much is asked of the trustees with respect to their time, it is important that trustee candidates understand the time commitment involved. Trustees are expected to attend quarterly Board Weekends, with three such meetings running from Saturday morning through Monday noon, while the April quarterly meeting is combined with the General Service Conference (seven days); trustees also attend any special meetings of the board. In addition, regional trustees serve in rotation for attendance at Regional Forums other than in their own regions. Regional trustees are usually asked to serve two years on either the A.A.W.S. or Grapevine Corporate Boards, which meet more frequently than the General Service Board.

Trustees serve on committees of the General Service Board and may also serve on trustees' subcommittees or corporate board subcommittees whose work often involves conference calls. They are often invited to participate in regional or area activities, such as service conferences and area assemblies. The term of trusteeship is four years. Applicants are encouraged to discuss the time commitment with their family and employer. Trustees are reimbursed for travel, hotel and meal expenses.

■ U.S./CANs: Another A.A. Solution

In 1975, A.A.s had major milestones to celebrate. First, *Living Sober* was published, and proved to be an instant classic. Then, in the fall, the A.A. Archives opened at the General Service Office (G.S.O.) in New York, with Nell Wing as archivist.

The year 1975 is also significant because it is the year Dr. Jack Norris, (nonalcoholic) chair of the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous, suggested that A.A. host weekend sharing and informational sessions designed to help the General Service Board, A.A. World Services, Inc., the Grapevine corporate board and the staffs of Grapevine and G.S.O. stay in touch with A.A. members, trusted servants and newcomers to service throughout the A.A. service structure. Dr. Jack's idea would take shape that year with the launch of A.A.'s first Regional Forums.

For the next 45 years, A.A. Regional Forums did not change a great deal. General Service Office staff, trustees, delegates and A.A. members traveled to one of the eight regions in the U.S. and Canada. (Forums are held in four regions each year, on a rotating two-year schedule). Members and G.S.O. staff discussed concerns, events and developments within the Fellowship so that the message of A.A. could be better carried to alcoholics who still suffer.

However, with 2020 came Covid-19 and the widespread closures associated with it. Not to be deterred, Sandra W., G.S.O.'s director of staff services, reports, "We knew that we would like to hold some kind of regional meeting by the end of 2020." With the support of then general manager Greg T., the issue was brought before the General Service Board. "Obviously, holding in-person A.A. Regional Forums was out of the question. The question we asked the board was, 'How can we gather as a Fellowship, given the parameters that are right in front of us?' The answer came in the form of the U.S./CAN virtual forums."

Utilizing dual-platform video and web-conferencing software, these two meetings would take place two weeks apart, with each lasting one day, rather than a full weekend. In addition, the regions would be condensed, with eight regions divided into two new groupings: U.S./CAN East would be comprised of the Northeast, Eastern Canada, East Central and Southeast Regions, while U.S./CAN West would consist of the West Central, Western Canada, Pacific and Southwest Regions. The theme of the U.S./CANs was, appropriately, "Experience, Strength and Hope — What it was like, what happened, and what it is like now."

With the organization of the regions settled and a theme agreed upon, a challenge remained: how to

present the content of the forum virtually in a way that would fully engage the Fellowship. It was necessary, Sandra notes, to "reimagine certain aspects," such as using panel discussions to replace some of the workshops and presentations. According to Sandra, in one very popular panel discussion — called "'A' Class Act" — Class A (nonalcoholic) trustees told their stories. "In A.A., we *are* our stories, but we don't often get a



chance to hear the stories from our Class A's. People loved it."

Sandra also remarked on the liveliness of the discussion in the popular intergroup/central office panel: "People across regions and areas had a chance to talk about how they were pivoting from the 'old' way and figuring out how to carry the message virtually to others — especially to newcomers looking for help right now. Everyone shared their solutions."

Each U.S./CAN had over 2,000 attendees, and a combined 1,500 questions were asked and answered. As Sandra says, "We want to let the Fellowship know that we are here and that we *hear*. We want to know how we can better serve you as you carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers."

While many A.A.s (including staff and trustees) are eagerly awaiting the day they return in person to their home groups, meeting places and events, Sandra acknowledged the truth in a colleague's observation: "A.A. is not a place, but a set of 36 principles that live in our hearts." She continued, "For all that has happened, look at how this situation has opened up new ways of reaching our fellows." It is in the combination of these "new ways" and the old that A.A. will grow and continue to be of maximum service to our fellows.

Regional Forums will return to their regular weekend format in 2021. However, attendance at them will remain virtual until 2022. For more information about A.A. Regional Forums, please visit aa.org.

■ Name That Theme: 2025 International Convention

Believe it or not, it's time to start thinking about a theme for the 2025 International Convention celebration of A.A.'s 90th Anniversary in Vancouver, B.C., July 3-6, 2025. We invite you to send in suggestions for a theme, which will be selected by the trustees' International Conventions/Regional Forums Committee. The deadline is coming up fast: please let us hear from you by October 15, 2021.

To spark your thinking, the themes of past A.A. International Conventions have been: 1965 "I Am Responsible"; 1970 "Unity"; 1975 "Let It Begin With Me"; 1980 "The Joy of Living"; 1985 "Fifty Years With Gratitude"; 1990 "Fifty-Five Years — One Day At a Time"; 1995 "A.A. Everywhere — Anywhere"; 2000 "Pass It On — Into the 21st Century"; 2005 "I Am Responsible"; 2010 "A Vision for You"; 2015 "80 Years — Happy, Joyous and Free"; and 2020 "Love and Tolerance is Our Code."

Send your ideas to International Conventions Assignment, P.O. Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163, or email 2025ictheme@aa.org.
Deadline 10/15/21.

■ International Convention: Registration and Housing for 2025

A.A. members are looking forward to the 2025 International Convention, and many members are beginning to contact G.S.O. requesting information on registration and housing accommodations for A.A.'s 90th birthday celebration in Vancouver, B.C. While we appreciate the enthusiasm, this information will not be avail-



able for some time, so please refrain from writing or calling G.S.O. with such requests at this time.

Registration forms will be sent to all A.A. groups on our mailing list in the fall of 2024. Local intergroup/central offices will also receive copies of these forms at the same time. Most of the hotels in and around Vancouver are already committed to our Convention, and the rates for each will be described in the housing information.

Other than the fall 2024 mailing date, the procedures for registration and housing are still in the planning stages. Please rest assured that notification of these procedures will appear in *Box 4-5-9* so that anyone who is interested will have timely and accurate information. As we do not maintain a separate mailing list of A.A. members who have requested information, please be sure your home group receives *Box 4-5-9* so that you and all members of your group will have access to this information as we get nearer to Convention time. (For information on ordering *Box 4-5-9*, go to "G.S.O. Newsletters" on aa.org).

Also keep an eye on aa.org for International Convention updates and information.

■ The 71st General Service Conference Convenes

In Alcoholics Anonymous, *change* is a word that inspires a wide range of responses: excitement, dread, resistance, anticipation, hope. It can be seen as a challenge or an opportunity for growth. And one thing is for sure: the 71st General Service Conference, held virtually for the second time in its 71-year existence, proved that the Fellowship itself is smack in the middle of tremendous change.

While A.A.'s foundational principles remain fixed — as reflected in our Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions and Twelve Concepts — the "when, where and how" of Alcoholics Anonymous has taken on new expression. Spurred by the global pandemic, the Fellowship has successfully pivoted over the past year toward new and effective approaches to A.A.'s Three Legacies of Recovery, Unity and Service, making clear that the message of A.A. and the lifesaving experience of our membership need not be limited by time, space or custom. Drawing together 132 Conference members across multiple time zones from Hawaii to Newfoundland, the

71st General Service Conference both supported and expanded the Fellowship's responsiveness to the realities hinted at in the 2021 Conference theme, "A.A. in a Time of Change."

As noted by Newton, P., rotating trustee-at-large/U.S., in his keynote address, "Perhaps more than in the previous 60 years combined, the global pandemic has changed the A.A. world of how we come together and carry our lifesaving message to the alcoholic who still suffers." In closing, he noted, "We, the members of this General Service Conference, are the successors to our co-founders. It is our annual collective spiritual exercise to lower the bonds of fear and rigidity and closed-mindedness, to allow the fundamental idea of a loving God to be expressed through our group conscience, to trust the process and each other."

Addressing a broad range of issues, the 71st Conference (made up of 93 delegates, 26 trustees and corporate directors from A.A.W.S. and Grapevine, along

with 13 General Service Office, Grapevine and La Viña staff members) worked its way through an agenda filled with items remaining from the 70th Conference, along with many new items submitted by the Fellowship over the past year. Through a deliberative process of discussion and debate that was not without controversy or important questions of process and procedures (guided often by references to Robert's Rules of Order), Conference members sought to acknowledge changing times and to evaluate the needs of the Fellowship as it finds new and effective ways of communicating.

Delegate presentations examined the Three Legacies of Recovery, Service and Unity in a changing world. Cynthia T. of Maryland noted, "The reality is, the world around us has been in a constant state of lightning-fast change and growth for years. I am wondering if, possibly, our response to the pandemic has opened our eyes to changes that may have been needed pre-pandemic." Added France F., of Quebec, "The emergence of the coronavirus changed our lives.... Without knowing it, we entered an intense time of change, as expressed in the theme of the 71st Conference.... That theme imposed itself on our Conference." And Carlos L. of Puerto Rico shared, "For me, it's not been easy adjusting to all the changes the pandemic has brought, but after a lot of meditation and personal inventories, I have come to make amends with the changes and to understand that change is never a comfortable proposition — it's uncomfortable before it is comfortable again."

Emblematic of the 71st Conference's appetite for change were three floor actions related to new language for the Preamble that pushed discussion and debate late into the night on the final day of the Conference. Committed to developing inclusive language, the Conference considered and accepted two separate proposals, creating a dilemma necessitating yet a third proposal that sent a final version to the General Service Board for acceptance. The third recommendation recognized the ultimate preference of the Conference for inclusivity, changing the words "men and women" in the phrase "Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women..." to read "Alcoholics Anonymous is a fellowship of people..."

With that final piece of business accomplished, the 71st General Service Conference came to a close, with the words of Michele Grinberg in her General Service Board report reverberating with all Conference members: "It's going to be a long week of staring at computer screens, but I know we will be guided by our principles and our love for each other and the Fellowship. Together we will continue to model good A.A. servant leadership, as Bill describes it in his beautiful Leadership Essay. Good leadership, he writes, 'originates plans, policies and ideas for the improvement of our Fellowship and its services.'"

Navigating through a time of unprecedented change, the 71st General Service Conference provided the Fellowship with such leadership.

■ 2021 Conference Advisory Actions

Conference Advisory Actions represent recommendations put forward by the standing committees of the General Service Conference that have been discussed, voted on and approved by the Conference body as a whole with substantial unanimity (defined as a majority of at least two-thirds). A sampling of Advisory Actions from the 2021 General Service Conference appears below in abbreviated form. A complete list, along with the full report of additional items considered by each Conference committee, will be published in the Conference *Final Report* (available from G.S.O. in late summer).

Agenda — That the theme of the 2022 Conference be "A.A. Comes of Age 2.0: Unified in Love and Service."

Cooperation with the Professional Community — That a dynamic A.A.W.S. LinkedIn page be implemented by G.S.O., to provide current and relevant content about A.A. to professionals in accordance with A.A. principles and Traditions; and that the updated draft pamphlet "Members of the Clergy Ask About Alcoholics Anonymous" be approved with minor editorial changes and retitled "Faith Leaders Ask About Alcoholics Anonymous."

Corrections — That revisions be made to A.A.W.S. literature directed to members behind the walls and that the terms "inmate" and "offender" be replaced with "person in custody."

Grapevine — That the AA Grapevine Board implement an Instagram account.

Literature — That a fifth edition of the Big Book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, be developed, including an update of stories to better reflect current membership; that revisions be made in the essays on Steps Six and Twelve in *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* and the long form of each Tradition be added at the end of each respective chapter; that the pamphlet "A.A. for the Black and African-American Alcoholic" be updated and the draft pamphlet for Spanish-speaking women in A.A. be approved; that a draft version of the book, *Alcoholics Anonymous (Fourth Edition)*, be translated into plain and simple language and be developed in a way that is accessible and relatable to as wide of an audience as possible.

Public Information — That podcasts to communicate on topics with similar sharing as can be found in *Box 4-5-9*, *About AA*, *aa.org*, and sharing from AA Grapevine and La Viña be produced and distributed by G.S.O. in cooperation with the Grapevine office.

Report and Charter — That the fully revised manuscript for the 2021-2023 Edition of *The A.A. Service Manual combined with Twelve Concepts for World Service* be approved.

Floor Action — That the Preamble revision replacing the words "men and women" with the word "people" be presented to the General Service Board for approval as the new revised A.A. Preamble.

■ The North/South Connections Forum: Bringing Remote Communities Together

Members of the Fellowship in the far south of Argentina and Chile face many of the same challenges as are found in remote areas of North America in terms of connecting with other A.A. members and their areas as a whole. These challenges include a sparse population and A.A. membership, individual members and groups separated by great distances and challenging geography, as well as unreliable internet connectivity — a connectivity that the rest of A.A. has come to depend on during the Covid-19 pandemic.

In conversations with A.A. members in Argentina, trustee-at-large/Canada Trish L. was struck by the realization that the country's remote Patagonia region faced issues strikingly similar to those of remote communities in the far north of Canada and the U.S. She suggested the idea of a virtual forum “to bring members of these remote communities together for the sharing of their experience, strength and hope,” and it was embraced by four countries — Argentina, Canada, Chile (which shares the Patagonia region with Argentina) and the United States. Thus the first North/South Connections Forum, held via virtual technology on May 15, was born. It was truly the group effort of a “transcontinental village,” as Trish calls it, hosted by the General Service Board of Argentina with teleconference technology and translation services (English, Spanish and French) provided by the U.S./Canada General Service Board. Staff from the company that consults with G.S.O to set up virtual events worked closely with Argentina's own tech team to iron out issues surrounding connectivity in remote areas, including allowing speakers to dial in on regular phones to virtual break-out rooms, which helped keep internet disruptions to a minimum.

The nonalcoholic chairs of three General Service Boards — Argentina's Lic. Corina Carbajal, Chile's Sandra Huenumán and U.S./Canada's Linda Chezem — led off with introductory and welcoming remarks and the day was then turned over to the members of the remote communities themselves. There were three panels (the topics were “How My Remote Group Started,” “Challenges Met, Faced and (Maybe) Overcome” and “Our Personal Stories”). Lawrie C., of Yukon, Canada, described living in an area with the land mass of California with only 14 communities. They had no phone service until 2004. “One town had continuity in terms of regular meetings,” she related, “but others came and went.” But when Canada's national health service brought videoconferencing into the towns' health centers in 2008, Lawrie and her fellow A.A.s used what she thinks of as a “combination of tech and collective wisdom. We thought, why not use the service to broadcast a simultaneous A.A. meeting out into the community? The point was to have this reliable regular place where people had access to A.A. at a given time each day.” People

have been attending these virtual meetings (or calling into them on landlines) for 13 years, Lawrie pointed out.

Martin G., of Tierra del Fuego, Argentina, spoke of how expensive travel is and how great the distance is between groups. “Virtuality,” he says, “has become a solution.” In some ways, the widespread use of virtual platforms has become the silver lining of the pandemic for certain remote communities. Daniela U., of Concepción, Región del Bío Bío, says that “Chile is a long country [2,600 miles north to south] and teleconferencing has helped us a lot to carry the message to alcoholics who still suffer.” Yolibelle M., of Comodoro Rivadavia — a remote Patagonian city on the Atlantic coast of Argentina — spoke of surviving a childhood where there was “lots of violence, lots of alcohol,” becoming an alcoholic herself, and recovering in A.A. Virtual meetings have taught her, she says, “that A.A. is so much larger than my little home group and I am interested in learning more and more about everything.”

Whether you're a sober alcoholic living in Yellowknife, Northwest Territory, Canada, or one who resides in Punta Arenas, Chile, you share certain things, despite the more than 8,000 miles that separate you. Bob of Ketchikan, Alaska — who got sober via taped telephone meetings — spoke of his strong feeling of having been “born an alcoholic.” José María M.P., of Bariloche, a city in the foothills of Argentina's Andes, also knows he was an alcoholic “from birth. I was a problem child, the only one who drank in my family.”

In six hours of seminars, people shared how they found the miracle of recovery in A.A., whether by videoconferencing, the phone line, texting groups, the old-fashioned mail, even making 12-hour boat trips to remote Canadian communities once a year, as does Della G. of Alert Bay, British Columbia. It's not easy and it can be lonely. Irene D., the G.S.O. staffer on the Accessibilities and Remote Communities desk, says: “I am from Chile and I know how much people drank in those remote towns in the south. I have seen people trying to get sober with no meetings.” But, she adds, “we are all united by A.A. principles and the A.A. way.” James H., the G.S.O. staffer on the regional forums desk, agrees. “We have A.A. members in the far reaches of the planet, literally, and we know that our program is based on connecting one alcoholic to another. We share a common goal and a common solution. What we are doing is discovering ways to share that common solution.”

Perhaps the final word of the day came from Antarctica, where Estefania Pérez (nonalcoholic) is stationed at Esperanza Base, an Argentinian research station. Invited to attend as an observer, she called in to say: “I want to express my gratitude for your sharing. I feel a lot of admiration for all of you and all of the speakers. You show what the meaning of true human strength is.”

NOTE: Due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, events may be canceled or moved to online formats. Please contact the event coordinators as listed before making your plans.

Calendar of Events

Events listed here are presented solely as a service to readers, not as an endorsement by the General Service Office. Please note that we cannot attest to the accuracy, relevancy, timeliness, or completeness of information provided by any linked site. **For any additional information, please use the event contact information provided.**

June

- 4-6—*Online*. Northeast Regional Forum. Write: Forum Coord., Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163; regionalforums@aa.org. Info: https://www.aa.org/pages/en_US/regional-and-local-forums
- 9—*Online*. Monthly Area 19 Service Sharing Sessions. Via Zoom. Second Wednesday, June through December, 6pm CT. Info: casa@chicagoaa.org.
- 26-27—*Online*. Pacific Northwest Conference; Info: <https://www.pnc1948.org>

July 2021

- 10—*Online*. Area 73 Convention. Via Zoom. Info: areachair@aawv.org
- 14—*Online*. Monthly Area 19 Service Sharing Sessions. Via Zoom. Second Wednesday, June through December, 6pm CT. Info: casa@chicagoaa.org
- 16-18—*Bismarck, North Dakota*. North Dakota Young People in Alcoholics Anonymous Write: 1400 East Interchange Avenue, Bismarck, ND 58501; www.ndypaa.com
- 16-18—*Eugene, Oregon*. Summerfest Write: Box 11824, Eugene OR 97449; www.aa-summerfest.org
- 22-25—*Pine, Idaho*. 37th Annual District 10 (Area 18) Campout Write: 324 4th Avenue E., Jerome, ID 83338
- 30-Aug 01—*Jefferson City, Missouri*. Missouri State Conference Write: Box 407, Columbia, MO 65205-0407; <http://mistateconvention.org>

August

- 5-8—*Jacksonville, Florida*. 64th Florida State Convention. Write: Box 57442, Jacksonville, FL 32241; www.64.floridastateconvention.com
- 11—*Online*. Monthly Area 19 Service Sharing Sessions. Via Zoom. Second Wednesday, June through December, 6pm CT. Info: casa@chicagoaa.org.
- 13-15—*Oklahoma City, Oklahoma*. Area 57 State Conference. Write: Box 6601, Norman, OK 73070; <http://aaoklahoma.org/2021-state-conference>
- 20-21—*Online*. 25th Annual Southeast Woman to Woman Conference. Via Zoom. Info: www.sewomantowoman.org
- 20-22—*Austin, Texas*. SWTA 68 PI/CPC Conf. Write: ox 141434, Austin, TX 78714; 2021.picpc@gmail.com
- 27-29—*Chattanooga, Tennessee*. Serenity in the Scenic City. Write: Box 22602, Chattanooga, TN 37422; serenityinthesceniccity.org

September

- 8—*Online*. Monthly Area 19 Service Sharing Sessions. Via Zoom. Second Wednesday, June through December, 6pm CT. Info: casa@chicagoaa.org.
- 10-12—*Online*. West Central Regional Forum. Write: Forum Coord., Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163; regionalforums@aa.org. Info: https://www.aa.org/pages/en_US/regional-and-local-forums
- 17-19—*Key West, Florida*. Keys for Serenity. Info: www.keysforserenity.com
- 24-26—*Wichita, Kansas*. 64th Annual Kansas Area 25 Conference. Info: ks-aa.org
- 25—*Montréal, Québec, Canada*. Journée des centres de détention — Région 87/Correctional Facilities day Area 87. Info: Comité des centres de détention 3920 Rachel, Montréal, Québec H1X 1Z3; centresdedetention@aa87.org

October

- 8-10—*Online*. Southwest Regional Forum. Write: Forum Coord., Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163; regionalforums@aa.org. Info: https://www.aa.org/pages/en_US/regional-and-local-forums
- 13—*Online*. Monthly Area 19 Service Sharing Sessions. Via Zoom. Second Wednesday, June through December, 6pm CT. Info: casa@chicagoaa.org
- 21-24—*Memphis, Tennessee*. 47th Annual Memphis Bluff City Fellowship. Info: <http://www.memphis-aa.org/event/47th-annual-memphis-bluff-city-fellowship>
- 23-26—*San Diego California*. Seniors In Sobriety International Conference. Write: P.O. Box 70084, San Diego, CA 92167; <https://seniorsinsobriety.com>

November

- 5-7—*Talladega, Alabama*. ALCYPAA X. Write: 606 Sterling St., Piedmont AL 36772; alcypaa2020@gmail.com
- 10—*Online*. Monthly Area 19 Service Sharing Sessions. Via Zoom. Second Wednesday, June through December, 6pm CT. Info: casa@chicagoaa.org
- 12-14—*La Crosse, Wisconsin*. Area 75 Conference. Write: Box 2123, La Crosse, WI 54602; <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/2021-area-75-conference-tickets-132868598555>
- 19-21—*Tampa, Florida*. Southern States Service Assembly. Info: SSAASA6outreach@gmail.com
- 19-21—*Online*. East Central Regional Forum. Write: Forum Coord., Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163; regionalforums@aa.org. Info: https://www.aa.org/pages/en_US/regional-and-local-forums