

■ Choosing the Site City for The International Convention

As preparations for the International Convention in Toronto reach their final stages, it is worth noting that planning for these events takes years. The involved process of choosing the site city, though, is the first order of business.

It is already decided that A.A.'s biggest meeting will be held in San Antonio in 2010 and Atlanta in 2015.

For a city to be considered the area encompassing it must agree to form a host committee that will provide approximately 4,000 A.A. volunteers.

The city itself must be home to a domed stadium that seats at least 55,000. A town with only an open stadium can be considered if historically there is no more than a minimal chance of rain on the days in July when the Convention meets. A city must have a convention center with a minimum of 250,000 gross square feet, and theater-style seating capacity for thousands in its meeting rooms. There also must be at least 15,000 hotel rooms that will definitely be available at the time of the Convention and are located within 25 to 30 miles of the Convention site.

One stricture is that no town that has been the site of either of the two previous Conventions can be in contention. Also, an attempt is made to rotate the site throughout the regions of the U.S. and Canada Conference structure.

In preparation for the 2010 Convention, the General Service Office in New York five years ago mailed out site-selection guidelines and bid questionnaires to all delegates. G.S.O. then sent bid questionnaires to Convention Bureaus of prospective cities in delegate areas that agreed to provide a host committee.

Cities that meet the criteria and respond satisfactorily to the bid questionnaires are invited to make a presentation to the International Convention Site Selection Committee. This committee is made up of one Conference delegate from each of the regions, plus the members of the trustees' Committee on Regional Forums/International Conventions. A site-inspection team visits the few cities that make the final cut. It was in October 2001 that San Antonio got the nod for the 2010 Convention.

■ Regional & Special Forums—Coming Soon to Your Neighborhood

The weekend of May 20-22, the Northeast Region will host a Regional Forum at the Holiday Inn by the Bay in Portland, Maine.

August 19-22 a Special Forum will travel to the following cities in Alaska: Anchorage, Homer, Fairbanks and Juneau.

Forums provide an opportunity for A.A. members, groups and area representatives in a particular area to share together and enhance communication with representatives of the General Service Board and G.S.O. and Grapevine staff members. Special Forums are designed for remote, sparsely populated or urban areas, as well as communities where it is difficult to carry the A.A. message.

■ ICYPAA Nears Five Decades of Reaching Out To Young Alcoholics

With the membership it serves young and getting younger—ranging today from about 14 to 35—the International Conference of Young People in A.A. (ICYPAA) shows staying power: On Labor Day weekend (Sept. 1-4, 2005) it will hold its 48th conference in New Orleans at the Sheraton Hotel, and members are expected to gather from the U.S./Canada and other countries as well.

According to delegate Keith H., of Oahu, Hawaii, who served as chair of the ICYPAA advisory council from 1995-2002: "One year we had 16 people from Japan—they filled a whole table. It was exciting to see them identify with other young people, and there didn't seem to be much of a language barrier."

Young People's Groups (YPGs) began appearing as early as 1945 in Los Angeles, Cleveland and Philadelphia and now can be found all across North America. In 1957, a group of young U.S./Canada A.A.s started ICYPAA to provide a setting for a yearly celebration of sobriety among young people in A.A. Two years later, at the Fellowship's 25th Anniversary Convention in Long Beach, California, Bill W. noted that the age of new members was much lower than when he and Dr. Bob founded A.A. in 1935. In a letter to ICYPAA, dated June 15, 1969, Bill wrote, "...in recent years I have found nothing for greater inspiration than the knowledge that A.A. of tomorrow will be safe, and certainly magnificent, in the keeping of you who are the younger generation of A.A. today."

Since the inception of ICYPAA, growing numbers of people who at first did not think of themselves as "young people" have become regular attendees at both the international conference and at young people's groups. Keith, who came to A.A. at 16, then slipped before corking the bottle at 19 in December 1990, remembers that "at the YPGs, like my Bad Brains home group, there were people I could relate to, and none of them were telling me, 'You're too young to be an alcoholic.'" Keith is quick to point out that he does not limit his participation to young people's groups. "I go to many different groups," he says, "and they have enriched my sobriety in more ways than I can count."

Young people's groups try to make the newcomer understand that 20-plus years of drinking coupled with

loss of family, friends and financial stability are not necessary for one to be ready for sobriety. Young people's groups bring the newcomer into the mainstream of A.A. recovery, service and unity through the Steps, Traditions and Concepts of World Service. Newcomers are shown by people their own age that using A.A. principles in their daily lives and getting involved in service can lead to a lasting and comfortable sobriety. "In my home group," Keith says, "we're constantly looking for more and better ways to carry the message. In a group inventory we'll ask questions such as: Is the group attracting people from different backgrounds? At our meetings are we seeing a good cross-section of our community? Usually we come up short, and that's when we try to change our ways."

From time to time the General Service Office is asked if ICYPAA and young people's groups are "part of A.A." The answer is definitely yes. ICYPAA and its attendees are committed to reaching out to newcomers—no alcoholic is ever turned away, regardless of age—and to involvement in all facets of A.A. service. In most local A.A. meeting directories, young people's meetings are listed along with others, though in some areas asterisks may identify them as YPGs. Members of these groups often can be found serving at the national, state, area and group levels. ICYPAA conventions and conferences are vital A.A. activities and as such are listed in the *Box 4-5-9* "Calendar of Events."

Writing in the October 1989 Grapevine about her early experience in A.A. as an 18-year-old, Robin F. of Los Angeles echoes the feelings of young people everywhere, then and now: "I know one thing for certain: No young person ever needs to hear that she has gotten sober before she had to hurt; she has hurt plenty. She needs to hear what every newcomer does who comes into the Fellowship: 'Welcome. This is A.A., where the only requirement for membership is a desire to stop drinking.'"

■ Business Meetings: Where the Group Conscience Happens

Group unity is not a destination, it's a journey that is happening all the time, and nowhere more vividly than in business meetings, often called group conscience meetings. "If we called them business meetings at our group," an East Coast A.A. recently joked, "nobody would show up."

Because each group is autonomous, formats vary. But the collective experience of A.A. shows that business meetings, which usually are held on a monthly or quarterly basis, offer an optimum setting in which big and little issues—from how to help a drunk newcomer to whose turn it is to make the coffee—can be aired and reconciled and a group consensus reached. Some groups hold specially scheduled group conscience, or inventory-taking meetings, especially when confronted with a thorny issue about which there are strong conflicting views.

The goal is to reach an informed group conscience—a term implying that any vital information has been studied and all views have been heard before the group votes on an issue. Not always understood, the group conscience as expressed in Tradition Two is a basic and powerful principle that makes it possible for people of diverse backgrounds and temperament to rise above personal ambition and unite in one common purpose—to stay sober and help the still-suffering alcoholic. In the words of our Declaration of Unity, "This we owe to A.A.'s future: to place our common welfare first; to keep our fellowship united. For on A.A. unity depend our lives, and the lives of those to come."

The pamphlet "The A.A. Group"—used by groups around the U.S. and Canada as a guide on how to start a group and help it function—points out that "on sensitive issues the group works slowly, discouraging formal motions until a clear sense of its collective view emerges. Placing principles above personalities [in the spirit of Tradition Twelve], the membership is wary of dominant opinions; its voice is heard when a well-informed group comes to a decision. The result rests on more than a 'yes' or 'no' count—precisely because it is the spiritual expression of the group conscience." (p. 35)

Business meetings usually are scheduled before or after the group's regular meeting, and members are given reasonable notice. During this time, announcements may be made at the regular A.A. meetings; if a group has a bulletin board, posting a notice about the business meeting can be helpful.

Then there are those instances when a group feels it necessary to call for an impromptu group conscience either before or during an A.A. meeting. Decisions to open a closed meeting or to ask a disruptive person to leave are examples of the situations that can trigger a call for an immediate group conscience. Numerous groups have developed guidelines for dealing with some of the more common situations that can arise.

Business meetings tend to be informal, but custom varies from group to group. Some have tried observing Robert's Rules of Order, only to find that many members are inexperienced in parliamentary procedures and feel too intimidated to speak up. To ensure that everyone present has a chance to share their views, some groups allow each member to speak only twice on each topic—and for a limited amount of time.

Sometimes a decision made by the most ideal of group conscience procedures misses its mark. The A.A. visionaries who came before us anticipated this; they wrote reassuringly in Warranty Four that "when a decision taken in substantial unanimity does happen to go wrong, there can be no heated recriminations. Everybody will be able to say, 'Well, we had a careful debate, we took the decision, and it turned out to be a bad one. Better luck next time!'" (The A.A. Service Manual/Twelve Concepts for World Service, p. 69)