



Newsletter of the New Jersey Region

May 2005

Fund Flow

The March regional meeting approved a \$3,527 contribution to world services, after sending nothing beyond the minimum established by policy in January. The usual flow was complicated by the months-long failure of one of our helpline service providers to bill us. When they finally got around to it, there was an unusually large bill, because it was for many months of service. The Public Information committee also successfully requested that \$2500 be reserved for projects it is contemplating but has yet to formally propose. This effectively increases the size of the prudent reserve by \$2500 until such time as a project is proposed and a decision reached on it.

Region to Host Jan.'06 Zonal Forum

The region approved a total of \$3,000 to meet expenses related to hosting the Northeast Zonal Forum in January of 2006. The Zonal Forum is a multiregional body presently lacking a precisely defined role, but serving largely as a discussion and sharing forum for the regions of the northeastern United States. Its meetings rotate among the member regions much as the region meeting rotates among the member areas.

PI Moves Forward

The region approved \$600 to fund the PI subcommittee to maintain a booth at the annual meeting of the Addiction Treatment Providers of NJ, and \$165 to assist the Central Area's PI subcommittee in renting a booth. In addition, the subcommittee is considering a rather ambitious plan for providing a fairly large number of Basic Texts to prison facilities. (This being the main reason for the establishment of the \$2500 reserve mentioned earlier.) If and when a proposal is actually forthcoming there will probably be considerable discussion as to whether that is the best possible use of such a sum of money.

Select Committee Reports

A select committee was recently formed to study and make recommendations on improving Regional services to the large number of Spanish-speaking addicts in New Jersey. The committee issued its first report at the March regional

meeting. This initial report focused largely on recommendations concerning the helpline, of which there were 4 main ones:

1. Standardizing on a common and accepted dialect,
2. Creating a Spanish Domain chairperson position on the Helpline committee,
3. Creating a Spanish Domain subcommittee to function similarly to the volunteers on the English-speaking portion of the helpline (and how well does that work—ed.)
4. Redesigning the Spanish-speaking domain on the Helpline to compensate for the lack of Spanish-speaking operators provided by the helpline. (Call-forwarding or voice mail to available volunteers were among the suggestions.)

As with anything else we do, its a long way from recommending something to fully implementing it, and the select committee could undoubtedly use the assistance of any interested members who might be interested.

Convention Issues Update

As previously reported, the issue of joint membership on the Board of Trustees and Planning Committee flared up some months ago. The region's Joint Administrative Committee reports that the BOT believes itself to be making progress toward resolution. It is hoped to have a motion by the May region meeting so as to have any new rules in effect at the time of the turnover from one convention to the next.

As the heat seemingly died down on this issue, another tempest arose in the old teapot. By way of background, some time back a decision was made to provide a free basic registration package to the first 99 people booking 2 nights of hotel rooms. (The purpose being to encourage early booking of rooms, and increase the ability to fill the room block.)

Members of this year's Planning Committee became concerned, apparently, with the "appearance of a conflict of interest," that might be perceived when those who vote to have a freebie make use of it themselves. Based on this line of reasoning, they passed a motion to exclude Planning Committee and Board of Trustees members from the free basic registrations.

(continued)

Convention Issues (continued)

When the motion reached the Board of Trustees, it swiftly became apparent that there were (at least) two ways of looking at the issue, and that the BOT was opting for a different one than the planning committee. Rather than summarizing the Trustees' position in our own words, we'll just give you the flavor by quoting at some length the BOT report delivered to the region by the vice-chair of the Trustees:

"This motion was rejected by the BOT. The almost unanimous feeling was that members that serve on either the Planning Committee or the BOT already incur costs of between \$300-\$400 to serve the convention. The BOT feels that no one should dictate to anyone whether they choose to use the registration or give it back for a newcomer or someone that cannot afford to register. Keep in mind that the members of Planning and BOT already make-up (sic) at least one quarter of our contract obligations as far as room block and meals are concerned. We would be better served to thank them for their efforts."

The average addict either unblessed or uncontaminated by prolonged periods on politicized service bodies may find the tone of the above a bit odd. To characterize any effort to establish guidelines for behaviour of trusted servants as "dictating" seems extreme unless one takes the position that accountability must always be purely voluntary.

The references to costs that members incur (scientifically derived by "feeling," at that) and to the quarter of contract obligations made up by planning and BOT seem to be irrelevant to the main principle involved. (The conflict of interest issue is not addressed *at all* by the BOT report.) The members of the Planning Committee, which was responsible for the motion, are of course among the people making the alleged sacrifices which the BOT seems to see as an argument against the motion. They passed the motion nonetheless, apparently feeling that this was a more responsible course than thanking themselves for their efforts would be.

Having said this much, let it be noted that the value of a basic registration packet is relatively miniscule, and that no one we are aware of has seriously suggested that any inappropriate motivation was involved in establishing the freebie for the first 99 reservations. Denying oneself the right to benefit from perks that one votes to create is, however, a perfectly standard method of avoiding the appearance of a conflict of interest, and it is not at all difficult to understand that responsible persons might find it desirable to avoid that appearance. It is also unfortunate, to say the least, when trusted servants respond to proposals not by addressing the issues, but simply by engaging in a self-congratulatory litany on the theme of "We work so hard. We do so much."

Area Convention Issue—Tail wags dog?

In the course of lengthy discussion following Ocean Area's report to the March region, it emerged that a troubling situation seems to exist. If the report is reasonably accurate, the area seems to have been having difficulty meeting basic obligations. Expenses have exceeded contributions for several months, and the area is unable to pick up even a share of the statewide helpline costs and is looking into increasing literature prices, among other things, as a way to make ends meet. This is against a background in which more than \$11,000 has been raised for a convention that apparently donates proceeds to world services and does not return proceeds to its area, and in which some groups choose to donate directly to the convention rather than the area.

This appears to serve as a textbook example of several things that can go wrong in service. We appear to have an "area" event that has somehow

Tail wags dog, cont.

become autonomous in relation to its own area, coupled with enough people who seem to have confused priorities to allow the situation to persist.

What do we mean by confused priorities? A periodic large party we throw for ourselves may be a "nice-to-have" thing, but it relates less directly to our primary purpose than just about anything else we do. PI efforts, H&I efforts and a helpline are "need-to-have" things. The kind of year-round activities that provide a safe social environment for the newcomer around the holidays are probably also more important than a biennial party.

Whenever we find ourselves able to afford frivolous chotchkies but not basic necessities, whether as individuals or as part of N.A., this is a clear indication that a basic inventory of our attitudes and priorities is in order.

Send input and articles to:

**Sanity 4729 Larchwood Ave.
Philadelphia Pa. 19143**

**Phone:(215)476-0655
e-mail: bob115@earthlink.net**

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