

Alternate Delegates March 2014 Report: I attended the 2014 Northeast Regional Alcoholics Anonymous Service Assembly in Warwick Rhode Island, February 21-23. Over 800 A.A. members attended the assembly.

At the assembly, I was privileged to represent the area on a panel devoted to the Grapevine magazine. NERAASA assigns you a topic and asks that you provide a written copy in advance of your presentation along with the source material cited. The presentation is at the end of this report.

In addition, I participated in the two roundtables held for the panel 63 and panel 64 Delegates and Alternate Delegates. The primary focus of the roundtables was on the upcoming general service conference – what to expect and your responsibilities at the conference. The Northeast Regional Trustee hosted a luncheon for current and past delegates and current alternate delegates. Also, I attended other service panels and the Saturday night banquet and speaker meeting. This was the 8th NERAASA that I have attended. As always at events like this there is much to be informally learned in conversations with trusted servants from the region. It was nice to see so many familiar faces and to reconnect with some friends.

At the assembly I participated in the Report and Charter, and the Literature roundtable discussions. I will be attending with the Delegate pre-conference meetings with A.A. members in Ithaca and Rochester. Providing the delegate with an informed area conscience is all of our responsibility, one of which I take very seriously. In service – Joe S, CNY Area 47, Panel 63
Alternate Delegate

Grapevine Magazine: Self Supporting or Outreach to the Community?
Is it all about the money or are we providing a service?
NERAASA, Warwick, RI
February 22, 2014

By Joseph S, Panel 63, Alt-Delegate, Area 47 Central New York

I am an alcoholic and my name is Joe S. I am currently serving as Panel 63, Alt-Delegate, Area 47 Central New York. The Dewey-Avis group in Rochester, NY is my home group.

Good morning. Thank you to my fellow presenters. And thank you to my service sponsor.

The short answer: No it's not all about the money. And yes, we are providing a service.

If it ever was all about the money the magazine would have ceased publication long ago. The conscience of the fellowship is that the Grapevine magazine be published. It is self described as a "meeting in print." And is not intended to be a Big Book, etc., it attempts to reflect the current fellowship and provide a forum for issues pertinent to recovery in A.A. In this way the Grapevine helps to carry out our 12th Step and our 5th Tradition. I suggest you read the Grapevine statement of purpose. This is inside the front cover of each issue. The statement is a concise summary of what the Grapevine does and does not do.

The concerns over the financial viability of the Grapevine go back to its origin. In the July 1945, one-year anniversary issue of the Grapevine Bill wrote “The Grapevine is self supporting now and should be kept that way always, rather than be dependent on subsidies or gratuities, to insure its continuity, quality and service.”¹

However, in the November 1950 Grapevine issue Bill wrote that the magazine was “running a deficit”² And as far as Bill was concerned the problem was not on the mostly volunteer management side. “To be dead sure everything is buttoned down tight.”³ They were doing all they could to be self supporting. Bill while praising the self sacrificing efforts of the volunteers knew that in the long run this was an unsustainable business model. Full time paid staff would be necessary to create a monthly publication that he thought the fellowship wanted.

In the June 1957 Grapevine issue the ongoing deficit problem had become a major impediment to improving and expanding the publication. Bill wrote, “Even after the recent push for subscriptions, the Grapevine still can’t get by. This state of affairs is totally unsafe for the long run and it is a bar to any large improvement in size or quality, now or ever, under these conditions.”⁴

Bill quotes the editor Al, “The Grapevine is in a bad fix. Cost have been going sky high. Printing, postage, rent, payroll – everything.”⁵ To try and alleviate the problem the price is raised by 10 cents to 35 cents and members are encouraged to subscribe. Al said, “If circulation can be raised from 20,000 to 30,000 by Christmas that “might turn the trick.”⁶

In a review of the General Service Conference Advisory Actions based on reports of the Grapevine committee beginning in the 50’s and up to the present you read over and over again of the importance of increasing the subscription base.⁷ Various ideas to do so came and went, including asking the conference delegates to promote the magazine. But nothing ever proved to be a permanent solution. An A.A. member once said to me that the problem with the Grapevine was that Bill W. no longer wrote for it.

Personally, I have been a Grapevine representative for my home group. My home group has multiple meetings – one of which a story from the Grapevine is read. Over the years I was a subscriber on and off. More off than on. Right now I am a digital subscriber but only out of a sense of obligation because I rarely read it. I need to return to a print subscription so at least I can give the issue away.

¹ Bill Wilson, *Language of the Heart*, p. 385-386

² Ibid. p. 391

³ Ibid. p. 391

⁴ Ibid. p.392-393

⁵ Ibid. p. 394

⁶ Ibid. p. 394

⁷ *Advisory Actions of the General Service Conference of Alcoholic Anonymous 1951-2006* and the yearly reports 2007-2013

We never seem to get tired of discussing this topic. Which is probably a good thing least we become inured or indifferent about losing money – and miss any opportunity to take corrective actions. After all, a good idea can come from anyone at anytime.

We all understand that AA is not a business. How do you count up the lives touched and recovered from alcoholism from reading a story in the Grapevine? And there is no question that in correctional facilities the Grapevine serves a very valuable service. How is it possible to place a price on the saving of a human life from active alcoholism?

Reading the Grapevine board annual reports over the last several years it is clear to me that the General Service and Grapevine boards and the Grapevine staff understand what they are up against. They are doing what they can to at least slow the downward trend. And they are trying to grow new sources of revenue including through digital platforms. Or as I previously quoted Bill, “To be dead sure everything is buttoned down tight.” But is it enough?

As our assembly theme notes how do we communicate our vital legacies in a changing world? Much has been written and said about the transition we are experiencing as we move into a so called digital world. Living in Rochester I have seen firsthand a large well know company almost go out of business because of the digital revolution. This is not to say that print is completely dead yet. But we do know that times change and everything dies, that is a fact. That is life.

Today we live with ever increasing levels of noise and artificial light in our cities and towns. We live in an extroverted world. This is not an era conducive to reflection and contemplation. So much so called information is whizzing by us that complex issues are reduced to black and white simplicities in a vain attempt to comprehend. We are skimming and sifting not immersing. Watch any television show or film and there are camera cuts every seven seconds or so. We can't watch stasis. Bursts of 140 characters or less or no one bothers to read.

However, for us, thankfully, there is a language of the heart and we speak it and try to live it. We trust a higher power even when, especially when, circumstances are dire. We don't live in fear. God will not let us face our problems alone. A fellow A.A. member in the CNY Area Assembly is noted for saying: If we are doing what we should be doing the money will be there.

Here is a question for you to walk away with: If there was no Grapevine would we start one or something like it today?