

MARGENSER

Fostering Unity and Carrying the A.A. Message in Area 29 MARYLAND GENERAL SERVICE

Regional Panels: Your Link to AA's Collective Conscience

by Pete S

Q: If AA is a true democracy—and my Home Group is the basic building block of AA—practically speaking, how does my Home Group's voice get heard in AA?

A: Through interactive communication in Regional Panels.

What are Area 29 Regional Panels?

Regional Panels are the vital part of the path to carry our voice to AA—through our Area Delegate, the Area 29 Mini-Conference, and finally the General Service Conference (GSC). In Area 29/Maryland General Service (MGS), six Regional Panels help prepare our Area Delegate for the GSC. Regional Panels also recommend Agenda Items to the Area for consideration and possible approval no later than the December Area Assembly. See www.marylandaa.org for Assembly dates and locations. (Regional Panels refer to regions of Maryland General Service, not to larger areas of North America also called regions.)

Regional Panels are made up of group General Service Representatives (GSRs), District Committee Members (DCMs) in the designated region, all interested members of our fellowship; and Area Committee Leaders, Past

Delegates, and Officers.

How can I, my Home Group or District help prepare our Delegate for the General Service Conference?

- Introduce yourself to the Area 29 Panel Leader at the next Area Assembly. Your District is assigned to one of six panels, as laid out on p. 20 of the Maryland General Service Area Assembly Handbook (Feb. 2012). Ask the leader of your panel to send you dates, times and places of upcoming panel meetings. GSRs, DCMs and other interested AA members are encouraged to attend. Each Regional Panel is assigned, on a rotating basis by December of even years, Conference Agenda Items for two General Service Conference (GSC) Committees, one of which corresponds to an Area Standing Committee. If you are not a GSR, encourage your Home Group's GSR to join the districts assigned panel. Buy a copy of the MGS Area Assembly Handbook at the next Area Assembly (\$2).

- Attend meetings of the Regional Panel assigned to your
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MARGENSER STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The Area 29 MARGENSER newsletter is published to foster unity and facilitate communication among AA members, groups, districts, and intergroups within the Maryland General Service Area. The MARGENSER aims to be instrumental in carrying the AA message. This quarterly newsletter seeks to publish AA-related material, including personal stories of experience, strength, and hope. Material will be reviewed by the MARGENSER committee chairperson or by a member of the committee. Nothing published in the MARGENSER should be thought of as a statement of Area 29 or AA policy. Finally, publication shall not constitute endorsement by the newsletter itself, Area 29, intergroups, districts, local groups, or AA as a whole.

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District. Here you learn about current issues being – or to be – considered by the General Service Conference via our Delegate.

- Present these issues to your Home Group to discuss, and report your group’s conscience back to the Panel. The December Area Assembly is the final opportunity to get an Area Vote on proposed Agenda Items to send to the General Service Board (GSB) for possible inclusion on the April GSC Agenda. In even years, Panels are assigned new Agenda Items (p. 21, Maryland General Service Area 29 Handbook lays out the calendar-year schedule).
- Help prepare a presentation summarizing Regional Panel discussions on assigned General Service Conference Agenda Items for the Area 29 Mini-Conference in April.
- Attend the Area 29 Mini-Conference (Spring) where the voices heard and opinions expressed in all six Panels are presented—to help our Delegate carry the conscience of Area

29/Maryland General Service to the General Service Conference.

Basic Functions and Suggested Timetables of Regional Panels:

- Between February and April, meet regularly to discuss assigned GSC Agenda Items.
- Review assigned Standing Committee Kit and Workbook. Make appropriate recommendations and changes.
- Prepare a presentation, summarizing Regional Panel discussions on assigned General Service Conference Agenda Items for the Area 29 Mini-Conference in April.
- Re-convene beginning in May to review resulting General Service Conference Advisory Actions and Additional Considerations.
- Recommend, beginning in August but no later than the December Area Assembly, Agenda Items to be submitted by the Area 29 Delegate for possible inclusion on the General Service Conference Agenda. These items must be approved by a vote of the Area Assembly.
- Receive new Agenda Items no later

than December of even years.

Reflection: I attended my first Regional Panel Meeting about 15 years ago, with no clue about what I was getting into, unable to tell you the difference between an Intergroup, a District or an Area, much less a Regional Panel within an Area. But I did know that I loved the energy and enthusiasm of my panel. I was asked to review pieces of AA’s conference-approved literature being updated through the Regional Panel process. Wow! I was being asked for my opinion—or, more to the point, asked to seek my Home Group’s conscience regarding proposed changes. My fellow Home Groupies discussed and voted their conscience on these issues; I carried the Group’s conscience back to my Regional Panel—then helped present Panel findings to the Delegate at the Mini-Conference. Since that day, I have remained a servant of Area 29/Maryland General Service—feeling connected to AA in ways I’d never before dreamed possible. 🌱

Purpose of the Area 29 Regional Panels

The purpose of the Regional Panels is to help prepare the Area Delegate for the General Service Conference and to recommend Agenda Items to the Area for consideration and possible approval no later than the December Area Assembly. The Regional Panels will consist of GSRs and DCMs in the designated region, as well as Committee Leaders, Past Delegates, Area Officers and all interested members of the fellowship. Each Regional Panel will elect a chairperson and a recording secretary to facilitate the meetings and help prepare reports and presentations.

Each Regional Panel will be assigned, on a rotating basis by December of even years, Conference Agenda Items for two General Service Conference Committees, one of which will correspond to an Area Standing Committee. Therefore, Regional Panels will also include a Standing Committee Chairperson as one of the Regional Panel participants. This union between the Regional Panels and Standing Committees will encourage participation in the Area and help the Standing Committee fulfill their primary purpose. Remaining General Service Conference Agenda Items may be presented by a past Delegate as a workshop activity at the Area Mini-Conference.

Districts are assigned to Regional Panels as follows:

The basic functions and suggested timetables of the Regional Panels are:

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| Regional Panels | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
|-------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Districts: | 21 | 1 | 4 | 9 | 2 | 3 |
| | 24 | 6 | 10 | 17 | 5 | 7 |
| | 25 | 22 | 11 | 20 | 13 | 8 |
| | 32 | 23 | 15 | 40 | 14 | 12 |
| | 37 | 26 | 28 | 41 | 16 | 18 |
| | 38 | 27 | 29 | 43 | 34 | 19 |
| | 46 | 31 | 30 | | 39 | 44 |
| | 47 | 35 | 33 | | 45 | |
| | | 36 | | | | |
| | | 42 | | | | |

- Between February and April, meet regularly to discuss assigned General Service Conference Agenda Items
- Review assigned Standing Committee Kit and Workbook. Make appropriate recommendations and changes
- Prepare a presentation, summarizing Regional Panel discussions on assigned General Service Conference Agenda Items for the Area 29 Mini-Conference in April
- Re-convene beginning in May to review resulting General Service Conference Advisory Actions and Additional Considerations
- Recommend, beginning in August but no later than the December Area Assembly, Agenda Items to be submitted by the Area 29 Delegate for possible inclusion on the General Service Conference Agenda. These items must be approved by a vote of the Area Assembly
- Receive new Agenda Items no later than December of even years
- Elect a Panel Leader and Recorder between December and February to plan, conduct and record Regional Panel meetings for the coming year

It is incumbent upon the Regional Panel Leaders to be aware of the budget amount allotted to their Regional Panel for each one year period. The Area will pay the cost of facility rental if necessary, and copies made, up to a designated amount each year. ▲

Home Group Inventory

Reflections: How One Group Does It
By Pete S

Learning to think like a group member rather than as an opinionated individual is one of the greatest benefits of active home group membership.

Two main avenues of interaction lead the way to putting our common welfare first:

1. Business meeting, where regular business is discussed and conducted; out of this evolves a Group conscience, where members share information and decide collectively and in substantial unanimity on issues before taking actions; and
2. Group inventory, conducted periodically

to decide how to fulfill our primary purpose: to help alcoholics recover through A.A.'s 36 spiritual principles (12 Steps (recovery), 12 Traditions (unity) and 12 Concepts (service) and carry the A.A. message of hope.

Business Meeting

I chose my current home group after attending a few **monthly business meetings** as a guest. This gave me an inside look at how the group functioned. In addition, it allowed me to determine whether the group was action-focused, and how members dealt with problems. In short, I was

looking for a group that could discuss issues openly, and decide on matters with substantial unanimity (two-thirds support).

Group Inventory

Happy with what I saw and heard, I joined the group, which later conducted a group inventory that lasted several hours, in two sessions, to discuss ways to better achieve our goals. Leading topics were Tradition Five issues revolving around Why we're here: keep the door open; make sure someone is always here, including in bad weather or at inconvenient times; provide hot coffee and literature.

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(Home Group Inventory) continued from page 3...

Human Element

Our group inventory included a careful discussion of people-issues: Were we an inviting group? Were we welcoming hosts? Did we care about and listen to new ideas from outsiders about our meeting? Did we provide an effective forum for out-of-area speakers to bring fresh ideas? How well did we showcase AA’s message of hope? We decided what AA literature to make available. What about anniversary cakes and who pays for them? Chips?

How We Fit Into the Bigger Local AA Picture

When we started our new meeting, were we careful to pick a day and time that would not conflict with other groups’ ability to attract participants and members? This was an issue at my group, started by well meaning out-of-area people who wanted to establish a new meeting with a format that was more in keeping with their experience. The founders decided to establish their group on a day and time without considering the impact on other meetings in our vicinity. In a group inventory, we acknowledged the problem, and changed our meeting time to eliminate a conflict with other homegroup meeting times. Result: our meeting grew substantially almost immediately by attracting a new audience.

Service Commitments

My group carefully listens to experiences of our many servants. Is our General Service Representative (GSR) able to attend all monthly district meetings, and if not, do we have an alternate? Ditto for our Intergroup representative (IGR). Are we keeping up with our institutions commitments? If not, do we need to discuss ways to improve our performance or possibly even cut back on commitment promises?

Anniversaries

Our anniversary policy encourages celebrants to invite a guest speaker to share for the entire meeting, bringing a new voice. We have lost a member or two because of this policy, but our conscience is that we want to offer new voices and perspectives instead of annual encore presentations. This may not be everyone’s favorite formula, just the one we agree on. At our next group inventory, we might decide to change our format if the group conscience swings that way.

Our Inventory Format

My group follows the

1. *The AA Group...Where it all Begins* (pamphlet #P-16), a rich resource for groups; and
2. **Traditions Checklist** as published in the *AA Grapevine* (visit

http://aa.org/en_pdfs/smf-131_en.pdf or go to www.aa.org and type “traditions checklist” in the search box). A few selected questions:

Tradition One:

- Am I a peacemaker?
- Do I make competitive remarks?

Tradition Two:

- Do I criticize or do I trust and support my group officers?
- Am I willing to serve in positions of responsibility?

Tradition Three:

- Do I prejudge some new AA members as losers?
- Are there certain kinds of alcoholic people I don’t want in my group?

“The entire structure of A.A. depends upon the participation and conscience of the individual groups, and how each of these groups conducts its affairs has a ripple effect on A.A. everywhere.”
(*The AA Group...* pamphlet #P-16, page 11)

Group behavior may not come natural to those suffering from our “disease of isolation.” Active and enthusiastic participation in a group inventory can bring us, our fellow homegroup members—and those still on the street—into AA’s vortex of recovery, unity and service. ▲

SEND YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS TO...

In accordance with the 7th Tradition and abiding by the group conscience of your home group, you may send contributions in support of Area 29 to:

Maryland General Service, Inc.
PO Box 20177
Baltimore, MD 21284-0177

Is the Triangle Really Upside-Down?

By Bob C., Area 29 Delegate

Recently in talking with a GSR, I observed that people at the bottom of the triangle don't direct us in any imperative way. My GSR friend smiled and said, "Well, they try not to, anyway." But only a few examples served to convince this fellow that "they" really do more than "try;" that they actually do seek our guidance and do serve us.

How can we know whether the areas, Conference, trustees, GSO and Grapevine are serving us and not deciding for us? Well, as the Big Book says, "Let's look at the evidence."

- What I saw at the General Service Conference is that it is just a group conscience meeting. Spiritually, it's no different than the quarterly business meetings my home group holds. The Conference is "directly responsible to those they serve," as idealized in Tradition Nine, because it's never a matter of what's best for the GSO or for the Grapevine. Rather, the question in everyone's mind is always, "How can we best provide what our groups need to carry the message?"
- The trustees have asked for input from our membership all summer and fall and are responsive to membership concerns.
 - In June, the trustees asked for member feedback on how, as print sales continue to decline, we can address our dependence on profits from literature to fund group services.
 - In September, the trustees asked for member feedback on whether Tradition Eleven sufficiently addresses anonymity at the public level in the digital age, on the value of the A.A. Membership Survey, and on
- Conference theme suggestions for 2014.
- In July, after a letter from a member, the trustees reviewed an office management decision, recommended reversing that decision, and offered resources for an alternate solution. (The decision was subsequently reversed by management.)
- The Conference's agenda primarily originates as suggestions from members and groups, so most of its actions (later implemented by the trustees, GSO and Grapevine) start out as member ideas.
- Lower entities on the inverted triangle do not direct the groups. The delegates, comprising two thirds of every Conference, are elected by the group representatives and so are ultimately responsible to the groups. Likewise, the area committee, except for standing and ad hoc committee chairpersons, is elected by GSRs and is directly responsible to the groups. And the districts are composed entirely of GSRs, who are elected by the groups.
- The GSO, AAGV, trustees, Conference, areas and districts cannot issue edicts. Our Fourth Tradition ultimately liberates our groups to do as they please. It asks for prudence when impacting other groups or A.A. as a whole; yet there are no A.A. police. The groups are ultimately in charge.
- If a service entity acts beyond its scope of delegated authority or contrary to Tradition, the groups can pull rank by cutting off contributions. This is why money flows unidirectionally on the triangle, from top to bottom. "He who pays the piper, calls the tune," writes Bill in the 12 & 12. Hence, ultimate

authority of the groups is not just a spiritual theory; we actually live it.

These points clearly demonstrate that our service triangle truly is upside down, not just in theory but in fact. Sixty-two years ago, A.A. stood the corporate triangle on its pointy little head to create a service structure. The question is now, does this arrangement work well?

Well, things get done. Literature gets updated, issues get addressed, and the groups are served. Yet, how much more responsive to our groups could the Conference be if more groups were represented and had input into the Conference process? In Area 29, as in all other areas, the most tenuous connections in the inverted triangle are at the group, district and area levels. In this area, only around a fourth of our groups have active GSRs, and half of our districts meet regularly. Those that don't participate simply go unrepresented.

If your group doesn't have a GSR or if your district doesn't meet, please contact me at delegate@marylandaa.org and we will try to change that. We owe it to ourselves, to the newcomer, and to future generations of alcoholics yet to come – including some of whom may carry our own genes. Think about it. The future of A.A. depends on all of us, including you and me.

Ideas

Services

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Let's Not Lose Our History

By Morgan J, Archivist archivist@marylandaa.org

Bill wrote in 1957: "We are trying to build up extensive records which will be of value to a future historian..."

"It is highly important that the factual material be placed in our files in such a way that there can be no substantial distortion..."

"We want to keep enlarging on this idea for the sake of the full length history to come..."

On a recent trip to our archives I took some time to study the items that we have in our archives and I was struck by what we don't have. There is almost nothing in our archives that describes the growth in the number of groups in our area. There are a few pieces that talk about the first few groups, but how did we grow from less than 25 to over 1000 today. When were all these groups started and by whom? Your Archivist has group history forms that will aid you in completing your Home Group's history. Please take the time to research your home group's history and put it in writing so that it can be preserved.

What was A.A. like in the 40's, 50's, 60's, etc? The only way that we are going to obtain and preserve that information is by recording the story from those that were there. Let's not wait too much longer before we get started on this valuable task. I am seeking people willing to interview long timers so that we can add their story to others to help build and preserve our history.

Carl Sandburg explained "why" very well. He wrote: "Whenever a society or a civilization perishes, there is always one factor present: they forgot where they came from." ▲

Researching A.A. Group History

Service Material from the General Service Office

The General Service Office Archives Department is frequently asked how A.A. Groups can write their group history. Listed below are some typical questions that the Archives Department uses when writing a group history. It is suggested that groups try to answer these questions and, as needed, contact both the General Service Office Archives and their local Archives for information. If groups are conducting an oral history, the G.S.O. Archives has prepared an Oral History Kit that can be used as a guide – experience has shown that many groups have found it to be helpful. The Oral History Kit is available on the Archives portal of G.S.O.'s A.A. website at www.aa.org.

- Who were the founding members of the group?
- Where and when was the first meeting held? In date order, list where later meetings have

been held. Include city, state, building, residence, church, clubhouse, etc.

- Did the group list with the General Service Office at the time the members first met?
- What is the group's name? Have there been any changes to the group's name over the years?
- What initiated the meeting: was it the offshoot of a parent group; was there a split due to disagreements; did a few A.A.s simply decide to start a hometown group, etc.
- How did the founding members let the community know that a new A.A. meeting was forming?

- How many members attended the group's first meeting?
- Describe member composition, for example, men only, women, young people, etc.
- How did the group experience growth over the years?
- Are group inventories conducted regularly and have they been helpful?
- Who were the early group officers? List, for example, GSR, Group Contact, Chair, Group Secretary, etc.
- Has the group used a steering committee?
- Have any group members participated in District, Area or other

continued on page 7...

(Researching A.A. Group History) continued from page 6... service to the Fellowship?

- How often were meetings held and has that changed over the years?
- What meeting formats have been used – closed, open, discussion, etc.
- Describe the group’s growing pains or controversies.
- How does the group celebrate

group member’s anniversaries of sobriety?

- How has the group celebrated the anniversary of its’ founding?
 - Describe how the group has cooperated with professional agencies (by signing court cards, supporting a meeting in an institutional setting, taking regular phone duty at the Intergroup or Central Office, etc.).

- Has the group participated in special local or regional A.A. functions, such as conventions, conferences, round-ups, forums or workshops?

Send and/or e-mail completed Group Histories to:

Archivist
 Maryland General Service Inc.
 P.O. Box 20177
 Baltimore, MD 21284-0177
 E-mail: archivist@marylandaa.org 

MARYLAND GENERAL SERVICE, AREA 29 2012 CALENDAR

| | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|
| Fall Conference | October 25 – 28 | Hagerstown, MD |
| Area Committee | November 17 | District 28/29 |
| Area Assembly | December 15 | District 32 |
| | | St. Peter's Lutheran Church |
| | | 10301 Coastal Highway |
| | | Ocean City, MD 21842 |

THE MARGENSER IS YOUR NEWSLETTER

The Margenser Committee welcomes submissions. We are here to serve you. Submissions should be no more than 750 words and about service or recovery. Please include your first name, last initial and home group. Email all correspondence to Margenser@marylandAA.org or mail to Maryland General Services, PO Box 20177, Baltimore, MD 21284-0177. The submission deadline for the next issue is December 28, 2012.

REACHING OUT TO THE “DARK DISTRICTS”

Many of our neighbors do not actively participate in Area 29, nor are their voices heard within AA as a whole. We encourage you to reach out to those districts without active GSRs or DCMs, sharing your experience of service beyond the home group and carrying the message one-on-one. Area 29 welcomes your ideas on how we can best do this and offers our support.

MARGENSER

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Change | <input type="checkbox"/> E-mail Only | | |

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mail to Maryland General Services, P.O. Box 20177
Baltimore, MD 21284-0177