

MARGENSER

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

This Drunk's Experience

Tom R, Area 29 Delegate

After two years of tortuous “controlled” drinking I returned to Alcoholics Anonymous. I was not a first-nighter. I say tortuous, as I had reserved my right to drink, yet desperately wanted to stop and could not. My Higher Power sent me a message again through a member of the law enforcement community which finally got my attention. All I wanted at this point was to not drink. After ten days, I asked someone to be my sponsor, and instead of saying yes he asked me if I was willing to go to any lengths to stay sober. He then started to lead me through the Steps as they are laid out in the Big Book. The journey of recovery began with a decision to jump into this AA thing with both feet, and I knew if I didn't, I wasn't going to stay around. It was suggested that whenever someone asked me to do something of service to AA, I should say yes if at all possible. My sponsor and many others showed that service also was part of our recovery from alcoholism. These people had what I wanted. They were happy.

Eleven years later found me in a room with 133 other alcoholics, and non-alcoholics, participating in a week long AA business meeting called the General Service Conference. Nothing could have been further from my mind on April 18, 1997, much less a day earlier sitting in a police station in handcuffs (again.) Now, I asked myself, “How did I get here?”

Through attending our Area assemblies, our regional events like the Northeast Regional Alcoholics Anonymous Service Assemblies (NERAASA), Forums, and conventions galore, I continue to meet people who I see time and time again at these events. We get to know each other and I hear their stories. It's no coincidence that though we come from different backgrounds, we had all been to the

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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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The Challenges Of Service: Do Others Want What I Have?

Krista R, Happy Risers Group, West Ocean City, MD

Editors Note: *The following is a presentation made by Krista at the 2008 NERAASA held in West Atlantic City, New Jersey, February 22, 2008.*

Good afternoon, my name is Krista R. and I am an alcoholic. My sobriety date is September 7, 1994 and I am a member of the Happy Risers Morning Step Group. We meet in West Ocean City, Maryland at 9:00 A.M. and I would like to invite each and every one of you to stop in whenever you are visiting the beach. My current service positions are treasurer of my home group and chairperson of the Ocean City Intergroup. I have also been a GSR (General Service Representative), DCM (District Committee Member) and served at Maryland General Service on two committees. I have a sponsor and I sponsor women.

My first service position was washing all the ashtrays before the meeting every Sunday. I had just quit smoking a few months before and was not real happy about washing those darn old dirty things. But I was told that was what service work was about; sometimes doing things that we did not want to, but that were for the good of the group or AA. It's not just carrying the message.

One of Webster's definitions for the word “service” is: “An act of assistance or benefit to another or others.”

The following is taken from the January 24th entry in the *Daily Reflections* book: “I understand that service is a vital part of recovery but I often wonder, ‘What can I do?’ Simply start with what I have today! I look around to see where there is a need. Are the ashtrays full? Do I have hands and feet to empty them? Suddenly I'm involved! The best speaker may make the worst coffee; the member who's best with newcomers may be unable to read; the one willing to clean up may make a mess of the bank account—yet every one of these people and jobs is essential to an active group. The miracle of service is this: when I use what I have, I find there is more available to me than I realized before.”

AA's Legacy of Service written by Bill W., a co-founder of AA states: “Our Twelfth Step — carrying the message — is the basic service that the AA Fellowship gives; this is our principal aim and the main reason for our existence. Therefore, AA is more than a set of principles; it is a society of alcoholics in action. We must carry the message, else we ourselves can wither and those who haven't been given the truth may die.”

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My Awakening

by Don R., Tues. 12:15 Sharing and Caring

The "experience" had been progressing for quite some time, years. The crash took the form of an arranged visit to an ex flight surgeon who would assess my physical state following several years of avoiding doctors. Little did I know that the trunk of the Honda had been packed the night before and held a suitcase that hopefully would accompany me to a residential alcoholism and addiction treatment center located just outside Havre de Grace, Maryland.

Having had previous experience with flight surgeons, often at "happy hours," the visit to one who was retired posed no threat. The first surprise was seeing our four daughters upon entry to the doctor's home office. There they were in chairs similar to those we occupy so often at meetings. With the realization that two of these daughters were already in AA, I somehow knew that my drinking was finished. The drinking must stop. One of our two sons was overseas. The other had tried to tip me off weeks prior by suggesting that I might be drinking too much. I had assured him that he should not worry...it was all "under control."

So the little meeting went on, daughters and wife talking, weeping, me listening, which was unusual but stipulated by the flight surgeon prior to the meeting's start. There it was, all of it in front of me. What a failure, such disgrace and lack of discipline. All that was needed was some backbone.

While the family held their collective breath over the next several months, my "program" consisted of staying busy and staying abstinent. My refusal of the rehab did not help to lessen the worries of my family.

However, one Friday night I finally went to a meeting held in the same church where my wife regularly attended Al-Anon. This was the beginning. Some 22 years later my wife and I still go there. There have been changes. It took so much courage for my wife and kids to challenge my drinking, so much love. The memory of their tears in that encounter remains one of my tools for sober living. No longer does anyone in my family hold their breath wondering when dad will drink.

Another daughter has also come to AA. She is approaching the two year mark. I know that she has been and will continue to be embraced by the arms of AA just as her

sisters and I have been.

I thank my Higher Power for each day of freedom, grateful to Him and for the comradeship of my fellow alcoholics. It has been slow, but change has come. I return to my cherished colleagues in sobriety on a frequent basis and rejoice with them for our freedom, and for the promise and the hope that is present for the newcomer, who may experience the same initial doubts that I had. What a way to live this is! ☀

THE OXFORD GROUP – PART 2

Ron M, BYOL Group, Easton

The contributions of the Oxford Group to Alcoholics Anonymous turned out to be many and varied. Their broad based focus was to make the world a better place by the utilization of certain principals known as the previously mentioned "Four Absolutes" of Honesty, Purity, Love and Selflessness. It was their attempt to bring these concepts to everyone in all phases of their life. On the other hand, the focus of Bill W. and Dr. Bob was the drunk. It was probably preordained that the two efforts would eventually split apart. Because of Bill and Bob's focused efforts they became known as the "Alcoholic Squad." As time progressed, the Oxford Group unsuccessfully attempted to modify and change the sole effort of Bill and Bob. By 1937 the divergence of efforts led to a split. It occurred first in New York and then after a short while in Akron. The Oxford Group was trying to save the whole world and the objective of Bill and Bob was limited to alcoholics. In retrospect this early action of the founders can easily be seen as guidance to remain focused on a primary purpose. A few years later, in 1941, Samuel M. Shoemaker, Rector of the Calvary Church in New York also found it necessary to terminate relations with the Oxford Group. He stated in a letter to them that certain policies and points of view had arisen in their efforts for "Moral-Re-Armament" that caused certain misgivings.

The "Alcoholic Squad" moved on with their mission. They obviously took what was pertinent and left the rest. Early on, the meetings in Akron were held in the home of Oxford Group members T. Henry and Clarace Williams. Those gatherings were held along the lines of the Oxford Group. The meetings were opened with a prayer, the leader would read scripture, there would be witnessing by the leader and then from the others in attendance. This was

followed by quiet time to listen for guidance and the meetings closed with the Lord's Prayer. Not much difference today.

One of the concepts taken from the Oxford Group days was that of surrender. Even in the early days surrender to some Higher Power was essential to the alcoholic's recovery. Probably due to the influence of Dr. Bob and his experience with the Oxford Group, the Book of James was used as an absolutely essential part of the recovery process. This book was reportedly one of the three books of the Bible on Dr. Bob's "required reading list". It is also rumored that some early AA's favored "The James Club" for the name of the AA fellowship.

One of the early members to arrive was Clarence S. from Cleveland. (Home Brewmeister-AA Big Book, 3rd Ed.) Dr. Bob was his sponsor and the story of his surrender is reported as follows:

"T. Henry, Doc and a couple of other Oxford Group members went into T. Henry's bedroom. They all, including Clarence, who by now was used to kneeling, got down on their knees in an attitude of prayer. They all placed their hands on Clarence and then proceeded to pray. They introduced him to Jesus as Lord and Savior. They had him pray to Jesus and had him dedicate his life to Him. They then anointed him with oil and once again laid hands on him. They did this just as did First Century Christianity and then prayed for a healing and removal of his sickness, especially his alcoholism. When he arose, Clarence once again felt like a new man".

Although the founders of AA did not remain with the Oxford Group the early seeds were planted and bore fruit. Many of the ideas and customs seen and utilized in today's AA can be traced to that early relationship. For example it has been reported that if asked "Who is the leader of the Oxford Group?" the reply might be "The Holy Spirit". They reportedly did not have any officers or board of directors. They relied on "God Control." Sound familiar?

There is certainly much more to this story and many pages could be devoted to the history and inner workings of the Oxford Group. However, suffice it to say that certain basic and crucial ideas gave birth to AA as we know it today. The Oxford Group's original six steps have developed into our current 12 Step program. ☀

(Challenges of Service) continued from page 1...

Hence, an AA service is anything whatever that helps us to reach a fellow sufferer — ranging all the way from the Twelfth Step itself to a ten-cent phone call and a cup of coffee, and to AA's General Service Office for national and international action. The sum total of all these services is our Third Legacy of Service.

Services include meeting places, hospital cooperation, and Intergroup offices; they mean pamphlets, books, and good publicity of almost every description. They call for committees, delegates, trustees, and conferences. And, not to be forgotten, they need voluntary money contributions from within the Fellowship." (*The A.A. Service Manual /Twelve Concepts for World Service, S1*)

Once we have created a basically sound service structure, furnishing it with able and willing workers has to be a continuous activity. We have an abundance of men and women whose dedication, stability, vision and special skills make them capable of dealing with every possible service assignment. We have only to seek these folks out and trust them to serve us. Our leaders do not drive by mandate, they lead by example. A leader in AA service is a man or woman who can personally put principals, plans and policies into such dedicated and effective action that the rest of us want to back him up and help him with his job.

It is the very vital role of the GSR (General Service Representative) that allows the voice of the groups of Alcoholics Anonymous to be heard at the General Service Conference through active participation at the area level; sharing its experience, strength and hope with the whole of Alcoholics Anonymous and taking on our shared responsibility for the continuation of our society.

Answering the question "Why Do We Need a Conference;" the non-alcoholic, then chairman of the Board, Bernard Smith, insightfully and powerfully answered in his opening talk at the 1954 Conference:

"We may not need a General Service Conference to ensure our own recovery. We do need it to ensure the recovery of the alcoholic who still stumbles in the darkness one short block from this room. We need it to ensure the recovery of a child being born tonight, destined for alcoholism. We need it to provide, in keeping with our Twelfth Step, a permanent haven for all alcoholics who, in the ages ahead, can find in AA that rebirth that brought us back to life.

We need it because we, more than all others, are conscious of the devastating effect of the human urge for power and prestige which we must ensure can never invade AA. We need it to ensure AA against government while insulating it against anarchy; we need it to protect AA against disintegration while preventing over-integration. We need it so that Alcoholics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous alone is the ultimate repository of its Twelve Steps, its Twelve Traditions, and all of its services.

We need it to ensure that changes within AA come only as a response to the needs and the wants of all AA, and not of any few. We need it to ensure that the doors of the halls of AA never have locks on them, so that all people for all time who have an alcoholic problem may enter these halls unasked and feel

welcome. We need it to ensure that Alcoholics Anonymous never asks of anyone who need us what his or her race is, what his or her creed is, what his or her social position is."

As a member of Alcoholics Anonymous, I have had the opportunity and good fortune to have had the guidance of a sponsor, as well as being able to provide sponsorship to others.

The responsibility of sponsorship is an undertaking that cannot be taken lightly. This relationship is one of a "fit and match" partnership of exploration and discovery through our Three Legacies of recovery, unity, and service.

The acceptance of the responsibility of sponsorship through service has in many cases, been discarded somewhere along the Road of Happy Destiny. It is just such an issue that has lead to the emergence and maturation of the service sponsor. Our Legacy of Service enables us to carry the AA message worldwide.

Acting as a service sponsor takes a substantial amount of time, effort and understanding. It is this Legacy of Service that one must experience first hand. It is impossible to share with others the feeling of being at a home group business meeting, or the Area Assembly, or even the General Service Conference unless you have had that experience yourself.

Co-founder Dr. Bob said, "I spend a great deal of time passing on what I learned to others who want and need it badly. I do it for four reasons:

1. Sense of duty.
2. It is a pleasure.
3. Because in doing so I am paying my debt to the man who took time to pass it on to me.
4. Because every time I do it I take out a little more insurance for myself against a possible slip."

When I read this quote from Dr. Bob, I finally understood. It had just been a feeling that I had but he put it very simply and eloquently.

The basis of all sponsorship is to lead by example. Service sponsors can impart to their spouses the pleasure of involvement in the work of Alcoholics Anonymous. This is best done by stressing the spiritual nature of service work and by pointing out the usefulness of simple footwork and faith.

As to whether others want what I have, I really cannot give you a definitive answer. I can tell you that most of the ladies that I have sponsored or that I sponsor today have been or are involved in service work to one level or another. I also have the pleasure of being a service sponsor which is a learning and growing experience. I have also had the pleasure of guiding some of the men of the area into service. One in particular comes to mind. He came into service "kicking and screaming," not feeling that he was capable of doing any of the work necessary. But today I hear him repeatedly share in meetings that he is grateful for being able to carry the message any way he can and realizing the pleasure he receives in doing so. That is all that I can ask... for someone to try and give service, of any kind, a chance. Just like I have given this program called Alcoholics Anonymous a chance, and what a miracle that has been.

Lastly, I leave you this afternoon with your

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(This Drunk's Experience) continued from page 1... same spiritual abyss in our active alcoholism. We are all grateful just to be alive. What a gift it is to walk into a meeting somewhere in Maryland or outside of Maryland and know someone in the room, and feel part of the AA family.

This is the feeling I had arriving at the General Service Conference. The fear I'd always felt for the unknown was not there. There was just a twinge of anxiety during "roll call" on Sunday afternoon when my name was read and I stood to respond, "Here!" I started breathing after that. In our conference committee, I experienced God expressing Himself through a loving group conscience. We began our conference committee with some very strong opposing viewpoints, and through open sharing and free discussion it was overwhelming to me to watch everyone come together in agreement by our last committee meeting. Much like an Area Assembly, everyone shook hands and was the best of friends. On the Conference floor during the week, I moved around at random and sat next to someone new each day. I did not know if I would be sitting next to the delegate from Texas, a trustee from Canada, a General Service Office staffer, or one of my fellow Northeast Regional Delegates (lovingly called NERDs.) It did not matter. Love for Alcoholics Anonymous could be felt throughout the room.

Our conference quite possibly set the record for longest General Service Conference in history, and most floor actions ever made, at fifteen. The business of the conference was scheduled to be completed by 3:00 pm on Friday, with closing at 5:00 pm. The business of the conference was completed... floor actions and all at 11:55 pm. Given a short break for nourishment at 6:30, I wondered to myself how many would return. Needless to say, everyone was present when we reconvened, smiling happy and grateful to serve. Even though no one got to bed before 1:00 am that night, many to whom I spoke the next day had been too excited to sleep, just as I had been.

It is a powerful reaffirmation to hear the reports from AA members serving as delegates throughout the U.S. and Canada, that the message we hear in Maryland, is the same message being passed on in Florida as it is in Texas, Alberta, and Puerto Rico. This is a feeling of being a part of something much greater than my self. We can certainly do together what I cannot do alone. What a wonderful society to be a part of. ☺

The Basket, Whose Money Is It Anyway?

Morgan J., Finance Committee

At every meeting that I have ever been to, the preamble to Alcoholics Anonymous is read. Part of our preamble states "we are self-supporting through our own contributions." The question is; who are we self-supporting? Is it our group or meeting? Is it the local Intergroup that provides a valuable service without which we could very easily disappear? Is it the Area? After all without the area we wouldn't have a voice with AA? Or, is it AAWS where all of AA's literature and Worldwide services are created?

For years groups in my area struggled to achieve a "silent" collection, folding money only and only recently has that been occurring. Many have taken to putting a dollar in the basket for quite some time now, but is that keeping pace with other costs? We talk about the rising cost of gas, food and utilities, but are we willing to increase our contributions? The dollar bought four to five times as much 30 years ago as it does now, but we still give the same as we did in 1978. Some groups have encouraged home group members to double their donation for the home group to two dollars instead of one, and that has been generating some success for group treasuries, but this isn't a wide spread practice. The dollar donation still seems to be the standard.

Speaking of groups -- granted some small groups barely collect enough to pay the rent and buy a little coffee, but most seem to do well enough to be able to share a little with AA as a whole.

The long form of Tradition Seven reads; "Then too, we view with much concern those AA treasuries which continue, beyond prudent reserves to accumulate funds for no stated AA purpose. Experience has often warned us that nothing can so surely destroy our spiritual heritage as futile disputes over property, money and authority.

I have heard sad news from a few groups that their treasury has disappeared with someone leaving the group and with it the chance to help carry the message to the still suffering alcoholic. Is your group hoarding its funds or even worse using them for other than carrying the message? The Twelfth Concept Warranty Two states; "that sufficient operating funds and reserve be its prudent financial principle."

From the discussion of Warranty II: "But when it comes to the actual spending of cash, particularly for AA service overhead, many of us are apt to turn a bit reluctant. We think of the loss of all that earning power in our drinking years, of those sums we might have laid by for emergencies or for education of the kids. We find too, that when we drop money in the meeting hat there is no such bang as when we talk for hours to a newcomer. There is not much romance in paying the landlord."

Presently Maryland General Service (MGS) Budgeted income and contributions are as follows: Note: *the following are estimates and are for illustration only.*

In 2007 we had an approximate income of \$30,000.00 from 396 groups representing 39% of the total number of Groups in Area 29. This represents \$81.31 per group per year or \$4.06 per member per year providing \$29.56 in services to each of the registered groups per year. MGS does not discriminate its services to only participating groups.

We had requests for approximately \$50,000.00 to cover perspective projects which far exceeded even the most ambitious income projection. What does this represent? If we maintain the same percentage of contributing groups this will represent a challenge of raising the participating group contribution to \$126.25 per group per year or \$6.31 per member per year.

Another way that the funds could be raised would be to encourage the non-contributing groups to join in. If we were able to raise the number of contributing groups by 22% and maintain the same rate of contribution that we have now, then we could reach our goal.

Is this going to be possible? From the discussion of Warranty II: "But in recent years these attitudes are everywhere on the decline; they quickly disappear when the real need for a given AA service becomes clear. To make such a need clear is simply a matter of right information and education. We see this in the continuous job now being done with good effect for our world service by Delegates, Committee Members, and General Service Representatives. They are finding that money-begging by pressure exhortation is unwanted and unneeded in AA. They simply portray what the giver's service dollar really brings in terms of

DISTRICT & INTERGROUP EVENTS

3rd Quarter

August 15-17 (two nights) District 31 - "Serenity Under the Stars" Sober Campout; Tuckahoe State Park, 13070 Crouse Mill Road, Queen Anne, Maryland 21625. district31@marylandaa.org for flyer and more info.

August 23rd, District 9-Sobriety in the Park Picnic; 1:00-7:00 pm. Taneytown Park, Taneytown, MD. For reservation and fee information, email activities_chair@d9mdaa.org

August 23rd, District 36/Area 29 Workshop Committee -12 Steps/12 Traditions Workshop; 9:00 am-2:00 pm; Lexington Park United Methodist Church, Lexington Park, MD. Lunch provided.

September 19- 21, MGYPAA: (Friday, Saturday & Sunday) Maryland Gathering of Young People in Alcoholics Anonymous 2008 Camp, Fairlee Manor, 22242 Bayshore Rd., Chestertown, MD 21620 • For more information contact www.mgypaa8.org

September 26-28, District 11 - Campout @ Elk Neck State Park, 4395 Turkey Point Rd., North East, MD 219010 \$50 weekend site cost-2 tent/2car max per site. Fri-Sat-Sun meetings; Sat. night pot-luck dinner.

October 4, "Sponsorship in AA" Workshop; 10:00 am-2:00 pm, South Shore Recovery, 1199 Generals Highway, Crownsville, MD 21032; A panel of speakers; discussion. Lunch provided. For more info: southshorerecoveryclub@yahoo.com

October 5, District 31-Annual Crab Feast: 12:00-4:00 pm, \$20/person; no tickets sold @ the door; hamburgers, hot dogs, crabs, soda... please bring a covered dish. Naval Academy Annex, Past Naval Academy Golf Course-follow District 31 signs. district31@marylandaa.org for more info.

steering alcoholics to AA"

From The Language of the Heart – "But when we are generous with the hat we give a token that we are grateful for our blessings and evidence that we are eager to share what we have found with all those who still suffer." The money collected in "the hat" belongs to the Fellowship so that 12 Step work can be conducted and the message carried to all those that want it. ☐

(Challenges of Service) continued from page 3...

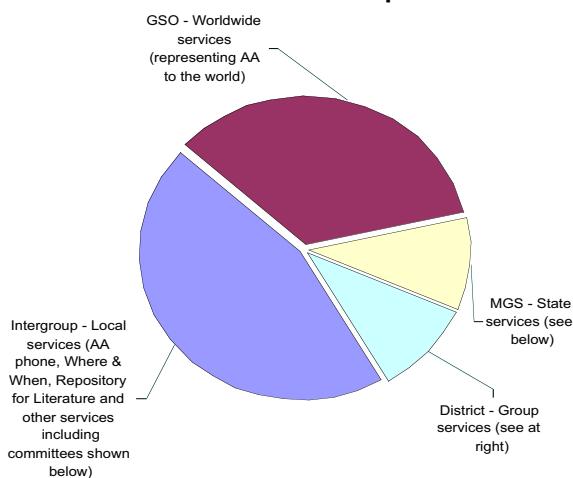
Rights as an AA member:

- You have the right to remain sober. If you give up this right, your misery will be cheerfully refunded.
- You have the right to a sponsor of your choice. If you cannot choose a sponsor, your group may find you a temporary sponsor to set your feet on the "Road of Happy Destiny."
- You have the right to participate in all matters affecting AA both locally and worldwide.
- If you choose not to participate, or let your voice be heard, you must take what you are given.

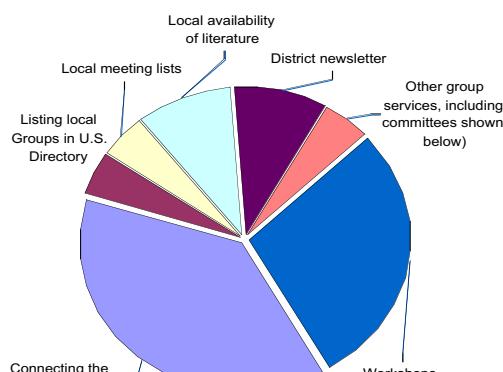
Thank you for allowing me to be of service to Alcoholics Anonymous and may God Bless You. ☐

Where Does Our Seventh Tradition Dollar Go?*

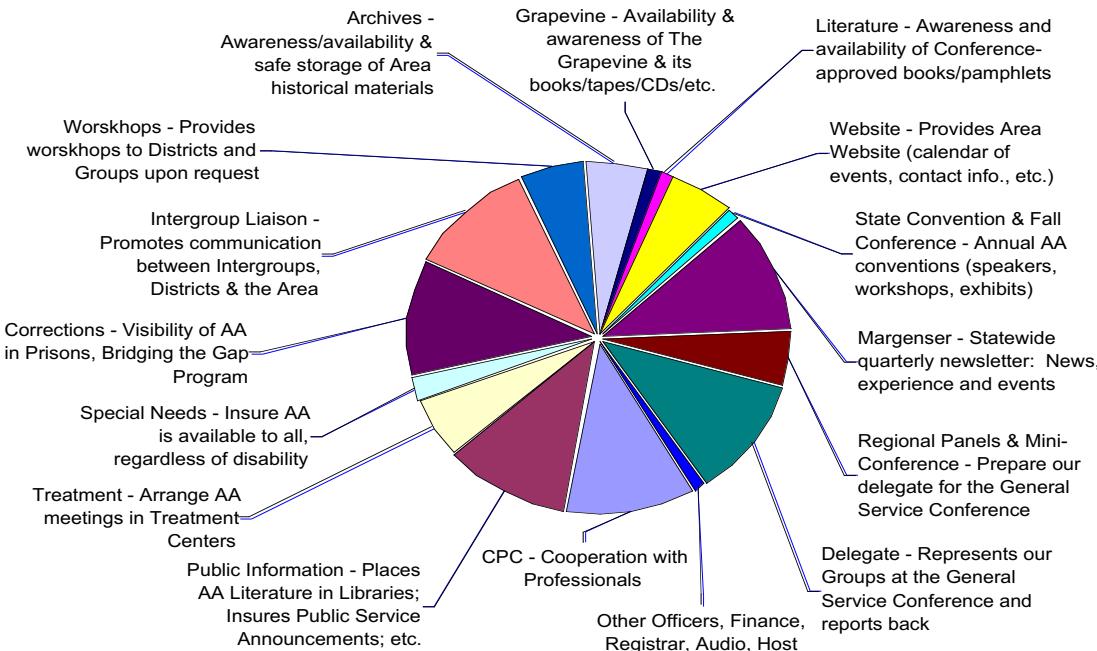
The Group



The District



Area 29 – Maryland General Service



* These charts are intended only to provide examples of the range of services and do not include all services. These charts do not attempt to depict actual percentages for Area 29 and are not intended to tell any group or district how to allocate money or services.

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.
P.O. Box 2683
Salisbury, MD 21802

MARYLAND GENERAL SERVICE 2008 CALENDAR

Area Assembly	August 16	Frederick, MD
Area Committee	September 20	Ocean City, MD
Area Assembly (Inventory)	October 18	Howard County, MD
Fall Conference	Oct 30-Nov 2	Carousel Resort Hotel, Ocean City, MD
Area Committee (Budget)	November 15	Crofton, MD
Area Assembly (Budget)	December 13	Aberdeen, MD

Internet Security & Maryland General Service, Inc.

Ray T, Area 29 Webmaster

How can I retain my anonymity when using the Internet? I need to send personal information to a Committee Chair and it's easier and cheaper to use the Internet. But is it safe? These are important, everyday questions with which technology has presented us. I'm going to try to explain in practical terms some of the issues and how we can deal with them.

My role as webmaster for Maryland General Service, Inc. is to adhere to the 11th Tradition-- personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and film. In announcements at Forums, Conventions, Assemblies, and other public gatherings, the 11th Tradition has been extended to include electronic media in this era of the Internet. What do we mean by anonymity?

To me, it means that my association with and as a member of Alcoholics Anonymous is not to be disclosed in any way in a public forum. I am not to identify myself as a member of AA in a newspaper or magazine article in a way that implies I am representing Alcoholics Anonymous. Likewise, this should not occur on television, radio, stage, or in a film of any nature, including Public Service Announcements. One of the ways we do this is by leaving off the mention of our family or last name when identifying ourselves. We also should avoid being photographed or filmed at an AA event.

Now we come to the Internet. How do we carry our Tradition to this new media? In the GSO service pamphlet "Frequently Asked Questions about AA Web Sites," it states:

"We observe all AA principles and Traditions on our Web sites. Since anonymity is "the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions," we practice anonymity on AA Web sites at all times. An AA Web site is a public medium, which has the potential for reaching the broadest possible audience

and, therefore, requires the same safeguards that we use at the level of press, radio, and film."

Publication MG-18, AA Guidelines – Internet discusses the various aspects of Internet use as experienced by AA members and offers many suggestions. I encourage anyone who is concerned about their anonymity and the impact of the Internet to read these Guidelines.

My experience has shown that problems arise in discussing Internet issues when individuals combine anonymity concerns with concerns over privacy and security. Publication of full names and affiliations with AA on Web sites is an anonymity concern; use of full names and affiliations in personal e-mail is a privacy matter. The transmission of the latter information over the Internet is a security issue.

Dealing with the privacy of your name, affiliation with AA, and your activities within the Fellowship is your responsibility. If you use a computer at work for personal e-mail that includes Fellowship activity, you have placed your personal anonymity at risk. If you use a computer in a library or other public venue for personal e-mail that includes Fellowship activity, you have placed your personal anonymity at risk. Even if you use "Webmail," such as Hotmail, Gmail, Yahoo, or other online Web e-mail services, your personal anonymity is at risk. As parents, you may have wanted to monitor your child's Internet usage and see what Web sites they have visited. This same monitoring can be done about your own Internet activity on a computer not located in your home.

In addition, if you use an e-mail address provided through your employer, the likelihood is that those e-mails are being stored on a corporate server and probably backed up on a regular basis. When I was employed and led an IT department, we retained years of backup files and could access that information in some cases in a matter of minutes.

Therefore, to recap, if you are using a computer outside of your home where you

have made an association between yourself and Alcoholics Anonymous, you have placed your personal anonymity at risk. This is not much different from placing an AA slogan on your car's bumper and then declaring your concern about personal anonymity.

Lastly, let's look at security. I have had discussions with Fellowship members about the security of the Internet. How easy is it to tap into the Internet, or hack into an ISP's (Internet Service Provider, such as Comcast, Verizon, Toadnet, etc.) server? On this second question, when you use an ISP for e-mail, your e-mail is kept on a computer owned by that company. If you use an e-mail program on your computer that downloads e-mail, those messages still reside on the company's computers after you have received them on your home computer. As mentioned earlier, that information is backed-up regularly and retained for later recall.

Can you do anything to protect yourself from a person "browsing" through personal e-mails at the ISP? Not really. About the only thing you can really do is read the privacy agreement provided with your contract (who really reads every one of those?) to see if, in your judgment, the company is adequately protecting your information.

What can you do to protect against hackers--persons who are deliberately trying to read private information about you? A flippant response might be "do not make any smart enemies." Seriously--there isn't anything you can personally do to protect yourself from an attack of this nature. The basic rule when dealing with the Internet is to use good common sense. Follow suggestions to protect against spam or phishing, work only with trusted sites, and when sending personal information to a Web site, make sure that Web site is using encryption. Maryland General Service, Inc. does not currently allow use of any personal information, so it has not needed to resort to encrypting information. □

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. Send all correspondence to Margenser, C/O Maryland General Service, Inc., P.O. Box 2683, Salisbury, MD 21802 or via email to margenser@marylandaa.org.

The submission deadline for the next issue is November 21, 2008.

No Longer In the Dark

Joe H, Past DCM, District 24

Every Saturday morning in the small hamlet of Queenstown on Maryland's eastern shore, whether to the accompaniment of honking geese in the winter or the shrill cry of ospreys in the summer, some one is at the front door of the Methodist Church saying, "Welcome to the Eye-Opener Group."

The Eye-Opener group is District 24's newest home group, not quite ten, yet. However, it is a group that started off small and has steadily grown. It is composed of AA members young and old, new to sobriety and those with a number of 24 hours. Additionally, the group reflects the demographics of Queen Anne County--that is--there are natives, chicken-neckers and transplants from other states. It is through each member, sometimes passionately, sometimes begrudgingly or smugly, that the message of the "one ultimate authority" is expressed and the group purpose is fulfilled. It is through this diversity that the group was pushed out of its comfort zone of doing what had been passed down verbally regarding what a home group should be and do.

Four years ago the group became open to a "new way" of doing things and became willing to do them. Unknown at the time, this "new way" would bring a District out of the dark. The group was doing well carrying the message. People were getting sober, others were moving into the area and enjoyed what they saw and they too stayed. The contributions to GSO (the General Services Office) in New York, MGS (Maryland General Services) and our Intergroup became regular as did the rotation of officers. Everyone in the group felt a certain pride in being a member.

Then a man from New York City started coming to the meetings with his Mets ball cap on and he joined the Eye-Opener group. He shared that he had enjoyed double digit years of sobriety, was active in service work, but then eventually allowed those things sobriety had blessed him with to take priority with the often heard end result.

After a few months he started approaching members with whom he had become friends, with this bomb shell--"You're not doing it right." Yes, there it was--that ultimate ego inflating insult that is akin to being told what to do.

Now there have been many who have immigrated to the shore and have expressed with dismay that the meetings were okay "but just not like Baltimore." For our AA "cousins" from the big city there is plenty of tolerance and the standard "keep coming back." There is, however, very little tolerance towards a swashbuckling, arrogant know-it-all

retread from New York City.

Thankfully, after the initial shock that we could possibly be doing something wrong, it was suggested that he present his observations at the next group conscience (perhaps to allow the group as a whole to enjoy some self-righteous amusement). As the next group conscience meeting began, he went over to the "pamphlets free for the taking" and then over to the "books for sale at cost" display. When new business was called the newest member raised his hand and humbly presented his case from the *AA Service Manual* and the Group pamphlet as to how AA suggests a group be structured. There were nays and yeas and in the end the proposal was tabled to give everyone time to investigate. It was agreed that at the next group conscience we would choose new officers and that would be a good time to address this suggestion.

The Spirit of Rotation meeting was held and after minimal discussion, the group was in agreement that the group would be best served by adopting the tried and true suggestions of AA group's world wide. The groups' structure and service positions would be identical to those in the Service Manual. There was one unknown position that no one stood for and that was GSR. I was asked if I would be the GSR. I asked, "What is a GSR?" "We don't know" was the answer, "but it's in the Service Manual and there is a pamphlet." Of course, like many in this program, I've been taught from the beginning that when asked by AA you don't say no. I accepted the position and went about preparing for my new position and my first MGS meeting.

Following my first Maryland General Services meeting in western Maryland, I reported back to the home group at the monthly business meeting what I had learned. I explained that other than the lower shore, I was the only GSR from the mid-shore. I explained that we were a "dark" district that had no GSRs, no District meetings, and no involvement with Maryland General Service's activities.

The group decided that we should approach the other 12 home groups and attempt to build an active district. Of course

we knew that we could not go into a neighboring home group and tell them they were doing it wrong like we used to do it.

The plan that was adopted was not to instruct or point out inadequacies but to have our home group members approach their friends in other groups and ask for their support in making the District active. The final result was that nine home groups sent GSRs to elect a DCM (District Committee Member.)

District 24 was no longer dark and a number of groups are now properly represented in the AA structure. ☐

Share Your Sobriety... Contribute an Article

Larry H, Margenser Chair

Many of us have had, or observed, some pretty interesting people, events or experiences in our sobriety. Many of these had a significant effect on our sobriety and could have the same effect on someone else if you would share it with us.

Contributing an article about your experience, strength and hope, or put another way—Recovery, Unity and Service is "carrying the message to another alcoholic."

It's really a fairly simple process:

- pick a subject
- put it in writing (about one and a half pages is the appropriate 750 word length)
- submit the article to

Margenser@marylandaa.org with your first name, last initial and home group.

No need to worry about proper grammar, punctuation or the like—Margenser committee members will review and help "fine tune" the article, as needed, prior to printing.

Share your memorable sobriety experiences with the Margenser readers throughout Maryland. Become a published writer and "carry the message." ☐

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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