

MARGENSER

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

The Work of the General Service Office is Never Done

Nancy B, Panel 60 Delegate, Area 29

As 2010 draws to a close, it must be the perfect time to relax and enjoy the holidays, right? Wrong! The Preliminary Agenda for the 61st General Service Conference is taking shape, and while the final Conference Reports from the 60th General Service Conference are being distributed, the work of the Conference goes on.

The twenty-one trustees of the General Service Board have met quarterly since the end of the Conference in April 2010 to implement, through the Trustees' Committees and our two corporate entities, A.A.W.S., Inc. and A.A. Grapevine, Inc., the Advisory Actions approved by the Conference.

As Area Delegate, I have been reporting since April about the efforts put forth year-round by our General Service Board, General Service Office, and General Service Conference. Below is a partial list of some of the actions that have taken place over the summer and fall, illustrating that the Conference is always in session.

continued on page 5...

Gratitude: Thankfulness in Action

Bob C, Area 29 Treasurer

One winter evening a number of years back, a young man shouldered a tattered backpack up a street in Charlottesville, Virginia. He was hungry, deep-down hungry. His last real food was a large bag of potato chips, gratis from a delivery man in Pennsylvania yesterday morning. Dinner last night was a pint of 151 that reduced his funds to pocket change. Now those calories were gone, and a fine mist filled the air. With no prospects for supper or booze, he wondered where he might sleep, safe at least from the law and the townies.

Walking up a hill, he passed fraternity houses and taverns where he knew better than to even try to bum a drink. The mist turned into light rain – cold, too, reminding him he had no way to stay dry outdoors, and nowhere to go indoors.

The next building on the right was a church. In front was a saw-buck sign, white with red letters: "A.A. Tonight." A.A., he thought. A.A. was for alcoholics, people who were down and out with no options left. Well, "no options" certainly seemed to fit, and at least it would be dry inside. Maybe the rain would stop before they finished, and he wouldn't get all wet. So up the stairs he went.

Pushing the door open, he found a couple dozen men and women seated in rows, and a middle aged woman speaking from behind a wooden lectern. Several members turned and nodded as he came in. He set his pack down and slipped into the back row.

Either A.A. meetings were really short, or he was really late, because the whole thing was over by the time he'd been there ten minutes. But

continued on page 7...

Table of Contents...

<i>Delegates Corner: The Work of The</i>		<i>Service Rewards</i>	...3
<i>GSO is Never Done</i>	...1	<i>Hank P., New York AA#2</i>	...3
<i>Gratitude: Thankfulness in Action</i>	...1	<i>MGS Contribution Information</i>	...4
<i>Change of Attitude & Outlook</i>	...1	<i>Maryland General Service 2010</i>	
<i>AA Service-What We Were Like, What</i>		<i>Calendar</i>	...6
<i>Happened and What We're</i>		<i>Journey in Service</i>	...7
<i>Like Today</i>	.. 2	<i>Change of Address Form</i>	...8

Change of Attitude and Outlook

Cass, Westminster, MD

Even I can see that my attitude and outlook on life is different from when I first came to Alcoholics Anonymous! It happened unbeknownst to me, gradually and in spite of myself.

At first A.A. meetings were just scary; all those alcoholics kept trying to talk to me and shake my hand! I did not get it. Eventually it got more comfortable as the faces I was seeing got more familiar. It finally occurred to me that these people were reaching out to me as part of the effort to stay sober. Hmmm. "Pretty strange", I thought. After a few months I got involved by being secretary of my home group, then later GSR. Then I got a little more responsible (after about 10 years of sobriety and could show up early enough!) I became coffeemaker. All these positions have given me responsibilities, which kept me coming to meetings, and therefore, connected and learning. I learned about God and the principles by which I try to live my life.

continued on page 3...

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.

AA Service-What We Were Like, What Happened and What We're Like Today

Arnold R

WHAT WE WERE LIKE...

Prior to the General Service Conference 1935-1950

In the early months of his sobriety, Bill W. worked hard with many alcoholics without success. Nevertheless, he realized that this work kept him sober because it was not dependent upon the alcoholic's response. He found that his continued sobriety depended on his trying to give, not from demanding that something be returned. The early members, who were all Oxford Group members, referred to this as the Love which Asks Nothing in Return –or- Unconditional Love. This is the love we show to that drunk on the homegroup doorstep who may tell you where you can go and how to get there. When you sponsor and help someone find sobriety, and they in turn start to give it away to another drunk without even a backwards glance of gratitude to you, you feel happy about it anyway. Happiness is the byproduct - the extra dividend of giving without any demand of return.

In Dr. Bob's last talk, he said,

"Our 12 Steps, when simmered down to the last, resolve themselves into the words love and service. We understand what love is and we understand what service is."

When placed together, love and service give us a process by which we can become a harmonious whole and thus capable of meeting our primary purpose. Love and service exemplify the whole of our Fellowship working together for the good of the entire Fellowship. Love and service offer the opportunity to help alcoholics without bosses or rules. Love and service speak to mutually reinforcing clusters of trust and faith -- trust and faith in each other and a loving God. Love and service then create an environment where we become witnesses of a loving God expressing himself through our group conscience. Having said all of this;

So, how did we end up with a Board?

Historically, the General Service Board began in 1938 as something called the Alcoholic Foundation. Its main purpose was to raise money to print books, build a chain of drying-out hospitals and pay our 'missionaries' who would be needed to carry out the life saving

work of A.A. Most of you are aware of how our contact with John D. Rockefeller and the growing shared experience of A.A. altered these plans. The original board consisted of three non-alcoholics and two alcoholics, one of whom was Dr. Bob. The other alcoholic trustee was elected chairperson. Unfortunately, he relapsed. Since then all chairpersons of the Board have been non-alcoholic.

SO, WHAT HAPPENED...?

The short answer is "Dr. Bob became ill and died." In the late 1940s, Bill W. realized that he and Dr. Bob would not live forever, and that some mechanism must be available to lead Alcoholics Anonymous prior to their departure. In those early years, when "A.A. power-drivers ran hog wild", they had a preoccupation with trying to build up this thing while trying to save the Fellowship from each other, resulting in anger, suspicion, and all sorts of frightening episodes. It was through those early struggles that the Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions were born. These principles were designed for ego reduction and thus the reduction of our own fears. Bill stated that, "These were the principles which we hoped would hold us in unity and increasing love for each other and for our God. This means, my friends, that we have to accept the good and the not so good in each other."

Bill had drafted the Twelve Traditions as early as 1946, and the Traditions have provided the framework for the survival of our Fellowship to this day. Imagine this: there was a time when these principles did not receive wide acceptance! Everyone was afraid of some government growing up that would tell groups what they could and couldn't do. The Alcoholic Foundation Board already had trustees who looked after money matters and public relations at the national level, but how would these trustees communicate with the Fellowship, with us, when the founders were gone? How could the trustees get a cross-section of our opinion on important matters? (and) How could even one AA member express his/her concerns without some direct link to the Board? So, the Twelve Traditions coupled with this new idea of a General Service Conference, have provided the backbone for our evolution from a handful of do-gooders to the most significant social movement of the 20th century. I like to say that the 12 Steps save us from alcoholism, the 12 Traditions keep the Fellowship safe from our egos, and the 12 Concepts safeguard the

wonderful relationship among the trustees and the groups and even individual members.

The birth of the Conference 1951-1955

Even as Bob lay dying, Bill got his approval to try this conference experiment for a couple years. Bill's message to each A.A. member at the first General Service Conference in 1951, reminded them, and us, how perilous "faith without works" is for our fellowship:

"Faith alone does not save him. He has to act, do something. He must carry his message to others, practice A.A. principles in all his affairs. Else he slips, he withers, and he dies. 'To serve is to live'."

In 1954, three years after the Conference began the Alcoholic Foundation was renamed the General Service Board. At that time there were eight nonalcoholic (Class A) and seven alcoholic (Class B) trustees.

AA comes of Age – St. Louis, 1955

In 1955, at the International Convention in St. Louis, A.A. was declared to have 'come of age'. The Fellowship became the guardians of our Three Legacies: Recovery, Unity and Service. On the final day of the Convention, Bill asked A.A. to take "complete charge of those world services which are the means by which we function as an entire Fellowship, and from which radiate our principal lifelines to millions all over the globe who still need A.A."

Developments through the 1960's

In a 1956 talk, Bill laid out certain rights and responsibilities that every AA member enjoyed. Even though informally, the Rights of PETITION, APPEAL, PARTICIPATION and DECISION were ideas that had been around AA since the beginning. Bill formalized these and others into the Twelve Concepts for World Service in 1962. They are an interpretation of A.A.'s world service structure. Their intent is to record 'the why' of our structure so as to benefit future AA's with experience of the past. They can be found in *The A.A. General Service Manual and Twelve Concepts of World Service*.

Bill believed that the stability of A.A. members had been well demonstrated and proposed a change in the General Service Board, to shift the majority stake to alcoholic trustees. For ten years, the General Service Conference refused to go along with Bill's request to re-balance the Board. A.A. was not going to make changes impulsively then, and A.A. operates in much the same way today.

continued on page 4...

Service Rewards

Freddie, Southern Maryland

Service work for me started as a suggestion from my sponsor. I came into A.A. full of drama and I needed to find something else to occupy myself and my mind from drinking, so I did what was suggested. First, find a homegroup and take a service position. I became the coffee maker, and then I became the Chairperson for my homegroup "What's the Point". I found myself loving my service work because it has kept me out of myself.

So I was asked to chair another meeting which is called The Patuxent River Group. Now I have two home groups. I gave my first home groups position to one of my sponsees so that he may feel as useful as I have.

I never ask for any of my service positions, it has always been suggested to take on a position for the good of Alcoholics Anonymous. Now I hold a GSR position which allows me to bring back and forth the voice of my home group to our District 36 Committee of Southern Maryland and to our DCM who takes our voice into the Area 29 Maryland General Service. My latest position was after a little over a year when I was suggested into the Chair Person position for District 36 of Corrections & Treatment Facilities. I always felt that here is where my Higher Power wanted me to be, because in order for me to even be considered it is suggested that I should have two years of sobriety, nevertheless I was voted in with only one year. Before that I had told my sponsor I was not sure if here is where my higher Power wanted me to be, to which my sponsor replied, "sometimes it's not the quantity of sobriety but the quality". So I put it in the hands of my HP and was voted into the Correction & Treatment Facilities for district 36 in St Mary's County.

It's been one year since I humbly accepted this service position and I must say that being a humble servant for the good of A.A. has been rewarding and a spiritually blessing experience. Today I can say that no matter what life brings down the pike, because it not my will but thy will be done, I truly believe that everything will always be alright. All of us in service are rewarded with the gifts of gratitude, serenity and sobriety. It is the paradox of A.A. that we know we can seldom keep the precious gift of sobriety unless we give it away. And this my friends is what service work has done for me.

Grateful to be of service. 

(Change...) continued from page 1...

I take service positions in my home group, but I feel that I benefit the most in my recovery by helping women. I have always balked at the word sponsor because to me it denotes some kind of position of authority. I have never been much on people telling me what to do, so I figure others might not like it either! I read that I needed to find a friend in AA to help me. I found someone who extends a gentle hand to me, so that is what I try to do. (Others might not perceive it as gentle, but I do!) I try to help by seeking answers in the Big Book. I try to be a friend and share my experience, strength and hope with others. It is not my job to reprimand or give advice! Helping them go through the steps helps me stay focused on the steps. We read the Big Book and the 12x12 and this keeps the words and phrases in my mind. It forces me to continually look at myself and the action that I am taking to further develop my relationship with God. I can see when I am staying on track. When I am not, I usually feel it right away!

I sponsor one woman who continually helps keep me right sized. I am always looking at myself to see if I am getting to enough meetings when I ask her how many meetings *she's* been to this week. I see how I can use restraint of tongue and not say 'the thing' that is most clever or most final or most 'whatever' when I talk with her about restraint of tongue. I am not complaining of my physical ailments when I am reminded of hers. I consider *how* I am saying something to help her. I try to help, even when I don't really feel like it. I remind her that she made a commitment to her home group and needs to show up... and make sure I do the same. I remember that I cannot save her; her recovery is *really* between her and God, just like mine. I am reminded that I need to enjoy each moment since we don't really know how many moments we have left on this Earth.

I recognize that I lost interest in selfish things and gained interest in my fellows. What a concept – I certainly would not have laid claim to that statement when I got here! Really, helping others helps me more. What a wonderful, great big beautiful circle!

In watching the members of A.A. who came before me, I most admire the folks in A.A. who are the quiet workers; they help behind the scenes, and just do what needs to be done, without fanfare, without lecturing or proselytizing. They are the good examples. Those are the ones I want to emulate. Someone once came into a meeting at my home group, stood up during the meeting, shaking his finger, and lecturing the folks in the meeting about how they should be getting more involved with service work. I was not 'encouraged'; but I recognized the power of a bad example – how *not* to get people to do service!

I believe that the purpose of my life is to be of service to God and my fellows, and to continually try to develop my relationship with God. Taking action and staying connected to and involved in Alcoholics Anonymous have changed me. I have learned that those things are required for me to maintain any semblance of serenity and peace of mind. This change of attitude and outlook on life is good! 

Hank P., New York AA#2 1895-1954

Ron M, BYOL

After the historic meeting of Bill W. and Dr. Bob in Akron Ohio in 1935 Bill stayed for a while at the home of Dr. Bob and eventually went back to New York. Shortly after his arrival he found Hank at the infamous Towns Hospital and continued the work and efforts that he and Dr. Bob had started in Akron. Hank became Bill's first "sponsee" in New York. It is believed he got sober in October or November 1935. He stayed sober for around four years and eventually went back to drinking. According to Lois W., that eventually was the cause of his death.

Hank originally hailed from Marion, Iowa and eventually found his way to Teaneck, New Jersey. He is believed to be the person referred to by Dr. Silkworth in his "Doctor's Opinion" where he states his patient to be a case of pathological mental deterioration. Hank later became very paranoid and Dr. Silkworth warned Bill he might become dangerous. It is reported that Hank was a salesman, an agnostic

and a former Standard Oil of New Jersey executive who had lost his job because of drinking. An interesting aside is that at one time he was the supervisor of Jim B. (The Vicious Cycle) and had fired Jim because of his drinking.

Hank had a small business called "Honor Dealers" in New Jersey and it is reported that Bill and Jim B. worked there for a period and Bill had dictated much of the Big Book to Ruth Hock in that office. After Bill and Lois lost their home in New York they moved in with the Hank's family. While Bill continued to write the Big Book, Hank took charge of trying to get some funding for the project. He was the force behind setting up Works Publishing Company. The problem was that he set himself up to be in charge as the president and this did not set well with the group members and Bill in turn identified himself as the sole author and so a feud ensued. Hank set up and sold shares in the newly formed Delaware Corporation. His pitch was to the then existing members. Twenty five dollars (\$25.00) per share payable either all at once or five (\$5.00) down and five (\$5.00) each month for the next four months. Of course the corporation had

continued on page 7...

Finally, in 1966, Bernard Smith, our non-alcoholic Chairman of the General Service Board asked Bill to let him make the suggestion. The Conference approved the change to our current total of 21, seven non-alcoholic "Class A's" and fourteen ex-alcoholic "Class B" trustees, eight of whom are regional trustees.

...AND WHAT WE'RE LIKE TODAY

Our service work takes many forms, but, essentially it is as Bill W. stated, "anything whatever that helps us to reach the fellow sufferer – ranging all the way from the Twelfth Step itself to a ten cent phone call and a cup of coffee..." Action to carry A.A.'s message is, therefore, the heart of our Third Legacy of Service."

My experience as a Conference Member

134 people gather each year during the month of April in New York to conduct the annual Fellowship-wide 'group conscience'. I was privileged to serve at nine different Conferences as an elected delegate, nontrustee director, and as a trustee. We conducted some business but more importantly, Conference members renewed old friendships and talked about what is best for our worldwide Movement from early morning 'til long into the night. Trustees, both alcoholic and non-, directors of our corporate boards, staff from our General Service Office [the closest thing we have to a H.Q.], and 93

delegates from the US and Canada get together in a large hotel ballroom for a week-long group conscience meeting. Almost to a one, these are folks who REALLY love attending group conscience meetings!

During that week, it was not unusual for me to have breakfast with one or two regional trustees, have lunch with the delegates from Colorado, Hawaii and British Columbia and then dinner with a staffer or even, one evening, with the former warden of San Quentin Prison, who was serving as a Class A trustee – a friend of AA. But all of us are equals in that room, regardless of our "title".

On one of my visits to the General Service Office, Tuesday afternoon of one of my Conference weeks, I was given a tour by Greg M. (who spoke at the Area 29 Mini-Conference a few years ago). So, I asked Greg to show me the local sharing files. He and I took a walk back to the far reaches of the 11th floor, and Greg showed me a set of sliding bookcases – 1,500 cubic feet of shelving – which contain files of letters on every subject the Fellowship has ever asked the office. There are even letters from Bill W. still in those files. When a group writes your office with a question, a staff member can pull that subject folder from the shelf and find out how a question was answered before. When new issues

arise, a new folder is begun.

During my last Conference in 2007, I was also able learn that many of the preparations for the International Convention celebrating AA's 75th birthday, we just experienced in San Antonio, Texas last July 4th had begun to take shape. I am confident that it will not be long before the plans for 2015 in Atlanta, GA begin to surface in Delegate Reports, Box 459, The Grapevine, and Regional Forum Reports. Tens of thousands of AAs, Al-Anons, and Double-winners from all over the world will begin making plans to celebrate our collective sobrieties for our 80th year of existence.

More on our unstructured structure...

The General Service Board is responsible for two corporate boards, AAWS and AAGV, in which the Trustees are members and directors. A.A. World Services board runs the publishing and the service operations of A.A. at the General Service Office. Ours is only one of the now 59 GSO's worldwide in 180 countries. Currently, the Big Book is printed in 59 languages and 3 translation projects are in process. G.S.O. has a general manager [GM] and a staff of around 80 individuals doing many tasks to provide services and publishing for our Fellowship. Eleven of these persons

continued on page 6...

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, P.O. Box 701, New Market, MD 21774. The submission deadline for the next issue is March 1, 2011.

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.

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 701
New Market, MD 21774

(Delegates Corner) continued from page 1...

New or Revised Books, Pamphlets and other publications now available:

- Spiritual Awakenings II: More Journeys of the Spirit (from A.A. Grapevine, Inc.)
- Grapevine 2010 International Convention Commemorative Issue (limited quantities)
- Grapevine 2011 Pocket Planner
- Souvenir Edition Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age (limited quantities from the 2010 International Convention)
- 2010-2011 Regional Directories (Eastern, Western, Canada)
- 2010-2011 A.A. Service Manual with Twelve Concepts for World Service
- 2010 Confidential Final Report from the 60th General Service Conference

Actions of Various Trustees' Committees and/or GSO and Grapevine Staffs Including Requests for the Fellowship

Corrections

- A.A. Guidelines for Corrections Committees were updated with additional language regarding how A.A. members cooperate with the rules of local facilities
- Corrections Workbook will include in the next printing additional language regarding cooperation with facility regulations and how A.A. committees might prepare members new to this type of 12th Step work
- *The Corrections Desk is seeking local shared experience about how Corrections Committees resolve perceived conflicts between facility regulations and what A.A. does not do, particularly regarding facility regulations that involve legally binding paperwork. To pass along local experience, write the Corrections Desk at corrections@aa.org*
- 90 personal stories are being reviewed for "It Sure Beats Sitting in A Cell"

Finance

- Various methods are being discussed by the Trustees' Committee to gather personal stories from the Fellowship that humanize the impact of Seventh Tradition monies for the purpose of communicating about Self-Support in new or existing literature.
- Suggestions are being reviewed by the Trustees' Committee to revise the existing pie charts on page 12 of the pamphlet "Self-Support: Where Money & Spirituality Mix".
- Online Contributions rolled out June 11, 2010 allowing members to make contributions to the General Service Office by credit card or e-check

Grapevine

- A Grapevine Questionnaire asking the fellowship for their opinion on the A.A. Grapevine Magazine was distributed and over 8,000 were collected for compilation by the end of 2010. Results will be available when received.
- Grapevine Customer Service and product fulfillment systems have re-located. The mailing addresses to which you send your orders and payments has changed to: P.O. Box 16867 North Hollywood, CA 91615-6867 Phone: (800)631-6025 Fax: (818)487-4550
- Improvements will be made to the Grapevine online order experience at www.AAGrapevine.org
- LaViña is ready to edit the new perfect bound (staple-free), 68 page, magazine to distribute in January/February 2011.

Literature

- Subcommittees have been formed to address recommendations approved at the 2010 Conference: 1) develop literature which focuses on spirituality, 2) revise the pamphlet "The A.A. Member-Medications and Other Drugs", 3) revise the pamphlet "A.A. and the Armed Services"
- The text of the booklet "Living Sober" is undergoing revisions for outdated language or practices.

Public Information

- A policy is being drafted regarding showing or not showing the faces of actors who portray A.A. members or potential A.A. members in Conference-approved visual media.
- Draft text is being developed on the topic of anonymity in the digital age for the Conference-approved pamphlet "Understanding Anonymity"
- The latest A.A. Video for Young People, "Animation" is now available for distribution and is on the www.aa.org website.

Treatment Facilities/Special Needs-Accessibilities (TF/SN/A)

- The Trustees requested that the secretary begin collating background to include details regarding the impact of changing the name of "Treatment Facilities" Committees to "Treatment" Committees. Fellowship sharing is needed to determine the impact of this change. Please send your thoughts regarding the name change to tf@aa.org
- The Treatment Facilities Workbook has been revised and will be available with a new teal colored cover

- Eleven stories were selected from 42 submissions for the new recovery pamphlet for alcoholics with special needs.
- Three ring binders have been ordered for the Special Needs/Accessibilities kits at the request of the 2010 Conference Committee on SN/A. The new kit will have a burgundy cover.
- *The SN Conference Committee would like to receive informal sharing from folks involved in SN work on experiences with one or two successful committee activities to possibly be added to the SN Workbook or an article in Box 4-5-9. Please write to tf@aa.org*

61st General Service Conference Agenda – There's Still Time!

The 61st General Service Conference will occur April 30 – May 7, 2011 at The Crowne Plaza in New York City. The last date to bring a proposed Agenda Item to the Area for approval is at the December 2010 Area Assembly. The deadline for agenda items to be forwarded to the Conference Coordinator is January 15, 2011.

Remember that ANYONE can make a suggestion to the Conference, either individually, as a group, or by using the Committee system to give the Area Assembly an opportunity to participate in the process. In 2010, Area 29 submitted three Agenda Items for consideration to the Conference. Two of those items were placed on the Agenda and one was approved as an Advisory Action.

2011 North East Regional Alcoholics Anonymous Service Assembly (NERAASA) February 14-27, 2011, Tarrytown, NY

Area 49, South East New York (SENY) will host the annual North East Regional A.A. Service Assembly in 2011. The event is designed to develop greater unity among members, groups and areas of the Northeast; to encourage the exchange of ideas and experiences and to provide an opportunity for members to discuss pertinent aspects of A.A. Recovery, Unity, and Service.

The format for the weekend will include sharing sessions, workshops and presentations by GSRs, DCMs, Area Committee Chairs and Intergroup Representatives on topics appearing on the Final Conference Agenda for the 2011 Conference. There will be round table discussions specifically designed for each group of trusted servants. All A.A. members are welcome and encouraged to attend and participate in an event which will certainly enhance your service experience and probably your sobriety. Look for the blue flyer at your group, district or area meeting or visit www.neraasa.org to register online. 

(What it Was Like...) continued from page 4...

must be alcoholics to work directly with the fellowship and communicate to individual AA's what we do and how we do it. These eleven work on rotating staff assignments to corresponding committees of the trustees committees and provide secretarial support to conference committees. One additional, who must an alcoholic, serves in the role of special assistant to the GM, advising and sharing experience to maintain continuity.

The A.A. Grapevine is responsible for our meeting in print. The Grapevine has an Executive Editor/Publisher, Senior Editor and Circulations Manager, who are all members of our fellowship. Every year, the Grapevine publishes 12 monthly issues of our International Journal in English and bi-monthly issues in our Spanish-language version, called La Viña. Our AAGV releases books in audio and print format that are best sellers wherever they are displayed, including a new one last year – a collection of articles by young people, telling how they got sober, and most recently a book of sobriety messages describing miracles and redemptions shared with passion and humor (*Spiritual Awakenings II*).

The General Service Board and its committees meet three times a year and work with the General Service Office and Grapevine staff members to carry out the needs of the Fellowship, as expressed by the annual week-long General Service Conference, which is our collective conscience. Advisory Actions, passed by two-thirds of the membership of the Conference are directives to the Board, which works extremely hard to carry them out.

Let me emphasize once again here that Alcoholics Anonymous does not really have an organizational structure. What we really

have is a service structure that does two basic things. First, it gives a voice to the Higher Power that guides our Fellowship as a whole -- the loving voice we know as the group conscience. Second, it enables A.A.'s message of recovery to reach the still suffering alcoholic in places that individual A.A. members cannot go and in ways they do not have at their disposal.

The service structure is frequently described as an upside-down triangle with all the groups at the top. The groups themselves have the ultimate responsibility for the well-being and growth of the Fellowship. Most of this responsibility is passed on in a series of delegations to a more workable-sized group of trusted servants. We can observe from the structure the baton of delegation and responsibility being passed from group to GSR to DCM to the Area to your Delegate to the Conference becoming the effective voice of the Higher Power. Although the Conference does not impose its action on anyone, it does rely on the power of tradition to have them implemented. The entire service structure is just that - a structure to serve. It is a framework that enables A.A. groups to be served and the recovery message of Alcoholics Anonymous to be carried to the still suffering alcoholic. Just think for a moment: If the last alcoholic on the face of the earth had just sobered up, and genetics had guaranteed that no alcoholics will ever be born again; why would we need GSRs and DCMs and delegates and trustees and directors? The only reason for this structure, and the thing that breathes life into it, is the hope that the message of recovery will always be available to the alcoholic who still stumbles in the darkness one short block from here or the recovery of a child born tonight destined to alcoholism.

So what, then, is all of this talk of General Service that we hear from so many A.A. members, this level of service they call their lifeblood? It would be more correct to ask, "Who is General Service?" because we are all part of General Service. The general service structure provides the leadership for our Fellowship that was once exercised by Bill and Dr. Bob. The leadership is provided from individual members and groups through the rotating body of trusted servants who function as a body of peers without a hierarchy. No individual in Alcoholics Anonymous has the right or authority to tell other members what they may or may not do. We are a Fellowship of equals. Members of a district, area, conference or board have no individual authority over another member. Only when we function as a member of the body to which we are asked to serve on a rotating basis do we have any authority, and that is delegated authority granted to that service body rather than individually to its members. The goal of these many efforts is to carry a message of recovery to the alcoholics who still suffer, and to insure that alcoholics of the future have the same opportunity for recovery in our Fellowship that you and I did.

What is your and my role individually in the process of the service structure? A past Trustee captured this well in 1996 and passed this along to me; he said,

"We are here to carry the message, not to advance ourselves or ensure the outcome of certain issues we feel strongly about. We are discussing issues; it is not a matter of winning or losing, but rather of serving. When we come to the table as servants, we all win. No one has the only answer, that is why we have group conscience. The answer we try to achieve is through a Higher Power". ☺

MARYLAND GENERAL SERVICE, AREA 29 2011 CALENDAR

Area Committee	February 19	District 9
Area Assembly	March 26	TBA
Area Assembly	June 4	District 1
Area Committee	July 9	TBA
Area Assembly	August 13	TBA
Area Committee	Sept. 24	District 28/29
Area Assembly	October 22	District 40
Area Committee	November 12	TBA
Area Assembly	December 10	District 31

(Gratitude...) continued from page 1...

the minute the meeting ended, four or five people gathered around. "Are you new? Have you ever been to a meeting before?" No, this was his first meeting, and he was really here just to get out of the rain. One lady ventured: "Would you like some cake?" (Lady, you have no idea how good that sounds, he thought.) "We have cake in the back," she went on excitedly, "because tonight we're celebrating an anniversary. You see that woman who was speaking tonight? She's celebrating a year without a drink today! Can you imagine that? A whole year without drinking!"

Now wait a minute, he thought – this is getting too weird. A whole year without drinking? And for what? These people must be nuts! He wasn't hungry anymore, or cold – he just wanted out, and fast. Backing toward the door, he gushed, "Thanks, I appreciate the offer, but I really have to be somewhere," and grabbing his pack, he bolted. Out on the sidewalk, the rain seemed no more than a heavy mist, and a tolerable one at that. Asking directions outside a bar, he found the rail yard and an open boxcar, warm and dry. Next morning he awoke in Danville, the A.A. loonies a distant memory.

I wonder where those people are now. I know where the tramp is, the one who stumbled into his first meeting fifty minutes late. That was me. The people I wonder about are the ones I left behind in Charlottesville. How many of them stayed sober? Is the lady who celebrated that night still around? What have their lives been like? Did they get a good laugh out of the street person who grabbed his backpack and scampered out into the rain because he "had to be somewhere"? Did they wonder whether they had planted a seed?

November is Gratitude Month in Alcoholics Anonymous. My "gratitudes" aren't the things I'm thankful for. They're the things I do that arise from that thankfulness. My gratitudes, then, per my Charlottesville teachers, are to greet the newcomer, invite him to share fully in A.A., show him A.A. is about stopping drinking and staying stopped, and give him room to decide for himself whether A.A. is for him.

It's as simple as that. Certainly all our issues and conferences and conventions are not just fun. Some of them are vital. Yet we owe it to ourselves to ensure nothing eclipses our commitment to sponsorship, newcomers and home group. If November is about emphasizing gratitude, then Alcoholics Anonymous is about emphasizing the still-suffering drunk. To say gratitude is more about action than about thankfulness is simply to state in a fresh way that faith without works is dead. And as they taught me in Charlottesville, the "works" start at home – and at the home group. ▲

Journey in Service

Anonymous

As time goes by and I move along the "road of happy destiny" in our Program of recovery, the fact that I can see growth in myself never ceases to amaze me. Many years ago I was elected DCM of District 13 here in Area 29. I look back on that time and remember that there were only two of us GSRs voting. Two GSRs were all that was present from our District at that Assembly in November. I voted for Jack and Jack voted for me. Jack then spoke up and said that he thought he was too old to be DCM and he wanted me to take the position, which I happily accepted. Now Jack was at least 55 or 60 years of age at that time. Mind you he thought he was too old to be DCM. I was enthralled with my new title and didn't miss a chance to tell all my friends of my good fortune. Here I was just three years sober and I was DCM. Wow! What an accomplishment. Had I read the Service Manual I would have known the suggested length of sobriety for DCM is five years.

I go down memory lane and honestly cannot remember one time that I tried to increase interest in service in our District. I can't remember one time that I called a District meeting. I had never heard of a district meeting. Just the title, that was all for the next two years. After that there was not one soul to take over that important position so I just dropped out of service. That was the answer to that dilemma, just drop out, which I promptly did.

Today, at a ripe old age, I am DCM of my District. The difference between then and now is that I have listened to those who walked this path of service before me. They have shared their experience, strength and hope with me and have given me many suggestions, some of which I even took. By God's amazing Grace He put people in my life that actually walked the walk. After being GSR of my home group for about six years I was asked to serve as Co-Chair of our Area's PI Committee. This I did for a short time. I was then given the opportunity by Calvin J, the Chair of Maryland general service at that time, to serve as alternate Registrar at the Area level; I was then given the opportunity, to serve as Registrar. When the time came for rotation I was plummeted into being Editor of our quarterly newsletter. When I say "plummeted" I mean that I was "thrust" there by our Delegate of that time. When that stint was over I fell back into being "just" a GSR once again for my home group. I attended District meetings, was offered to serve on our District Workshop Committee, and was kept pretty busy most of the time, loving each and every moment. The excitement, for me, builds from day to day as I do my level best to carry our message of recovery.

To bring you up to date I am in the "middle" of my term as DCM and loving it. When our

beloved Bill W. speaks about service in our Twelve Concepts which I read now and again from our Service Manual, it almost brings tears to my eyes because the language he uses is so beautiful and so loving. Today, what a difference from where I came from, a staggering, falling down drunken woman without any hope or reason to live, to being a warm and loving mother, a true and loyal faithful wife, and a willingness to serve that could only have been given to me by my loving Creator working through everyone I have come into contact with during this amazing journey. ▲

(Hank P) continued from page 4...

no assets at the time. So it went, Bill writing and Hank promoting and fund raising. Ruth Hock, Bill's secretary, is quoted as saying the Big Book would not have been written without Bill and it would not have been published without Hank.

As with any company there were other problems with money and in addition Hank, although he was married to Kathleen, developed a liking for Ruth and when she moved back to the newly formed New York office with Bill, Hank became furious. By this time the book was moving along at a slow pace and most of the group members had been paid back their investment and agreed not to share with any profits. Hank, however, was furious and claimed that the office furniture was his and so Bill gave him \$200.00 for his shares and Hank left town going to Cleveland and reportedly went about claiming that Bill was skimming money from the finances.

No one knows just when Hank started drinking again, but in the diary Lois kept, various September 1939 entries mention that Hank was drunk. He did get sober at one point but it did not last.

After being rebuffed by Ruth he divorced his wife and went on to marry twice before coming back and getting remarried to his first wife. He died, after a long illness, at Glenwood Sanitarium in Trenton New Jersey a few months short of his fifty ninth birthday.

As an interesting sidelight, Ruth Hock stated that, with the exception of the first paragraph, Hank wrote the chapter in the Big Book "To Employers". His story only appeared in the First Edition, first printing entitled "The Unbeliever". He and Jim B. lead the fight against to much talk of God in the twelve steps which resulted in the compromise "God as we understand Him".

In spite of the various problems A.A. owes a debt of gratitude to Hank for his contributions to the program of Alcoholics Anonymous.

References for the reader if interested in additional detail:

- Alcoholics Anonymous Comes of Age - AAWS
- Alcoholics Anonymous 1st ed.
- Pass it On – AAWS
- Various Google Sites – Hank P. ▲

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