

focus



The Newsletter of Alcoholics Anonymous Area 86

Focus: Dean's Reflections as Delegate

Hi, Everyone!

It is hard to believe that this will be the last article I will be writing for the Focus Newsletter as your Area Delegate. My commitment to this job began almost 4 years ago when I became the Alternate Delegate. The next two years spent as Alternate Delegate was a learning process on how to become a Delegate.

Every job undertaken for service in Alcoholics Anonymous brings with it a degree of commitment which is started by letting your name stand for a position. There are three primary things you need to ask yourself when running for a position: 1) *Can I do the job?*, 2) *Do I want the job?*, and 3) *Do I have time to do the job?* This was explained to me when I was asked if I would like to become an Alternate General Service Representative (Alt. G.S.R.).

My journey in service actually began at my home group early one Sunday afternoon when I asked my Sponsor how much sobriety was required to chair a meeting. Apparently my three months were sufficient because I found myself chairing the Mohawk Serenity Group meeting in Brantford the very next Sunday. Next thing I knew, I was taken to a District Meeting. Shortly after that, I was introduced to an Area Assembly.

Each service position has its own level of responsibility and carries with it a time frame unique to its position. From my experience, the further on you go into service, or the further down the triangle you go, the knowledge you gain increases as does the time you spend doing the job. So, when I let my name stand for Alternate Delegate in October 2007, I had to prepare myself for a journey lasting four years regardless if I got the job or not. Once the job was mine, the most important part of that job was to make sure I had the time to cover for the General Service Conference in the off chance the current Delegate was unable to go. From that point on, the job as Alternate Delegate became that of learning how to become the Delegate.

For me, the knowledge base increased when the Area Chairperson resigned during the first year of the term. As per our Structure and Operating Procedures, that job became mine as well. That knowledge base deepened as there were Regional Forums each year of Panel 58. The hours Martin A. (Panel 58 Delegate) and I spent one-on-one were in the hundreds and that trend has continued here in Panel 60 with Percy G. (Alternate Delegate) and me.

Continued on page 3

CONTENTS

- P2 Tradition 11 - The Way We Were
- P3 Dean's Reflections *(continued)*
- P4 Grapevine Issues
- P5 Special Needs - Remote Communities
- P6 Tradition 12
- P7 Love Special Needs - Remote Communities *(continued)*
- P8 Dean's Reflections *(continued)*

"Items of current interest or under consideration within Area 86". Opinions expressed are those of the authors and may not necessarily reflect those of A.A. as a whole, the Editor or the members of the Area Committee.

If I had lived prior to the emergence of A.A., it is very likely I would have died a pitiful and incomprehensible alcoholic death. Fortunately for me, when I needed it, A.A. was here and I had no negative conceptions about the Fellowship when my bottom arrived to keep me from the doors. The program, the people and the meetings helped me to put the plug in the jug and I can say with great certainty and conviction that A.A. saved my life. I feel luckier than a five-time Lotto Max winner.

Focus: Tradition 11 - Guardian of Our Fellowship

On August 25, 2009 at 7:37 AM, Roger E., famous movie critic for the Chicago Sun Times, posted a blog on the internet entitled, "My Name is Roger, and I'm an alcoholic." (*) I was very disturbed at the time by Roger's outing himself with respect to his membership in A.A.. I remember thinking his act an egregious violation of Tradition 11.

How can A.A. itself, I thought, have any credibility when a famous member publicly violates the very principles that are in place to ensure A.A. is there for, and attractive to, the next suffering alkie? Though the article itself was well written and tugged at the heart strings and attempted to cast A.A. in a positive light, you could see the public controversy generated in the discussion associated with his piece below the article itself. He had essentially thrown down the gauntlet to some hard line A.A.'s who, of course, could not resist responding - at the public level. Their responses, in my opinion, made A.A. look like it is populated by zealots, and drew A.A.'s name into a controversial public debate. How ironic is that? All in all, I think Roger's very public admission had and has the potential to do more harm than good. However unlikely an event, what would happen to A.A.'s reputation if he is ever seen in his cups again?

I believe guardianship, the act of protecting the reputation of A.A., is a fundamental guiding principle of Tradition 11. On page 183 of The Twelve and Twelve, it asks us to become just that, "an active guardian of our Fellowship."

The preservation of A.A.'s good name for the next suffering alcoholic is, for me, more than a mere traditional act.

It is a personal duty!

Cheers,

Mike F.
DCM,
District 9
Owen Sound, Ont.

(*) *The article is still available online. To find it, simply Google "Chicago Sun Times Roger*

Focus: The Way We Were

Back in 1976-77, when I was delegate, we held our assemblies Sundays on the second floor of the YMCA in London, Ontario and committee meetings in a room on the first floor. Those were long days.

We also attended Ontario General Service meetings at the King Hotel in Toronto twice a year where Ontario A.A. business for the four Areas was taken care of. We had no workshops, banquets, speakers, etc. It was strictly business.

It was at this time we got rid of A.R.F. and other films which were available through Ontario General Service and being taken into institutions etc. by A.A. members.

Our General Service Conferences were held at the Roosevelt Hotel in New York City. What an experience they were.

Oh well, enough reminiscing for now.

John R.
Past Delegate—Panel 26

"Items of current interest or under consideration within Area 86". Opinions expressed are those of the authors and may not necessarily reflect those of A.A. as a whole, the Editor or the members of the Area Committee.

Focus: Dean's Reflection's as Delegate (Continued from Page 1)

So, when I became the Delegate on January 1, 2010 I was already familiar with what the job entailed. One of the biggest classrooms I attended was the Ontario Delegates Committee Meeting. Both the Alternate Delegate and the Delegate attend these meetings early each year before the Conference. In the near future, we hopefully will lose one of these meetings to a gathering called the Canadian Eastern Regional Alcoholics Anonymous Service Assembly (C.E.R.A.A.S.A.). This will be a Preconference event between the magnitude of the Ontario Delegates Committee Meeting and the Eastern Canadian Regional Forum.

The first and second years of the Panel 60 term were quite different. The Panel 60 Conference was held at the Rye Town Hilton in Rye Brook, New York which is about 40 miles from New York City and the Panel 61 Conference was held at the Crowne Plaza Times Square in Manhattan. The big difference here being that the first year I drove and the second year I flew.

The drive down the first year to Rye Brook is about an eight hour nonstop drive. I took somewhere between 10 and 12 hours so there was lots of time on the way there and back to think! The Conference itself was quite exhausting. After returning from Stepping Stones on Saturday afternoon, I drove 6 hours back to Rochester and slept for 12 hours. I came back from that Conference a changed person. The experience was overwhelming and I thank my friend, Martin, for grooming me for that experience. The flight down the second year only took about 2 hours, with another 4 to 6 hours spent in the airport – still lots of time to *Think, Think, Think!*

There is an A.A. meeting at 7 AM each morning (Monday to Friday) during the Conference and I attended all 10 meetings during the two years that I attended. What a way to start your day and your Conference Day. During that first year, aside from all the interactions that went on during our closed-door Conference Committee meetings to the Conference itself and the interactions of just meeting all the other Conference Delegates, one of the many highlights was the Online Contribution Presentation (I'll pass on the joke I usually tell at this point – if you haven't heard it, ask me).

Also, during the Panel 60 term, there was the International Convention in San Antonio, Texas. To be able to attend the International Convention during my term as Delegate truly was an opportunity beyond my wildest dreams.

Conversely, during the Panel 60 Conference, I was a newbie or a first-year Delegate. At the Panel 61 Conference I was a more seasoned second year Delegate. As a second year Delegate you are given a special assignment or what is referred to as a '*Loving Invitation*'. My assignment was that of a Workshop Moderator for the Discussion Topic "How to Increase Participation in A.A. – Striving for Self Support in All Our Affairs". Fourteen people attended this workshop: a Regional Trustee; a General Service Trustee; a General Service Office Staff Member; a La Vina Editor and 10 Area Delegates, including myself and my friend from Vermont who acted as the Reporter.

Aside from the fact that we were at Times Square and could be overwhelmed at any time simply because of where we were, we managed to do the business of Alcoholics Anonymous at the General Service Conference. The big news that came out of the Conference this year was that our A.A. Grapevine is now digital and is available both online and as a hard copy. Later on this year soon, after this (Focus Newsletter) publication, two of our books, the Big Book (Alcoholics Anonymous) and the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, will be made available to download online and made readable on a smartphone device or e-Reader.

Continued on page 8

"Items of current interest or under consideration within Area 86". Opinions expressed are those of the authors and may not necessarily reflect those of A.A. as a whole, the Editor or the members of the Area Committee.

Focus: Issues with Our Grapevine

It's my belief that the Grapevine is one of the most important tools we have available to us for twelve step work, not to mention personal growth in our recovery. Think of it. We write our experience, strength and hope on a given topic or step and, much like sharing at a table, someone gains from that. Carrying the message to the alcoholic who still suffers is what we are all about. This is our primary aim and all of our literature spells that out very clearly and even guides us through some of the process.

In recent months I've received many calls and emails concerning issues going on with or Monthly Journal. Most have had difficulty in renewing and many have had problems with deliveries not arriving on time. As you know, we in Canada experienced some outside issues with our postal service and I know that many groups received two months worth of issues within the same week. This makes it tough to sell but there was nothing we could really do about that. Those really aren't the problems that people want to talk about. The big thing that I continue to hear is that "our group has a number of subscriptions and when I tried to renew I had so many problems with it that I finally just gave up. I will not renew now until they can straighten up their act".

There seems to be frustration over the whole process. We are not used to having these things happen when we call or email. The quick answer, of course, is the change in fulfillment houses from Florida to North Hollywood. Certainly we have to give them the benefit of the doubt during the stressful time of this move but it's now been over a year. How much more patience do we have to have? Area 86 has over 600 active groups. Figure that there are 93 Areas that make up North America. The average amount of groups per Area is about 677 for a total of about 62,961 groups. If other groups throughout our two nations are having similar problems then do we have to give some leeway?

I generally allow two weeks delivery on any order placed to the Grapevine and for about a year it was much like clock work. Our Treasurer got the invoice in satisfactory time and paid the bill accordingly. That changed for a time as well. What took two weeks all of a sudden became two months. Bills got lost, records of payment were misplaced and, as a result, orders were not filled. Things for now have gone back to the standard two week delivery but getting invoices on time has been a challenge of late. We have all been feeling this change.

Persistence seems to be the key to getting things corrected. The more we bugged them to fix our problems, the more they responded and things have gotten better. So, in as much as I hate to repeat myself, the only answer worth sticking with at this point is to continue to be patient. Things will slowly get back to what we're used to. If you have problems, don't be afraid to call to have them resolved. The Grapevine does continue to need our help and will continue to carry our message as long as we are willing to listen.

Thad R.
Grapevine Area Sub-Committee Chairperson
Panel 60, Area 86

"Items of current interest or under consideration within Area 86". Opinions expressed are those of the authors and may not necessarily reflect those of A.A. as a whole, the Editor or the members of the Area Committee.

Focus: Special Needs – Remote Communities

Last year's Fall issue of Focus had an article with a brief description of Special Needs/Accessibilities and Remote Communities. A brief description is just that and normally does not get into what is required to put it into practice.

At the current time there are eight District sub-committee chair persons that are involved with Special Needs/Accessibilities. Of those eight, five of them are also involved with Remote Communities. Each of them has a committee comprised of at least two or more people who meet and decide what they will do as a committee. They usually choose one project to work on at a time and then choose another when the first is either completed or doesn't require as much time and effort or when they get a request.

In order to decide what to do with their choice they need information and resources that can and should be consulted such as the other sub-committee chairs in the District, the District Committee Member, service groups in the District, the Area chairperson and the chairperson at the General Service Office. Once they have enough information to make an informed decision they are ready to get into action.

Not all projects need a lot of research. Some are no brainers, such as accessibility information on the meeting lists. More than once I've gone to a new meeting and then had to walk around the building to find a door that was not locked. The meeting list, on paper or on the internet, could have said the door was at the back or side. And it's always on the other side isn't it! Most of the Area 86 District meeting lists have the wheelchair accessibility symbols on the lists for meetings that are wheelchair accessible. How do we know they are wheelchair accessible? The Special Needs/Accessibilities committee has made their own list and then either gone to those meetings or had the General Service Representative from that meeting check to make sure the meeting was or was not wheelchair accessible. They then gave their list to whoever was responsible for printing the meeting lists. The same goes for all the other accessibility symbols on your District's meeting lists.

So, what are some of the Districts doing now that they have most of the wheelchair accessible meetings listed? Some are trying to set up meetings in retirement homes, nursing homes and chronic care facilities. Others have decided to set up a meeting in hospitals or homes in order to bring a meeting to individuals when they request it since they are no longer able get to meetings on their own because of sickness, accident or infirmity sometimes due to getting into their not so golden years.

We have a couple of Districts that are trying to get more meetings with an American Sign Language Interpreter in attendance and trying to get a list of meetings that would welcome American Sign Language Interpreters at closed meetings. Some are also trying to set up meetings where single parents can bring their young children and have someone look after them while they attend a meeting and some are offering transportation to those that may not have transportation.

All of them are trying to keep you informed of new literature as it is produced and if you are not aware of it yet there is a new pamphlet out called "A.A. for the Alcoholic with Special Needs" and it includes eleven stories of alcoholics who are hearing or visually impaired, housebound, chronically ill, and disabled due to brain damage or stroke.

The VHS tapes of the Big Book and the Twelve and Twelve in American Sign Language have been converted to DVDs and are now the same price as the print editions.

Continued on Page 7

"Items of current interest or under consideration within Area 86". Opinions expressed are those of the authors and may not necessarily reflect those of A.A. as a whole, the Editor or the members of the Area Committee.

Focus:
Tradition Twelve

Short form:

Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

I well remember my first significant encounter with Tradition Twelve. Still in early sobriety with nerve ends raw, my mouth fired a volley well before my brain was engaged and my lack of restraint re-acquainted me with the twins: remorse and regret. During the ebb and flow of a lengthy heart to heart with my sponsor, Tradition Twelve emerged as a worthy but challenging solution to my difficulties in human relations, indeed in my relations in general. The practice of principles, tempered with warmth, prudence and humor is a sturdier, more life giving foundation in human dealings than the meteors of emotion and ego. Taking responsibility to think over, pray about and try to practice principles in all aspects of one's waking hours is a life time endeavor that enhances the quality of a single life but it also offers, as our early members recognized, a rich and bountiful way to protect a society and help it flourish.

With a small but growing number of alcoholics sustaining sobriety, the fledgling membership became aware they really had some light to offer to the dark world of alcoholism. Despite the many weaknesses of alcoholics and the pitilessness of alcoholism, there is hope and this hope is a springboard to the possible change from being a drunken alcoholic to being a sober alcoholic fully participating in a meaningful human life.

Our early members realized they had a task: to keep the message of hope alive and to pass it on. Moderation is hardly the hallmark of the alcoholic. Would it be possible for us to sustain our purpose?

Yes. The early members found we are successful at our task if we remain focused on it as a society and if we remain unified around it. The Traditions protect our second Legacy: Unity. Unity requires sacrificing personal desires for property, power and prestige, all very human, for the common and the greater good: carrying the message of hope to those who want it. Anonymity, with the principles of sacrifice and humility buoying it, keeps the ship on course. Sacrifice prunes the tendrils of desire and humility recognizes we need each other, the grace of God and the help of non-alcoholics to maintain our course. Paradoxically, anonymity imbues the life of the sober alcoholic with a sweet and free quality, their action with a sense of wonder and gratitude at the gift they have received.

Anonymity has many facets. It is deservedly cherished by the timid newcomer. She can enter the meetings of A.A. and expect that cloak to protect her. If members keep confidences there is the added blessing of comfortable sharing. Anonymity at the public level protects Alcoholics Anonymous. It ensures that the message is not confounded with the messenger. If the messenger changes their mind, loses interest, thinks the message is not branded: it remains viable. Alcoholics Anonymous can continue to grow. In an age of expanding and new forms of communication, A.A. has tools with which to evaluate and engage these innovations to aid our primary purpose while maintaining our distinctiveness. Oddly, anonymity assists in maintaining A.A.'s identity.

Jean C.
DCM, District10

Sources: Twelve and Twelve, A.A. Comes of Age, Understanding Anonymity, Freedom Under God, Bill W. (Grapevine, 1950), A.A.'s Legacy of Service and Bill W.

"Items of current interest or under consideration within Area 86". Opinions expressed are those of the authors and may not necessarily reflect those of A.A. as a whole, the Editor or the members of the Area Committee.

Focus: Special Needs - Remote Communities (Continued from Page 5)

These DVDs, as well as being American Sign Language Interpreted, are “voice over” and “open captioned” so you can read it, listen to it and watch it as an interpreter “signs” the Big Book.

Some of those that are looking after Remote Communities are collecting new and gently used literature and passing it along to the Area to distribute. Some are collecting money and then buying new literature and others have taken several communities under their wing and are sending Grapevine subscriptions and small amounts of literature to other communities.

When you get a chance to go to an Assembly you will see the Area sub-committee chairpersons give a report. You will not see the ones that really do most of the work . If you really want to see the people that make this work, attend your District or Intergroup meeting or a District workshop.

Bob J.
 Special Needs - Remote Communities Area Sub-Committee Chairperson
 Panel 60, Area 86

Focus: Love

I was listening to a radio show on “Legends Of Classic Rock” as I was sitting here working on this newsletter.

The announcer was talking about all the amazing artists over the years including guitarists, drummers, singers and other band members for whom the list goes on and on. They messed up their lives with alcoholism and or other substances and were now one of two things: dead or in recovery.

It made me sit quietly for a humbled moment, acutely aware of an overwhelming sense of love and gratitude for Alcoholics Anonymous and for the wonderful people who drove me to meetings when I had no license to drive, the ladies that took me through the steps for the first time and the fellowship that loves you till you can love yourself. I am truly free.

I think of all greeters who extend the hand of A.A., and the friendship that is and should be the closest thing to unconditional love we may ever know. The greatest service in A.A. is that handshake for the first timer, that lovingly says, “Welcome Home”. If that isn’t the love of God, I don’t know what it is!

Janis V.
 Newsletter Chair

AREA OFFICERS

Area Delegate: Dean T.

Area Alternate Delegate: Percy G.

Area Treasurer: Mary K.

Area Secretary/Registrar: Jim W.

Comments, feedback or articles contact

www.area86aa.org

“Items of current interest or under consideration within Area 86”. Opinions expressed are those of the authors and may not necessarily reflect those of A.A. as a whole, the Editor or the members of the Area Committee.

Focus: Dean's Reflections as Delegate (Continued from Page 3)

The Conference Committee I belong to is the Treatment Special Needs - Accessibilities (the name is now shorter and official). While we did a lot of work last year, we had no Advisory Actions and referred most of our agenda items back to the Trustees Committee. This year, however, there are two things that really stand out in my memory: One: we approved the pamphlet A.A. for the Alcoholic with Special Needs. Of the 11 stories that made the pamphlet I was fortunate to have met one of the story writers. This really took my being on that Committee to the next level. Two: we wordsmithed two documents dealing with the Temporary Contact for the Bridging the Gap pamphlets for both inside and outside members. The wordsmithing that was undertaken was so unique that these pamphlets are now generic enough to be used in either Treatment or Correctional settings. I really feel we accomplished a great deal as the Treatment Special Needs - Accessibilities Committee which is just one of 11 standing committees and two secondary committees.

The Conference experience and seeing the Conference in action when you realize we're dealing with 93 Delegate Areas in Canada and the United States is a sight to behold and an experience of a lifetime. While you're there, you realize and see for yourself that no recommendation or Conference Advisory Action is approved without the approval of the rank-and-file members of Alcoholics Anonymous.

I shall be forever grateful to you, the A.A. members of Area 86, for this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Although I will only be the active Panel 60 Delegate for 2010/2011, I will always be the Panel 60 Delegate for Area 86. As I look back on the last two years, I feel we have really moved forward as an Area here in Area 86. There will always be groups not acting like groups; members that don't all think like us and, of course, resentments. Welcome to Alcoholics Anonymous.

The two most important things I have learned these past two years are: the concept of a Higher Power and the power of the Group Conscience and, of course, the ability to see these things in action.

Thank you, most of all, for my sobriety today and for showing me how the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous could improve my life as well as how it has. This really has been quite a journey: to go from a drunk being awoken by a policeman rapping on his windshield to that same drunk standing on the floor of the General Service Conference of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Thank you and may God Bless.

One final note (borrowed from my friend Monte S):

Jon C, I heart you the most.

Dean T.
Panel 60 Delegate
Area 86 Western Ontario

Area 86 / Focus

Published twice a year by
Western Ontario General Service.

<http://www.area86aa.org>

Newsletter Chair: Janis V.

Assistant Editor: Heidi P.

Contributors:
Thad R., Delegate Dean T., Mike F.,
Jean C., Janis V., Bob J.,
Past Delegate John R.

Contact information:

Email only please

thegatekeepers@wightman.ca

"Items of current interest or under consideration within Area 86". Opinions expressed are those of the authors and may not necessarily reflect those of A.A. as a whole, the Editor or the members of the Area Committee.