

The Home Group—the ‘Heartbeat’ of A.A.

“When we took those first, faltering steps to recovery, many of us would have stumbled and fallen once again if we had to make what was to be a miraculous change by ourselves. In my case, the first ray of hope came from the sometimes cantankerous, always loving old geezers who sat around the table in my home group. Long before I believed, or even heard, what they told me, I began thinking there might be a chance for me. If they could stay sober, so could I.”

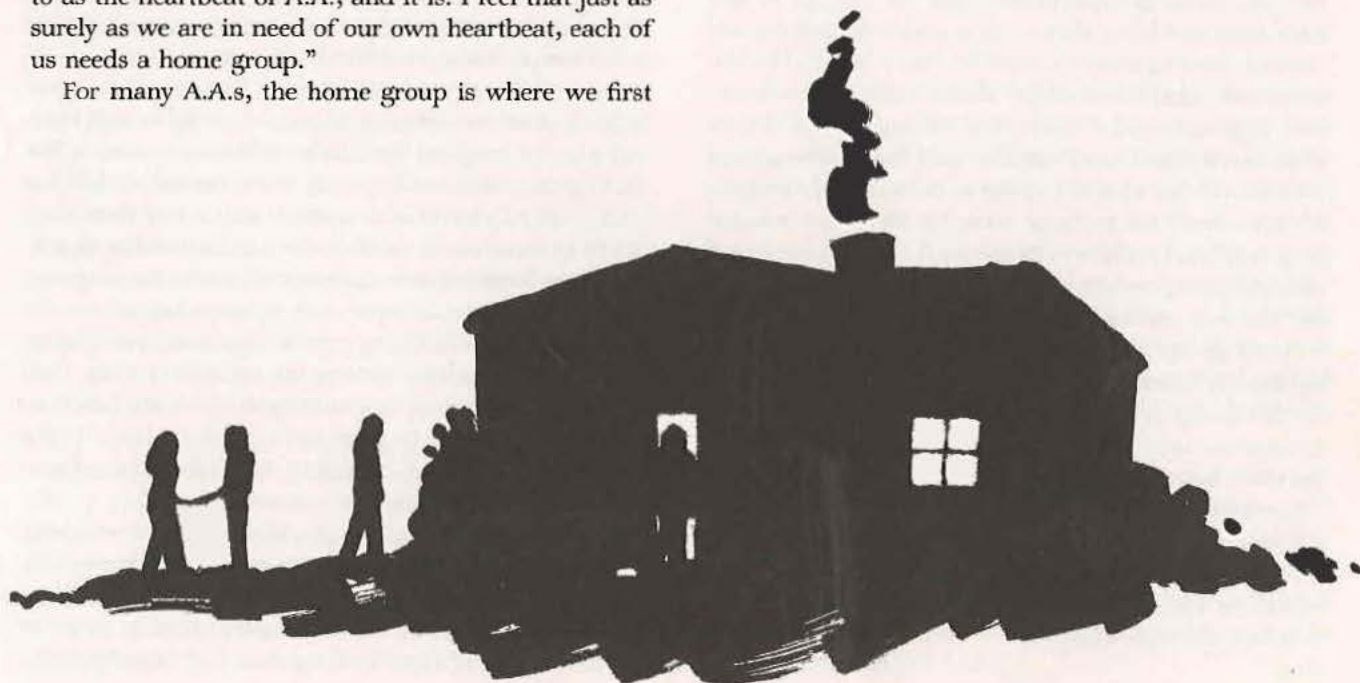
When he expressed these feelings in 1986, Richard B. was a Western Missouri delegate. Now a member of the G.S.O. staff, he says that his home group in Neosho, Missouri, means more to him than ever. “My first handles on sobriety—all those slogans and clichés I thought so corny—I heard from them. Later, when I heard the same things from speakers at a convention, I thought, ‘How wise they are!’ Only months later did I give credit where due—mainly to that wonderful, windy guy who became my sponsor. I’ve heard the home group referred to as the heartbeat of A.A., and it is. I feel that just as surely as we are in need of our own heartbeat, each of us needs a home group.”

For many A.A.s, the home group is where we first

learn to take on responsibility stone cold sober—for passing the basket, making coffee, stacking chairs—so that, in time, we can assume responsibility for our lives. It is in the home group that we start to do Twelfth Step work so that we can eventually pass on to others what has so freely been given to us. And it is there that we learn about the rest of the Fellowship and how it works.

Lejeune D., of Oceanside, California, points to other advantages of belonging to a home group: “The feeling of belonging is a new experience for many of us who have known the sense of isolation and loneliness for so long. Saying that I am a member of a home group is a way of saying ‘I belong.’ It means that I am responsible to the group and care that it is there for the sick alcoholic who walks in for the first time.”

Lejeune notes that “some groups have a confidentially held book which people sign when they consider them-



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selves members. This book also serves as a record of members' A.A. anniversaries, and as a listing of those who are available to make Twelfth Step calls and act as interim sponsors."

The home group that has a goodly number of members usually has little trouble finding volunteers for the various offices and tasks at hand, Lejeune adds. For many A.A.s, it is the world in microcosm. Learning to function as part of a group—to cope with its ongoing problems, joys and interrelationships—often provides the first crucial step toward functioning sober at home, at work, in all our affairs.

Through group sharing sessions and business meetings, members become familiar with the concept of "group conscience" as the deciding factor in any situation that arises, and with the need at all times to place "principles above personalities," as detailed in the Twelve Steps. Most importantly, many A.A.s have discovered that just by "being there" for other alcoholics, we help ourselves to stay sober.

When challenges crop up in the group setting, and they do, home-group members are far less apt to fold their tents and leave; they hang in and look for solutions instead. Writing recently from St. Pete's Beach, Florida, Grover M. cited the need to "attract more of our members to group service" and asked for suggestions. In her response, a G.S.O. staff member said that "some groups have found that shortening the term of office or responsibility—from six to three months, for instance—can help to attract members to service." She also suggested taking a group inventory, using the guidelines set forth in "The A.A. Group" pamphlet.

Most group problems, from refreshment hassles to anonymity breaks, are resolved through the mechanisms of the group conscience. And despite the occasional irritations, says former Arkansas delegate Ann B., experience has shown that, for most A.A.s, "home group membership is vital to the maintenance of our sobriety. Although all A.A. members are generally welcome at the meetings of all groups, and feel at home at these meetings, the home group remains the strongest bond between the individual A.A. member and the Fellowship."

"A.A. . . . Ought Never Be Organized. . . ."

The urging of Tradition Nine is as valid today as it was when the Traditions were first defined. It tells us that A.A.'s strength derives from its spiritual principles—not, as we find with most other groups and associations, from organized direction or government; nor from rules and regulations. In short, as they say, "There are no bosses in A.A." However, recognizing that some elements of organization are necessary in order that effective A.A. services might be made available, Tradition Nine goes on to provide that ". . . service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve" may be created.

When Tradition Nine was first written, its message was clearly consistent with A.A.'s humble beginnings; everyone welcomed the absence of organized government, and there was slight need for service boards or committees. Since that time, however, A.A. has grown enormously in size, reputation and prestige. And, whether we like it or not, A.A. has achieved international prominence, and has become a significant force in today's society. Thankfully, A.A.'s growth has not suggested to the Fellowship that it now needs people in charge—if anything, there are just that many more A.A.s who appreciate and reaffirm that "there are no bosses in A.A."

The service needs of our growing membership, however, have given rise to the creation of more sophisticated service boards and committees in order to deliver the required services. Indirectly, Fellowship growth has led to a concomitant need for some of these entities to become formally structured. For example, a number of area committees, as well as intergroups and central offices, are now incorporated (or organized as some other type of formal association)—usually as nonprofit, tax-exempt corporations (indeed, there are even a few A.A. groups that are similarly incorporated). What has A.A.'s growth to do with such structure and formality? Well, in some cases the need for a structured organization may have become apparent when it was necessary to rent commercial space: it is not uncommon for commercial landlords to require that their prospective leasees be formally structured entities, rather than loosely associated groups of individuals. Then too, even if it were possible to lease space without benefit of a formal organization, it might be difficult to obtain proper insurance coverage without doing so.

More importantly, though, some committees have become aware of an even more compelling reason for organizational formality: relevant provisions of law leave them little choice in the matter. That is, many of these entities are supported by voluntary contributions,

and, such income, beyond a certain amount, must be reported to the Internal Revenue Service. Many states also have their own reporting requirements. In order to avoid federal tax liability for such income, some committees have filed for and been granted tax-exempt status by the I.R.S. and the appropriate state agency. In many cases, however, such filing must be preceded by the restructuring of the committee as a corporation or some other formalized organization, under local state law. And once these steps are taken, there are reporting requirements to I.R.S., and, in many cases, a local state agency (e.g., the Charitable Contributions Division of the State Attorney General's Office, in New York State).

While, at first glance, such formality and structure seems to conflict with the Ninth Tradition, it is important to remember that the Tradition cautions against *internal* government, and does not suggest that an A.A. entity avoid, in any way, obligations imposed on it by law. Local committees might want to examine the requirements of federal and local law, as those laws relate to committee activities, so that whatever decisions are made by the committee regarding the need or lack of need for formal organization, they are informed decisions.

G.S.O. would be interested in Fellowship sharing on how A.A. entities are dealing with these incidental considerations arising out of A.A. growth.

The Group Business Meeting: Where A.A. Service Begins

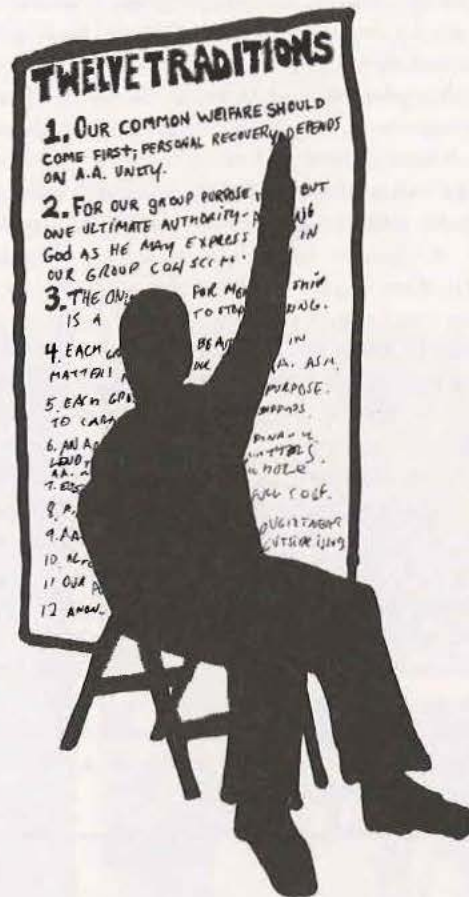
The 85,000 groups comprising A.A. today hold what co-founder Bill W. called "the ultimate responsibility and final authority for our world services." But where does this ever-lengthening chain of responsibility begin? Who has the authority to make it happen?

The entire structure of A.A. starts with the single group; and how each group conducts its affairs has a ripple effect on A.A. everywhere. The direction of the group is essentially determined at its business meetings, where the informed group conscience of the membership is voiced on matters ranging from group finances and policy to local intergroup and general service issues.

Recognizing the importance of group business meetings, some A.A.s in Seattle, Washington prepared suggested guidelines on the subject for discussion at a Group Officers' Workshop last year. Following are excerpts adapted from the guidelines. Says district committee member Burke D.: "We are sharing these in the hope that others will find them as helpful as we have."

Who calls and organizes the business meeting? For most groups, this is the function of the general service

representative (or the group chairperson, secretary, treasurer, intergroup representative or steering committee, if there is one). Usually held on a monthly or quarterly basis, regular business meetings have been found to contribute significantly to group identity and unity.



When Are They Held? Since each group is autonomous, there is no one answer, but here are some ideas that have worked: Depending upon the amount of business to be discussed, announce the business meeting as starting 30 minutes or an hour before the regular meeting. Or else, hold it immediately after the regular meeting. In some instances, the business meeting is held simultaneously with the regular meeting, in a separate room and in the same manner that many groups have a "Step table." Some groups have held business "potluck supper" meetings on nights other than those devoted to their regular meetings.

Who Attends? Business meetings are generally open to group members only. Some groups invite A.A.s who are nongroup members to attend, but request that they refrain from voting on matters pertaining to the group's activities. As with all group conscience matters, each A.A. member has one vote, and this, ideally, would be through their home group.

What kind of business is conducted? The agenda varies from group to group, issue to issue. But some aspects of group business remain fairly constant: electing new officers; scheduling new or different types of meetings; receiving and discussing the treasurer's periodic financial reports; hearing progress reports from other group officers; and apportioning excess funds among the local intergroup, the General Service Office, the area and district treasuries, and more. The meeting might also plan interchanges with other groups or organizations and determine the group conscience concerning issues to be voted on at the area assembly.

In addition to their business meetings, many groups periodically take a "group inventory"—an honest and fearless discussion of the group's weaknesses and strengths. Also helpful are "sharing sessions," in which members can air any problems or offer suggestions on how to avoid them.

Meeting Procedures: Most business meetings tend to be informal. But, if the need arises, Robert's Rules of Order are generally applicable, so long as they don't conflict with the Traditions. Many groups have found, however, that observing Robert's Rules to the letter can be detrimental. Most members are inexperienced in parliamentary procedures, and some of them might feel too intimidated to speak up.

Before an informal group conscience can be defined, it is essential that the members be given all the facts relevant to the subject at hand. In many cases, an individual member, or a panel of members, is asked to look into the pros and cons of the issue and present them at the meeting.

The Light of A.A. Shines Brightly Through the Darkness

Last November, Gratitude Month for many A.A. groups in the U.S. and Canada, and the month of the American Thanksgiving, a letter came to the General Service Office from Guttorm T., a member of a Big Book study group in Oslo, Norway. Guttorm spoke of the long, dark winter months in Norway, and how strongly the light of A.A. shines so brightly through that darkness.

A few weeks before that, we received a well-worn, unstamped envelope from California, with only a first name, and a return address, "Homeless Member," Los Angeles Homeless Center. Enclosed were two pages from the pamphlet "This is A.A." The staff member could not know what was intended, but decided to share in a letter and enclose some recovery literature. That staff member spoke later of a sense of being in touch

with those for whom we have no name or even a personal address, but who are a part of what A.A. is about: identification and sharing with each and every person who may be interested in recovery from the devastation of alcoholism.

An A.A. member, Risto M., who signed on to participate in the Correctional Correspondence Service, wrote G.S.O., saying, "I thought 'my prisoner' would be weak and confused. Instead, his letters are strong and direct; he has strength to share and plenty of spirit. I'll bet I'm getting more out of the correspondence than he is."

And, Gary W., who found sobriety through A.A. meetings inside a prison, wrote that the A.A. pamphlets and books he receives don't stop with him; he shares each treasured piece of literature with his A.A. friends who are also serving time.

Homebound Dorothy D. writes how grateful she is to receive the *Loners-Internationalist Meeting* and "for having you folks to reach out to; I am housebound due to an illness, and I know I don't have to work the A.A. program alone."

From across the Atlantic, a former World Service Meeting delegate, Tom C., of Limerick City, Ireland, shares enthusiastically his feelings as he makes plans for the upcoming celebration of A.A.'s 55th Anniversary at the International Convention, July 5-8, 1990, in Seattle, Washington. Tom concluded his letter with "God willing, we'll meet next year in Seattle."

These few experiences highlight a small portion of the array of sharing and services that comprise daily activities at your General Service Office; services that your group's contributions underwrite. Such group support directed to local intergroup/central offices, district and area committees, and your G.S.O., assures that the A.A. message will continue to be carried to the alcoholics who still suffer, and to the sober alcoholics around the world for whom A.A. is a beacon in the darkness.

Deadline for Directory Information — March 15, 1990

Printouts corrected to show up-to-date group information and returned to G.S.O. by the areas, will be used to produce the 1990 A.A. directories: Eastern U.S., Western U.S., and Canadian. These confidential directories list groups and contacts; delegates and trustees; central offices/intergroups; and special international contacts.

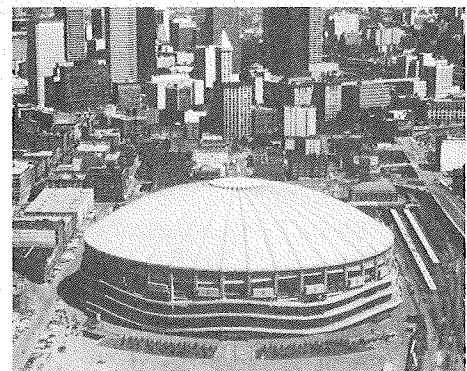
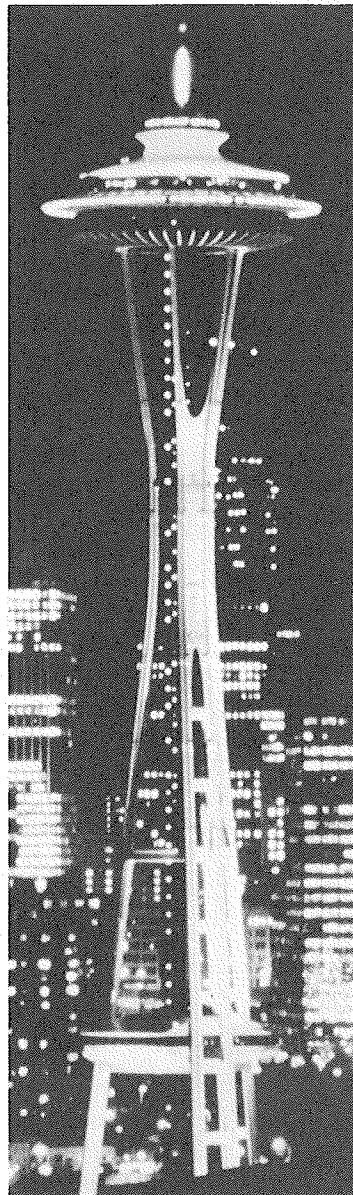
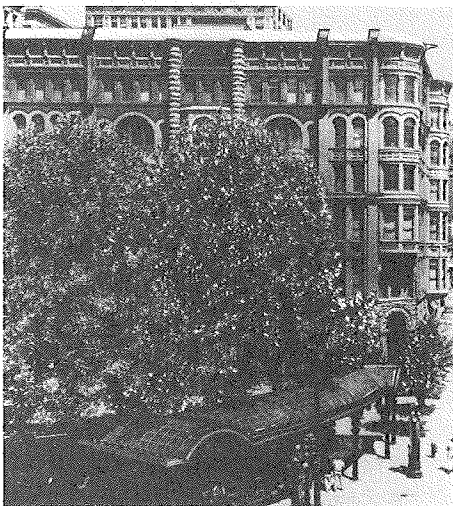
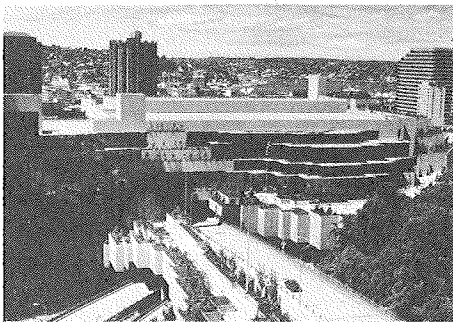
So, a reminder for area delegates, who received the printouts in the fall of 1989: If you haven't already returned your printouts, please remember that the *final* deadline for inclusion in the directories is March 15, 1990.

Seattle, Washington—Did You Know That . . . ?

- Seattle's motto, "The Emerald City," came about as the result of a public contest in 1981; prior to that the motto was "The Queen of the Pacific Northwest."
- The color television tube, the electric guitar, and the automobile headlight lens were invented in Seattle.
- The Evergreen Point Floating Bridge is the longest floating bridge in the world at 1.4 miles.
- The Space Needle is 605 feet high.
- Seattle's very first city ordinance dealt with public drunkenness.
- Seattle's Skid Road section became what we associated with skid road (or skid row), with cheap hotels, winos, a bowery-type city within a city. In 1970 this area was

declared an historic district by the city, and is now Pioneer Square—a favorite tourist attraction.

- Seattle is most proud of: The Pike Place Market; Boeing airplanes; Mount Ranier and other natural surroundings; the Magic Carpet (free downtown bus service).
- Seattle has worried most about: paving Lake Washington; Boeing unemployment; failures of the Mariners and Seahawks; and lack of recognition.
- After July 8, 1990 they will not have to worry about "lack of recognition" again! Seattle will surely secure a place in the hearts of the 45,000 or so sober alcoholics who attend Alcoholics Anonymous' 55th Anniversary celebration.



“Is A.A. for Me?”



How does it add up? Is A.A. for you?

A.A. cannot take care of all your problems. But we can show you how to live one day at a time without alcohol. Many people have beat their drinking problem. Only you can decide if A.A. is for you. If your answer is yes, call us.

Above is a sample page from the new pamphlet “Is A.A. for Me?” (P-36). Based on the 12 questions in the recovery pamphlet “Is A.A. for You?”, this 32-page pamphlet is an illustrated, easy-to-read version designed to help carry the message to people with limited reading skills.

Identification Is ‘The Essence of Our Common Bond’

“ ‘My name is Rosemary P., and I am an alcoholic.’ That’s a simple introduction. And powerful. It tells you who and what I am, instantly. It immediately connects me to you if you, too, are an alcoholic.”

Speaking at the June 1989 Northeast Regional Forum in Portland, Maine, Rosemary called identification “the very essence of our common bond” and expressed concern that “the way we traditionally introduce ourselves at meetings has changed so much, the word ‘alcoholic’ often is omitted entirely.”

The delegate (Panel 39) for Central New York pointed to a new crop of introductions heard around A.A.—from “I’m cross-addicted” and “I’m chemically dependent” to “I’m a recovering person.” She said that she is “always tempted to respond, ‘You’re a cross-addicted what?’ ‘You’re a chemically dependent what?’ And ‘Whom or what are you recovering from?’” Her frustration mounts, she added, “because I need to know that you’re at the meeting for the same reason that I’m there—for ongoing recovery from the disease of alcoholism.”

Rosemary further believes that the breakdown in the way we identify ourselves “puts a serious strain on our unity and singleness of purpose. When I say at an A.A. function that ‘I’m a drug addict and an alcoholic’ or ‘I’m a cross-addicted alcoholic,’ I am telling you that I’m a special kind of alky—my case of alcoholism is different from yours! I add an extra dimension to my disease—one that, because of our singleness of purpose, should not be addressed at an A.A. meeting. I have just cut our common bond in half and, more importantly, have diluted my own purpose for being there.”

In her area, Rosemary noted, “it was thought that after a person was around A.A. for a while, all the other descriptive words would fall away and we would hear, ‘I am an alcoholic.’ But this has not happened. We see people sober in A.A. for two, three, four years and more—still clinging to the treatment jargon they were first taught. They have not made the transition.”

What we need to do, Rosemary suggests, is to separate our issues and take them separately to the programs designed to address them: Narcotics Anonymous for drug addiction; Overeaters Anonymous for addiction to food, and so on. When participating in these various meetings, she feels, “we should identify ourselves accordingly.”

It has been suggested, she said, “that we approach treatment facilities and, in the spirit of cooperation and concern for the newcomer, ask that they instruct their patients on how to separate their addictions rather than group them together under the label of ‘addictive per-

sonalities'—using the catchall phrase we hear so often, that 'a drug is a drug is a drug.' ”

The idea of seeking outside cooperation is all very well, Rosemary observed, “but I wonder if the real answer doesn't lie squarely within our own Fellowship. Isn't it the responsibility of each of us to keep our program intact, to pass it on to the newcomer as it was given to us? Importantly, can we do this with patient explanation, tolerance toward differences—and more patient explanation? I believe we can, through committed sponsorship, strong home groups and active service. That way, our new members will learn how to be a part of A.A., not a fragment of it.”

Most of us, Rosemary concluded, “have heard it said that if A.A. is ever destroyed, it will be destroyed from within. In my opinion, apathy, cloaked often in the guise of 'live and let live,' is one of our greatest enemies. But the destructive force is not those members who introduce themselves as 'cross-addicted alcoholics'—it is the attitude of those members who sit back and say, 'So what!' ”

Box 4-5-9 Reflects Fellowship's Growth Over Past 50 Years

The first issue of *Box 4-5-9* was dated 11/14/40. Typed in letter-form on the front and back of an 8½" × 11" sheet of office-white mimeograph paper, it spelled out A.A. BULLETIN in capital letters inked out on a vintage machine. This appeared directly below the simple letter-head which read, THE ALCOHOLIC FOUNDATION, and, directly below, National Headquarters—Alcoholics Anonymous. The address listed was Box 658, Church Street Annex, New York City.

“This bulletin,” the first issue explained, “is an effort to develop a mutual idea exchange sheet to establish a closer feeling of friendship between A.A. groups from the east coast to the west, and we hope it will prevent the secession from the A.A. ranks of our San Francisco group who threatened to call themselves 'Dipsomaniacs Incognito' unless they heard from us more frequently. A bulletin has been contemplated for some time but delayed due to lack of sufficient personnel and office facilities. We now have at least the equipment and hope to be able to make this bulletin a periodic spree (not alcoholic).”

Signed “Ruth Hock, Secretary” (and Bill's devoted, overworked and underpaid nonalcoholic assistant), the A.A. Bulletin ended with a postscript: “Since it is not possible at the present time for us to furnish enough

copies for distribution to every A.A. member, perhaps you will feel it advisable to read this copy aloud at a meeting.”

Over the years, *Box 4-5-9* would undergo a series of expansions, formats and facelifts. In May 1956, it appeared as the A.A. Exchange Bulletin; and with the 1966 Holiday Issue, thanks to the suggestion of an A.A. member, it was named after the General Service Office's postal box number, which by then was, and still is, 459.

A glance at the early issues reveals the struggling Alcoholic Foundation's efforts to stay afloat during a period of enormous growth. In 1939, when the Big Book was published, there were only about 100 A.A. members; by December 1940, there were approximately 1,400—a figure which jumped to 5,500 in 1941 after publication of Jack Alexander's famous *Saturday Evening Post* article about A.A. that brought an avalanche of inquiries from alcoholics and their families. Each letter was answered personally.

The Foundation, now a cubbyhole at 30 Vesey Street, was faced with stacks of correspondence, no staff to speak of, and no money in the till. Addressing this crisis, the A.A. Bulletin proposed to the Fellowship's 169 groups “that we raise the minimum sum of \$25.00 (per group) by November 1, 1941 to be applied to office expenses.”

Besides emphasizing the themes of self-support along with “unity within, harmony without, and an open door for everybody,” the Bulletin devoted most of its space to news of group activity and growth, and the doings of the Fellowship's founders, Dr. Bob and Bill W. The December 1941 issue extended holiday greetings to all groups, adding that “A.A. Christmas and New Year's parties are being reported by almost every A.A. group in the country—lifesavers for new members who have not had time to adjust to their new way of life.”

By May 1956, when the Bulletin metamorphosed into the A.A. Exchange Bulletin, it had been expanded into a four-page newsletter complete with masthead, headlines and articles. The first issue of the “new” publication was chockablock with information about A.A. in prisons, hospitals and overseas. It announced that there were now 6,249 reported groups in the U.S. and Canada, with a total of 135,905 members.

A lead story stated that the Bulletin would reflect A.A. worldwide. “Due to obvious space limitations, only subjects of broad general interest can be covered,” it explained. “It is hoped, however, that space can be found for listings of group anniversaries in multiples of five years. . . .” And, on page two, a boxed item headed “Zig Zag” observed: “A member in Puerto Rico reports that he has sent literature to a man in Madrid at the request of a sponsor who was originally asked to cooperate by a member in Ireland who was acquainted with the sponsor through a woman member in Boston, Massachusetts Well, anyway, it got there!”

Beth K., a G.S.O. staff member from 1959 until her retirement in 1983, recalls doing pasteups for the Exchange Bulletin in the early 1960s. "Getting it out was a hit-or-miss, last-minute thing," she says. "Everything was done in the office except the printing. We were all so busy, and there never seemed to be time enough to do the job properly. It was literally a very sticky assignment, one that I was happy to rotate out of at the time. But, looking back, I realize that, through most of A.A.'s history, our newsletter has carried news of the Fellowship as a whole to groups everywhere, and has provided a central forum for the sharing of information and ideas."

Retired G.S.O. archivist Nell Wing, who came to G.S.O. for "just a few months" in 1947 and stayed more than 35 years, has her own story to tell. "The office was in a somewhat dingy building at 415 Lexington Avenue, just across from Grand Central Station," she remembers, "and we were all paid more in love than money. In 1966, I screwed up the courage to ask for a raise. I won it alright—all \$5.00 of it—and I also won responsibility for putting out the new *Box 4-5-9*, as the Bulletin was now called, for the next six years. That raise cost me a lot of headaches!"

From an archival point of view, Nell observes, *Box 4-5-9* is invaluable. "Just as old issues of The Grapevine record A.A.'s development in terms of personal recovery, so does *Box 4-5-9* give us a continuing picture of the growth of A.A.'s groups and the expansion of its world services."

Over the years, *Box 4-5-9* has mirrored the growth in both form and content. Now an illustrated, twelve-page newsletter with a clean '80s look, it is mailed to more than 85,000 groups the world over, and to thousands of individuals as well. It is also available in Spanish and French editions.

Yet much remains the same. The editorial staff of one person has jumped to two or three, it's true. But the preliminary layout is still done in the office at 468 Park Avenue South—or, occasionally, atop the copy editor's ironing board at home. Over the years, the price has hardly risen. In 1966, an individual subscription was \$1.00 per year; then, for many years it has been \$1.50, with groups paying even less—\$3.50 a year for 10 copies of each issue. As of April 1 the price will increase to \$3.50 individual; \$6.00 for bulk subscriptions. Still a bargain.

Turning the pages of past *Box 4-5-9s* affords a sense of continuity as well as growth and change. An article in the Holiday Issue 1966 might well have been written today. "As a movement," it states, "A.A. has much to be thankful for. It has come through its early, critical times, is now entering what historians may call its 'mature years.' A.A. is stronger today than at any point in its growth. Its Twelve Steps are time-tested, unchanged, ever richer in meaning. Its Traditions, too,

have stood the test of assault, of changing times, of rapid expansion within the Fellowship. . . . Our program speaks the language of recovery and it speaks from the heart. Thus, it has been easily translated to fit many different situations and to reach alcoholics in many tongues."

San Francisco's P.S.A.s Carry the Message

In an effort to reach out to alcoholics in the community, San Francisco's joint committee on Public Information and Cooperation With the Professional Community has distributed five Public Service Announcements to area radio stations. "Our committee members wrote the P.S.A.s themselves," says Bruce K., media coordinator. "They're prolific, too. We wound up with 40 or 50 announcements to work with."

The P.S.A.s were mailed last June, together with a letter over Bruce's signature. "As you probably know," it says in part, "many, many people have found a way out of the trap of alcoholism through the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. And it is part of that program to use every method we can to carry the A.A. message to alcoholics who are still suffering." The letter goes on to state the A.A. Preamble, and to "urge that the spots be read as written, without editorial comment. We have learned that it is very easy for any individual, within or outside A.A., with the very best intentions, to unwittingly misrepresent what A.A. is and does."

The 10-second P.S.A.s include the following messages: "If you want to drink, that's your concern. *If you want to stop, that's A.A.'s. Alcoholics Anonymous. It works! Look 'em up in the phone book.*" . . . "Alcoholics Anonymous has no dues or fees. The only requirement for membership is a *desire to stop drinking*. Their number is in the phone book. *Give 'em a call.*" . . . "Alcoholics Anonymous are people who lost the ability to control their drinking. So they *stopped drinking and started living*. To find out how, *give 'em a call*. They're in the phone book." . . . "Feeling guilty, angry, depressed because you're drinking too much? Alcoholics Anonymous knows just how you feel. *They've been there. Give 'em a call*. They're in the phone book."

"The effectiveness of the P.S.A.s to date is not easy to determine," says Bruce, "since we rely not on statistics but on our committee members' listening ears. But we have received favorable comments from disk jockeys at some of the radio stations."

Meanwhile, he says, the spots have been sent to the district P.I./C.P.C. committee for distribution to stations beyond San Francisco.

C.P.C.

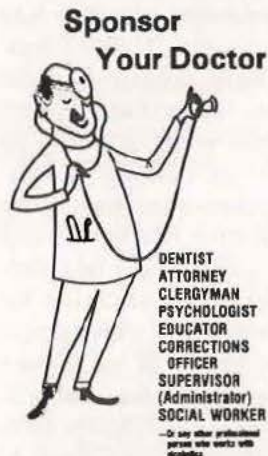
'Sponsor' a Professional

Seeking to strengthen and expand A.A.'s lines of communication with the professionals who so often are first to help alcoholics in the community, the Southern California Area Assembly's General Service Committee on Cooperation With the Professional Community has come up with a way to attract the "missing links"—sufficient A.A. members to do Twelfth-Step work with these professionals on a one-on-one basis.

Reasoning that members can't do what they don't know, the C.P.C. committee has developed an attractive, direct and easy-to-understand flyer for A.A. group members that explains what

C.P.C. work is about, details its importance in carrying the message, and invites interested persons to join in the effort.

The three-fold flyer points out that "C.P.C. work can begin when individual A.A.s reveal their membership to their doctors, or drop a quiet word in the ear of a pastor, priest or rabbi that an A.A. member is in the congregation." At the group level, it suggests, A.A.s can participate in C.P.C. work by welcoming professionals to their open meetings.



**A.A. wants
to work with
professionals**

Southern California Area Assembly
General Service Committee on
Cooperation With the
Professional Community (C.P.C.)

Area C.P.C. chairperson Cia F. credits the West Side District's groups for dreaming up the flyer, which, she says, "presents yet another way for A.A.s to carry the message and stay sober. It has really helped to raise our members' consciousness to the need for reaching out to the professional community. As the flyer says, 'We are all on the same side in our interest in helping alcoholics—even when we approach it in different ways. Thus, our mutual interest and hopes should outweigh any misunderstandings that might crop up.'"

Cia herself has sponsored a doctor—presenting literature, answering questions and, most importantly, "escorting her to an open A.A. meeting she never would have attended on her own." Medical school curricula are still weak in teaching the ramifications of alcohol-

ism, Cia explains. "Being in an actual meeting, peopled with sober alcoholics who are getting on responsibly with their lives, can impact enormously on the awareness of doctors and other professionals of what A.A. is and what it isn't. They experience the power of the Fellowship firsthand, not by turning a few pages in a dry report or textbook."

After being taken to meetings, Cia reports, "some professionals have wound up in A.A. themselves. That's communication at its best."

Treatment Facilities

Chicago Committee Shares Solutions to a Thorny Problem

Not understanding how A.A. works, a number of hospital and treatment facilities are sending patients to A.A. willy-nilly. The consequences: Too many patients tend to wind up at one overburdened group—and, all too often, a number of them have problems other than alcohol. What can A.A.s do? And how?

The Chicago Area Hospitals and Treatment Facilities Committee has developed guidelines for handling such situations that are a "compilation of experience and shared information." They call for communication and cooperation with treatment facilities in ample measure. Some excerpts:

Arrange, via phone or mail, to hold a meeting with the treatment facility administrators and two or three other A.A. members (no more—you don't want to bombard or overwhelm them). Explain that sending large numbers of patients to one A.A. group is detrimental to both the group and the individual patient. Then offer a plan whereby patients could be escorted by A.A. members to several meetings, with a reasonable number attending each one.

Suggest holding informal staff orientation meetings, hosted by a couple of A.A. members, then clarify what A.A. is about—what it can and cannot do.

If the treatment facility does not already have an A.A. meeting, suggest starting one, with two or more A.A. members serving as hosts on a rotating basis.

Furnish treatment center personnel with helpful A.A. Conference-approved pamphlets, including "The A.A. Group," "A.A. in Your Community" and "A.A. in Treatment Facilities."

If a treatment facility is sending nonalcoholic patients to A.A. meetings, talk to the director, if possible in a

nonconfrontive way. Explain A.A.'s singleness of purpose and mention that while anyone is welcome to attend open A.A. meetings, only persons with a drinking problem are encouraged to attend closed meetings or to become A.A. members. Additionally, furnish a list of other Twelve-Step programs, such as Narcotics Anonymous and Cocaine Anonymous, that are available in the area to help patients with problems other than alcohol. Offer to help the facility by expressing willingness to direct—even escort—such patients to meetings that may be more appropriate to their needs.

Last, but not least, discuss the problem at your area T.F. committee meeting and get input on how others have dealt with the situation. Experience and shared knowledge are the best teachers.

Correctional Facilities

Illinois Program Plugs In Ex-inmates to A.A.—and State Areas to One Another

The five-year-old Illinois Prison Contact Service is a computerized network that provides temporary A.A. contacts for just-released inmates—no matter where in the state they live. Says Southern Illinois delegate Herman G., past-chairman of his area's Correctional Facilities committee: "This successful program is an all-state effort. It shows what can be done when all of our committees work as one."

Some years ago, he relates, "we became aware that many inmates in one prison lived in other parts of the state. If a person released here in Southern Illinois were going home to the Chicago area, say, we found that arranging contact sponsorship was a hit-or-miss affair, particularly since inter-area communication left a lot to be desired."

A quantum leap occurred around 1983, when six C.F. chairpersons and members representing the three Illinois areas—Northern, Southern, and Chicago—met informally during an all-state conference to see what could be done. "For starters," says Herman, "we had a lot going for us. Our individual C.F. committees were very active and, importantly, we had local A.A. groups in most of the prisons throughout Illinois. That resulted in the built-in trust of A.A.s on both sides of the walls."

Coordinating their efforts closely, the three committees set out to compile and computerize a master list

of volunteers state-wide, by area, district and locality, to be housed in the Chicago Central Service Office. This enormous task would be handled by three area prison coordinators.

"For our service to be viable," Herman explains, "we needed A.A.s willing to meet the inmates upon release and take them to a meeting. Accordingly, we began to ask for volunteers at all area assemblies, workshops, district meetings and state conferences. The response was overwhelming."

In each area, he explains, nobody but the coordinator has access to the volunteer list—not even the chairperson—for two reasons: to observe to the letter our spiritual principle of anonymity, and to protect the volunteers from being the targets of released felons who might drink again.

When a resident of Moline, in the North Illinois C.F. area, is approaching release from a Chicago area facility and requests temporary sponsorship, his or her A.A. group contacts the Chicago coordinator, who then asks his counterpart in the North to assign a Moline volunteer. If facility rules permit, some volunteers make direct contact with the inmates before their release. However, "many of the volunteers are reluctant to go this route," Herman says, "due to the difficulty of communicating and still preserving their anonymity. They prefer to have the area coordinator establish initial contact with the inmate's case worker." Here he reiterates that "neither method could work were it not for the basic trust of members within the A.A. prison groups. Most of all, we owe the success of our contact service to our good relationship with prison officials. We observe their regulations carefully; and they, in turn, are generally supportive of our efforts to carry the A.A. message inside."

A number of ex-inmates have reported that contact sponsorship helped to keep them sober and out of the revolving prison door. Some time ago, Herman notes, "a dapper young man, with his wife and baby at his side, approached me at an East Central Regional Forum. 'You probably won't remember me,' he said with a big grin, 'but I'll never forget it was you who told me about the contact service back in 1985 at a Jacksonville Prison meeting. I used it, got to a meeting before I even knew I was outside—and I'm sober to this day. That was one of the best things that ever happened to me.'"

In assessing the Illinois contact service, Herman notes that "it has unified our state-wide areas in more ways than one. Morale is high, communication has never been better. It's true of A.A. service, as well as our personal recoveries, that the more we give of ourselves, the more we get back, individually and collectively."

The Illinois Correctional Facilities committees welcome input from other C.F. areas and are pleased to share their own experience in turn. For further information, please write to the General Service Office.

BOX 4|5|9 BULLETIN BOARD

Items and Ideas on Area Gatherings for A.A.s — Via G.S.O.

FEBRUARY / MARCH 1990

Calendar of Events

Events listed here are presented solely as a service to readers, not as an endorsement by the General Service Office. For any additional information, please use the addresses provided.

February

- 1-4 — Ft. Walton Beach, Florida. Emerald Coast Jamboree. Write: Ch., Box 875, Ft. Walton Beach, FL 32549
- 2-4 — Ostende, Belgium. Intergroup I Conv. Write: Ch., Box 3, B.8000 Bruges I — Belgium
- 2-4 — Cocoa Beach, Florida. Florida Mid-Winter Conf. Write: Ch., Box 1404, Melbourne, FL 32902-1404
- 2-4 — Kansas City, Kansas. Sunflower Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 1281, Mission, KS 66222
- 2-4 — Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada. Mid Winter Round-Up. Write: Ch., R.R. #1, Mouth of Keswick, NB E0H 1N0
- 2-4 — Christchurch, New Zealand. 27th National Conv. Write: Sec., Box 2062, Christchurch, New Zealand
- 2-4 — Salem, Oregon. Seventh Soberfest. Write: Ch., Box 5167, Salem, OR 97304
- 2-4 — Berchtesgaden, West Germany. Spirituality Weekend. Write: Ch., 5th Gen. Hos., Box 297, APO New York 09154-3345
- 2-4 — Cebu City, The Philippines. Eighth National Conv. Write: Ch., Box 280, Cebu City 6000, Philippines
- 2-4 — Diamondville, Wyoming. Area Business Meeting. Write: Ch., Box 232, Diamondville, WY 83116
- 9-11 — North Little Rock, Arkansas. Winter Holiday Conv. Write: Ch., Box 165402, Little Rock, AR 72216
- 9-11 — Universal City, California. 15th Annual San Fernando Valley Conv. Write: Ch., Box 44416, Panorama City, CA 91402-0416
- 9-11 — Camrose, Alberta, Canada. 10th Annual Valentine's Roundup. Write: Ch., 4610-61st Street, Camrose, AB T4V 2H7
- 16-18 — Montgomery, Alabama. Ninth "Heart of Dixie" Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 6043, Montgomery, AL 36106
- 16-18 — Sacramento, California. 13th Annual Spring Fling. Write: Ch., Box 19548, Sacramento, CA 95819.0548
- 16-18 — Greeley, Colorado. 39th Stampede. Write: Ch., 2644 11th Avenue, #D, Greeley, CO 80631
- 16-18 — Paducah, Kentucky. State Conf. Write: Ch., Box 8236, Paducah, KY 42002-8236
- 16-18 — Syracuse, New York. Salt City Mid-Winter Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 871, Syracuse, NY 13205
- 16-18 — Kings Island, Ohio. S.W. Ohio

- Seventh Mini-Conf. Write: Ch., 710 Miami St., Waynesville, OH 45068
- 16-18 — Afton, Oklahoma. Four State Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 2146, Joplin, MO 68403
- 16-18 — El Paso, Texas. 28th Annual Jamboree. Write: Sec., Box 3115, El Paso, TX 79923
- 16-18 — Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. 18th Annual North Shore Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 91086, West Vancouver, BC V7V 3N3
- 16-18 — Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada. 23rd Annual Roundup. Write: Ch., 1122 Byna Avenue, Saskatoon, SK S7L 5J5
- 16-18 — San Jose, California. Fifth Anniversary (hosted by gays & lesbians). Write: Ch., Box 6978, San Jose, CA 95150
- 17-18 — Santurce, Puerto Rico. 1990 Conv. Write: Ch., Box 9845, Santurce, PR 09908
- 23-25 — Virginia Beach, Virginia. Oceanfront Conf. Write: Ch., Box 9332, Virginia Beach, VA 23450
- 28-March 4 — St. Simons Island, Georgia. 28th St. Simons Island Weekend. Write: Ch., Box 892, Statesboro, GA 30458

March

- 2-4 — Corpus Christi, Texas. 36th Coastal Bend Jamboree. Write: Ch., Box 3204, Corpus Christi, TX 78404
- 2-4 — St. Albert, Alberta, Canada. 13th Roundup. Write: Ch., c/o 505A-15503-87th Ave., Edmonton, AB T5R 4K4
- 2-4 — Bakersfield, California. PRAASA 1990. Write: Ch., Box 481193, Los Angeles, CA 90048
- 2-4 — Swan River, Manitoba, Canada. Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 1484, Swan River, MB R0L 1Z0
- 2-4 — Minneapolis, Minnesota. W. Central

Closed Meeting Topics From the Grapevine

For more detailed suggestions, see the pages noted.

February (page 16): Trusted servants; A.A.—the road ahead; beginner's topics

March (page 15): Tradition Three; pennies for sobriety; working the Steps; is A.A. changing?

- Reg. Service Conf. Write: Ch., Box 103, Wayzata, MN 55391
- 2-4 Houston, Texas. Spring Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 7727, The Woodlands, TX 77387
- 2-5 — Anaheim, California. Orange City Conv. Write: Ch., Box 3926, Huntington Beach, CA 92605
- 9-11 — San Jose, California. 43rd Annual Spring Conf. Write: Tr., 1046 Irving St., San Francisco, CA 94122-2290
- 9-11 — Osaka, Japan. 15th Anniv. Conf. Write: Kansai Central Office, Daigen Mansion Rm. 302, 6-18-1 Fukushima, Fukushima-ku Osaka 553, Japan
- 9-11 — Victoria, British Columbia, Canada. Victoria Rally. Write: Ch., 2020 Douglas St., Victoria, BC
- 9-11 — Ardmore, Oklahoma. Lake Murray Men's Conf. Write: Ch., 5327 N. Central Expwy., Ste. 200-K, Dallas, TX 75205
- 9-11 — Clarion, Pennsylvania. Big Book Seminar. Write: Ch., Box 77, Coopertown, PA 16317
- 9-11 — Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Sioux Empire Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 182, Sioux Falls, SD 57101

Planning a Future Event?

Please send your information on April, May or June events, two days or more, in time to reach G.S.O. by February 10, the calendar deadline for the April/May 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): _____

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

Flip up this end of page — more events listed on reverse side

March (cont.)

- 16-18 — *Cherry Hill, New Jersey*. 26th Annual Southern NJ General Service Conv. Write: Ch., Box 542, Marlton, NJ 08053
- 16-18 — *Calgary, Alberta, Canada*. Conf. Write: Ch., Box 32009, Calgary, AB T2T 5X6
- 16-18 — *Slidell, Louisiana*. Spring Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 4040, Slidell, LA 70459
- 16-18 — *Lake Kamesha, New York*. 17th Roundup. Write: Ch., 6 Bird Place, Spring Valley, NY 10977
- 16-18 — *Newport, Oregon*. Seventh Women's Conf. Write: Ch., Box 154, Newport, OR 97365
- 22-26 — *Miami Beach, Florida*. Seventh Annual Roundup (hosted by gays & lesbians). Write: Ch., Box 030237, Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33303-0237
- 23-25 — *Montgomery, Alabama*. Al./NW Fl. Area Assembly. Write: Ch., Box 362, Camden, AL 36726-0362
- 23-25 — *Denver, Colorado*. Spring Area Assembly. Write: Ch., 727 Marion Street, Denver, CO 80218
- 23-25 — *French Lick, Indiana*. 37th Annual State Conv. Write: Ch., Box 17544, Indianapolis, IN 46217
- 30-April 1 — *St. Charles, Illinois*. 1990 NIA Spring Conf. Write: Ch., Box 1218, Elgin, IL 60120-1218
- 30-April 1 — *Seekonk, Massachusetts*. 14th Rhode Island Conv. Write: Ch., Box 9342, Providence, RI 02940
- 30-April 1 — *Fort St. John, British Columbia, Canada*. 20th Annual Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 25, Taylor, BC V0C 2K0
- 30-April 1 — *Jacksonville, Illinois*. S. Area Spring Conf. Write: Ch., Box 466, Jacksonville, IL 62651
- 30-April 1 — *Longview, Texas*. 21st E. Texas Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 2082, Longview, TX 75606
- 30-April 1 — *Ames, Iowa*. Ann for Ames Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 2491, Ames, IA 50010

April

- 6-8 — *Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada*. Southern Alberta Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 212, Lethbridge, AB T1J 3Y5
- 6-8 — *Tarrytown, New York*. 27th SENY Conv. Write: Ch., Box 1688, Madison Square Station, New York, NY 10159
- 6-8 — *Clarksburg, West Virginia*. Jackson's Mill Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 825, Clarksburg, WV 26302-0825
- 6-8 — *Fort Wayne, Indiana*. NE Ind. Conv. Write: Ch., 4026 Willshire Ct., Fort Wayne, IN 46815
- 12-14 — *Belem, Para, Brasil*. 11th National Conv. Write: CENSAA/PA, Av. Pte. Vargas, 560/s/9, 10 e 11, Caixa Postal 1272, CEP 66.020, Belem, Para, Brasil
- 13-15 — *Johannesburg, South Africa*. Better Than Gold. Write: Ch., Box 62147, Marshalltown 2107, Republic of South Africa
- 13-15 — *Cape May, New Jersey*. Area IG Roundup. Write: Ch., 311 S. Juniper St., Room 309, Philadelphia, PA 19107
- 14-15 — *Sydney, Australia*. 45th Anniversary. Write: Sec., P.O. Box 56, Croydon, NSW 2132 Australia
- 20-22 — *Banff, Alberta, Canada*. 17th Annual Banff Round-Up. Write: Ch., Box 6744, Station "D", Calgary, AB T2P 2E6
- 20-22 — *Wichita, Kansas*. 15th Annual Spring Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 1814, Wichita, KS 67201
- 20-22 — *Lloydminster, Alberta, Canada*. Write: Ch., Box 1026, Lloydminster, SK/AB S9V 1E9
- 27-29 — *Santa Rosa, California*. H&I Conf. Write: Ch., 1450 Sierra Ave., Cotati, CA 94928
- 27-29 — *Killarney, Ireland*. 33rd All Ireland Conv. Write: Ch., c/o Cork-Kerry Tourism, Killarney, County Kerry, Ireland
- 27-29 — *Scottsbluff, Nebraska*. 35th Panhandle Jamboree. Write: Ch., 2606 Ave. D., Scottsbluff, NE 69361