

Happy Golden Anniversary Philadelphia Area A.A.!

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On February 28, 1940, seven ex-drunks met in a room at 22nd and Delancey Streets in Philadelphia. The primary purpose of the gathering was to support the resolve of each of those present not to drink alcohol and to discuss a way of helping others like them to find a way to stay sober. They decided to start an Alcoholics Anonymous group in Philadelphia... Thus begins a success story that – one day at a time – has been repeated for 18,262 days as sober alcoholics help themselves and others to recover from their fatal disease.

Alcoholics Anonymous celebrates fifty years of sobriety in the Philadelphia area in 1990 with a series of anniversary events honoring and continuing a tradition of service to all who suffer from the disease of alcoholism.

The AA group those seven men formed that February day would be the fourth in the country – only New York, Akron and Cleveland had formed earlier meetings. The book Alcoholics Anonymous had been published only a few months before this first Philadelphia organization meeting. Precious copies of the "Big Book" had been hand-carried that February from New York by Jim B., a traveling salesman who had "been dry in the original New York Group for about two years," according to his history of the founding of Alcoholics Anonymous in Philadelphia. Jim had come to this city on a new job two weeks previously and "knew he had to have other alcoholics to work and play with."

During the next fifty years, that one recovering alcoholic's desire to work and play with other recovering people would become an organization called the Philadelphia Intergroup Association of A.A. with over 672 local A.A. groups in the five-county area, and that first meeting would blossom into over 1,200 similar A.A. meetings a week. Along the way, hundreds of thousands of men and women in this area would be saved from lives condemned to end in institutions, prisons or premature death from alcoholism by practicing each day the suggested program for better living of Alcoholics Anonymous.

The Philadelphia A.A. spirit includes many firsts, including the first "complete" clubhouse – with a lunch counter (fall, 1940 at 2036 Sansom); the first monthly business meeting of an A.A. group (December, 1940); the first Young People's Group (February, 1946); and the establishment of the first private Alcoholic Clinic (June, 1946) at St. Luke's Hospital through the efforts of two Philadelphia physicians who were the earliest medical advisors to endorse A.A. in a national publication (Jack Alexander's famous article in the Saturday Evening Post, 1941). Two traditions in service began within months of the start of A.A. activity in Philadelphia: the establishment of routine Saturday visits to the Philadelphia general Hospital psychiatric unit (then called the "Psychopathic Ward") in April, 1940, and the first visit to the House of Correction at Holmesburg in September, 1940. These commitments to institutions and prisons have been met continuously for the past fifty years and thanks to the efforts of the committees and members of the Philadelphia Area Intergroup Association, long past this Golden Anniversary year.

Philadelphia Intergroup celebrates this history as a legacy of experience, strength, and hope which can be passed on to other suffering and recovering alcoholics for many more years, one day at a time.

The following events will help local A.A.'s mark this important year:

Share-a-Day – February 18, at St. Joseph's College
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Open House – February 10, 311 S. Juniper Intergroup Office
Round-Up – April 14, 15, 16 at Grand Hotel, Cape May, N.J.
55th Int'l. Convention – Seattle, WA.
50th Anniversary Meeting & Banquet – to be announced.