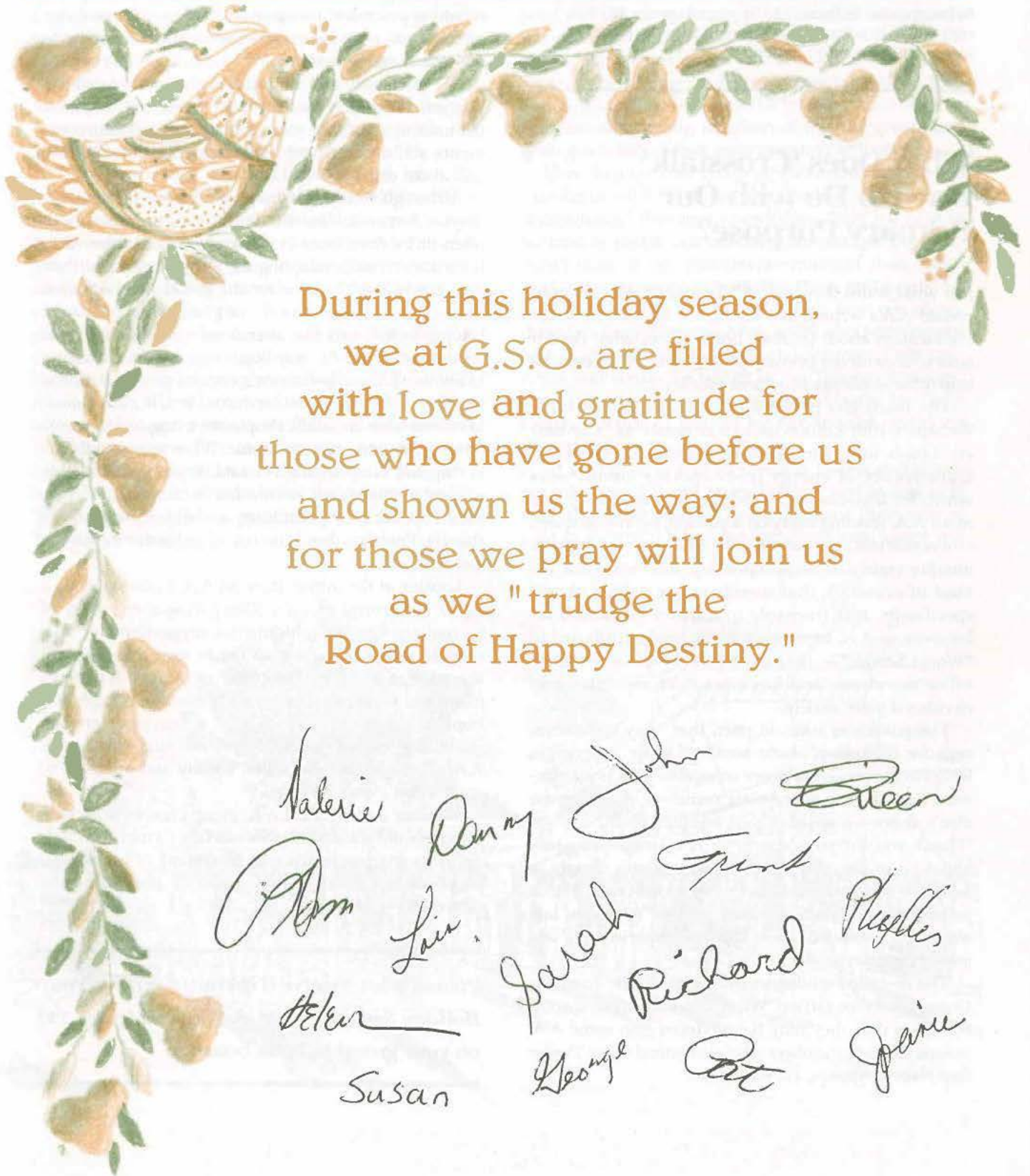


BOX 4|5|9

News and Notes From the General Service Office of A.A.®

VOL. 40, No. 6 / HOLIDAY ISSUE 1994



During this holiday season,
we at G.S.O. are filled
with love and gratitude for
those who have gone before us
and shown us the way; and
for those we pray will join us
as we "trudge the
Road of Happy Destiny."

Valerie Danny John Ellen
Ann Lois Sarah Frank Phyllis
Helen Richard
Susan George Pat Jane

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What Does 'Crosstalk' Have to Do with Our Primary Purpose?

Just what is this thing called "crosstalk"? Why are concerned A.A.s writing to the General Service Office for clarification about it? And, bottom line, what does it have to do with our primary purpose: "to stay sober and help other alcoholics to achieve sobriety"?

The word has been with us at least since 1887. Webster's 10th Edition defines crosstalk as "unwanted signals in a communication channel caused by transference of energy from another circuit"—as when, for instance, two members sitting side by side at an A.A. meeting carry on a private, yet not so quiet, conversation...or when one member interrupts another rudely or inappropriately. But this is not the kind of crosstalk that members are asking about; specifically, it is traceable to a list of guidelines for behavior at A.A. meetings—*erroneously* attributed to "World Service"—that appears in 1992 in a central office newsletter and has since been reprinted and circulated more widely.

The guidelines state, in part, that "Any comments, negative or positive, about another's share, experience, life, program or remarks are crosstalk—that is interference..." "The only appropriate comment about anyone else's share—a speaker's or another member's—is 'Thank you for your share.'" "A member may talk about his or her own experience as it relates directly or indirectly to another's share, but should not refer to that person's share. Even comments such as 'When you talk about...it reminded me of my own experience...' are possibly inappropriate."

The so-called guidelines did *not* emanate from the General Service Office. What random investigation reveals is that they may have filtered into some A.A. groups through members who also attend other Twelve Step recovery groups. For example:

(1) In its literature, one fellowship includes a boxed item head, "Suggested Announcement Regarding Crosstalk & Feedback (adopted 12/13/87)." It reads: "In sharing during meetings, we proceed in an orderly, respectful manner. The chairperson (or speaker) will call on people to share. We do not interrupt one another or engage in discussion—this is called 'crosstalk.' While we encourage expressions of identification with a speaker and appreciation for speakers, we also do not judge or comment on what people say or tell them what to do—this is called 'feedback.'"

(2) Another anonymous organization, in its "Suggested Meeting Format," asks attendees "to please not interrupt someone else's sharing, not to make comments about other people's statements...and to talk only about yourself."

Although many self-help groups emulate A.A.'s Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, their practices often differ from ours in other respects. As they may have discovered in adapting the A.A. program to their own needs, what's sauce for the goose may be poison for the gander. Says Anne T., of Rome, New York, who belongs to A.A. and also attends meetings of a different fellowship: "From the very beginning, one drunk talking to another has made the A.A. program go round. But in meetings (of the other fellowship), I feel, it makes sense to refrain from crosstalk. People are trying to free themselves from extraordinary shame. When someone shares in response to something I've said, that's okay, but only so long as there's not even a hint of censure, belittlement, scolding or preaching, all under the guise of sharing. Knowing there's no risk of judgment makes me feel safe."

Looking at the subject from an A.A.'s point of view, a G.S.O. staff member, says, "Comparing notes, many of us realized that nonjudgmental suggestions we had received in meetings, in response to something we had shared, was very beneficial to our recovery. It is how we learn, and that's what 'sharing experience, strength and hope' is all about. Also, there is a thin line between guidelines and rules; and experience suggests that in A.A.'s 'benign anarchy,' rules, rigidity and attempts to control don't work very well."

Whether an individual A.A. group chooses to include the crosstalk 'guidelines' in its meeting format is entirely up to its group conscience to determine, of course. But please do not say that such guidelines came from the General Service Office.

**Please post Twelve Tips on Keeping Your
Holiday Season Sober and Joyous (page 11)
on your group bulletin board.**

San Diego Host Committee Prepares for A.A.'s 60th Birthday Party

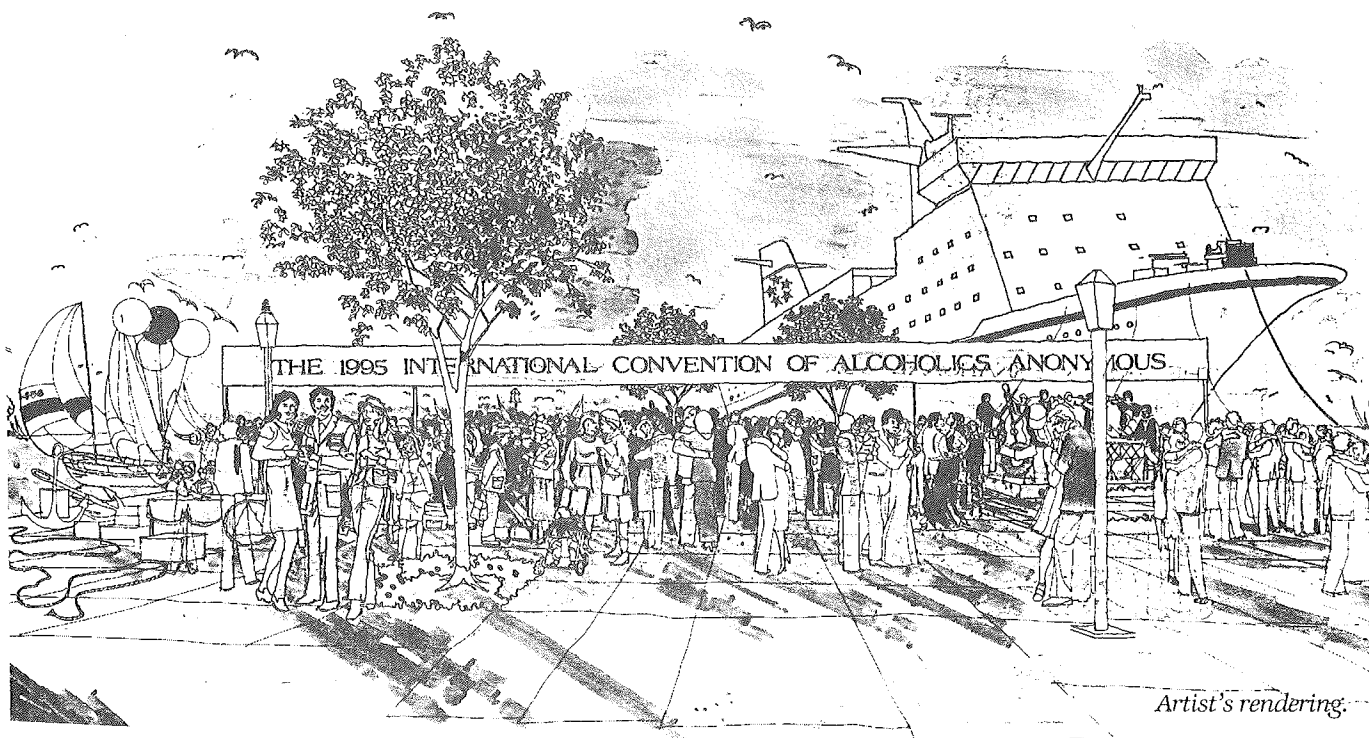
In sync with the theme of next summer's 1995 International Convention, "A.A. Everywhere—Anywhere," as many as 6,000 A.A. volunteer hosts will be on hand everywhere they're needed in San Diego from June 29-July 2, 1995, to welcome and assist A.A. visitors from all over the world. Says Host Committee chairperson Bobbie C.: "We could have as many as 75,000 celebrants at A.A.'s 60th Birthday party—far more than the 48,000 people who attended the Seattle Convention in 1990. And we are aiming to triple the 3,000 volunteers who did such a fine job there."

"Countdown 1995" officially began in 1988, when the San Diego/Imperial Area Assembly, after bidding for a third time to serve as an International Convention site, finally won the nod from the General Service Board. Since then, planning for the event has gained momentum with each passing month. The Host Committee countdown began last year with formation of the "core group"; headed by Bobbie, it includes Gary U., vice chairperson; and Gail N., alternate vice chairperson—each an A.A. service veteran with well over 20 years of sobriety. "We take no action without first talking to each other and taking the time and effort to reach unanimity," Bobbie reports. "The fact that one or another of us has served together at various times over the years certainly helps—we're very aware of the constant need to 'place principles before personalities' in the spirit of Tradition Twelve."

Radiating out from the core group, like spokes from the hub of a wheel, are no fewer than 17 committees, which in toto will extend a helping hand at every point of the Convention—including all transportation and hotel and dormitory lodgings sites, and assisting guests who are disabled or have language and other special needs. "We are fortunate," says Bobbie, "to have guidelines provided by the Seattle Host Committee of the 1990 Convention, which maintained a written record of all its activities; additionally, members of the core group have given generously of their experience and support."

How does the core group go about rounding up the thousands of A.A. volunteers needed? "It's a huge undertaking," Bobbie acknowledges, "and we tend to buttonhole people one-on-one. However, we expect to enroll most of our volunteers—many of them bilingual—at a large pep rally in San Diego on January 14. We anticipate that they'll come mainly from our immediate San Diego/Imperial Area; we're also reaching out to A.A.s in the Mid-Southern and Southern California Areas and across the border in the Tijuana, Baja area. Local calls of inquiry are being handled by the San Diego Central Office as well as by our Spanish-speaking Central Oficina Hispana."

At the Convention in Montreal in 1985 host-committee volunteers sported straw boaters, and in Seattle in 1990 they wore cowboy hats that made them easy to spot in a crowd. What the San Diego contingent will



Artist's rendering.

wear is still under wraps, but “you’ll have no trouble finding us,” Bobbie promises. “Wherever you turn, we’ll be there to answer your questions and help in any way we can.”

You’ll find an exciting assortment of activities to choose from at A.A.’s Tenth International Convention: the Thursday night kickoff harbor block party, spilling out all along the Embarcadero to Seaport Village and beyond, and two dances; major marathon meetings, in English and Spanish respectively; the Friday night opening ceremony, complete with the heart-stirring parade of flags of countries represented by the attending conventioners; all sorts of meetings, workshops and panels, including those in other languages such as Spanish, French and ASL (American Sign Language); a Fun Run; and much more.

Al-Anons will, of course, accompany their loved ones, and be part of the 1995 Convention. Al-Anon members will have their own daytime workshops and other activities, joining in with us for the big Stadium meetings. And

just about everyone will want to take time out to see some of San Diego’s famous attractions—including Old Town, La Jolla, the Zoo and Sea World—or stroll along the waterfront promenade just outside the Convention Center. Chances are, conventioners will see volunteer hosts everywhere they turn!

The responsibilities of being Host Committee chair haven’t dulled Bobbie’s sense of humor. When asked, “What did you do before?,” she replied without missing a beat: “I drank.” But that was more than 25 years ago, and in A.A., Bobbie has steeped herself in sobriety and service. Among other things, she has been a district committee member, chairperson of the San Diego Area Assembly and a 1990-91 delegate to the General Service Conference.

Last September, registration forms were mailed by G.S.O. to A.A.s worldwide. If you have decided you want to be there, and have not yet registered, please write to: International Convention Coordinator, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163.

SERVICES AT G.S.O.

Mailing to A.A.’s Global Village— The Six Men Who Bring it Off

They’re a closely-knit group of six men. They work as a team, or individually; replacing each other if, and when, the need arises. Together, their combined years of employment at G.S.O. comes to 93 years. In simple terms, what they do is: receive and ship out thousands upon thousands of pieces of mail—a gargantuan job, at best.

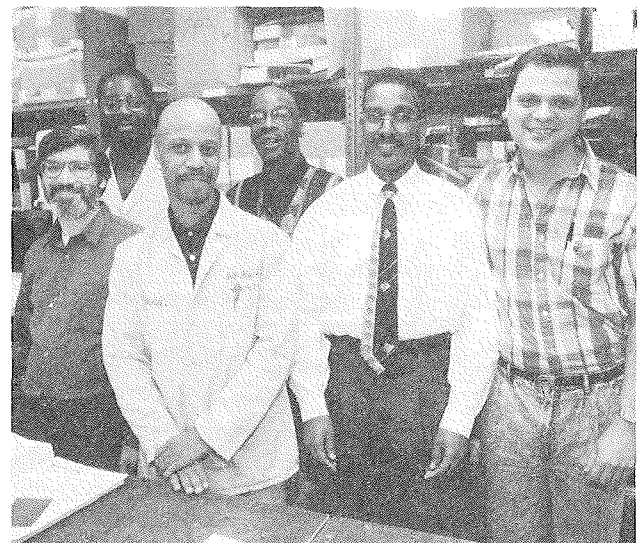
What’s surprising is how efficiently, and smoothly, the operation of G.S.O.’s mailing and shipping department runs, day after day, year after year.

“We work very well together, interact into each other’s jobs, which makes it easier when someone is out sick or on vacation,” relates supervisor Aubrey Pereira, a nonalcoholic, who’s been there 12 years. It’s a good thing there is such friendly cohesiveness, considering the amount of mail the six-man team handles each year: 150,000 pieces received, and 120,000 pieces sent out. These include letters, books, pamphlets, newsletters, in what is an ever-growing, worldwide mailing operation, with mail coming in “even from Vietnam, lately, as well as Cuba, which has recently lifted some postal restrictions,” says Aubrey.

In addition to Aubrey, the mail department staff includes Joe Moglia, with 27 years of service; Bill Heinitz,

with 15; Ronnie Shelton, 21 years; Frank Smith, 14 years; and Stanley Kims, four years. All are nonalcoholic.

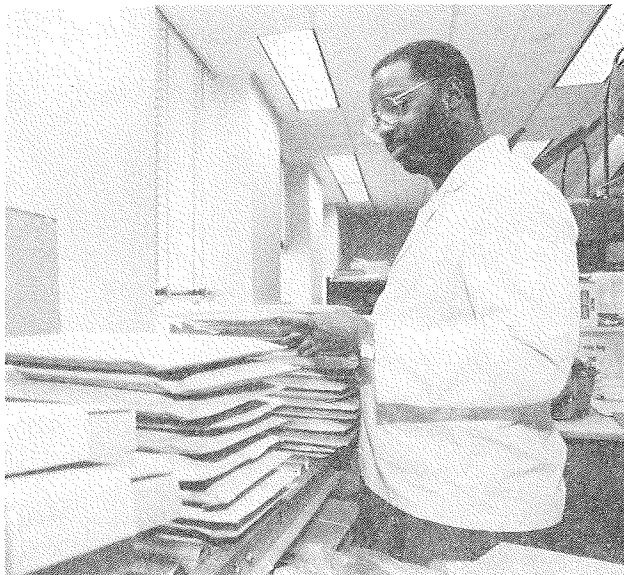
As the Fellowship grows, so does its mailing lists. A



Left to right, front row: Joe Moglia, Ronnie Shelton, Aubrey Pereira and Bill Heinitz. Back row: Stanley Kims and Frank Smith.

good portion—roughly 95%—of A.A. book orders are processed through a distribution center in Kansas City. Prior to the center's establishment in 1989, the Fellowship maintained eight warehouses throughout the country, each of which processed A.A.'s literature orders it received from the New York General Service Office. "G.S.O. handles some of the smaller orders for the Eastern states and Kansas City handles the rest. There are also two distribution centers in Canada," Aubrey explains.

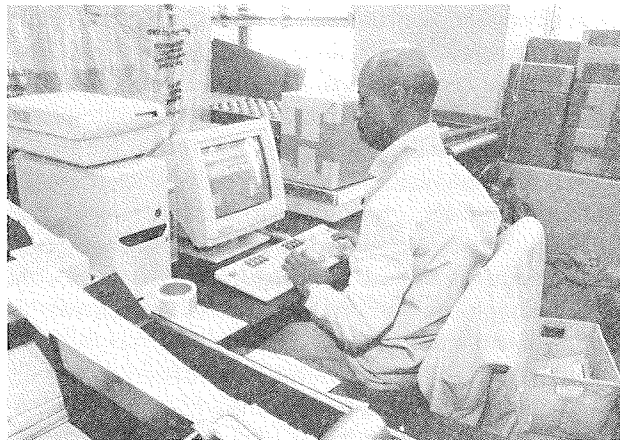
As might be expected, the fall and winter seasons, October through May, are the heaviest for ordering literature, with a general slack during the summer months. The General Service Conference does not bring on sudden large orders or prior mailings, but what *does* keep all six men in the shipping department hopping are the six annual Regional Forums, Aubrey says.



Stanley Kims loads packages onto conveyor belt.

"Time is a critical factor here," he explains. "We get bombarded with literature orders prior to each Forum. There's a lot of coordination necessary, many forms have to be filled out carefully, and the sheer volume of orders is tremendous." It usually takes about six weeks to prepare for each Forum, first ascertaining whether the shipping department has the required literature in stock, ordering it, if necessary, then shipping it.

Box 4-5-9 requires another heavy-duty mailing. Approximately 58,000 copies of the Fellowship's bimonthly newsletter are shipped out by a New York City mailing house, which folds, puts into envelopes, zip codes and mails. These newsletters are sent to various groups and trusted servants, for example, district chairpersons and G.S.R.s. Another batch of newsletters is



Ronnie Shelton feeds information into computer, which not only creates postage stamp, but also records and stores information on cost and date shipped.

shipped out by the G.S.O. mailing staff to individual subscribers, some groups, as well as to individuals requesting 20 or more copies. "We do that mailing from this office because it's more economically feasible," Aubrey says.

New and updated equipment, installed only recently, has helped to ease the heavy work load that increases each year, not only as membership in the Fellowship grows, but to accommodate increasing orders of existing literature, as well as new translations of books and pamphlets. Not too many years ago it was all done manually, Aubrey says.

"We went from no-tech in the '80s, to high-tech in the '90s," Aubrey explains. Prior to the 1980s, his department had a machine that "wet stamps and metered letters and book packages," but otherwise each transaction was done by hand.

Enter the PC. In late spring of this year, the department acquired a computer which seems to be able to do everything but talk. On it, mail is coded, weighed (there's a computerized scale), and information on every piece of mail that goes out is stored for record-keeping. "For example, I can do a weekly or monthly report, for the Financial Department," Aubrey explains, "make a cost breakdown of various carriers, and charge costs back to a specific department, when necessary—all at the stroke of a few keys."

As busy as the mail room is, there's a friendly team spirit and good humor that pervades it. Longevity of service, tied to loyalty to one another, seems to have given the men a collective generous spirit—which came to the fore exactly a year ago, in an incident, unrelated to A.A. literature, postal rates, or the mailing of pamphlets on how to stay sober. Aubrey tells the story of just how closely-knit this group of six men is:

"It was shortly before Christmas, and in comes this letter from a woman in the Bronx. It was addressed to 'Santa's Elves,' but it had A.A.'s Box 459 number on it,

Grand Central Station, and our zip code," he relates. The letter had probably been intended for one of the different charitable organizations answering Christmas mail. Never mind. The men in the mail room decided that *they* would be Santa's Elves and respond to the woman's request for some clothes for her three kids, aged seven, eight and nine.

"We put some money together, I went shopping, bought clothes for all of them, jeans, nightwear, socks, and a couple of dresses, as one of the children was a girl," Aubrey relates.

One of the men, Bill Reinitz, a father of three, brought in boxes of toys, to which the other men added many more toys. "By this time, Christmas was drawing near, so we mailed the package, at our own expense, and we felt wonderful about it!" Aubrey says. "That just gives you an idea of how closely we work together."

A.A. Grows in Cuba

The first A.A. group in Cuba was formed in 1992; today there are about 25 active groups—a great rate of growth when one considers that the island is smaller in area than the state of Pennsylvania. Much of A.A.'s success in carrying the message to Cuban alcoholics has happened thanks to assistance from the General Service Office in Mexico City, Mexico—one country sponsoring another. A.A.s from Mexico visit Cuba every few months.

Last July, two American A.A.s—Class B (alcoholic) trustee David O'L., and G.S.O. staff member Danny M. (Spanish Services)—accompanied Jorge R., of G.S.O. Mexico, on a goodwill trip to Cuba. Says Danny M.: "We were welcomed in a big way, by A.A. members at the meetings we attended and by the health-care workers. Cuba is an island with centralized medicine covering all the 11 million inhabitants from birth to old age. It means that A.A. operates largely through close cooperation with government agencies, and so the acceptance of our approach to recovery by medical professionals has in turn accelerated the Fellowship's growth."

Here Danny notes that the visiting A.A.s were invited to sit in on a meeting of Cuba's General Service Board, which is composed of four nonalcoholic, and four alcoholic, trustees. It is co-chaired by nonalcoholic trustees Dr. Humberto Massop Ballantyne and his wife, Angela Miriam Núñez, a licensed medical practitioner. Another nonalcoholic trustee, Dr. Rosa Gilda Alonso, heads a treatment facility; she also oversees the A.A. meetings held there. Physician-lead A.A. meetings are not uncommon in Cuba.

Danny adds that "every doctor we met spoke of the need for A.A. in a country where 'demon rum' runs riot.

They exhibited tremendous compassion and caring for the suffering alcoholic and expressed gratitude for the fact that virtually all of our Conference-approved literature, audiovisual tapes and service pieces are available in Spanish." Recent correspondence from Cuba brings news of continuing growth, Danny says, "and the hope that A.A.'s message of love and service will continue to spread on this enchanting island."



Each Holiday season, hundreds of cards and messages come pouring into the General Service Office—in the last few years they even come via fax. They come from A.A. members worldwide—from Loners in isolated areas, Internationalists at sea, area service people, past and present delegates and trustees, local intergroups and overseas G.S.O.s, and from groups—signed with each member's name. Some are religious, others bear no relation to any holiday. Many are creative homemade messages, some computer generated; a few are long letters and others send photos of local scenes. Recently we have received musical cards; last year one from Argentina played "Feliz Navidad."

These colorful, thoughtful greetings are put in folders and circulated throughout the General Service Office for all to enjoy. This year we thought we would share a few of them with you.

Isn't It About Time To Reinvent the Twelfth-Step Call?

When did you last make a Twelfth-Step call on a sick, unkempt alcoholic, either on a drunk or coming off one and maybe verging on the DTs? Were you to go on one right now, would you know what to do? Says Carole T., of Oshkosh, Wisconsin: "I've been sober in A.A. more than 25 years, and it has been a long while since I went off on a 'wet' call. Yet, early in my sobriety, before treatment centers mushroomed all around, the Twelfth-Step call was a mainstay of sobriety"—just as it was in the mid-1930s when A.A. co-founders Bill W. and Dr. Bob, newly sober themselves, were always looking for another drunk "to fix," as they called it then, with their special blend of sharing, proselytizing and Dr. Bob's own fast-food combo of tomatoes, sauerkraut and corn syrup for strength and energy.

What happened? As time passed, Carole suggests, "the treatment facilities began assuming the responsibility of carrying the message and we A.A.s became lazy. Sure, we became temporary sponsors and greeted the treatment center patients with caring and concern when they were 'vanned' to our meetings. But by the time we saw them for the first time they were clean, groomed and virtually free of the shakes; they even smelled pretty good."

Now that treatment centers in some areas are closing, Carole notes, the responsibility for carrying the message to the suffering alcoholics is coming full circle. We may have to scramble to get the rust out of our Twelfth Stepping, she says, "but in the long run I believe that each of us will grow and that the A.A. program will become even more effective."

Meanwhile, she reports, the Big Book Group, of which she is secretary, "has been holding sharing sessions on the Twelfth-Step call as it relates to the changes in our communities. There are many service-oriented A.A.s who have never gone out in the middle of the night to visit a 'sick' and 'tired' alcoholic who has been holed up for days without benefit of personal hygiene, with a family that has 'had it' and with nothing but a few drops of booze at the bottom of the bottle."

This is where a strong sponsor is needed, someone who can show the new Twelfth Stepper the ropes: never go unaccompanied by at least one other A.A. member...try to approximate closeness of age and gender for identification if possible...learn from experienced A.A.s how to interact with family members at the scene (and how to know when it's wiser to leave than to stay)...don't toss out what alcohol remains but get the sick alcoholic to do it...know what to do if the alcoholic is addicted to alcohol plus drugs...think of yourself as a

temporary sponsor only...be sober a while, preferably at least six months, before venturing forth on such a mission...and much more.

Carole is more aware than most A.A.s of the importance of Twelfth-Step calls. With a daughter presently in treatment, one son sober in A.A. and another who died last May of alcoholic liver disease, she takes to heart the Responsibility statement: "When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there. And for that: I am responsible."

"I'm excited about getting back to basics," she says, "because I believe I've missed a great deal by letting the treatment facilities do my work for me. But I do feel we need to be prepared, to have a network of reliable teams who can be called upon when a cry for help is heard. We need to know that if a person is ready, we can't really say anything wrong; and if the person is not ready, we can't say anything right at the time. We need to know that we can only carry the message and let God do the rest. We need to know that we are not failures if the person fails to grab on to our life raft, and that sometimes it is enough to plant the seeds of hope."

A.A.s Continue to be Committing to Sponsorship

Sponsorship in A.A. includes a lot of carrying the message—between individuals, groups and entire countries. Necessarily it is a commitment with many new beginnings and no endings, because, as co-founder Bill W. stated so clearly in our Third Legacy, "We must carry the message, else we ourselves can wither, and those who haven't been given the truth may die." Guided by our Twelfth Step, A.A.s everywhere are committing themselves to sponsorship—giving their sobriety away in order to keep it, and loving it all the way.

In Arlington, Virginia, the four-year-old Acceptance Group, which meets once weekly, "has developed an enthusiastic approach to sponsorship that also enhances unity among the members," says founder Cliff T. "To make certain that newcomers are identified, welcomed and helped as much as possible, we have greeters at the door before meetings. We have introduced a monthly beginners meeting and a trimonthly meeting on some aspect of sponsorship—here the A.A. pamphlet 'Questions and Answers on Sponsorship' has furnished helpful guidelines. We provide the newcomers with 'Where and Whens' (meeting lists) as well as the phone numbers of members who would welcome calls, and we offer gift copies of the Big Book to those who have been sober less than 30 days and don't yet have one. Very importantly, we have started a temporary sponsorship

program involving member volunteers, and the response has been amazing.”

Every week, Cliff explains, “the availability of temporary sponsors is announced at our meetings, which usually draw 40-45 attendees. And every time, as many as four or five people—not all of them newcomers either—come up after the meeting for a name and phone number.” Often, he notes, “they latch on to their temporary sponsors for good; some of them join the group and pass on what they’ve been given to the alcoholics right behind them.”

In Oklahoma, area delegate Gene B. observes that, “If we needed anything in A.A. today, maybe it’s to get back to the ‘tough sponsorship’ that oldtimers of 20 years ago had.” Writing in the area news bulletin “The Delegate’s Corner,” he reminisces, “I remember in the beginners meetings what the late Gene W. used to say: ‘If you haven’t quit drinking yet, find yourself a jug and get with it and quit wasting time in A.A. When you’ve had enough, come on back. We’ll still be here.’” Early in sobriety, Gene B. heeded the tart admonition of his own sponsor: “If you ask God for help in the morning to keep from taking a drink, thank Him at night, go to meetings, read the Big Book and don’t drink, quite possibly you could turn into a human being.” Says Gene: “He was one thorough sponsor, just exactly what I needed. As Bill W. wrote in the January 1958 issue of the Grapevine, ‘Nowadays my brain no longer races compulsively in either elation, grandiosity or depression. I have been given a quiet place in bright sunshine.’”

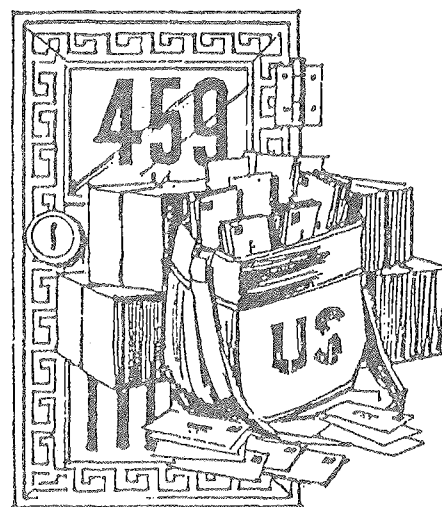
Sharing her experience at the European Service Meeting in Frankfurt, Germany, last year, chairperson Christiana C. of Ireland addressed the conference theme: “Sponsorship—Help to Self-Help.” In 1975, she said, “I was in a mental institution, fearful that I might not get out. A.A. found me there. Two members took me to my first A.A. meeting; they sponsored me, and one of them still does.

“Recovery was very painful for me, an experience I would not like to go through again. Because of my Higher Power and being sponsored through the Steps and Traditions, I made it, one day at a time. With the help of my sponsors, I became active in service at the group, area and intergroup levels. Over time I came to realize that sponsorship into service is of vital importance. I cannot survive without A.A. You cannot survive without A.A. Yet you and I *are* A.A. How well it functions depends on how well we abide by our principles and Traditions, on how much we give of ourselves.”

Speaking at the same meeting, George D., general manager of the General Service Office in New York, said that sponsorship takes many forms—from the basic Twelfth-Step call on an alcoholic who is still drinking to temporary sponsorship of an alcoholic just released from a hospital or prison and long-term sponsor-spon-

see relationships. “Some A.A.s feel they were sponsored by their group or through G.S.O.’s ‘Loner Sponsor’ correspondence program,” he noted. “And A.A. in many countries engages in a sort of sponsorship: Mexico has sponsored two groups in Cuba; Japan is working with A.A.s in Korea; and Finland, among others, has worked with A.A.s in Russia and Estonia.”

No matter what the final outcome appears to be, George suggested, by committing to sponsorship we invariably help ourselves. Giving an example, he said that “nearly 60 years ago, following Bill W.’s spiritual experience in New York City’s Towns Hospital, he began working tirelessly with ‘wet’ alcoholics, to utterly no avail. No one got sober. After several months, a depressed Bill talked to his wife, Lois, about giving up. She then asked him the question that saved my life, your lives and those of millions of others: ‘But, Bill, there is one person who is still sober, isn’t there?’”



From
the
Mailbag

The envelope, addressed to “Anonymous (AA)” was posted from a small town in Pennsylvania. It contained a photograph of an open-faced, pretty little girl, about 11, with hair below her shoulders, enclosed in a sheet of paper that said, simply, “Thanks for helping my dad. H.L.M.”

The General Service Office has received other letters of gratitude recently, including one from Christian H., a general service representative of the Open Arms Group in Karlsruhe, West Germany. “Thank you,” he writes, “for sending us not only information about the 1995 International Convention in San Diego, but also the Thai translations of the pamphlet ‘This Is A.A.’ and the Big

Book. We really did not expect that there really exists a Big Book in Thai, and expected, even less, to receive our copy by mail only five days after sending our fax with its little postscript asking about Thai literature. You have made someone here very happy, and we thank you for your service work!"

And writing from Melbourne, Australia, Fred S. sends "appreciation for my copies of *Box 4-5-9*." He says he looks forward to "going to the U.S.A. for A.A.'s big 60th Anniversary next summer," and adds, "Thank you for being there when I needed you." Fred enclosed a photo of himself, seated comfortably and reading what appears to be A.A. literature. In a postscript he notes that he was "born in Copenhagen on June 10, 1937 and *reborn* in Melbourne on June 18, 1977."

Arizona A.A.s Develop Positive Approach to Court Referrals

Dodging none of the thorns of controversy that for years have complicated efforts to carry the message to court referrals, the Arizona Area's committee on Cooperation With the Professional Community has developed an A.A. orientation presentation keyed specifically to parole and probation officers, along with detailed guidelines on group, individual and C.P.C. participation, and, last but not least, a letter of introduction to the alcoholic referral.

"What our program does," says C.P.C. committee chairperson Tom D., "is to set forth some of the main problems and explain what we can do to help alleviate them. Parole and probation offices are professional state- and county-run entities that lie well outside A.A.; we cannot demand that they conduct their affairs in accordance with our Traditions and principles. These entities will continue to mandate people to attend A.A. meetings because they respect the Fellowship and for almost 60 years have witnessed the results of its program of recovery. While we cannot stop this practice, we can, in the spirit of cooperation, do all we can to insure that help is available to all alcoholics who want what we have."

Addressing the need for A.A. group and individual participation, the C.P.C. committee says, "What kept most of us here was a sense of belonging.... We were like zebras who had tried all our lives to run with horses. When we went to our first A.A. meeting, we were greeted by a room full of, yes, zebras. We were introduced to

healing concepts—tolerance, understanding, love—no strings attached. We were welcomed because of what we were rather than who we were.

"Let us pass that on by welcoming in the same way those who have court papers.... They may need, but not want, A.A. today; that is part of their story, not ours. If and when the day comes that they want help, their initial experiences with us may well mean the difference between recovery and a continued journey into the gates of insanity or death. That is part of our story as well as theirs. So, to show we care, let us make sure the 'court card' is given the same attention as the walk-in. Shake a hand, share a story, offer a chair next to yours, give out a phone number, invite them to coffee."

In its presentation on C.P.C. participation, the Arizona committee gives clear and detailed information on how to conduct a Twelfth-Step workshop for court officials. A sampling: "Do not go alone. Two people should be in attendance, preferably a man and a woman. Alkies' brains have a unique ability to go completely blank at the wrong time." "Be well-dressed. Suits, ties and gowns are not necessary; a neat, clean-cut appearance is. You are not just Joe and Jane Cool. You are representatives of Alcoholics Anonymous. Let them see and hear a winner." "Try to relax. Remember, you are carrying the A.A. message of recovery from alcoholism; you are not running for governor."

The Arizonians also tell all you need to know about preparing information and literature packets, both for the probationers and the probation officers. And it stresses that "the purpose of these presentations is to cover certain aspects of A.A. that will enable the parole and probation departments to make effective and informed evaluations of each person coming into their system, and place them where they will get the best possible help."

In a separate presentation, the committee provides step-by-step guidance through an orientation program for court officials. "Open the meeting to questions and comments from the officers," it admonishes. "Do not try to bluff through a question if you have no answer. Ask the person's name and promise to get back with an answer."

Finally, the C.P.C. committee has drawn up a letter directed to the court referral. Headlined "So The Court Sent You to A.A., and You Hate the Idea. Don't Worry, It's Not All That Bad," the letter restates the A.A. Preamble and notes that "If a judge, court school or employer has sent you to A.A. meetings, it is because they believe there is evidence that you may have a drinking problem. We had nothing to do with their decision, but A.A. does provide information about recovery from alcoholism to interested parties."

After emphasizing to the court referral that "You are a welcome guest," the letter explains what to expect at

A.A. meetings, from varied practices among groups when it comes to signing court cards to anonymity and membership. On an end note it observes, "We are probably a lot happier to be here than you are. If you stick around long enough, you'll find out why."

The Arizona C.P.C. Committee would be pleased to share its experience, strength and guidelines, which are available in both English and Spanish. Just write to: C.P.C. Desk, General Service Office, Box 459, Grand Central Station, New York, NY 10163.

Correctional Facilities

Everything You Need To Know to Correspond With Alcoholics 'Inside'

Max M., a member of the Institutions Committee of the Ithaca, New York Intergroup, has been corresponding for some seven years with A.A.s behind prison walls. Here, in Question/Answer format, he shares his experience in being a part of this important and rewarding Twelfth-Step work:

Q.: How did you get started? How did you feel?

A.: I knew about the Correctional Correspondence Service (CCS) at the General Service Office, which maintains lists of inmates who have asked for correspondents. So I wrote and asked to join. When the letter from G.S.O. naming my first correspondent arrived, however, I became fearful. What could I say to him? How long would it take? I'd always had a dislike of writing, although I certainly enjoyed getting personal mail. At first it was a struggle to write one letter; now, after practice and discipline, I can do it in about an hour. Often, mulling over what I want to say during my meditation times helps the words to roll out when I sit down to write.

Q.: Can inmates relate to you?

A.: I believe so. I've never served time, and I don't know the difference between a felony and a misdemeanor, so I don't ask what they're doing time for—nor do they usually tell me. Most say they are inside as a direct conse-

quence of drinking, and that is a good enough common basis for me.

Q.: Do you and your correspondents honor each other's anonymity?

A.: Yes. First of all, I don't correspond with inmates in my own state's correctional system. G.S.O. does not send me names of people nearby; my correspondence to date has been with people from 17 states, everywhere but in the Northeast. Also, I don't use my last name or home address. Rather, I use my home group's P.O. Box. As for correspondents, I know little about them other than their names and ID numbers.

Q.: Do prison officials open and read your letters?

A.: They do in some states, so I try not to say anything incriminating. The letters from the inmates are not opened; but many states require the envelope to carry a stamped advisory that it comes from an inmate.

Q.: What do your correspondents talk about mainly?

A.: Many inmates are articulate writers. I have received letters filled with humor and also with much misery. Some of the men just want to share what their lives are about; some want help in getting to A.A. when they're released. Others desperately seek spiritual guidance. And many want what I have, but not the A.A. stuff, so I tell them honestly why I'm writing and what I have to offer them—my experience, strength and hope for recovery through A.A.'s Twelve Steps. Some may discontinue writing, but that doesn't mean they're not serious. They simply may be sidetracked by events happening inside the prison. Once the A.A. seed is planted, I don't give up hope.

Q.: What are your own letters like?

A.: First, I try to answer any of my correspondent's questions. And I try to relate some incident involving my personal recovery and growth in the interval since my last letter. I usually talk about some Twelfth-Step work I've done, and I usually close with some questions in return. My letters generally consist of one typed page, leaving room for just three additional pages of material from my files if the letter is to weigh an ounce. I do not send extra material the first time around, and after I do, I always ask if it has been found useful. What I send—excerpts from newsletters, copies of Grapevine articles, cartoons, to name some—tends to be well-received, since mail is eagerly welcomed. However, I never send money, food or other items that inmates sometimes ask for. Carrying the message and nothing else has been my guideline.

Twelve Tips on Keeping Your Holiday Season Sober and Joyous

Holiday parties without liquid spirits may still seem a dreary prospect to new A.A.s. But many of us have enjoyed the happiest holidays of our lives sober—an idea we would never have dreamed of, wanted, or believed possible when drinking. Here are some tips for having an all-round ball without a drop of alcohol.



1 *Line up extra A.A. activities for the holiday season.* Arrange to take newcomers to meetings, answer the phones at a clubhouse or central office, speak, help with dishes, or visit the alcoholic ward at a hospital.



2 *Be host to A.A. friends, especially newcomers.* If you don't have a place where you can throw a formal party, take one person to a diner and spring for the coffee.



3 *Keep your A.A. telephone list with you all the time.* If a drinking urge or panic comes—postpone everything else until you've called an A.A.



4 *Find out about the special holiday*

parties, meetings, or other celebrations given by groups in your area, and go. If you're timid, take someone newer than you are.



5 *Skip any drinking occasion you are nervous about.* Remember how clever you were at excuses when drinking? Now put the talent to good use. No office party is as important as saving your life.



6 *If you have to go to a drinking party and can't take an A.A. with you, keep some candy handy.*



7 *Don't think you have to stay late.* Plan in advance an "important date" you have to keep.



8 *Go to church. Any church.*



9 *Don't sit around brooding.* Catch up on those books, museums, walks, and letters.



10 *Don't start now getting worked up about all those holiday temptattons.* Remember—"one day at a time."



11 *Enjoy the true beauty of holiday love and joy.* Maybe you cannot give material gifts—but this year, you can give love.



12 *"Having had a . . ."* No need to spell out the Twelfth Step here, since you already know it.

Flip up this end of page — for events on reverse side.



BULLETIN BOARD

Items and Ideas on Area Gatherings for A.A.—Via G.S.O.

HOLIDAY ISSUE 1994

Calendar of Events

Events listed here are presented solely as a service to readers, not as an endorsement by the General Service Office. For any additional information, please use the addresses provided.

December

02-03—*Jacksonville, Florida.* Angels are Happening. Write: Ch., Box 1091, Fernandina Beach, FL 32035

09-10—*Tampa, Florida.* Angels are Happening. Write: Ch., Box 1091, Fernandina Beach, FL 32035

09-10—*Baton Rouge, Louisiana.* 50 Golden Years in Baton Rouge. Write: Ch., 4756 Florida Blvd. #109, Baton Rouge, LA 70806

10-11—*Neosho, Missouri.* Annual Winter Holiday. Write: Ch., 1409 Hillcrest, Neosho, MO 64850

30-Jan 01—*Chicago, Illinois.* Fourth Annual Blazing Trails Mega Alkathon. Write: Ch., 2018 W. Giddings St., Chicago, IL 60625

30-Jan 01—*Ocean Shores, Washington.* New Years Jamboree. Write: Ch., Box 995, Ocean Shores, WA 98569

January 1995

06-07—*South Padre Island, Texas.* Lower Rio Grande Valley Jamboree. Write: Ch., Box 5453, Brownsville, TX 78520

20-22—*Jamestown, North Dakota.* 14th Annual Roundup. Write: Ch., Box 1655, Jamestown, ND 58402-1655

20-22—*Port Naches, Texas.* 33rd Annual SETA Conv. Write: Tr., Box 122, Port Naches, TX 77651

26-29—*Fort Walton Beach, Florida.* Emerald Coast Jamboree. Write: Ch., Box 875 Fort Walton Beach, FL 32549-0875

27-29—*Nanaimo, British Columbia, Canada.* 27th Annual Rally. Write: Ch., Site 01, Comp. 52. RR-4, Nanaimo, BC V9R 5X9

February

03-05—*Burbank, California.* 20th Annual SFV Conv. Write: Ch., Box 7727, Northridge, CA 91327-7727

Closed Meeting Topics From the Grapevine

For more detailed suggestions, see the pages noted:

December (page 35): Helping others; Anonymity

January (page 26): A Family Affair

03-05—*Redding, California.* Shasta WinterFest. Write: Ch., NCCC, Box 491707, Redding, CA 96049

Planning a Future Event?

Please send your information on February, March, April events, two days or more, in time to reach G.S.O. by *December 10*, the calendar deadline for the February-March issue of *Box 4-5-9*.

For your convenience and ours — please type or print the information to be listed on the Bulletin Board page, and mail to us:

Date of event: from _____ to _____, 19 _____

Name of event: _____

Place (city, state or prov.): _____

For information, write: (exact mailing address) _____

Contact phone # (for office use only): _____

Cut along dotted line, and post this page on your group's bulletin board

