

Sobriety Sentinel

AUGUST 2021 - SERVING DISTRICTS 14, 19 and 20 OF AREA 38 - TRICOUNTYAA.ORG

Trivia night to deliver sober fun

by ANDREW H
Group 968

At its most recent meeting, the Spring Fling board decided to adopt a disco theme for its upcoming Trivia Night. One could say this annual fundraiser is really, um, stayin' alive.

Board member Lisa was quick to point out to us that - while there will be prizes for best-decorated table and best-dressed - the rounds of questions themselves will cover general information and not be disco-centered. So no need to brush up on your Bee Gees trivia, unless you really just want to.

"The trivia questions aren't terribly hard, and we just have a lot of fun answering them," Lisa said. "It's just standard trivia, basically, but sober. It's for a good cause, to benefit the Spring Fling Convention for 2022."

Lisa told us that attendees should bring their own food, but added, "We will have some snacks if you forget your snacks."

Our friend Helga of Al Anon has already reserved her table of eight. It will be her first time attending.

"It'll be good to get out and be with people at a fun event," Helga said. "The Spring Fling had 400 registrants this year, so I think Trivia Night will be sold out. Get your tickets early!"

There will be an AA young person speaker and an Al Anon speaker at 6:30 before trivia starts at 7:15.

TRIVIA NIGHT:

Sat, Aug. 21 at Crestwood Community Center
Fellowship at 6, speakers at 6:30, trivia at 7:15
Tickets - \$20
Tables of 8 - \$140
Visit springflingstl.com



Andrew H/Sobriety Sentinel

The main pavilion at Old Towne Park in St. Petersburg will be the center of activities and fellowship for the annual Tri-County Picnic, held Saturday, August 14, from 11:30 am-5 pm.

Outdoor Celebration

Activities Chair details decades of involvement with Tri-County Picnic

by JOHN A
Group 164

Among the many things that Tri-County does is, it provides sober activities that are family-oriented. Traditionally, the two major activities have been the picnic in the summertime and the Alcathon on New Year's Eve.

When I first sobered up 30 years ago. I was told by my sponsor that I was going to be on the activities committee. It was really a moving experience for me. I was pretty shy and probably wouldn't have gone to any of those events if I wasn't thinking I was in charge of something. After I had about five or ten years, I actually became the activities chair.

Then three years ago, we needed an activities chair. I stepped in and did a picnic and an Alcathon, and they were both very successful. Covid hit, and we went a whole year without activities. So this year, I stepped in to finish my second half of my activity committee chair term.

When I originally took the position, Tri-County had a fair amount of money in the budget, and I was very

adamant about, *Let's make this a free event.* Everything's free. We cook the hamburgers, the brats, all the food and stuff. People in early sobriety may not have the money to pay five dollars to get in and then have to buy sodas.

We try to make the money back by selling raffle tickets to donated baskets. The last picnic we had, we were a little light, and donations were made by people who were touched by the no-charge philosophy and said things like, "You know, there's a newcomer that's been coming to my homegroup that I don't think would've been able to come to the picnic if they had to pay for stuff." We wound up breaking even.

Basically, we cook the meat - the hamburgers, the brats and all that stuff. We have AA speakers. To me the service part of it is kind of a spiritual thing. I remember close to 30 years ago, in my early days of being involved with service, the day of the picnic, we would stand in this guy's garage and pray. I didn't understand it, but I thought it was really cool. To me, service basically gets me out of myself, and it'll be fun to let some different people do it next year and take over.

Fortune Cookie

The fortune cookie slip read, "A miracle is coming your way." Wow, that's much better than the one I got in college that read, "Have you been to the clinic lately?" How do these messages show up?

I believe God sends us messages all the time in the form of other people, animals, signage on roads, song lyrics, a quote in a book, a hunch, a feeling, a fortune cookie.

If we are awake and aware, these messages come steadily to the questions on our minds. I believe I can release the struggle of finding or forcing the answers. If I trust and have faith, the answers always come.

I had a sponsor once say, "Sometimes no answer is an answer." Or, "Waiting is an action." These were at first baffling forms of guidance. I was used to "making things happen," moving the ball down the field, goal-setting, sales goals, fund raising goals, goals for my life, goals for your life. It was exhausting!

Now instead of being super-charged in the goal setting department, I allow, I let, I choose to go with the flow.

Back to the fortune cookie: since that day, two weeks ago, I've installed my first solo art exhibit without relying on my spouse to come to do the labor, climb the ladders, hammer the nails. I hammered. I learned how to use a level—which is, ironically, an instrument used to find perfect balance.

I had a successful art opening with 60 visitors, and I'm getting interviewed by a major city newspaper about my art work. I made that happen by doing the footwork, calling my sponsor, suiting up and showing up. And leaving the results up to God. I signed a contract on a new gallery space for October, to hang my work in 60 days after my existing gallery contract ends. Flow.

A bright yellow goldfinch shows up in my backyard. There for only a few seconds. That could be another miracle in the long list of miracles.

A man shows up on the sidewalk outside the current art gallery. I'm struggling and limping and using a cane. He asks first if I need help. "Yes," I reply, "that would be great." He asks if I believe in prayer. I tell him, "I do." He asks if he can pray for me. I say, "Why not? I'll accept all the prayers I can get." He proceeds to lean over my outstretched leg, wrapped in a black knee wrap, and place his hand upon my injured knee. I wait. He silently prays for healing. We chat for a few moments afterwards. He leaves.

He texts me his contact info. He writes that we know each other through a friend of mine, that he is her boyfriend I have heard about but never met.

I've been wondering since then, "Am I healed? Did I receive a miracle that day?" My knee does seem a bit better, more stable; it's less painful to hold my weight. Whether or not there was any physical healing, there was love shown by a stranger. Kind words. Being seen is the miracle.

God loves me and sends me a stranger on my path to smile, to connect, to heal. I am grateful for that man that day. It broke the momentary self-pity, the struggle, the feeling-alone. We can all do that for each other.

A few weeks ago, it was my turn to show the face of Love, to a stranger standing by a highway exit, in the pouring down rain, begging for change. I gave him an extra umbrella I had in the front seat of my car. The sermon that Sunday morning was a reminder to give from our surplus. The homeless man was already drenched in rain. The umbrella was a symbol of love.

You are seen. You are loved.

Brenda F
Group 451

Looking back on her first five years

by CHRISTINE W
Group 1197

When I first came into AA, no one in my house was talking to me anymore. I had completely ruined my relationships. My mom told me she was ready to disown me, that my husband should divorce me, and that my children were crying all the time because I was so mean to them.

"I've watched you," she said. "You're awful. You're nasty. If you're going to drink the way you're drinking, do it away from us."

I knew she was right, and as I was sitting in her kitchen that morning with the worst hangover ever, I knew I

had to do something.

I didn't know a single person in Alcoholics Anonymous, and I don't know where the thought came from, but I said, "I think I should try AA."

I found a meeting, and I went that night, still with the worst hangover ever. I went to Immaculate Conception Dardenne's Monday 7 pm meeting, and I heard everything I needed to hear. I cried my eyes out, but I felt safe. Everyone told me to come back to another meeting the next day. I just did what they told me to do. My second meeting was at 212 Club. I kept crying and kept listening.

In those rooms, I learned that I was not crazy, that I was not just an awful mom and an awful wife. I learned that

I had a disease. That made me feel better, more comfortable, like there was actually hope for my future.

I heard people in there talking about stuff they had done, and it was the same exact stuff that I had done. Relocating, trying different drinks - and nothing ever works. I'd never realized it was the first drink that was getting me in trouble.

At the time I met the woman who would soon become my sponsor, I didn't know what a sponsor was. She looked at me and said, "I will sponsor you," and I said, "I don't even know what that means." She said, "That's okay, just start calling me every day." I said, "How often?" "Call me every day." I said, "Okay. I don't know

why." She said, "You don't need to know why. You just need to do what I tell you to do."

So I called her every day, and we built a relationship, a bond, a trust. After about 30 days of daily phone calls, we started working the Steps. One step a month, one-on-one, and there I started learning exactly what I needed to learn about AA.

I learned that only a Power greater than myself could restore me to sanity. I learned that I would have to own my part for everything that I had done, give amends and help others.

For more, please see
FIRST FIVE, Page 2

RESPONSIBILITY STATEMENT

When anyone, anywhere, reaches out for help, I want the hand of A.A. always to be there. And for that: I am responsible.

BIRTHDAYS

GROUP	Name	Age	Birthdate
GROUP 164	John A	30 years	7/1
GROUP 4094	Bill C	30 years	June
GROUP 1023	Kathy L	38 years	6/13
	Krysta H	3 years	6/18
	Christine C	7 years	6/1
GROUP 968	Ken G	14 years	6/16
	Skip H	42 years	6/17
	Gloria Z	33 years	7/14

DECLARATION OF UNITY

This we owe to AA's future: to place our common welfare first; to keep our fellowship united. For on AA unity depends our lives, and the lives of those to come.

Pray for Kristina M!



Dear Gina



A genuine letter mailed to an estranged mentor

by **ANDREW H**
Group 968

I believe the last day I encountered you was the day I graduated journalism school, May 1999. I told you I was going to take a year off and write a book. You supported and encouraged me, as you always did. What I didn't tell you was that I had decided to fully dedicate my life to the pursuit of pleasure in the form of alcohol and drugs, and just doing whatever I decided to do.

I continued to work at a movie theater as my day job, then when my living situation went kaput, I moved in with my mom and became a restaurant server. I told myself I'd do that for a couple months and publish my book, then my illustrious writing career would take off. Well, I finished the book and shelved it, and I stayed in restaurants for 20 years. I also stayed drunk for the majority of that period.

I've thought about you from time to time. You were there as a steady source of strength -

knowledgeable but not a showoff, authoritative but kind and reassuring - at a time in which I needed exactly what you had to offer me. And you opened up about your personal life, which to me seemed like it was full of challenges I knew nothing about. Being a single mom. Being a minority female in a historically Caucasian-dominated field.

You'd leave to go pick up your daughter because the day care was closing, but you'd bring her back to the newsroom so you could help us edit and finish our stories. You gave us extra time throughout the day, whenever we needed it. You went to lunch with me one time when I wasn't even one of your students anymore. I wrote about you in my book that sits on the shelf. Chapter 10. I went back and read it today.

I hadn't thought about you in awhile until recently. I've been sober for six-plus years. I don't work in restaurants anymore. Thanks to a plan I didn't even know I had, I now work a full-time salaried job as a peer support specialist with a

drug and alcohol treatment center. My main qualification for the job is that I was drunk for so long and now sober for pretty long also.

My journalism degree went on the shelf with my first-draft book manuscript. But as a gratefully sober member of Alcoholics Anonymous, I was asked to take a service position that involves me reporting, editing, designing and distributing the region's monthly newspaper. I use every bit of everything you taught me now, 22 years later, and I use it in a way that fulfills a passion and a spiritual purpose. Again, this is not my plan. I was asked to do something and I said yes. It's brought me untold amounts of fulfillment.

Recently, at my job, during a small outpatient group I co-lead with a therapist, the therapist asked the group to share about a person who has impacted their lives. Everyone wanted to talk about their spouse or their kids or their parents. (By the way, I've been married almost 14 years to an awesome woman and have two kids, now headed into sixth and seventh grade.) She told us

to think back over our lifetimes, though, so I started scrolling back through the years in my head, and I stopped at 1998. At you.

All the times I've thought about you, I wanted to get in touch. Write an email, send a letter, make a phone call, see you in person. And I wasn't ready. I was embarrassed of myself. Everyone expected such greatness from me, or at least I thought they did. I didn't get a newspaper job, but now I put together a newspaper. I didn't publish the book, but I've been published four times over the past year by AA's worldwide magazine.

I was just a worthless drunk waiter, in my estimation, and I couldn't bring myself to contact you. But I found you online just now - so easy to do these days, if we choose to do it - and when I finish writing this paragraph, I'm going to sign my name and press "send," with no shame and with no hesitation.

You have made a tremendous impact on me, and I hope you are well.

First Five: Surrender, gratitude and reality

From Page 1

I went to meetings every single day for the first year of my program. I had notebooks, I wrote down notes, I had a homegroup, and I loved every single minute of it. It was so exciting, fresh and new. I was learning how to live my life and finally gaining back the respect of my family.

I didn't wish for my children to leave me alone anymore. I didn't push them away so I could drink. Instead, I gained an interest in my fellows, like it says in the Promises. Honestly, my fellows gained an interest in me, too. We have a really great relationship, my children and I do. My husband and I have an amazing marriage today, with love, respect and honesty.

When I was in my second year of sobriety, I got - I feel like I'm the one who termed this - the second-year suckerpunch. That's when I found out SOBER stands for Son Of a Bitch, Everything's Real!

Sobriety wasn't quite as exciting anymore that second year. I was still going to meetings, but I had worked all the Twelve Steps, and now it was time to learn how to live life.

My younger son had developed severe anxiety that I had to work through with

him, and it was hard. We had to homeschool him. That was something completely new to me, that would have driven me to drink even more had I still been drinking. I had to now homeschool my child, be sober, and be okay with it. I would definitely not have been able to do that without the help of AA, my sponsor, and all the women and men in the rooms. They all helped me through that.

That's when I learned what "one day at a time" truly meant. I never knew from one day to the next how anything was going to go. By taking the time and learning to live life one day at a time, it really made such a difference, because I'd get so stressed out wondering what would happen tomorrow.

My third year in the program, my son had gone back to school, and I felt like life would be a little easier. That's when I started sponsoring multiple women. I have one sponsee I've had for three years. Sponsoring women has definitely been challenging at times but has helped me to grow in my own recovery process. I have the opportunity to go through the Twelve Steps a second time, a third time, a fourth time. I sponsor women the same way I was sponsored.

I have a phone call in to my sponsor once a week, and I'm receiving phone

calls from my sponsees a couple times a week, still going to meetings, listening to tapes. I work a strong program. I always have. I always knew I had to.

Then came the fourth year, and that's when Covid hit. I found out very quickly how to get on new Zoom meetings. I went to those regularly, as often as I could. My live meetings had been about three times a week, but my Zoom meetings were five to six per week. I felt disconnected and needed to dig in deeper. I just wanted to feel that fellowship, and when you're not with humans, that's hard to do.

We say that God has a sense of humor. When Covid hit, I had already experienced homeschool, and all these moms started calling me and saying, "Oh my gosh, what on earth?! We have to homeschool our kids now! How did you do it? How did you make it work?"

I said, "You know, girls, we have to honestly live our lives and do this homeschool Covid thing one day at a time." Homeschooling was a lot easier for me the second time.

Now that Covid has settled down and we're back at live meetings, it feels so good to see the people and to be back in the rooms with the men and the women and the fellowship that helped me get this

far. I have to say, coming up on five years, it really has gone super-fast. My life is so much better because I'm not feeling guilty and not doing things wrong. I'm not doing things perfect, by any stretch of the imagination, but five years of drinking takes such a toll on your body versus five years of recovery.

My five years in recovery have reinforced my relationship with my family, and I've gained a love for myself in the process. I've learned who I am. This has been a big journey in self-discovery. I'm learning what I like, how I want to live, who I want to hang around with, what I want to do in my life. I am not bound by the bottle anymore. I get to live my life the way I want to live my life.

In the beginning, the first year or two, I would have cravings and feel like I wasn't able to handle it. Surrendering my alcoholism to God is the one thing that finally made that obsession go away. I would have to get down on my knees and pray to God and surrender my alcoholism, say "Please God, just take this away." Surrender isn't just a one-time thing.

Today, I have a great day if I take the time in the morning to get on my knees and pray, and say, "Thy will be done, not

mine." "Grateful" is the key word, I'd say, about getting five years in the program. I feel like five years is the next big milestone after one year.

I feel like I'm capable of reaching out and helping anybody that needs help learning the Twelve Steps of the program. In the next five years, my goals are to basically just continue and not forget that I have to live this life one day at a time.

I have to continue to surrender to my God, my alcoholism and my disease. Sometimes I have to surrender people, places and things to my God that I cannot control. Otherwise, I will go crazy wondering about the what-if's in life. We can't have the what-if's; we just have to have the one-day-at-a-time.

I plan on continuing my recovery the same way. One day at a time. Going to meetings, probably at least two to three a week, and sponsoring other women.

I'm so grateful for this program and for everyone I've met, the men and women that walk this journey with me.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Christine's sobriety date is August 1, 2016.

FEATURED MEETINGS

Group 630 is kid-friendly

My homegroup is Friday night, 6:00 meeting at the 212 Club, called Project Hope. I've been in this homegroup for ten years now, and the meeting itself has been around for a very long time.

The older kids hang out in the club and watch the younger kids. There's a playroom, they'll also sit in the general area where there's a TV, and some of the youngest kids sit in the meeting room with their parents.

Nobody gets uptight when the small kids make noise during the meeting. There was one instance when my sponsee Amber - her little girl and this other little boy, they were babies at the time - were just hollering back and forth in the meeting. It was just so cute, because they were just learning to use their voices and speak a little bit.

I like the atmosphere of this meeting better than any other meeting I've ever

been to. We have probably 10-15 homegroup members, but the average meeting attracts 40 to 50 people. It's a mixed population of women and men.

After every meeting, we welcome people to go out to dinner with us. I do this every Friday night. That group can consist of 10-20 people, sometimes even more. We always invite the newcomer to join us.

There's one girl in the meeting, Sammi, who I know really well - now - but in the beginning I'd tell her, "Come out to eat with us," because she felt odd going out to eat, like you had to be part of an elite club. She talks about that in the meeting now, that it's not like that at all, that it's so welcoming and that people are great and that we have so much fun.

With Covid, our group did not shut down. A lot of the 212 Club meetings stayed open. We did do a Zoom hybrid, but a lot of people still went up there during Covid. It

gave people the opportunity to do what they wanted. There were no severe outbreaks or anything; it didn't seem to cause any harm being open. Our Zoom connection has been gone now for probably a few months.

We rotate the format weekly - Big Book, 12+12, Popsicle sticks, speaker.

-Laura G

Group 128 moves to ARCH

Group 128 (closed men's meeting, Sundays at 7:30 pm) has moved to ARCH, at 502 S. Fifth Street in St. Charles. We used to meet across the street at the Welcome Hall. When the Hall shut down, supposedly temporarily, we moved to our chairperson's office conference room. After several months, a group conscience decided to make the move to ARCH.

This is a solid group, with a good mix of old-timers and newcomers, and our format

is topic/discussion.

-Bill T

Brand new meeting off Wolfrum

Beginning August 3, there will be a new Big Book Study on Tuesday evenings from 7-8 pm. This is a closed meeting at St. John's United Church of Christ, 945 Wolfrum Road, in Weldon Spring.

Three of us decided to start the meeting. Nan H, Colleen and myself are sisters in sobriety. Nan sponsors the two of us. We're not sure what to expect for attendance at first, but we would love to see this meeting grow.

Until further notice, please bring your own beverages. No coffee will be prepared.

-Theresa N

To report Tri-County AA news or events, announce birthdays, recommend your homegroup for a feature piece, or just to share your experience, strength and hope with us, please email sentinel@tricityaa.org