

Newsletter

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Fall is a Slow Time for Fellowship Events

-Or so it seems from the schedules posted on the Oregon Area website and District/Intergroup websites that link to it. The period between Labor Day and Thanksgiving is the shortest of the unequal quarters in our Area year, and also the one with the fewest recurring service and fellowship events. Work and school schedules tend to be their busiest for those of us fortunate and sober enough to have a real life. Our Delegate is pretty much finished with disseminating conference materials from this year's General Service Assembly and has not yet begun gathering feedback for the next round. AA wisely holds its general elections with little lead time and no campaigning – no opportunity for a three-ring circus there. The summer picnics and campouts are over and the holiday parties have not commenced.

Using web resources to find out what's available can still be a little tricky. Thanks to a dedicated team of web gurus our Area Calendar has become more user-friendly, but meetings and Districts are still not routinely posting their fellowship events. As of September 5 the only upcoming events posted on the Area calendar are a GSR school in Portland on October 4 and a District 23 Inventory in West Linn on October 10. There is also a link to the AA International Convention in San Antonio Texas on July 1-4, 2010. The International is the subject of a separate article

The Portland Intergroup (www.portland-aa.org) lists the 48th Annual Hawaii Convention on 10/29, and WACYPA in Eugene on January 1, 2010. This is the Western Area Conference of Young People in AA. With the theme "children of chaos" and a great slate of speakers, this event is right in our own backyards and is very accessible. Registration forms and information are available at <http://wacypaa13.org>. I am informed that "young" means "young at heart" and that a baby-boomer with gray hairs and crows' feet will not be refused at the door, although possibly the slate of events will not be entirely to the tastes of someone distinctly over the hill. Emerald Valley Intergroup (www.eviaa.org) lists a 12th step workshop on working with wet drunks on September 13 and the Java Jive, a popular talent show, on September 26. The Central Oregon Intergroup site (www.coigaa.org) is no longer maintained by District 5 and contains commercial material. District 30 ("It's not the end of the world but you can see it from there") lists a gratitude banquet in Langlois on November 14 and a Christmas party December 12 in Gold Beach. There's a lot on their site about the February 2010 Assembly.

Time to Start Planning for the International AA Convention in San Antonio Next Year

Alcoholics International Conventions take place every five years, and attract upwards of fifty thousand sober alcoholics from all corners of the globe. The next International convention will take place in San Antonio, Texas, from July 1-4, 2010. If you ask anyone who has attended a convention in the past, they will probably urge you to “go to any lengths” to enjoy this experience. It’s time to start making your plans. The organizers have put a helpful website on the internet, which can be accessed through links on the Oregon Area Website. Registration opened September 1. Although you can register at any time and the registration fee of \$95 is good until the middle of May, 2010, it’s advisable to register early in order to be able to register at the hotels where the convention has reserved 10,000 rooms. People will also want to make airline reservations in advance (at least two airlines are offering discount conference rates) and make sure they have the time off from work.

The following reminiscences of prior International Conventions were contributed by Mark M. of Eugene, who attended his first International convention in 1985, with a little under five years of sobriety, and has been going back for more ever since. He's already making plans for going to San Antonio and twisting the arms of a few people newer in sobriety to do the same. He is one of many who speak with great enthusiasm of the exhilaration of being in an event with that many people assembled for a grand common purpose.

We drove from Eugene to Montreal in 1985 for my first International AA Convention. This was the 50th anniversary of Alcoholics Anonymous. It was awe inspiring to sit in Olympic Stadium with 50,000 sober alcoholics from around the world. Bill Wilson’s wife, Lois, spoke Saturday night about the humble beginnings of AA.

In 1990 the International Convention was held in Seattle. Friday evening the Convention begins with the flag ceremony in which all countries are represented. Alcoholics from over 100 countries attended. During each International Convention there is tremendous media coverage by newspapers and television reporters who have been briefed on our traditions.

San Diego hosted the 1995 International and 75,000 alcoholics from over 130 countries attended. Meetings are held in all of the hotels and convention center in a variety of languages. Every Convention offers panels whose speakers have a minimum of over 50 years of sobriety. Often times these folks had intimate contact with the founders, Bill and Bob.

In 2000 Minneapolis was the site of the International. Convention attendees literally take over the downtown core of the host city. Typically, AA utilizes every hotel-room for a radius of at least 20 miles. Restaurants, shopping venues and the sidewalks are filled with grateful alcoholics. Convention attendees are extremely friendly and eager to talk program and make new friends.

Toronto hosted the 2005 Convention. In the Sunday morning stadium meeting, there is the traditional sobriety count-down. This involves thousands of recovering alcoholics who stand to be acknowledged for various increments of sobriety. Eventually the person who has the least amount of sobriety in the stadium comes forward to the podium to receive a big book and thunderous applause from a packed stadium.

July 1st through 4th is the date of the 2010 International Convention in San Antonio, Texas. I have tremendous anticipation and excitement about this event even though our program is a one day at a time proposition. This 75th anniversary of Alcoholics Anonymous will be the ultimate celebration of sobriety.

Fred D., who serves as proxy GSR for members of the Mill Creek Group at the Oregon State Penitentiary, contributed the following articles.

DELEGATE'S PRE-CONFERENCE MEETING AT OSP

The scene that confronted us is apparently quite common for members of Alcoholics Anonymous (at least those who have gotten their feet wet in the service structure), but the location was not. A group of members were seated around a table having a discussion about those topics in corrections that may be brought up at the upcoming General Service Conference in New York in April, 2009. Dave A., Oregon Area 58 delegate, and Chase B., Oregon Area 58 Chair, were conducting a pre-conference discussion with a group who were all intimately qualified to talk about corrections. They all were inmates at Oregon's maximum security prison, Oregon State Penitentiary, in Salem, Oregon.

This historic occasion for A.A., on Friday, March 27, 2009, marked the first time in recent years that inmates were asked to participate in the process by which A.A. members communicate with their delegates and the General Service Conference in New York. Now our Delegate could carry the group conscience of incarcerated A.A. members to the General Service Conference. Enthusiasm was high and the inmates had many penetrating questions including several about conference-approved literature. One corrections pamphlet in particular was due to be revised and the inmates were able to inject their own unique perspective into the process.

After more than an hour and a half of spirited discussion, the inmates were required to leave the meeting, but not before the usual meeting-after-the-meeting small talk. We all look forward to a repeat with a post-conference meeting report in the coming months of 2009.

HISTORIC 65TH ANNIVERSARY MEETING AT OSP

On a recent late spring evening on Thursday, May 7, 2009 in Salem, Oregon, thirty-five men and women gathered together in the parking lot at Oregon State Penitentiary (OSP), Oregon's only maximum security prison, located in Salem, Oregon. They were there to celebrate the 65th anniversary meeting of the Mill Creek Group of Alcoholics Anonymous at Oregon State Penitentiary. Eventually the group moved into a visitors' registration area where they had their identification verified and had to pass through a metal detector. Finally each attendee was issued a temporary prison pass and all were escorted into the visitors' center deep within the prison.

We were courteously met by a small group of inmates who saw to it that each visitor got a seat and some light refreshments. Shortly the visitors were joined by a larger group of inmates who mingled with the guests. It was just like the time before any other A.A. meeting with all the members, inmates and visitors, being engaged in casual conversation.

What happened next was quite normal to outsiders. An opening prayer was followed by some readings, and then the president of the inmates' A.A. club made some brief remarks. A former inmate, a friend of several of the current inmates, who is now confined to a wheel chair, opened the sharing. He gave an inspiring talk on his sobriety experiences on the outside. He was followed by several inmates and a couple of outsiders who shared their experience, strength, and hope. Then the president and vice-president (also the internal GSR) passed out personalized certificates to all the outsiders.

The inmates then closed the meeting with a short prayer. This was followed by a very ordinary thing--the inmates and outsiders stood around chit-chatting until the guards showed up and insisted that the inmates leave and return to their cells. Then the outsiders left the prison and drove off into the late dusk of this very warming evening.

This meeting commemorated the 65th anniversary of the first meeting, of the Mill Creek Group, which occurred on May 30, 1944.

Twelfth Step Workshop: Working With Wet Drunks

On the evening of Sunday, September 13, roughly fifty service-oriented recovering alcoholics gathered at St. Mary's Episcopal Church in central Eugene to participate in a workshop on front-line 12th step work. The workshop was organized and sponsored by Emerald Valley Intergroup, with input from Districts 6, 19, 20 and 33. I am sure just about everyone came away from it feeling that it had been a valuable educational experience and that the organizing committee and panelists did a splendid job. I say "just about" because I am uncertain of the effect on an actual wet drunk street person who wandered in midway through the proceedings. This unplanned incursion gave those present a good practical demonstration of how some very experienced AA members deal with a person who is disrupting a meeting. Everything was fine until he became verbally confrontational and refused to be silenced by a firm "thank you for sharing." At that point a large, levelheaded and impeccably sober man escorted him to the door.

The workshop had its inception in a discussion at an EVI business meeting a few months ago concerning how we were going to respond to rising numbers of requests for help from people who had not been through treatment centers. Over the last two decades, treatment centers have increasingly taken over the function of working with "wet ones" but the recent recession has produced a surge in people who have no insurance and come to AA first. We realized that there are many people in AA who have some years of solid sobriety and are eager to do service work but have no personal experience with front line 12th step work, either as "step-ers" or "step-ees."

The workshop consisted of presentations from a panel of three men and two women with substantial 12th step experience, representing a variety of approaches, followed by a question and answer period. The panelists ranged from Abigail, with 33 ½ years of sobriety, who ran a women's recovery house in California for many years, to Denna, with 8 ½ years of sobriety, whose experience has been entirely connected with Emerald Valley Intergroup.

All of the presenters stressed the importance of going on 12th step calls in pairs and recommended that people with some experience make a point of bringing along sponsees or other relative newcomers - for backup, to show them the ropes, and to reinforce their sobriety. All felt that speaking with newcomers and introducing them to AA had been immensely helpful to their own sobriety. As Jack put it, "I have a 100% success rate with sponsorship and 12th step calls. I've never gotten drunk." All reiterated that men should work with men and women with women. One man made calls on people of both genders with his wife, who is also in AA.

Panelists were divided on whether, or to what extent, one should try to 12th-step an actual wet drunk, that is, someone who is very intoxicated when they contact AA. Some recommended simply telling them to call back later when they were sober but others favored being more proactive about following

up. The consensus was, it is no use trying to tell someone about AA when they are too impaired to comprehend the message.

Although representing different shades of spiritual tradition and involvement all panelists felt a Higher Power's direction was important to a 12th step call and that prayer or meditation was a valuable precursor to getting into the car. They also recommended a quick review of the Big Book section on working with others. Les shared several anecdotes about how responding to an inner prompt to do something slightly uncharacteristic and unplanned opened up new dimensions. Panelists testified that their own personal stories as recovering alcoholics were their most powerful tool for encouraging a drunk to try AA, followed by the Big Book and other conference approved literature.

The organizers prepared and distributed a well-designed pamphlet, "Twelfth Step Workshop: Working with Wet Drunks", with a list of 12th step guidelines, a page of "12th step troubleshooting" tips with a flow chart, a list of community resources and phone numbers, a list of recovery houses, and a form for signing up for the list of 12th step volunteers that EVI maintains. This pamphlet is available in PDF format on the EVI website. Some of the information is specific to the southern Willamette Valley but could be modified to suit the needs of districts elsewhere.

AA in the EVI Area owes a hearty round of applause and a debt of gratitude to those who made this workshop possible.

Martha S.

Peanut Gallery May 2009

(No one volunteered any tidbits from meetings to this feature this quarter, so the offerings are once again a compendium of things people said at the meetings your newsletter chair attends. We're a pretty articulate bunch in Eugene but I am sure there are clever people in other parts of the state who deserve exposure for their witticisms.)

In the meantime – and believe me, that's what it was, a mean time..." *Michael, Eugene*

I found sobriety a couple of years dry. *Mel, Eugene*

I realized you can't stay sober on yesterday's AA. *Bruzz, Eugene,*

Reality is the scariest horror movie I've ever been to. *Anonymous, Eugene*

It's really hard to bitch somebody out when you're texting. I'm hitting cap-A, cap-S, and by the time I've finished a paragraph I'm no longer mad at the person I'm texting but I've got a resentment against the I-phone company. *Rocky, Eugene, young man new in sobriety.*

I'm glad this is a program of honesty rather than a program of goodness. *Sharon, Eugene*

If, as they say, pain is the touchstone of spiritual growth, I must be building a basilica.
Sheila, Eugene

For me, switching personas wasn't even serial monogamy. It was more inner polygamy. Somebody in this meeting said they felt like they were two people., and I thought to myself, that would be nice. I felt I was a school bus full of unruly kids inside. *Jule, Eugene*

Sponsors provide you with the opportunity to do a rough draft of life and go over it before you send it in. *Hank A., Eugene (a professional writer)*

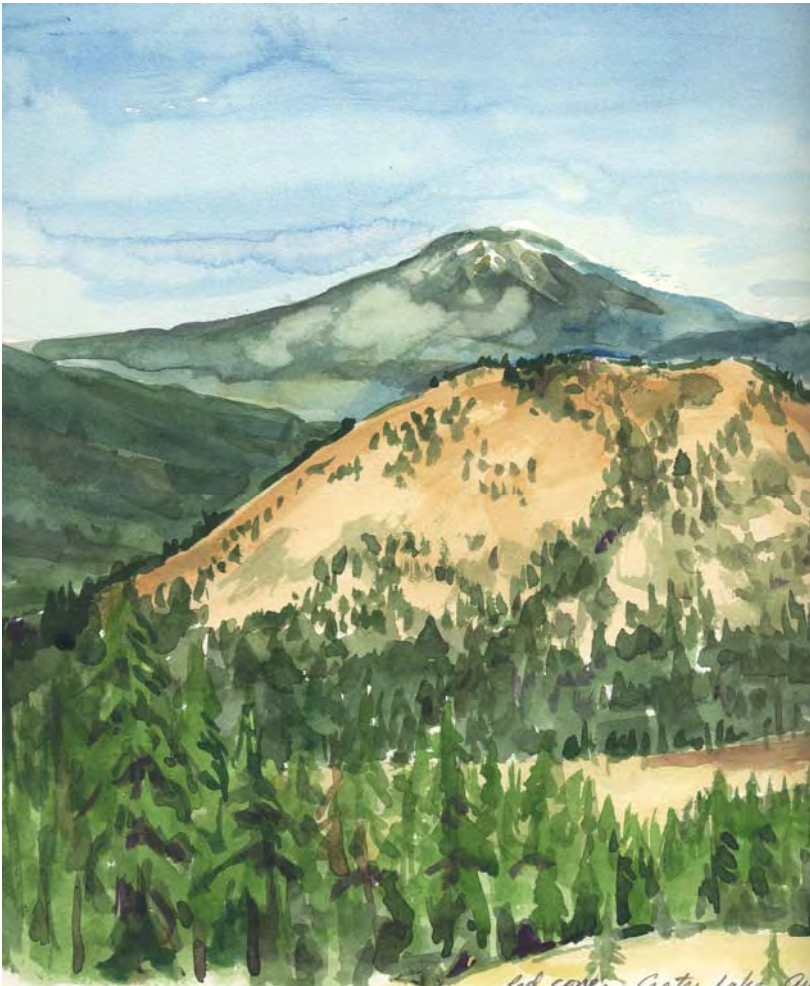
My sobriety date is 9-9-99. Sheer arrogance has helped me stay sober to keep that sobriety date. *Tara, Eugene.*

I didn't have everything catastrophic happen in my life – what I had was everything catastrophic happening between my ears. *Pat, Eugene.*

When I got sober, I found I wasn't really ready for myself. *Ashley, Eugene, young woman in early sobriety.*

I like Mondays since I got sober. Mondays always used to be the day I either had to go looking for a new job or call up with a new excuse. *Rocky, Eugene.*

IMAGES OF SOBRIETY



This is a painting I did of Red Cone in Crater Lake National Park this August. I have been painting since High School but only since I got sober 9 years ago have I had the time, motivation, and coordination to do so seriously. Now that I'm sober, financially solvent, and semi-retired, I can throw my paints and a tent into the car and take off for one of the marvelous sites of natural beauty with which Oregon abounds. I used to contemplate nature with a bottle of Old English 800 in one hand – it's a much more spiritual experience with a paintbrush in that hand. –Martha S.