

## **The Growth of the NIA Committee with the NIA Assemblies**

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When the first Assembly in a newly autonomous Northern Illinois Area 20 convened at Yorktown Center in 1972, the differences and similarities with Downstate AA were immediately apparent. Karen T., Area Secretary, recalled that attendance at the Area Assemblies nearly matched that of past combined-Area Downstate Conferences (Assemblies). An average of forty AAs met the challenge of Area service, and NIA Assembly attendance began its growth. Both Southern Area 21 and Northern Area 20 had secured the “separate identities” described by Bruce W. Their vigor and enthusiasm made the dissolution of the combined-Area State AA Committee an easy consensus in August of 1973. Redistricting plans began with boundaries for District 5 and District 5A, settled in June 1975. Other NIA Districts soon brought the results of their separate planning.

Our ten AA Districts began holding Assemblies and Committee Meetings in the same calendar frames as today, with an Assembly every three months, and with Committee Meetings held five to six weeks before each Assembly. Eight times a year, Area 20 began its meetings on Saturdays, initially in three hour afternoon sessions. The new consensus of NIA to meet at the beginning of weekends allowed for more participation with less difficulty obtaining places to meet. Another reason for the change to Saturday meetings was significant: many Downstate AA Assemblies were held on Sundays at the close of weekend conferences, where agendas were informally discussed during an entire weekend. NIA Districts, adjusting to the new change in the Area meeting day of the week, were now able to develop and

discuss topics with five to six week notices. Voting on topics and business items was first on the agendas of the early Assemblies.

The locations for the first Assemblies and Committee Meetings were chosen for the same reasons that our current service meetings are successes. Facilities with inexpensive meeting room fees, coffee and food service availability, good parking, and especially an easy travel effort for AAs proved to be the ingredients for steadily increasing turnouts for NIA meetings. The average of 40 AAs participating in 1972 NIA grew to 130-150 AAs attending early 1990s' NIA Assemblies, with a slightly lower average of 115 AAs through 2003. Area Committee Meeting attendance grew from an average of 15 AAs in the early 1970s to a current participation of 40-50 trusted servants.

The sites of both NIA Assemblies and Committee Meetings moved to different locations around northern Illinois when NIA Districts volunteered to host a service meeting. The concentration of 1972-1976 Assemblies in Lombard at the Yorktown Center Auditorium varied with Assemblies in Zion, Rockford, Moline, and Rock Falls. From available minutes, the Lombard site in District 4 had an easy access when other NIA Districts could not offer a meeting place. Many Committee Meetings during the same years were also held at Yorktown Center, but moved between Elgin, DeKalb, Freeport, Rockford, and LaSalle. A motion approved at the Saturday, June 14, 1975 NIA Assembly provided that "locations for future NIA Assemblies will be considered & decided upon at each Assembly."<sup>48</sup> Today, Winter Assemblies approve a yearly NIA Calendar developed by the Area Committee, with meeting sites and District hosts planned ahead of time.

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<sup>48</sup> Minutes of NIA Summer Assembly at Moline, June 14, 1975, one page. Reported by Myrtle G., NIA Secretary. Source: NIA Archives.

Presentations were made at early NIA Assemblies on a wide range of topics and many times were given by two presenters offering different views. NIA Minutes reported all discussions as amicable and lively. For example, the 1974 Spring Assembly at Yorktown Center heard a panel discuss "Problems With Outside Agencies" with an AA and an agency point of view. The same Assembly was presented with a developmental talk on the "Relationship of General Service Conference Committees and Local Committees." Delegate Hank S. reported on visiting District caucuses about Conference agenda items, to take an accurate group conscience "feeling" with him to the 1974 General Service Conference in New York City. He nominated past NIA Delegate Bruce W. for a term as East Central Region Trustee at that Conference, where Bruce was unanimously elected.

Lou D., past NIA Delegate from two years before, was elected NIA Treasurer by the 1974 Summer Assembly held at the Rockford Alano Club, and finished Bruce's NIA Treasurer term. Lou later served a full term as NIA Treasurer in 1980-81.

The Assemblies' panel presentations were excellent tools in highlighting possibilities and potential directions for AA service. District workshops on many service topics were held continuously with much success and results were shared at Area meetings. The activity at local levels brought the Districts' consensus to develop a consolidated voice in a 1977 Area-level Public Information Committee and a new NIA Hospitals and Institutions Committee.

The April 1976 Quarterly Planning Session (the NIA Committee Meeting) named an Area Coordinator to act as a District liaison between the Public Information and Hospitals and Institutions Committees, and procedural guidelines were developed for the two separate committees. District activities, reported at each Assembly, showed that both committees' activities were separately developing at local levels. Area 20 elected its first

Hospitals and Institutions Committee Chairman that year in December at the 1976 Winter Assembly.

The early elections of NIA “officers” at Fall Assemblies (every two years on odd-numbered years) continued from the practice of Downstate Illinois AA Assemblies, but included voting for more than just selecting the Delegate. NIA ballots were cast for six positions: the Delegate to the General Service Conference, the Alternate Delegate, the Area Chairman, the Alternate Chairman, the Area Treasurer, and the Area Secretary. The early 1970s’ NIA Committee consisted of these six servants, past Delegates, and ten District Committee Members (DCMs).

Many “Ad Hoc” Committees were formed and reported at NIA meetings over the years, with the definition of such committees as completing a specific purpose and disbanding when the goals were accomplished. The NIA History Project is a current example, served by an Ad Hoc Historian to write the history, with a review panel comprised of a dozen NIA Committee members that disbanded after discussing changes to the final draft. Ad Hoc Committees in 1970s’ NIA met as various nominating committees, a Study Committee for Redistricting, annual NIA Budget planning committees in the fall of each year, and NIA Spring Conference Weekend committees. The first NIA Spring Conference, planned by District 7 volunteers and NIA Committee volunteers, took place in 1975 at the Tabala Towers in Rockford.

Ad Hoc committees met in the 2000s to develop solutions on NIA mailing lists, obtaining insurance coverage for Area meetings, and inventorying and recommending electronic equipment purchases. The Ad Hoc committees report their findings to the Area Committee Meetings for further Assembly action.

Topics that generated long-term early Assembly discussions are comparable to 2000s’ subjects. The printing of a paperback

Big Book edition was discussed in 1976 NIA as an agenda item for the 1977 General Service Conference. The original consensus, that the integrity of the hardbound book would be compromised by a paperback version, was heard at both Area meetings and the General Service Conference, where a soft cover edition was not approved until a later Conference in 1986.

The consensus for any change may always be prudent and slow for AA as a whole. The Fourth Edition Big Book discussions began in 1994 through its Conference-approved publishing in 2001. In a 1996 example of a developing topic from 1991 dialogue, the increased use of “on-line” computer networks to carry the AA message received a very active discussion. Area 20 eventually launched its own web site in January 2000.

The 1970s’ NIA Assembly group conscience, however, easily approved a number of much-needed items. The procedure of taping Assembly sessions by the NIA Secretary was formally accepted at the Spring Assembly of 1976. The purchase of a public address system was approved at the same Assembly.<sup>49</sup> The new 1976 designation of “NIA Committee Meeting” was accepted to dispel any confusion, where past labels of Quarterly Planning Sessions, Business Meetings, etc. presented a limiting concept to the eighteen Area 20 Committee (including DCMs) members of 1975.

#### A Textbook Democracy

Northern Illinois Area discourages no AA member from participating at Assemblies or from standing for election to any position on the Area 20 Committee. The active discussion and

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<sup>49</sup> Minutes of March 13, 1976 NIA Spring Assembly held at Yorktown Auditorium in Lombard, one page. Ruth P., NIA Secretary.  
Source: NIA Archives.

sharing in an atmosphere of a “textbook democracy” permeates all NIA meetings and events. At any given time, Ad Hoc committees are formed and dissolved, thoughtful ideas are freely given, and substantial unanimity is eventually reached on all issues. NIA members abide with the final voting on any Area group conscience.

As practiced in the entire Fellowship’s actions, Tradition Eleven’s “attraction rather than promotion” and Concept Four’s “right of participation” appear very much alive and well in Area 20 service to Alcoholics Anonymous.

#### NIA Guidelines

Preceding our efforts to develop any legal Area 20 incorporation for tax-exempt non-profit status (Illinois in 1981 and the U.S. Government in 1995), AA service principles were actively discussed at 1980s Assemblies. NIA Chairpersons and NIA Secretaries announced voting rights and eligibility for NIA members at every Assembly, accepting the votes of NIA service committee chairs, past Delegates, District Chairpersons (DCMs), GSRs, and NIA committee officers (Delegate, Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer). The Alternate Chairpersons for these committees possessed a vote only when their elected Chairs were absent.

NIA planned for increased participation through a vote of the 1984 Summer Assembly, where the Alternate Chairs of all Area service committees were given voting rights at Committee Meetings. A motion to the 1995 Spring Assembly also gave all Alternate DCMs a vote at NIA Committee Meetings.

At Assemblies, voting eligibility remained for DCMs and NIA service committee Chairpersons, allowing for voting by their Alternates when the Chairs were absent. The Assembly voting eligibility took great care to place the majority-voting block with Area 20 GSRs.

The 1987 Spring Assembly approved a new document, the *NIA Service Structure Guidelines*, detailing the responsibilities and voting rights of Area servants. All the points of prior Assembly discussion and approval votes on Area service were organized into this first NIA Guideline. A second major section, Spending Guidelines for Area Servants, was added and approved by the Assembly in 1992. Through 2003, the two sections received revision approvals only three times per section, each time to meet changing needs and Area service responsibilities. Voting rights, the members of the Area Assembly, the members of the Area Committee, and the suggestions on funding and spending comprise its content. *The NIA Service Structure Guidelines* act as type of operational Area charter and “standard practices” document for Area 20 service, and it reflects the similar purposes of the By-Laws of AA’s *Conference Charter* and the *AA Service Manual*.

The NIA Spring Conference “planning guide” developed from the model of the original 1974 *State Conference Planning Digest*. Assembly motions and planning committee recommendations were assembled and approved as the *NIA Spring Conference Guidelines* at the 1995 Winter Assembly. Spring Conference planning committees’ final reports add considerations and recommendations from the annual NIA events, and are provided to each new Ad Hoc planning committee.

The 1992 Summer Assembly approved a proposal for *NIA Assembly Hosting Guidelines*, completed and approved a year later at the 1993 NIA Summer Assembly. The Assembly approved updates and revisions in 1998.

The 1993 proposal for the annual NIA Big Book Conference developed into the *NIA Big Book Conference Guidelines* that followed the event’s first success of 1994. The Assembly approved its revision and update in 1999.

Each of the Area 20 Guidelines requires a two-thirds Assembly majority for approval on any changes. Each document aids NIA service, carries the Assembly's careful development and substantial unanimity support, and presents the ongoing result of AA unity in action and in principle.

All Area 20 Guidelines are available on the NIA website today, at: <http://www.aa-nia.org>

### **NIA Service Committee Histories**

The development of all the standing service committees at the Area 20 level follows in this longest chapter of *An Alcoholics Anonymous History of Northern Illinois Area 20*, beginning with the establishment of the NIA Hospitals and Institutions Committee in 1976, after careful development by the NIA Committee and the approval of the Assembly. Many times, the growth and creation of NIA service committees paralleled similar developments and Advisory Actions out of our General Service Conferences. Presented here, in their historical sequence in NIA, are the following Area-level service committees:

- DCMs
- Treatment Facilities
- Correctional Facilities
- Public Information
- Cooperation with the Professional Community
- GSRs
- Answering Services
- Archives
- Grapevine
- Literature

The chapter continues with the chronicle of appointed NIA positions, our Area 20 publications, Area events, and closes with our NIA Committee officers-- the Secretary, Treasurer, Chair, Delegate and the Alternates to the elected offices.

#### District Committee Members

DCMs (District Committee Members) held the largest amount of votes at NIA Committee Meetings since the beginning of NIA autonomy in 1972. Many early NIA minutes referred to the Committee Meetings as “DCMs Meetings,” highlighting District reporting for much of each session. Whether or not DCMs deliver lengthy reports to the NIA Committee Meetings, their presence and voices carry each NIA District’s views and group conscience. DCMs also carry the invitation for all District representatives to attend and participate in the NIA Assemblies. Since 1984, the DCMs meet as a service committee at each Assembly.

The 1995 Spring Assembly held in Indian Creek approved a major revision to the *NIA Service Structure Guidelines*. The compilation of approved actions that were collected for an updated NIA Guideline contained no major changes, but a discussion led by a few DCMs at the Assembly brought an entirely new idea to NIA: that Alternate DCMs possess an additional vote, along with their attending DCMs, at all future NIA Committee Meetings. Discussion progressed around ideas of fairness, the possible increase of participation, and the certain aspect of inclusion that NIA has always emphasized. The “motion to include” DCMs and their Alternate DCMs, with individual votes at the NIA Committee Meetings, revised the NIA Service Structure Guidelines that the Spring Assembly unanimously approved.

### Treatment Facilities Committee

The Hospitals & Institutions Committee service, designated simply as the Institutions Committee by General Service Conferences until 1977, was well established in early 1970s NIA Districts. Hospital detox units and rehabilitation centers, staffed by doctors, professional counselors, or State of Illinois professionals, either requested help from Alcoholics Anonymous volunteers or were contacted through an outreach effort to carry the message of recovery into the facilities. Earlier than this committee's establishment in NIA, AA outreach to the wards of State Hospitals saw continuous success from the 1950s onward. Alcoholics were patients at Manteno State (now in District 52) and Elgin State Hospitals, and by the late 1960s were placed in special treatment wards. The alcoholic unit at the Elgin State Hospital, with announcements by local AA volunteers (now in District 22), benefited from an early 1970s H. & I. newsletter.

The 1976 NIA Committee approved a liaison between District committees for both Institutions and Public Information, to remedy an overlapping effort. The development specifically brought the hospitals outreach into a separate activity of the Institutions Committee. The election of an H. & I. Committee Chairman for service in 1977 freed the Districts' Public Information committees to develop their outreach into other areas.

A 1975 law passed by the Illinois General Assembly under Governor James Thompson generated much Area 20 discussion, and NIA minutes described the legislation as the "new drunk law." Illinois enacted a "Right to Treatment" statute, officially acknowledging alcoholism as a sickness. The law favored alcoholism treatment over criminal prosecution of public drunkenness, and growth in the number of treatment centers over the next twenty years can be partly attributed to this law. Where Alcoholics Anonymous had announced the facts of the disease

since 1939, state legislatures across the United States and Canada slowly realized the benefits of rehabilitation by enacting similar statutes for the “right to treatment” and classifying alcoholism as an actual disease.

The 1977 General Service Conference renamed the Hospitals and Institutions Committee as the Treatment Facilities Committee. The Conference further separated and defined the efforts of AA outreach in medical institutions from outreach efforts in penal institutions (correctional facilities). NIA Assembly minutes reported the H. and I. Committee as the Treatment Facilities Committee beginning in 1983.

AA volunteers in treatment centers and hospitals were directed to abide by AA Traditions when working with facilities, and the NIA Chairpersons of this committee assisted NIA Districts with any difficulties. Solutions to the problem of treatment centers sending drug-only dependent clients to AA brought about the ideas of holding introductory open discussion meetings in facilities, and having local answering service numbers available for staff to give to alcoholic patients. One result of the NIA TF committee’s work established a closer cooperation between treatment center staffs and AA volunteers.

NIA Treatment Facilities chairpersons emphasized that the message of what AA “can and cannot do” continually needed to be communicated to public-funded and privately run facilities. Many TFC chairpersons mailed annual letters that were sent in addition to an annual letter from the AAWS Treatment Facilities Desk at the General Service Office. TFC Communication with the smaller number of current treatment centers remains consistently effective today.

In 1986, the Conference Committee on Treatment Facilities at the General Service Conference began discussion to develop a “Sponsor Contact Program” for AA volunteers, and the outreach

work of bringing treatment center clients into the AA Fellowship was formally adopted at the 1991 Conference. From successes in Oklahoma, Southern Minnesota, and Northeast U.S. Areas, AAWS first published the pamphlet *Bridging the Gap---Between Treatment and AA Through Temporary Contact Programs* in 1991, establishing a network for temporary sponsors and contacts for treatment center clients. NIA TFC chairpersons have coordinated the “Temporary Contact Program” by matching clients with AA volunteers in the towns they return to after treatment, with much assistance and development of “Bridging the Gap” ideas from NIA’s District TFC chairpersons.

AAWS first published the *Treatment Facilities Newsletter* in 1988, and the General Service Office has sent it to both TFC chairpersons and treatment centers at least two times a year since then, although some years have had the opportunity for a quarterly mailing. AAWS released the videotape *Hope: Alcoholics Anonymous* in 1990, developed from the effort of Treatment Facilities Committees. Much of the film highlights AA’s outreach work in treatment centers, and it serves as an excellent resource for many TFC volunteers and chairpersons in explaining AA principles to newcomers and prospective members.

#### Correctional Facilities Committee

Following its separation from the Institutions Committee by the 1977 General Service Conference, Northern Illinois Area voted unanimously to separate the Correctional Facilities committee from Hospitals and Institutions at the 1978 Summer Assembly. Just as the formation of the H. and I. Committee in 1976 had corrected overlapping efforts with Public Information Committees, creating a NIA Correctional Facilities Committee helped focus the scope of H. & I. while allowing the CFC service effort to prosper. NIA members were carrying the AA message of recovery “behind the

walls” into Illinois prisons and County jails for many years before the beginning of an autonomous Area 20, but Corrections existed as a sub-committee within the Institutions Committees. Earl R. of Joliet, a past Treasurer of the Downstate Illinois AA Conference in the mid-1950s, reported early examples of AA members working with prison facilities. Earl R. became an AA Coordinator with the Illinois Department of Corrections. An AA member as well as a DOC employee, he greatly helped to create a productive linkage between Alcoholics Anonymous and the formation of prison groups in Illinois. In a 1978 report to the NIA Summer Assembly on conditions at the maximum security Stateville Prison in Joliet, Earl shared that his length of Correctional Facilities AA service spanned over twenty-five years. Susie R. of Joliet (no relation) began volunteering at the Women’s Prison at Dwight, Illinois in the early 1960s. She maintained her participation and involvement by representing and sponsoring both groups and individual inmates. Susie served as NIA Correctional Facilities Committee Chairperson from mid-1988 through 1990.

The County jail and State prison inmates benefited from NIA participation. NIA and District CFC chairpersons started AA meetings and provided books, literature, and volunteers to assist in carrying the AA message into many correctional facilities. The AAWS publication of paperback books gained its first approval at the 1986 General Service Conference, when Correctional Facilities Committees announced the need for the new format to comply with prison administration requirements of no staples or stiff book bindings.

The State of Illinois always required background checks on volunteers, but clearance from the Department of Corrections has never been particularly difficult for AA members. Early volunteers provided Social Security numbers and personal information to CFC members, who then contacted the Illinois Department of

Corrections. Waiting periods for clearance and orientation have never been longer than one month and volunteers are usually approved within one or two weeks. As recently as 2001, tuberculosis and drug screening tests became part of the volunteer approval process.

In December of 1994, NIA CFC Chairperson Steve S. reported his acceptance as a Statewide Volunteer, along with his receipt of an identification card that provided immediate clearance to any Illinois correctional facility. This Statewide clearance resulted from many years of negotiation, effort, and cooperation from CFC members and was considered a milestone for CFC access to inmates in Illinois.

In recent years, CFC members began an outreach to Youth Centers, and Area 20 CFC began coordinating contact lists for paroled inmates to be met by AA volunteers with its own multi-Illinois Area "Bridging the Gap" program. A nationwide Corrections Correspondence Service remains a function of CFC through the General Service Office in New York, and NIA CFC chairpersons continue to announce the rewards of writing letters to inmates that share our experience, strength, and hope.

AAWS produced a sixteen-minute film *It Sure Beats Sitting In A Cell* after approval by the 1987 General Service Conference, from development of a pamphlet with the same title. In 1991, AAWS published *AA In Prison: Inmate To Inmate*. The booklet of thirty-two personal stories collected from the *AA Grapevine* shared the success of the CFC effort to carry the AA message "behind the walls" to the suffering alcoholic. The 2003 Conference voted to update the stories for a second edition of the AAWS *Inmate To Inmate* booklet.

### Public Information Committee

The Public Information effort by NIA Districts created the need for the establishment of the committee at the Area 20 level. Minutes included District Public Information reports as early as the Spring Assembly in 1976. When the 1976 NIA Committee appointed a Coordinator between the Hospitals and Institutions and Public Information committees, a clearer and better-directed development defined each committee's responsibilities and focus.

Service committee meetings preceded afternoon Assemblies beginning with 11 a.m. sessions in 1977. AAs representing Public Information had no NIA chairperson and met with the Hospitals & Institutions committee until April 1977, when the NIA Committee Meeting nominated a P.I. Chairman and Alternate P.I. Chairman who were elected at the Spring Assembly. Yearly expenses of \$50 were approved at the Spring Assembly for each of the four new trusted servants on the two committees.

Ruth P., elected NIA Delegate at the 1977 Fall Assembly in Freeport, was seated on the Conference Public Information Committee when P.I. interest began to grow at NIA. An Area-wide "Speakers Bureau" was established in 1977, and NIA P.I. efforts provided pamphlet literature to many doctors and churches. The NIA P.I. Chairman emphasized that Districts could donate AA books to local schools and libraries, continuing the public information outreach that many NIA Districts and groups performed for several years. The Area 20 P.I. Committee held orientation sessions for AAs interested in P.I. work, and it coordinated and reported on activities throughout the Area. Early NIA Public Information Committees purchased pamphlets for distribution in NIA Districts, assisted Districts in writing letters to local community leaders and professionals, and maintained good communication with District P.I. committees. A 1979 tape recording of an Area P.I. committee meeting brought the first

proposal to purchase many sets of AA public service announcements (PSAs) for radio stations in Area 20.<sup>50</sup>

The 1971 General Service Conference established the Conference Committee on Professional Relations to coordinate activities with a corresponding Trustees' committee established in 1970. Both committees were renamed as the Cooperation With the Professional Community (CPC) Committee at the 1974 Conference. However, separating CPC from P.I. in Area 20 was not resolved until 1985, when the Fall Assembly formally established the NIA CPC Committee to begin service in 1986. Public Information redirected its efforts toward schools, community groups, mass media, and coordinating the NIA Speakers Bureau. P.I. transferred much of its outreach to doctors, medical staffs, police, legal professionals, courts, and clergy to CPC in 1986.

The NIA P.I. Committee announced the availability of audiovisual items for Area-wide use in the summer of 1987. Many 16 mm films were purchased for general use in the next year and were later announced as additionally available in two videocassette formats of regular VHS and 3/4" tapes for television broadcasting. The films for Public Information outreach in the mid-1980s' were *Young People In AA*, *It Sure Beats Sitting In A Cell*, and *AA--An Inside View*. Two other 16 mm films, the 1967 releases of *Bill's Own Story* and *Bill On The Twelve Traditions* were placed in the audiovisual lending library. The large collection of items in the NIA P.I. library has always been available for loan to AA groups, AA committees, Districts, and individuals since 1988.

NIA P.I. Committees added the films *Hope: Alcoholics Anonymous*, *AA Rap With Us*, *Markings On The Journey*,

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<sup>50</sup> 1979 Audiocassette, located in the NIA Archives.

*Circles of Love and Service*, and *Your General Service Office* when released on videocassette. P.I. also provides public service announcements for broadcast on radio and television.

In the 1990s, books and pamphlets in Braille as well as videocassettes in American Sign Language were announced by P.I. Committees for individuals with special needs. The potential of on-line computer networking and website development generated much discussion of possible Public Information activity.

The NIA Public Information Committees continually announce the successful methods and tools that can reach local communities. The coordination of outreach effort by P.I. chairpersons since the 1977 committee establishment at NIA generates a long-lasting and effective field of AA service involvement.

#### Cooperation with the Professional Community

CPC branched out from the Public Information Committee in 1985 NIA service, similar to the earlier separation of NIA Correctional Facilities and NIA Treatment Facilities. The CPC committee's field of outreach met a growing need for AA participation that supplemented the work of Public Information.

CPC efforts with health fairs, court information programs, and the coordination of NIA District activities have proven the Area 20 CPC Committee as more than its originally focused third-party method of outreach, where the CPC contacts professionals having exposure and involvement with clients who could be attracted to the AA program of recovery. The 1994 NIA CPC Committee built its first display of CPC materials that NIA Districts actively used with participation assistance from the Area-level committee.

NIA CPC Chairs continue to emphasize personal contact with professionals as its most effective outreach.

## A Larger and Longer Area Assembly

Morning meetings of NIA committees informally started at 1977 Assemblies, and these pre-Assembly meetings attracted many AAs when more service committees were established at the Area level. The 1984 Fall Assembly in Round Lake approved a motion to formally begin all NIA Assemblies with morning sessions. Until its first full Saturday Assembly held that December in Palatine, all NIA Assemblies began at 1:00 or 1:30 p.m. The growing need for NIA service committee meetings could not have been accommodated in any afternoon Assembly session. Most importantly, more time was needed for discussions in a General Service Representatives' meeting session. GSRs attended Assemblies throughout our early history, but only met in its own "group" session when presentations were given on AA service.

The NIA Assembly starting times of 9:30 a.m. changed to a 9:00 Assembly start beginning with the 1990 Spring Assembly held in Joliet, to accommodate the need and request for longer service committee meeting time. The hosting Districts provide lunches at minimal cost, and Assemblies adjourn in mid-afternoon.

### The GSR Meeting

Since the Winter Assembly of 1984, the largest group of AAs holding discussions at NIA Assemblies has always been at the GSR meeting. Many 1990 Assemblies needed to divide GSRs into two smaller GSR sessions to allow for better sharing. Chaired between Delegates, past Delegates, the NIA Chairperson, Alternate Delegate, or the Alternate NIA Chairperson, the GSR sessions discuss solutions to group service, NIA committee activity, current business items, and conduct its meeting along the lines of general sharing sessions.

DCMs encourage all GSRs to participate at Assemblies and the entire NIA Committee always seeks the involvement of GSRs in Area 20 discussions and voting. First-time GSRs are welcomed to an Assembly with the same enthusiasm as newcomers at any AA recovery group. Their reception at the start of each Assembly shows an honest appreciation of their attendance.

The GSR sessions serve as forums to find solutions to problems shared by groups, and the attractiveness of AA service is one of many results that the sessions can generate. The entire Fellowship continues to emphasize that the post of a group's GSR is the most important position in Alcoholics Anonymous. The attraction to continue AA service work at other committee levels actually begins with information that is passed along to the GSRs.

The consensus of each AA group, actively sought by Districts and Assemblies and carried by the GSRs, maintains the strength of our Fellowship today. The NIA Assembly relies on the informed group conscience brought by GSRs to all its voted decisions.

The Assembly format of morning service committee meetings and GSR sessions was reversed for only one year beginning with the 1991 Summer Assembly. The NIA Committee felt that business items could be more easily decided at the start of each Assembly. A secondary intent of having a larger "quorum" (voting representation) to conduct business at the morning Assembly session was discussed by the NIA Committee during an ongoing Twelve Traditions inventory in early 1991. The earlier format, with committee sessions in the morning and full NIA discussions and voting held in the afternoon sessions, was restored by a vote at the 1992 Fall Assembly held in Barrington. The GSR meeting of that Assembly developed and presented the motion, and as reported in the minutes: "Frustration levels were quite high over

the Assembly format. The GSRs felt that more time was needed to discuss the issues and become better informed prior to voting.”<sup>51</sup>

#### Answering Services

The 1984 Winter Assembly, held in Palatine, established the NIA Answering Services committee. First developed during the preceding year as an Ad Hoc committee, the Assembly acknowledged its importance and approved its establishment as a regular NIA standing committee.

The NIA Answering Service Committee’s effort to obtain telephone numbers for all Area 20 Districts and towns resulted in an Area-wide listing first printed in the 1984 summer issue of the service newsletter *NIA Concepts*. Assisting newcomers with answering service work, helping District Answering Service chairpersons with successful procedures, and updating the NIA telephone listings of Districts and towns attracted active participation at the Area 20 level. Sharing at Answering Service committee meetings continues to support District efforts on a range of methods with computer-assisted systems, pager use, and cost-effective success.

At the 1988 Winter Committee Meeting, NIA Answering Services distributed the first professionally printed NIA map in three sizes, with Area 20 towns and confirmed District telephone numbers. The 8 1/2 by 11” letter size, currently in use, incorporates similar graphics of the original map. It continues to serve its effective purpose of providing AA contact anywhere in Northern Illinois Area 20.

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<sup>51</sup> September 12, 1992 NIA Fall Assembly minutes, Barrington. Reported by Priscilla S., NIA Alternate Secretary.  
Source:NIA Archives.

July 1993 reporting by the Group Services Desk at the General Service Office in New York announced that the *AA Guideline on Answering Service Committees* would be discontinued as a single *Guideline*. One of fourteen *AA Service Guidelines* available from Group Services in 1993, its content would be condensed into an *AA Guideline On Intergroups and Central Offices*. To prevent the Answering Service guideline's departure as a distinct service piece, members of the NIA Committee began correspondence to Group Services staff toward reconsideration of its decision. From September through November 1993, NIA trusted servants mailed many letters in favor of re-establishing the Guideline. Group Services notified Area 20 in early December that as a result of our concern and positive suggestions, the *AA Guideline on Answering Service Committees* was immediately reinstated, and its next printing contained updated information.

The current NIA map with District Answering Services telephone numbers is available to Area members in letter size, is also printed in the *GSR Handbook*, and continues in issues of the *NIA Concepts Service Newsletter*. Discussion began in 2000 toward establishing an Area-wide toll free telephone number, and its developing ideas continued into 2003 with no Assembly action.

#### Archives

The NIA Archives Committee developed out of 1981 NIA Assemblies hearing the request for donations of historical items. The NIA Secretary, Trudy P., began assembling a collection for displays at NIA Conference weekends, where additional display panels were loaned from the AA Archives at the General Service Office. In 1984, the NIA Assembly approved an Archivist after selection by the NIA Committee. The responsibilities of collecting,

sorting, maintaining, storing, and coordinating items and displays was ably met by Greg N. of Waukegan, who served the NIA Archives Committee until the end of 1993.

The Archives Committee had no chairperson until 1988, when immediate past Delegate Hank G. of Princeton was appointed by the NIA Committee. The standard procedure at that time was to offer the rotating Delegate the chairmanship of the NIA Grapevine Committee, but Hank chose to serve and was confirmed as NIA Archives Committee Chair. As a result, two Archivists served NIA for the next four years. In 1992, the NIA Committee affirmed the idea that the Alternate Archives Committee Chair would serve as the NIA Archivist and would maintain the collection of the NIA Archives. The 1992 NIA Committee appointed Susie R. of Joliet as the Archives Committee Chair, and she continued to assist with Archives Committee sessions at NIA Assemblies through 2002, when age and health prevented her participation. In appreciation of her NIA service that began with the 1972 Area 20 autonomy, the 2003 NIA Summer Assembly approved an honorary position and declared Susie as Archives Committee Chair Emeritus.

The 2001 Spring Assembly amended the Service Guidelines and voted to establish a two-year service term for an elected NIA Archives Committee Chair and Alternate Chair. The non-rotating NIA Archivist remained as a Committee appointment and Assembly-approved position.

The collection of AA historical items comprises hundreds of audiocassette tapes, older editions of AA pamphlets, books, meeting directories, *AA Grapevine* issues, and thousands of written, typed, and printed pages of NIA proceedings. Many NIA Districts have contacted the NIA Archives Committee when researching District histories. NIA Archives purchased a portable tape player and earphones in 1993 to allow access to audiocassette

tapes. For a few years, as an active part of displays in the Archives rooms of weekend Conferences, visitors could listen to taped AA talks and interviews having AA historical value.

The NIA Archives also maintains two large podium-sized photographs of Bill W. and Dr. Bob S., the co-founders of Alcoholics Anonymous. Panel 30 Past NIA Delegate Pete P. contributed the first set of unframed photos in 1983. NIA Archives offers the photographs for AA Conference weekends as well as the offer to provide archival items and displays for any Area 20 event.

Archives Committee sessions at NIA Assemblies assist District Archivists, discuss the direction and continuing growth of the Area 20 Archives, provide an opportunity for sharing sessions about AA history, the development of District Archives, and discuss methods of successful organization and preservation of archival items. The NIA Archives Committee and the NIA Archivist continue to collect, store, and maintain historical material relating to NIA and AA history, and actively seeks contributions to its growing collection of historical items. Volunteers began an ongoing itemized inventory of NIA Archives' possessions (Area 20 property) in late 1994.

With the appointment and Assembly confirmation of its fourth Archivist, the 1998 Spring Assembly in McHenry approved the establishment of a Repository for the NIA Archives. Located at a refurbished office site in Elgin, all of the archival items were moved to a secure, single location.

In 1994 and 1995, the proposal for the General Service Conference to consider establishing a Conference Archives Committee was approved and announced at NIA Assemblies. The 1995 Conference, with a lack of input, declined to proceed with its development. The Trustees Archives Committee reported to the General Service Conference since 1974 as the only committee

without a corresponding Delegate-seated Conference Committee. All Delegates were asked to find their Area consensus for discussion on the 1988 Conference Policy & Admissions Committee proposal to establish the new Conference Archives committee.

In 1998, with lengthy floor discussion and multiple votes, the Conference recognized the need for the Conference Archives Committee and established its service as a secondary Delegate assignment. Panel 48 Delegate Jerry P., received his extra assignment for the inaugural term of the Conference Archives Committee in 1999, and its members elected him as its first Chair.

The Conference Archives Committee approved an AAWS *Archives Workbook* in 2001. A September 2002 Area Archives Workshop discussed developing a District Archives Workbook as an addition to the AAWS service booklet. The Area Archives Workshop also proposed a Class A Trustee History Project for launch by the Trustees Archives Committee, to gather the recollections of all current and past non-alcoholic Trustees. The 2002 Winter Assembly voted its full support for the proposal.

#### NIA Grapevine Committee

The 1982 NIA Summer Assembly held at the Deck Restaurant in Geneseo heard its first report by past Delegate "Pete" P. as NIA Grapevine Committee Chairman. NIA minutes do not describe any voting on establishing this committee, but a 1982 NIA Committee Meeting requested Pete P., the immediate past Delegate, to continue his NIA service as the Area 20 Grapevine Representative and Committee Chair. After 1983, NIA Grapevine Committee chairpersons and alternate chairs were included in NIA Fall Election Assemblies. The NIA Committee asked past Delegates to stand for the chairmanship of the committee and the Assembly elected the NIA GvR Alternates

from its other members. Immediate past Delegates Pete P., John G., and Jack O. each served terms as NIA Grapevine Chairmen, until the 1987 Fall Assembly elected the Chair and Alternate Chair for the NIA Grapevine Committee.

The past Delegates, as well as succeeding NIA Grapevine Committee chairpersons, utilized contacts with the *AA Grapevine* office at GSO in New York, to bring the most recent Gv announcements and events to NIA Assemblies. The committee reported news, assisted new GvRs and NIA District GvRs, attended and led many GvR workshops, and informed the NIA Assemblies of all the items that *AA Grapevine* offered in addition to the magazine. The enthusiastic announcements and reporting continue today.

The 1988 Summer Assembly approved the purchase of a selection of items for resale at Assemblies, and the resale of items carried over to NIA Conference weekends. Apart from any shortfalls or loss of carrying over items between service terms, the NIA Budget Line Item for Gv literature has proven very successful for NIA Grapevine committees for its use as “seed money.” *AA Grapevine* materials such as audiocassette tapes, audio CD discs, posters, *Best of Grapevine*, *Came To Believe*, and *The Home Group—Heartbeat of AA* paperbacks, calendars, and other special items are maintained in a rotating stock, replenished with funds taken into the committee from cash sales.

Of special note, the NIA Grapevine committee added the 1989 hardcover book *Language of the Heart* to its rotating stock, the collected writings of Bill W. published in the magazine from 1944 to 1970. The *AA Grapevine* articles, grouped into three chronological segments, contain almost an entire record of Bill’s work (the book’s editors decided not to duplicate any of the writing that was already available in other AAWS publications).

The 1990 Grapevine Committee built a portable and colorful display for showcasing all the items the *AA Grapevine* offers the Fellowship: the magazine, books, booklets, calendars, tapes, CDs, posters, and all special items. Current NIA Assemblies enjoy and utilize Grapevine displays.

#### NIA Literature Committee

The 1995 Fall Election Assembly in Arlington Heights established the new committee, with its suggested responsibilities for announcing current releases, developments, and discussions of changes to new or existing AAWS literature, showcasing the current literature available, and providing a resource for service committee workbooks and order forms. The committee serves as the Area 20 liaison to the Trustees and Conference Literature Committees and the Literature staff desk at the General Service Office. While the NIA Literature Committee's purpose was not intended for it to become a clearinghouse or broker to bulk-purchase AAWS literature, its potential to generate enthusiasm and highlight the content of AAWS literature appeared full of promise. In 2003, NIA Literature began an outreach for written input on proposed new items and existing reviews, for summary reporting to AAWS at GSO and reporting to the Delegate and Area Assembly.

#### **NIA Appointed Committee Members**

##### The Area 20 Newsletter Editors

*Concepts, the Northern Illinois Area Service Letter* printed its first issue in the spring of 1982. The 1981 NIA Public Information committee developed and presented the idea of printing an Area 20 newsletter, and 500 hand-assembled issues were distributed at NIA Assemblies on its first "run." *Concepts*

brought an immediate positive response and acceptance from all NIA members. Following the rotation of its first Editor, Wally P. of Aurora, the NIA Committee, with Assembly approvals, appointed the newsletter's next six Editors and three Co-Editors through 2003.

The intent of *NIA Concepts* to inform, challenge, announce, and celebrate AA service to the Fellowship brings wide-ranging acclaim to the quarterly issues. The early years of *NIA Concepts* reported the changes of Area 20's redistricting and rapid expansion. Tex. B. of Naperville, the newsletter's longest serving Editor from 1989 through 2000, chose topic themes for the quarterly issues, and wrote many personable and compelling article series that he took from his longtime sobriety that began in 1947.

No matter how large the circulation, *NIA Concepts* is available without charge. The 2003 estimated circulation reached 3,400 readers. Each Editor and editorial board has attempted to manage the newsletter's growing circulation while turning aside any ideas of charging a subscription fee. In an attempt to manage the large circulation and reduce the "return to sender" costs, the 2003 Spring Assembly approved the recommendations of an Ad Hoc Mailing List committee, to delete the addresses of recipients who declined to respond to the newsletter's re-subscription requests. When very few recipients responded by the August deadline, over 2,400 addresses were removed from its circulation. The 2003 Fall Assembly approved a final postcard outreach to the AAs removed from circulation, supporting the new Editor's hopes to rebuild an accurate mailing list.

*NIA Concepts* Editors request article contributions, especially from NIA trusted servants, and continually ask for works, ideas, and any NIA member's written "language of the heart."

The NIA Archives holds at least two sets of issues dating from 1982 to the present and often places the entire collection in its

Archives displays for viewing at NIA Conferences and events. *NIA Concepts* is distributed at all NIA meetings and also is mailed bulk rate to the many AAs requesting its delivery.

The *NIA Concepts* service letter remains the primary publication that Northern Illinois Area 20 provides for its members.

#### The GSR Handbook

Different issues of *NIA Concepts* presented topics on fields of AA service work, and the positive response to an article "Welcome to the New GSR" from the spring 1990 *Concepts* provided the opportunity for the Area to implement the development and approval of Area 20's first service piece. The 1991 NIA Winter Assembly held in Grayslake approved the printing of a *GSR Handbook*, developed by *Concepts* editor Tex B. The first edition of NIA's *GSR Handbook* was released to the 1992 Winter Committee Meeting held in Sycamore, and 2,000 Handbooks were distributed by DCMs and given to GSRs at NIA Assemblies over the next two years. Updates to the *GSR Handbook* brought a 1994 second edition, a 1995 third edition, assisting the GSRs of Area 20 through an eighth edition in 2003. The Handbook does not take the place of the *AAWS Group Handbook* or the GSR section of the *AA Service Manual*, but brings its focus to participating GSRs in Northern Illinois Area 20 general service.

#### Area 20 Archivist

(see Archives Committee history on page 89)

#### NIA Historian

The 1987 NIA Archives Committee completed the writing of *A Brief History of NIA* in 1993, and submitted the piece for inclusion in an AAWS AA History Book that was under

consideration by the General Service Conference. An earlier 1989 AA History Book did not receive Conference approval, and the 1994 Conference also declined to proceed with the completion of a second attempt for a history book. The 1994 NIA Spring Committee Meeting at the Cortland Firehouse received the resignation of the NIA Historian and appointed a replacement, with a cordial challenge to the NIA Committee that a detailed and comprehensive history of Area 20 Alcoholics Anonymous could be completed and made available to Northern Illinois Area members.

The 1994 Summer Assembly in Cambridge approved the position of an Ad Hoc NIA Historian to research and complete a finished manuscript. A panel of NIA trusted servants met in Aurora and discussed the draft manuscripts in December 1995 and in the winter and spring of 1996. The 1996 Summer NIA Assembly in Rockford received the panel's proposal to print the NIA History Project's reviewed manuscript, *An Alcoholics Anonymous History in Northern Illinois Area 20*. The Assembly approved the use of NIA Reserve funds to print 1500 copy sets for distribution, and the NIA History was first made available for purchase at cost through the NIA Literature committee. The 1999 Winter Assembly restored the Reserve fund amount to the NIA Treasury and acknowledged that the booklet purchases, while not easily documented, paid for the 1996 printing cost. When the booklet was no longer available and was considered as "out of print," the NIA web site posted its pages online in February of 2002.

Years of additional research, the new discovery of detailed information, as well as further Area 20 Assembly actions and growth, brought a proposal for the 2001 Summer Assembly to consider proceeding with an updated Second Issue for publication and posting on the NIA web site. Approved at the 2001 Fall NIA Assembly in Rochelle, the Second Issue History Project

progressed with the renewed appointment of the NIA Historian to complete its writing and editing. An identical 1995 and 1996 Panel Review process on the draft manuscript took place in October and November 2003 in Cortland.

The scope and responsibilities for NIA Historian were approved at the 1995 NIA Spring Committee Meeting. The description for the NIA Historian post, developed from the Ad Hoc Historian experience, was included with *Suggestions for NIA Trusted Servants* presented to the 1995 Summer Assembly held in Crystal Lake.

#### Area 20 on the World Wide Web

The Trustees Public Information Committee unanimously recommended that the General Service Office establish an AAWS website, and “alcoholics-anonymous.org” was launched in December 1995. A rapid increase of website usage brought the website management transfer to the AAWS Board, as actual usage (“hits”) on the GSO website doubled each year.

The 1999 Winter NIA Committee formed an Ad Hoc committee to investigate an Area 20 web page, through an ongoing discussion of the potential of the Internet as both a P.I. and AA general service resource. The initial 1991 NIA discussions about online AA meetings suggested possibilities for NIA Districts to launch informational web pages, post meeting schedules, list answering service telephone numbers, and creatively announce the resources and events of Alcoholics Anonymous on the World Wide Web. Many AA Areas established web pages, online Bulletin Boards for messages, and worldwide A. A. support for Internet use and outreach gained momentum through the entire decade.

NIA District 51 launched its first Internet web page in 1998 with reasonable success. In early 1999 and with his own funds,

District 43 DCM Bob B. of Warrenville created a test “niarea” site for a three-month trial. The NIA reception was positive and the Area welcomed his efforts, bringing an approval vote of the 1999 Winter Assembly for the creation and funding for an Area 20 web page. After difficulties with one hosting service company in late December 1999, a more reliable hosting service was selected, and the website “aa-nia.org” was successfully launched on January 18, 2000. Its development and expansion continues through the present with Bob B.’s appointed NIA Committee service as Area 20 Webmaster.

The website posts links to the GSO website, the AA Grapevine website, other Area-supported web pages, and NIA District answering services telephone numbers. District meeting schedules were placed online without individual contact information. Event flyers could also be computer-scanned and posted in a tamper-resistant format, using the familiar Acrobat Reader “pdf” program. All the files are printable. The issues of the *NIA Concepts Service Newsletter* soon appeared on the Area 20 site, and web folders for Area reports, NIA Service Guidelines, and NIA service committee outreach followed soon after. A traffic “hit” counter was added in late 2001, recording an increasing usage and access to the NIA website.

Personal telephone numbers, full names of AA members, and private email addresses are not posted on the NIA website, abiding with AA’s Tradition Eleven principle regarding anonymity protection in media.

AA weekend conference flyers and registration forms are easily printed from posted event flyers, and 2002 discussion began on the possibilities of actual online registration and secured payment activity for NIA conferences. The discussion continued through the end of 2003 with no Assembly action. Earlier attempts to establish email links and message forwarding to Area

Committee members experienced many problems. Unsolicited email (an overwhelming percentage of “spam”) and regular (although unsuccessful) attacks from Internet viruses required vigilance and much administrative maintenance from the Area 20 Webmaster. The write-protected Acrobat Reader (pdf) file format proved to work more effectively for posted documents. The First Issue of the NIA History book, the 1996-copyrighted, and 104-paged *An Alcoholics Anonymous History in Northern Illinois Area 20* was successfully posted in Acrobat Reader format at the beginning of 2002.

Including updated NIA Service and Conference Guidelines, the NIA Calendar, a Supplemental events Calendar, and NIA service committee outreach (Delegate, P.I., Treasurer, *the NIA GSR Handbook*, Archives, the *NIA District Secretary Handbook*, NIA Special Needs Committee Guidelines) in its function, <http://www.aa-nia.org> continues to grow in size and effective use.

### Special Needs

Area Assemblies opened up discussion on carrying the message to alcoholics with physical, hearing, and sight disabilities with a presentation from a District 11 member in 1996. Many District meeting schedules highlighted handicapped-accessible meeting sites regularly, and some Districts’ Public Information committees provided Braille copies of the Big Book to public libraries. The late 1990s interest in special needs service grew from the NIA Assembly, to assist Districts developing Special Needs committees and to establish an Area 20 Special Needs Committee. To meet the challenges of assisting alcoholics with special needs, Area 20 appointed a Special Needs Coordinator in 2000, approving reserve funds for American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters. The 2002 Summer Assembly in Kankakee voted to

fund ASL “Signers” for Area service meetings when needed. The vote also affirmed the financial autonomy of NIA Conferences, providing for only NIA Special Needs coordination of the services rather than their funding. Reserve funds for Signers at Area Meetings became a budgeted line item expense in 2001. Guidelines were developed and approved by the NIA Special Needs committee at the 2003 Summer Assembly in Grayslake, in addition to the materials and service pieces from GSO’s Group Services desk.

Districts and Groups could borrow an assembled display and library of materials comprised of audiocassette tapes, Braille books and pamphlets, large-print AA books, ASL videotapes, a TV+VCR, and service materials available from AAWS.

The General Service Conference received its first formal request for an Accessibilities Committee in 1993, when the Conference Literature Committee approved new Braille pamphlets. Two *AA Guidelines for Special Needs*, the ASL video of the first section of the Big Book, and general information pamphlets developed are also available in 2003, developed out of GSO Groups Services activity.

Mobile meetings, carrying the message to different sites for homebound and physically disabled AA members, showed success in Rockford’s District 70, and the 2003 NIA Special Needs committee passed along the methods of getting the meetings started.

### **Annual NIA Events**

#### The NIA Spring Conference Weekends

Since District 7 hosted the first NIA Spring Conference in 1975 at Rockford’s Tabala Towers, District committees and volunteers planned every NIA Spring Conference. After the

Assembly approves a District's bid for the annual Spring Conference weekends, the event's Chairpersons report their planning progress to NIA Committee Meetings and Assemblies. Current NIA Guidelines ask that Districts plan their bids one and one-half years before each NIA Spring Conference. The 1994 NIA Committee consensus recommended the extra six months, allowing an increased planning time for easier reservation opportunities, for negotiating hotel dates, and for inviting AA speakers, guests, and Al-Anon participation.

The NIA Spring Conference weekends, beginning on Friday afternoons through noon Sundays, currently draw a registration of over one thousand AA, Al-Anon, Alateen members and visitors. With the assistance of NIA trusted servants, presentation panels are organized around various aspects of NIA service to the Fellowship. Many times an invited representative from AA's General Service Office participates as a speaker or panel presenter. Hospitality "greeting" rooms are open all weekend with coffee and snacks. One-hour AA "Alcathon" meetings, "Al-Anonathon" meetings, and Alateen sessions begin on Friday evening and continue around-the-clock through the Spring Conference's closing on Sunday morning. A dance follows the Saturday night banquet and featured AA speaker. NIA Spring Conference themes highlight the spirit of the AA community, celebration, and service. By way of Illinois AA hospitality, the NIA weekend events never fail to carry the message of experience, strength, and hope.

Since 1978, Spring Conference Committees distribute remaining funds, after conference expenses, in the percentages of participating Al-Anon and Alcoholics Anonymous registration. The original distribution of all excess money was passed on to the General Service Office, but changed as NIA Committees and Assembly votes developed the 1995 Spring Conference Guidelines.

In 1999, the NIA Committee suggested appointing a Spring Conference archivist to prepare a summary report of successes and recommendations for the use of future planning committees.

#### The State and Regional AA Conference Weekends

The Illinois AA State Conference Committee planned its first summer conference weekend in 1973, with leadership drawn equally between the three AA Delegate Areas in Illinois. While the first AA State Conference at Bradley University in Peoria lost \$1,100 due to an over commitment of rooms reserved but not filled, planning guidelines were developed with participation from each Area. Karen T., NIA Secretary, completed a revised Budget Guide to assist the AA State Conference Committee and it was included in the first 1974 Conference Planning Digest. Each Area freely used its ideas for their own future conference weekends as a result of the early Planning Digest model. The summer AA State Conference weekends move between sites in each of Illinois' three Areas from one year to the next, and provide the opportunity for all Illinois AAs to participate in the Fellowship's unity.

Illinois AA State Conference planning, hosted by local Districts, enjoys the experience of each Area's Delegate and Chairperson as members of its Policy committee. As a direct result of our inter-Area sharing, AA State Conferences accent the AA Legacy of Service.

Illinois first hosted an East Central Regional Conference in 1975 at the Sheraton O'Hare Inn (presently named the Ramada Inn) in Rosemont. All Delegate Areas of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Wisconsin rotate as hosts for each year's Regional Conference event.

### An Annual NIA Big Book Conference

NIA discussed the potential of a service weekend at the beginning of the 1990s, but the NIA consensus grew for Area 20 to hold an annual Big Book Conference in its place. District 40 hosted the first one-day Saturday event at the Naperville Holiday Inn in 1994, and the October conference's success was repeated in 1995 at Pottawatomie Center in St. Charles' District 61. Bidding and planning procedures developed into a new NIA Guideline in early 1995, assisting any NIA District with the opportunity to bid, plan, and host the newest NIA service event. Flyers, programs, and audiotape sets of every NIA Big Book Conference are located in the NIA Archives.

### **Area 20 "Officers," the remaining members of the NIA Committee**

#### Secretary

The NIA Secretary and Alternate Secretary positions record, produce, and distribute meeting Minutes as their major responsibility, but this two-person NIA Committee accomplishes much more. Nearly every NIA Secretary report at Area 20 meetings requested that NIA members, when notifying GSO, additionally mail service position changes and new information to the NIA Secretary. The complete NIA service roster of elected NIA trusted servants and DCMs are managed in a perpetual state of change.

NIA Secretaries brought progress and positive developments to the position and duties of an AA service secretary. A 1993 Secretary's Workshop in Aurora intended to write a suggested guideline and replace an outdated *AAWS Secretary's Handbook* not revised since 1954 (and located in the NIA Archives). The

resulting March 1994 *District Secretary Guidelines/ Handbook* proved a tremendous assist to District Secretaries in Area 20. Updated in 1998 and in 2003, the eighteen-paged *NIA District Secretary Handbook* serves as an effective service piece.

A direct result of the first Secretary's Workshop discussions, the 1994 Winter Assembly held in Grayslake approved the suggestion for an NIA policy toward the confidentiality of Area minutes. Future NIA meeting minutes listed full names, recorded the names of AAs presenting and seconding motions, and contained the following header: "The NIA Minutes are considered confidential and ought to be used for AA purposes only."

Alternate NIA Secretary Dale G. presented the 1994 Summer NIA Committee Meeting with a computer printout of all recorded voting approvals from 1974 NIA minutes forward. The 1994 Summer Assembly held in Geneva added an additional motion, accepting the idea that Area 20 meetings needed an easy access to the record of all motions approved throughout NIA history: "Take money from the Computer Fund to purchase a laptop (portable computer) suitable to our needs at the Area meetings."<sup>52</sup> NIA Secretaries utilized and updated the *NIA Voted Actions* at Area 20 meetings, and printouts of the file are located in the NIA Archives.

#### Recordkeeper

The NIA Committee Meetings and Assemblies of 1993 discussed establishing a second Area 20 Alternate Secretary position for the single responsibility of coordinating the massive NIA trusted servants listings, with over 1,000 Area 20 groups counted in 1993. However, after much discussion the 1993 Fall

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<sup>52</sup> NIA Fall Assembly Minutes, page 4 of 5 pages, September 10, 1994. Reported by Dale G., NIA Alternate Secretary. Source: NIA Archives.

Election Assembly in Joliet approved a new position of Area 20 Recordkeeper. Past NIA Secretary, NIA Alternate Delegate, and NIA Chairperson Barb B. was elected “from the hat” to serve, developing the database during her next two years of NIA service. Barb had first improved the 1984-85 NIA Minutes with the use of computers, and her NIA service appeared to come full circle with her effort to update the computer records tracking for 1994-95.

On a much larger scale than the NIA Secretary’s Roster, the NIA Database of DCMs, GSRs, and District service committee names and addresses is a “moving target” list in a perpetual state of change.

#### NIA Treasurer

The 1974 establishment of a \$2,000 “ceiling” to funds located in the NIA Treasury allowed NIA Treasurers to pass along NIA funds to AA World Services, in a contribution sent to the General Service Office at the close of each year.

The annual sum is taken from the “extra” moneys above the NIA prudent reserves. No funds were ever contributed to AAWS that might impair the operations of a well-funded start to each new year, and the contributions to the General Fund varied through the years of NIA history. A detailed accounting of each NIA Budget year is not included here but someday may be prepared in a future NIA effort. Records are located in the NIA Archives.

The 1980 NIA Fall Committee Meeting prepared its first Budget of \$6,000 for Area 20 expenses and its motion for Assembly approval was presented by then-NIA Chairman Jack O. The 1981 Winter Assembly held in District 7 approved a 1982 NIA budget in the amount of \$8,412. In contrast, with additional NIA service committees and the ongoing development of Reserve Funds (totaling \$15,000 in 1995), the 1995 Winter Assembly held in Rockford approved a 1996 NIA budget of \$41,800. The 2003 NIA

Budget holds \$20,000 in Reserve Funds as part of a \$51,000 budget total. The budget increases match the continuous growth of Area 20 service needs, while funds from NIA groups and Districts regularly provide the NIA Treasury with welcome contributions.

Many NIA Treasurers of the 1970s' and early 1980s' announced the ideas of "gratitude" contributions in a loosely organized program called "A Penny A Day For Sobriety." In 1986, the NIA Treasurer began the practice of sending money, kept separate from any other funds passed along at the end of each year, in a NIA "Birthday Plan" for the AAWS General Fund at GSO. These "Remember November" gratitude contributions, sent by NIA members and groups to the NIA Treasury, pass along an annually collected Birthday Plan sum of between \$1,500 to \$5,000. The NIA Birthday Plan contributions help offset year-end AAWS operating costs involved in carrying the AA message throughout our worldwide Fellowship.

NIA achieved an Illinois Sales Tax exemption through the effort of 1981 Treasurer (and past Delegate) Lou D., and the exemption was renewed in 1992 and 2002. The Area 20 goal of achieving federal Internal Revenue Service status as a not-for-profit organization began with the guidance of the 1990-91 NIA Treasurer, establishing the incorporation of "Northern Illinois Area, Limited (NIA, Ltd.)" All the details for a "corporate charter" and required submittals for NIA's non-profit acceptance took place in 1994 and 1995. Designed to lower mailing costs and prevent NIA liability for any federal taxes, Area 20's new classification as "federally tax-exempt" was happily announced by the NIA Treasurer to the 1995 Summer Assembly held in Crystal Lake. The NIA Assembly warmly received the news with resounding applause for the result of a very involved and lengthy effort.

### The NIA Chairperson and Alternate Chairperson

With duties and responsibilities that involve a great amount of time, travel, and effort, NIA Chairpersons not only lead the Assemblies and Committee Meetings but serve as liaisons to AA State Conference Committees, NIA Spring Conference planning committees, and all planning committees for any NIA events. The smooth and amicable conduct of NIA meetings owe much to the energies and leadership shown by the NIA Chairpersons.

### The Delegate and Alternate Delegate

The NIA Delegate and Alternate Delegate serve as Area 20's messengers to worldwide Alcoholics Anonymous. Our Delegate is seated with the total of ninety-three Area Delegates to the General Service Conference. Conference Committee assignments are randomly chosen by the Trustees Conference Committee and are given to our NIA Delegate for the two years of the service term. Every Standing Committee of the Conference has been served at least once in the two-year terms of the twenty-seven elected NIA Delegates serving Area 20 since 1952.

Participation at the General Service Conferences defines a Delegate as one of the members of the Conference with a duty to act and vote in the best interests of AA as a whole. The NIA concerns and group conscience carried to the Conference many times gain strength and momentum toward decisions approved as "Advisory Actions." The Advisory Actions are the final Conference consensuses that provide specific solutions and recommendations to the General Service Board, AA World Services, and the AA Grapevine. The intent of any Conference consensus always reflects a consideration of the entire Fellowship.

The 2002-03 *AA Service Manual* listed twelve primary duties for an Area Delegate, highlighting five relating to the Conference.

NIA Delegates arrange schedules of even larger amounts of time, travel, and effort than those described of the NIA Chairperson service position. An immense amount of mailed correspondence also arrives at the NIA Delegate's address, containing news, views, and discussions of every conceivable issue involving the Conference and current activities of service in Alcoholics Anonymous.

#### The Delegate's Workshop

District 80 held the first NIA Delegate's Pre-Conference Workshop in Ottawa in early 1993. The NIA Committee approved the idea of an all-day February meeting for NIA members to discuss agenda items planned for the General Service Conference.

It provides an open forum between the Area 20 Delegate and all NIA members. The Delegate's Workshop hears presentations from NIA trusted servants, bringing discussion on Conference Committee agenda items approaching action at the April's General Service Conference. The consensus of NIA groups, carried through the voices of the AAs participating, gives the NIA Delegate the opportunity to understand the NIA group conscience. That group conscience is carried to New York for developments and decisions by the Conference. The 1990s have experienced a more timely notification of the Conference agendas, announced in a preliminary agenda format at the end of January and the final agenda released in mid-February. The Delegate's Workshops allow a better and more fully deliberated NIA consensus to assist the NIA Delegate in the expression of Area 20 views. Complete verbal transcripts were printed after the initial two Workshops, and current reports of each year's sessions are distributed as soon as possible before the Delegate leaves for the Conference. The 1994 NIA Committee voted to hold the event closer to the Conference's April startup, scheduling March 1995 for the third NIA Delegate's

Pre-Conference Workshop. To provide for more voices of Area 20 consensus on each year's Conference agenda, beginning in 2000 the NIA Spring Assembly dedicated its discussion and service committee meeting time to the Pre-Conference Workshop.

#### Post-Conference Delegate's Report and Workshop

The success of the first Delegate's Workshop developed the addition of the Post-Conference Delegate's Report and Workshop in 1994, held within a few weeks after the close of the General Service Conference. It is announced as the Delegate's chance to present an immediate General Service Conference report to NIA. First hosted by District 73 in Rochelle, the geographically central NIA location proved successful. Both the 1994 and 1995 Post-Conference Workshops held full discussions there on General Service Conference topics with excellent participation from an average of forty NIA members. Current Post-Conference Delegate Workshops take place in Cortland, the site of NIA Committee Meetings. Delegates also continue to visit and report to individual Districts following each Conference, sharing a thorough discussion of Conference actions, potential new agenda items, and the ongoing development of issues and proposals.

The honor to serve Alcoholics Anonymous as a member of the General Service Conference passes from one elected NIA Delegate to the next every two years, and the permanent right of NIA participation given to past Delegates carries much more than any past Delegate's single vote at NIA meetings. All Area 20 Delegates deliver a voice of experience, ability, trusted leadership, and a certain wry humility to ongoing Area 20 discussion.

In appreciation, Northern Illinois Area meetings always extend their welcome.