

From Modest Roots, A Thriving Conference

The fellowship was small, and it was chronically broke. But it still dared to dream greater dreams.

The Debtors Anonymous World Service Conference celebrates its 20th anniversary this year. In mid-August, 100 or more delegates are expected to gather in Sturbridge, Mass. for DA's 21st annual business meeting, a meeting many take for granted today as part of the service landscape, but one that exists only because of extraordinary vision and commitment on the part of a handful of early members.

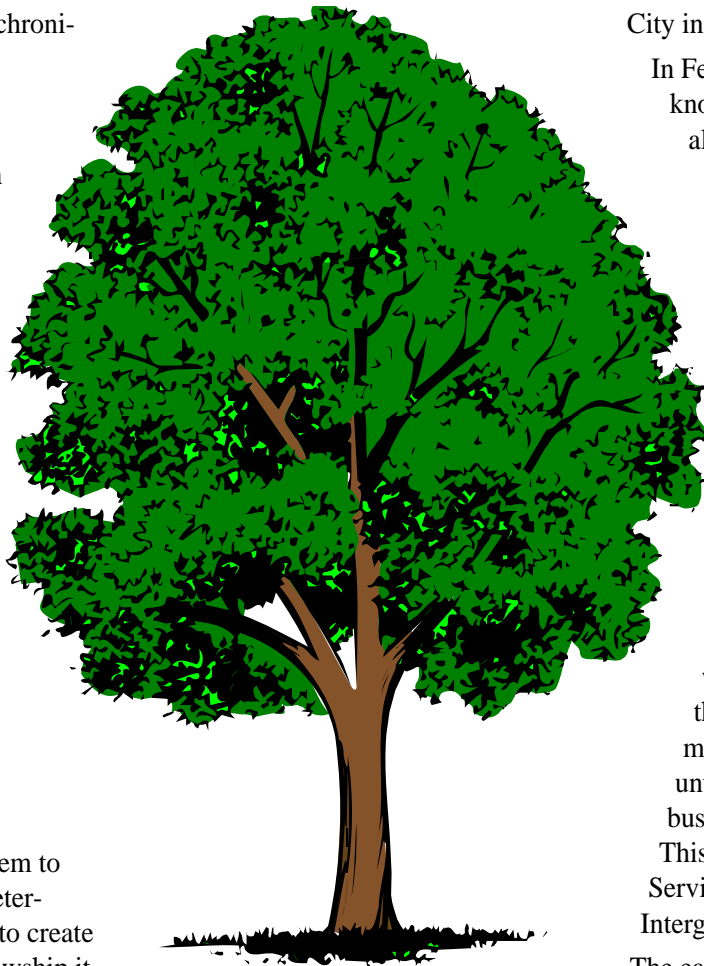
Listen to George D., the first of DA's Class B (non-debting) trustees, a man who was intimately involved for many years with the General Service structure of Alcoholics Anonymous, and who later gave years of his time and experience to the fledgling fellowship of DA.

Writing some years later, in 1992, he says, "I witnessed a few things that seem to me truly remarkable. There was the determination and daring of the DA Board to create links with the DA groups and the fellowship it served. This was particularly true with respect to initiating a General Service Conference (now called the World Service Conference), and the Board's willingness and desire to seek guidance from the DA groups through the Conference.

"AA did not establish a General Service Conference until there were over 100,000 members and groups in every US state and Canadian province. I had grave reservations as to whether a Conference would work for DA so early on, but it has."

George D's recollections of the early years of the Conference are echoed by other early members and trusted servants of DA, some of whose stories appear inside this issue. They paint the picture of a tiny, young, inexperienced fellowship that dared to follow in the footsteps of its much larger predecessor, AA, long before anyone thought it could be accomplished.

The roots of the first WSC began sprouting about five years before it actually convened at St. Vincent's Hospital in New York



City in September of 1987.

In February 1982, there were only five known DA groups in the entire world, all of them in New York City. (Groups had been started earlier in Los Angeles and Boston, but were not yet meeting reliably). Until then, the business meeting of the St. Ignatius Prosperity Group, which met on Tuesday nights in Manhattan, had taken de facto responsibility for the overall service structure of DA, such as it was.

Anni W., a former trustee and DA's first unofficial historian, wrote in 1985 of this arrangement, "The program's business needs were growing. Five members of the Tuesday night group's business meeting began to meet separately to untangle general DA business from the business of the Tuesday night group. This led to the formation of the General Service Board in 1982 and the New York Intergroup in 1983."

The early leaders of DA, many of whom had extensive experience in the service structure of Alcoholics Anonymous, asked each of the five New York City groups to elect one trustee to a new service entity known as the "Pro-Tem Board of Trustees of Debtors Anonymous."

The five "pro-tem" trustees included John Henderson, founder of the DA program, Donald A., who served as the first chair, Harriette T., Nancy D., and Frank B.

Meeting throughout 1982, they used their AA experience to work slowly and (and often contentiously) toward the beginnings of a service structure for the young fellowship. By August 1982, they had arrived at a plan to convene an "annual meeting" of

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1989: Conference Confusion In Washington DC

My first experience at a World Conference (the 3rd, held in 1989 in a suburb of Washington, DC) was when I was only two months solvent. I should have known that things would not go smoothly when the Trustees had tried to insist that the Conference be held on a major Jewish holiday. The local organizers balked and there was a serious possibility that the Conference would not happen at all. It is now ironic that there are now a number of DA events that are regularly held on Sunday in part so that observant Jews can more easily attend – I was the keynote speaker at one just two months ago. Perhaps we have all grown in sensitivity.

The Conference itself started out well enough. People were sharing about their home meetings, deciding which committees to join, and enjoying fellowship together. A highlight was an address by John Henderson, founder of DA. He seemed someone who was totally connected to his Higher Power, which should have been no surprise since he was about 40 years sober in AA at that time.

But the content of his address seemed a bit strange; he talked more about psychology than spiritual recovery. If I recall correctly, he attributed his spending to the fact that he was an “intuitive” Jungian archetype and therefore incapable of managing money. That didn’t seem to have anything to do with recovery; the DA literature said that knowing the reasons we got into debt was not helpful to getting out of it. I hung out with him for much of the afternoon after he left the main assembly.



For some reason I didn’t understand then it seemed like the people running the Conference – in fact, the Trustees themselves – did not want him to have anything to do with the business of the Conference. But I appreciated the opportunity to meet DA’s founder and experience some of his recovery. I did not know it at the time but I would never meet him again before he died.

The plenary business meeting was when things really got out of hand. A few minor issues seemed to get handled without a lot of problems, and then a finance report was presented to the assembly. Things quickly became chaotic as everyone had their own ideas about the financial problems facing the organization, and the chair of the assembly (who was also the chair of the Board of Trustees) seemed way over her head in that she did not know how to either keep the discussion on target or avoid injecting her own personal arguments into the discussion. I have no idea how we finally managed to get through things; by the

time we were done I’m not sure anyone had any idea what we had discussed or had voted on.

We then went to discuss giving a “Conference-Approved” stamp to two pieces of DA literature. People who don’t know the history of DA are unaware that the early DA literature was not produced by the Conference literature process. In any case, someone thought that the Conference should vote its approval of the two existing pieces of literature. This was significant because the DA fellowship as a whole had never officially endorsed any literature.

But the assembly was running late and there wasn’t time to discuss the pros and cons of the literature presented. And if I recall correctly, a major change in DA position was buried in a revision to one of the pamphlets – removal of a paragraph that said that declaring bankruptcy had not proven helpful to people in DA.

This was quickly approved – it would not be inaccurate to say that it was rammed through -- with no debate among the delegates. I tried to point out that this violated normative parliamentary procedure. The chairwoman of the Board of Trustees, who was also chairing the Conference business meeting, replied that she was not following Robert’s Rules. I asked, innocently, what rules she was using? To this day I remember her reply: “My rules.” Such was the concern for the collective wisdom of DA that was shown by the early leaders. 🍷

Charlie H.
(Bronx, NY)

WAYS & MEANS

A Quarterly Newsletter For The
Fellowship Of Debtors Anonymous

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Ways & Means, our “meeting in print,” is a quarterly electronic newsletter for the fellowship of Debtors Anonymous. It is a forum for sharing the experience, strength, and hope of DA groups, members, and service entities. Articles are not intended to be statements of DA policy, nor does publication constitute endorsement by either

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20 Years On, Memories Of The First WSC

Strangely, one of my fondest memories of our first DA World Service Conference which took place on September 20, 1987 in New York City is a personal triumph that still brings a ready smile to my mind and heart. It also reminds me that it is often the seemingly smallest of actions that give birth to the largest of changes.

I cannot stress how defiant and scared I originally was when my step sponsor at my last PRG before the Conference suggested that I purchase a book or some magazines at the store in the airport. I was convinced that I would never be able to do this. Didn't I need to study the 15 concerns I was shepherding from the combined Northern California groups? And how could I possibly spend money on such luxuries as a book or magazines?

Ironically, I had hemorrhaged away hundreds of books as I had plunged into the later stages of compulsive debting where I believed that owning two suitcases of material possessions and moving every few weeks were the only solutions and possible cure. These small but significant purchases after such a long drought of poverty allowed me to see that I could rejoin the everyday world and sidestep my spiritual disease.

The Trustee from California and I spent our first night at the home of a warm and welcoming DA couple in the New York Borough of Queens. Little did I realize that my experiences at this Conference would not just be an opportunity to give service, but also a Ph D course in receiving. This was yet another example of that strange spiritual mathematics by which you always receive more than you give, in unexpected ways.

The next day, I was escorted to my very own, very prosperous apartment donated to the delegates by New York members of the fellowship. Fellowship Day, which was then a separate event from the Conference, was held on September 19 at the Mabel Dean Bacon Vocational High School at 127 East 22nd Street in Manhattan. Admission was five dollars. Interestingly, only the beginners meeting and the tools meeting were open meetings. All of the others were closed meetings, for DA members only.

The trustees of the DA General Service Board had made a last-minute decision to reduce the registration fee for the Conference from \$35 to \$25, to encourage attendance, although it was also announced that no group representative would be turned away for a lack of funds. The board also politely requested that we bring the registration fee in the form of cash or money order rather than personal checks.



The Conference itself was held on Sunday the 20th at St. Vincent's Hospital at 153 West 11th Street in Manhattan. A jubilant crowd heard introductory remarks by a variety of DA trusted servants, including founder John Henderson and members of the General Service Board and other committees, and was also treated to a presentation on DA history. There were then six committees of the WSC: Literature, Conference, Public Information, Fellowship Communications, Service, and Legal. Committee chairs were appointed on the Conference floor, and the committees got right down to business, meeting for three hours.

Of the 15 concerns I brought to New York as the delegate representing the combined Northern California DA groups, 9 directly involved literature, or more accurately, the lack of literature at that time. The most heated debates at that first Conference seemed to center on various literature issues.

In the 20 years since that first Conference, most of the recommendations I brought from Northern California have come to pass. We now have a variety of pamphlets, recordings, and a book of recovery stories (*A Currency of Hope*), as well as a quarterly newsletter filled with recovery stories (*Ways & Means*) and another quarterly service newsletter (*The DA Focus*).

Just a year later, we were able to have the second World Service Conference on the West Coast (in Los Angeles in 1988, followed by San Francisco in 1991). DA has also reaffirmed AA literature including the AA Big Book and Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions as core DA recovery literature, and we also today have an energetic public information effort that distributes literature and carries the message to libraries, schools, hospitals, and health professionals.

As I review the concerns my California groups had 20 years ago, I have mixed feelings. DA has had many wonderful accomplishments that have thrilled and sustained me, but I am frustrated that we have still not produced the DA counterparts to the AA Big Book and 12 & 12. The production of Conference-approved literature is the living evidence of the Promises of DA in action, especially the Promise which reads "We will value ourselves and our contributions; we will be enough."

As I look forward to our next 20 World Service Conferences, I hope our fellowship will unite on the necessity of moving forward financially, spiritually, and emotionally with the production of these DA books. 🍀

Anonymous
(San Francisco)

Overcoming Challenges At The Early WSC

It was the toughest job they ever loved. Three pioneers who help guide Debtors Anonymous through its early World Service Conferences have many different memories, but one emotion in common: they all feel they received much more than the service they gave.

Marjorie M. of Northern California, who chaired the DA General Service Board through the first several Conferences, says: "It was just one of the most incredible experiences of my life. I think of it so fondly, everything we went through and everything we accomplished."

Alan S. of New York, a trustee who helped the new fellowship produce and distribute some of its first literature, adds, "It was the greatest time of my life. We just had such a group of wonderful, dedicated people, all working together for the good of the fellowship."

And Mary M. of Chicago, part of the "second wave" of trustees who also chaired the GSB through several later Conferences, says, "I really feel this service was one of the great gifts of my lifetime. I grew so much--personally, spiritually, professionally, in every way."

The three served as members of the GSB at a time when DA's membership and financial resources were tiny compared to today. DA was just beginning to see itself as a national fellowship, rather than a collection of ragtag groups meeting in a handful of cities with virtually no literature or national support. All say that the challenges then facing DA seemed overwhelming, but that overcoming those challenges over a number of years with hard work and good will forged a sense of unity that made possible the fellowship we have today.

To be sure, the exhilaration they experienced was balanced by the growing pains DA had during those years, as well as a great deal of controversy and acrimony over key issues. At times, it appeared as though the fellowship might fracture or cease to exist altogether. All three feel deeply grateful that DA was able to navigate those shoals and grow

to become an international fellowship with more than 500 meetings in more than a dozen countries.

Marjorie M.

Marjorie M. was the first DA trustee from Northern California and was chair of the GSB at the time of the first World Service Conference in New York in 1987. She now lives in Denver. She doesn't have clear memories of the first Conference itself, but she does remember the aftermath in which the board sat down to evaluate DA's first experiment in a fellowshipwide group conscience: "It was very clear from the first Conference that DA had three overriding needs that needed to be addressed in those early years -- first, the need for communication within the fellowship; second, designing an architecture for the World Conference (a Conference charter); and third, getting literature not only written and printed, but to set up a distribution channel for literature to all the groups.

"The board and the Conference spent a great deal of time in procedural discussions of those three things over the first several years. We were also very concerned with finding out where groups actually existed. DA groups were springing up everywhere and we didn't have any communication with many of them, didn't know where they were."

Of all the issues, literature was probably the most contentious. The California fellowship felt separated from the DA heartland in New York by 3,000 miles of empty countryside, and did not believe it could survive and grow until DA began to produce its own literature.

"There was a lot of push and pull on this issue, a lot of fights about it. The people in Los Angeles were very upset about this. It got so bad Los Angeles threatened to break off from DA and form their own program unless we got some literature quickly."

It was the threat of a potential schism with California that led the GSB to locate the 2nd WSC in 1988 in Los An-

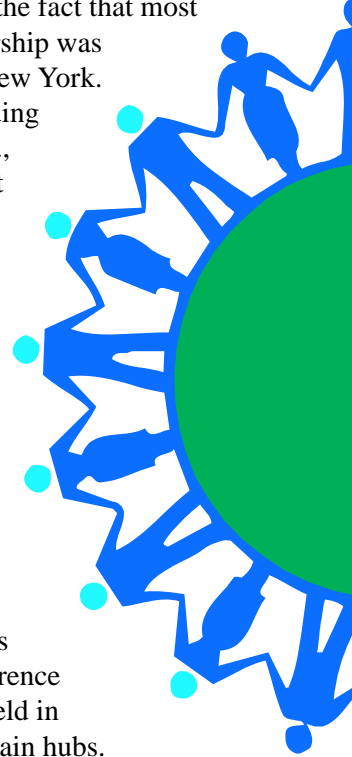
geles, despite the fact that most of the membership was then still in New York.

Indeed, according to Marjorie M., the board went to extraordinary lengths to include recovering debtors from all over the US, even in areas where DA was barely established: "Washington, DC [1989] was the first Conference that was not held in one of DA's main hubs.

We weren't sure how it would work to have the Conference in a place where DA had not been established very long, but it worked fine. Over the next several years we had Conferences in places where DA barely existed, in an effort to help us spread out across the country."

The next several Conferences also were held outside of New York and Los Angeles -- the 4th in Chicago in 1990, the 5th in San Francisco in 1991, the 6th in Boston in 1992, and the 7th in Dallas in 1993. The WSC did not return to New York until 1994.

Gradually, as literature began to be produced, internal communications improved, there was more of a feeling of a national fellowship and a unified recovery program. And all that work began to pay off. A California fellowship that had been something of a rival to DA, Money Anonymous, decided to merge with DA rather than continue on its own course. "I believe it was because we had the literature and the Conference that Money Anonymous decided to come in with us rather than continue off on their own," Marjorie says.



Contrasting the uncertain feeling of the first Conference in 1987 with that of

her last Conference (Boston, 1992), Marjorie adds,

“We had these very prosperous surroundings near Harvard University, and there was this very special spirit around that. It was very beautiful. It was kind of like DA had grown up and gone from grade school to junior high!”

“You could look out over this sea of faces and see so much enthusiasm for DA, so much recovery. There was this much bigger sense than ever before of a feeling of ownership in the fellowship.”

Alan S.

Alan S. was involved during several of the same early Conferences in the development of DA’s literature. He coordinated finances, contracts with printers, and the establishment of distribution channels.

“We spent years working very, very hard on creating literature for the fellowship,” Alan S. says. “DA at that time was very oriented around meetings--there was hardly any literature. People were asking why should they send money to the General Service Board, what they were getting out of it. We overcame that feeling. We must have put out 8 or 9 pieces of literature in just three years.

“Once the literature began coming out on a national scale, it really solidified the feeling throughout DA that we were a national organization. The literature

really put us on the map as a resource for the recovering debtor everywhere.”

Alan S. recalls a humorous incident involving the printing of one of DA’s first major literature orders. The printer had apparently misunderstood instructions as to the shading of colored ink on the pamphlets, and the pamphlets seemed to have come out different than intended, with a gradual transition of shading from dark to light for the colored ink used on them: “We thought the printing press was defective. We thought thousands of pamphlets were ruined. We didn’t know what we were going to do. And then the printer reminded us that, just like the ink, we in DA had gone from darkness to light, and it was just one of those God moments where we realized how perfect it was.”

Mary M.

Mary M. of Chicago was one of the second generation of DA trustees, serving on the GSB through six Conferences, from the 5th Conference in 1991 in San Francisco to the 11th in 1997 in Los Angeles. Her first Conference as a GSR was the 1990 WSC in Chicago.

She recalls how, as a member of the nascent Chicago fellowship, she came to do service on the national level: “At Chicago they had this question-and-answers session with the GSB and I was so hungry to hear all this recovery, right then and there I had this thing like an out-of-body experience in which I told myself ‘I think I’d like to do that someday.’”

After the Conference, the young Chicago intergroup wrote to the GSB, asking it to include a trustee from the Midwest on the board. Within five months, Mary M. was appointed to the GSB, the first Midwesterner to ever serve.

Of the six Conferences she attended as a trustee, several as chair of the board, she recalls: “Each year had a different flavor to it. We were growing year by year. In the early years there was a feeling that people from New York were running things too much. But we really did go

through a transition in being much more open and inclusive as time went on.

“There was also a growing sense of transparency that developed between the board and the fellowship. In the early Conferences there was sometimes a feeling of ‘us against them’, but as time went on a real sense of trust between the board and the fellowship began to develop.”

Mary M., who now lives in Buffalo, NY, identifies the 9th Conference, held in 1995 in Ann Arbor, Michigan, as the biggest turning point during her tenure. DA was experiencing its worst financial crisis ever at that time, and the GSB was afraid to tell the fellowship how bad the situation was: “We had no money. The board felt under siege. Finally, we shared everything. We shared our real financial condition with the fellowship and that was the real beginning of a deep sense of trust. Nobody was mad at the board; we were all united on finding solutions.”

There was also a long battle that went on for several years over the creation and publication of DA’s first book, *A Currency Of Hope*, she says, at a time when no money seemed available for it, but the fellowship ultimately came together to get the book printed.

The highlight of her years at the WSC came at the 10th Conference, held in Mundelein, Ill., just outside Chicago, in 1996: “At the end of the Conference, I asked everybody to form one big circle. We all held hands, and we all felt so grateful for our unity and what we had as a fellowship. It was so beautiful. We all came together as one.”

(Marjorie, Alan, and Mary also stressed the contributions of many other trustees and other trusted servants who contributed greatly to the WSC in DA’s early years. They include, but are not limited to, John Henderson, the founder of DA, Leila B., Donald A., Bill C., John S., John C., Anni W., Joan M., Diana D., Alex K., Peter T., Tom S., Denise H., Richard C., Chris and Fred F., and Colin S.)



Year By Year, DA's

Following are some of the highlights from the first 20 years of the DA World Service Conference, which has been held since 1987. The year 2007 marks its 20th anniversary.

1. New York, September 1987:

DA's first-ever World Service Conference convenes on Sunday, September 20, for one day only at St. Vincent's Hospital in Manhattan. A Fellowship Day is held the day before as a separate event. There are just six committees of the WSC, which meet for three hours each: Literature, Service, Legal, Fellowship Communications, Conference, and Public Information. Passionate discussions over the need for, and lack of, Conference-approved literature occupy much of the Conference.

2. Los Angeles, September/October 1988:

The strong desire of West Coast members for a Conference in California is fulfilled. The Conference approves plans to develop a comprehensive world meeting directory. The Meetings and Spending Plan pamphlets are approved.

3. Washington, DC, September 1989:

DA's Interim Conference Charter is approved after years of debate. The chair of the General Service Board declares that DA has "truly come of age as a fellowship".

4. Chicago, September 1990:

A spirited debate divides the Conference over the renaming of the "Pressure Groups & Pressure Meetings" pamphlet. Many members feel a proposed change to "Pressure Relief Groups and Pressure Relief Meetings" would wreak havoc with DA tradition and represent a watering down of the concept. The change is ultimately approved. Work continues on a permanent Conference Charter, which will spark controversy for several years before it is finally adopted.

5. San Francisco, September 1991:

After years of bitter controversy as to whether Service should be considered a Tool of Recovery, the Conference votes to add Service as DA's 12th Tool. A proposal to abolish Fellowship Day as part of the annual Conference is defeated. The Conference expands by one day to a Friday through Sunday schedule. The Recordkeeping pamphlet is approved for sale.

6. Boston, October 1992:

The permanent Conference Charter, still being debated after more than two years, is voted down. The Conference approves reimbursement for telephone conference calls, allowing many of the Conference committees to work throughout the year between Conferences.

7. Dallas, October 1993:

A proposal to move the time of the annual Conference from the fall of the year to June is soundly defeated. The WSC votes to extend the terms of group General Service Representatives from two to three years. A motion to grant full voting privileges



to Intergroup Service Representatives as Conference delegates is approved, but is ruled out of order because it is not in keeping with the interim Conference Charter.

8. New York, September 1994:

A permanent Conference Charter is approved after years of debate on a vote of 75 to 4. The Conference votes to include Intergroup Service Representatives as full voting members. The ISRs join GSRs and Trustees as Conference delegates.

9. Ann Arbor, MI, September 1995:

Controversy erupts over the General Service Board's go-slow approach to DA's proposed recovery book, known then as the DA "Big Book". The board had numerous financial and legal concerns about the book, but many delegates felt the project had been delayed long enough, and at one point, threaten to raise money on their own to publish the book. For the first time, new trustees elected by the General Service Board are also ratified by the WSC. Concerned that a variety of separate fundraising efforts by different committees might threaten DA's ability to function, the Conference votes to require that all funds raised in the name of DA be administered solely through the GSB. DA faces its worst financial crisis in many years. The GSB issues an emergency fellowshipwide appeal for contributions.

10. Chicago (Mundelein, IL), November 1996:

DA's still-nameless recovery book is approved in concept by the Conference, with the stipulation that the General Service Board have final authority for approval of the text after professional editing. The Conference discontinues one long-running committee, the Service Committee, and creates a new one, the General Service Office Operations Committee (in later years renamed Internal Operations). The new Operations Committee issues a vision of DA's future that includes at least three DA General Service Offices--one each in the East, Midwest, and West.

World Conference In Action

11. Los Angeles, September 1997:

The Conference votes for the first time to reimburse DA's trustees for their expenses in attending the WSC. Previously, only 25 percent of their expenses were paid for by the fellowship, and trustees had to pay the remainder out of their own pockets. Dealing with a major crisis in which DA's meeting database had been lost, it was voted to require all DA groups to re-register as groups within a year. The length of future World Service Conferences is extended from three to four days.

12. Seattle, September 1998:

After considerable controversy over DA's longstanding opposition to bankruptcy, the Conference by a vote of 56 to 13 declares bankruptcy an outside issue on which the fellowship has no opinion. The Conference votes to recommend "A Currency Of Hope" as the name for the proposed new recovery book. The General Service Board, which has the final decision, later goes along with the name. The Business Owners Debtors Anonymous (BODA) Caucus is established at the WSC.

13. Boston (Cape Cod, MA), October 1999:

Delegates get to see copies of the recently published recovery book A Currency Of Hope, which had been the main item of business at so many previous Conferences.

14. Albuquerque, September 2000:

The Conference votes in favor of having DA create and market "recovery items" such as chips, medallions, and timers, but the General Service Board later rejects it because of tradition problems. The 12 Concepts For DA World Service are adopted for the first time.

15. Baltimore (Linthicum Heights, MD), August 2001:

The 12 Promises of Debtors Anonymous are adopted by vote of the Conference. The BODA Caucus sifts through 18 suggested names to replace Business Owners Debtors Anonymous, on which DA had lost its servicemark. After numerous ballots, it chooses Business Debtors Anonymous as the new name, and the choice is ratified by the Conference. The concept of a Triennial Fellowship Convention, which has been discussed for years, is endorsed by the Conference. The quarterly Ways & Means newsletter, in danger of being shut down, gets a one-year reprieve. Three of DA's oldest surviving members, all with more than 20 years of continuous solvency, speak at Fellowship Day.

16. New York, August 2002:

The Underearning pamphlet is approved for distribution. Faced

with a location crisis in which the Pittsburgh fellowship is unable to carry through with hosting the 2003 Conference, Minneapolis DA volunteers to organize the next Conference in just one year's time. A controversial proposal to make changes in the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions much easier is overwhelmingly rejected.

17. Minneapolis, August 2003:

The General Service Board's Long-Range Planning Committee, which evolved out of the former Prosperity Committee, unveils a long-range vision for the fellowship aimed at attracting new members, retaining longer-term members, and developing abundant resources to carry the DA message. The Conference votes to change the last sentence of the DA Preamble to: "Our primary purpose is to stop debting one day at a time, and to help other compulsive debtors to stop incurring unsecured debt" The change is aimed at diffusing controversy over language definitions in different parts of the country.

18. Sacramento, CA, August 2004:

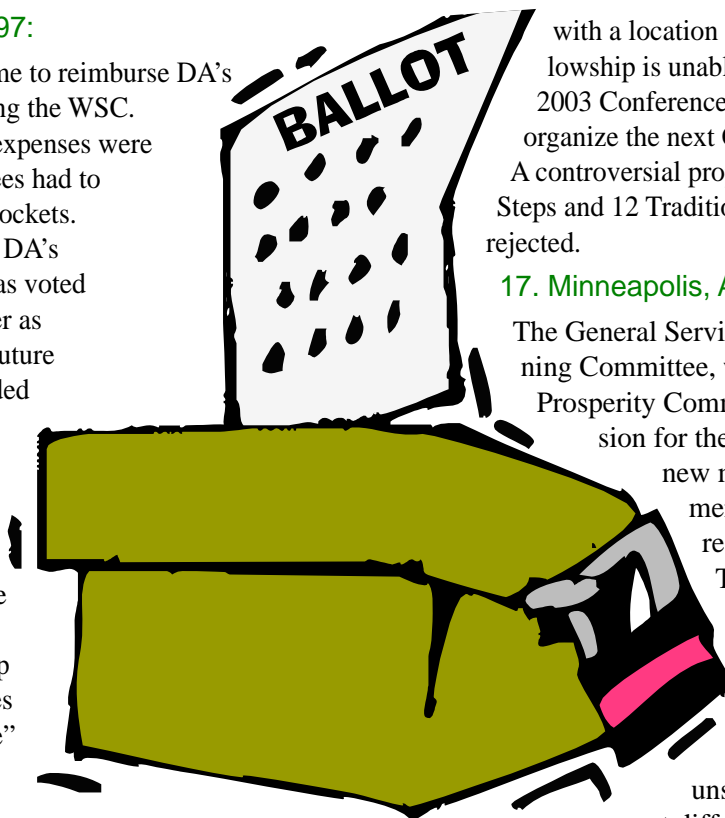
A proposed DA Responsibility statement, modeled closely on one used in Alcoholics Anonymous, is defeated, largely because it is too similar to AA's. Another attempt to make it easier to make major changes in DA's 12 Steps and 12 Traditions is again defeated overwhelmingly. The Compulsive Spending pamphlet is approved for distribution. A motion stating that the term of service for delegates serving on committees or caucuses of the WSC continues throughout the year until the next Conference is approved.

19. Philadelphia (Mount Laurel, NJ), August 2005:

A revised list of the 12 DA Tools is approved. A proposal to create a Visions Caucus at the WSC is defeated. The General Service Board emphasizes the spiritual principle of rotation, and urges that it be practiced throughout the DA service structure.

20. San Diego, August 2006:

In a statement that electrifies the Conference, the General Service Board urges that DA members unite in a renewed commitment to DA's singleness of purpose. The Conference votes to mandate the preparation of a strategic five-year plan for the DA fellowship within a two-year time period. A commission to study the feasibility of trustee selection by regions is created by vote of the Conference. A Diversity caucus to address the concerns of those who consider themselves minorities in DA is created, and will meet for the first time at the 2007 Conference.



Delegates Share Conference Memories

Concepts and Spirituality

I remember my first World Service Conference (the 16th WSC in 2002 at Columbia University in New York City), and thinking “these guys don’t know the 12 Concepts. I’ve got to do something about that!” I remember listening to my first DA qualification, and it was from a successful author who spoke about bells and whistles. I knew people in DA who were poor because they were artists and such, but worked a solid program and kept a spiritual outlook.

I remember my second Conference (Minneapolis, 2003), and giving a talk on the Concepts, which was very well received, and working on principles before personalities, looking forward to winding down with Jimmy W., who told great jokes, and laughing until my sides hurt. I remember ordering AA service manuals and conducting an inventory for the General Service Board. I remember praying that the board and its trustees would not be ruled by fear so we could do what was right for the fellowship, and having talks with my sponsor, a past chair of the AA General Service Board, and asking him how we could provide sponsorship for non DA’s like me when they serve as Class B trustees.

I remember rotation (a nasty word in DA!) and asking for a moratorium on the issue of changing the 12 Steps. DA’s Higher Power is still smiling on you and all of you are doing the spiritual business of the fellowship. The spiritual part of the program means an unselfcentered approach to everything, not insisting on having our own way but accepting what is best for DA as a whole. The DA way is to give each individual his or her dignity and freedom, each group its dignity and freedom, and through that sharing to help DA grow stronger in all parts of the world, always keeping our focus on our primary purpose.

Cookie S.
(New York City)

Proud To Be There

I attended my first World Service Conference the first year I got into Debtors Anonymous about 16 years ago. DA was my very first recovery program. Even though I have been a member of several other 12-Step programs since then, compulsive spending is my core addiction. I live in Northern California, and the Conference that year (the 5th WSC in 1991) happened to be in San Francisco, one hour away. Not only that, but my home group was in charge of the Conference and the chairperson was someone who did PRGs for me! (I was not humble about this at all.) Conferences to me are always like a shot in the arm, a large dose of an “upper” with no bad side effects. I am always walking on a cloud for days after a Conference, just high on life!

Jan D.
(N. California)

Barely Affordable

I laugh today when I think how uncomfortable I was with prosperity at my first World Service Conference, the 15th WSC held in

Baltimore in August 2001. I was the first person from my state ever to attend the Conference, and my group was so small it could only afford to pay about 15 percent of my expenses. I had an old junk car that I couldn’t trust to make the 1,000-mile round trip journey, so I had to ride a Greyhound bus all night, arriving in a bad section of Baltimore at 6 in the morning, and I didn’t think I could afford to stay in the dorms at the Maritime Institute. I had planned to camp in a tent at a nearby state park and cook my own meals, although I am glad I ultimately decided to spend the money to stay on campus with everyone else.

At later Conferences I was able to get adequate funding and accept my right to stay in a nice place and eat good food. Each year (this Conference will be my sixth) I am more comfortable with spending the money to travel decently and well. Although I’ve had many interesting and fulfilling experiences at the WSC over the years, my favorite is still from Baltimore, when as part of the Convocation I voted to adopt the brand-new 12 Promises of Debtors Anonymous. DA had initially tried to copy the 12 Promises of Alcoholics Anonymous, but was denied permission by AA World Services on the grounds that DA would eventually develop its own set of new and better promises uniquely suited to our fellowship. That led to the writing of our own Promises, which are today read at DA meetings all over the world

I will never forget the thrill of bringing those bright, shiny new Promises home to the members of my home group, and reading them at our meeting for the first time. Even today, many years later, some people in my group still talk about “the day you brought the 12 Promises back home to us.”

Anonymous

The Smell Test

I can’t remember which Conference it was, but it was one of the very early ones, maybe the 2nd or 3rd. People were just beginning to be aware of environmental allergies at that time, and I think it was mainly an East Coast and West Coast thing. At one point in a tense moment in a hot, crowded room, a woman from Boston got up and said to the assembled Convocation, “I move that all the men stop wearing (a particular brand of) deodorant!” She meant it seriously, but it got a big laugh and provided some humorous relief among the tension.

Majorie M.
(San Francisco)

Conference Items Wanted

The Archives Committee of the General Service Board is seeking any and all items related to DA’s 20 World Service Conferences, and the five annual meetings that preceded them. The items include, but are not limited to Convocation minutes, committee minutes, registration packets, attendance lists, Host Committee materials, souvenirs, speaker and workshop tapes, tee-shirts, and personal recollections anyone would like to write. Please send donations to the DA General Service Office, PO Box 920888, Needham, Mass. 02492, and mark “Attention: Archives”.



Modest Roots . . . (page 1)

DA, which they scheduled for September of that year.

The first “annual meeting” was held on September 25, 1982, in the parish hall of the Church of the Good Shepherd at 236 East 31st Street in Manhattan. Part of the proposed permanent DA General Service Board was elected at that meeting--five members, each representing one of the five New York City groups.

In the interim, groups had become established in Los Angeles, Boston, and Washington DC, but because of a lack of funds, no one was able to travel to New York for the annual meeting. The pro-tem trustees asked DA members in each of those cities to meet and elect one regional GSB trustee for each city.

Because so few DA members had attained long-time recovery at that time, the requirements to become a trustee were almost laughably lax--only one year of continuous solvency and the holding on one other service office in the previous year. Voting for trustees at the annual meeting was open to any DA member who had one month of continuous solvency and had actively been attending meetings for one month.

Again, George D. comments on the early years of the General Service Board elected at that first annual meeting: “I most remember the courage of John H., Donald A., Leila B., John S., Jim C., John C., and others to establish a national board in such a young and tiny fellowship. Their faith and vision strike me as incredible.

“In those years there was not always a great deal of recovery, at least in terms of length, on the Board. There was a lot of turnover, personality conflicts, and emotionalism. Despite these problems, the Board never lost its vision of building a DA service structure and of DA unity. Frequently, the Board took two steps forward, one backward, but it always kept the faith.”

This faith sustained the GSB during the



five years leading up to its decision to launch the World Service Conference. As it groped, year by year, toward the creation of a national service structure, as it began to create literature, a General Service Office, all the nascent services of a truly national fellowship, it experimented with the format of the annual meeting, which continued to be held each September in New York.

In its early years, the annual meeting was almost exclusively a New York City affair. But as DA communities began to solidify in the three other major urban centers--Boston, Los Angeles, and Washington DC/Baltimore, and as meetings began to spring up in other early centers such as San Francisco and Chicago, members in those cities began to gravitate to New York for the annual meeting.

By 1986, the annual meeting was attracting 30 representatives of DA groups, including a few from as far away as California and Texas.

In her early written history of DA, former Trustee Anni W. described the GSB's dilemma in 1986: “Currently final decisions on issues which affect the fellowship as a whole are made by the General Service Board based on what they think we all want, but there is no organized structure for the membership at large to contribute to these decisions. Our Board is working on setting up such a structure.”

Under the guidance of such early Trustees as John C., Leila B., and Meryl M., the shape of the first World Service Conference was hammered out, and launched on September 20, 1987 at St. Vincent's Hospital in New York. The one-day Conference followed the pattern of the five previous annual meetings in meeting on Sunday, while having a Fellowship Day as a separate event on the day before.

The creation of the Conference did not, of course, result immediately in the design and implementation of a full-blown national service structure. Rather, it began a process that took several years of intense, and sometimes angry, discussion and debate that finally resulted in the adoption of an Interim Conference Charter at the 3rd WSC in Washington DC in 1989, and the eventual adoption of a permanent Conference Charter at the 8th WSC in New York City in 1994. It was not until then that the national service structure used in Debtors Anonymous today was firmly and permanently established.

Just as it took many years for the Conference to assume the shape it has today, so did it take years for a feeling of prosperity to develop among the recovering compulsive debtors in attendance. At the 1987 New York Conference, hotels and prosperous meeting spaces were unheard of. GSRs from around the country slept in the apartments of obliging New York DA members, and were barely able to afford a stay of one day. It was very gradually that the fellowship was able to increase the length of the Conference in one-day increments to the five-day, Wednesday through Sunday, schedule used today.

By the 6th Conference, held in much more prosperous surroundings at Harvard University near Boston in 1992, DA's founder John H. was able to exult in the beautiful facilities rented by DA for that Conference, and proclaim, “Just look at how far we've come, from St. Vincent's Hospital to Harvard. We've moved from the infirmary to the university!”

