



# GRATITUDE GAZETTE

## Knock, knock

This is the time of year when things tend to slow down a little (see the bulletin board, back page). It's also the time of year when, if you have an issue you want brought up at the next Conference, you need to get busy working on it. If so, we hope you'll find help in "How to start an Advisory Action", on page 4.

In that spirit of speaking up, we felt it would be a good time to look at our efforts to hear and be heard, to be a part of, to include others, to break down walls and let ourselves in. Tradition Three came to mind, of course, but also Concept Five, and some of the committee work, and the pamphlets, and the groups. We hope you enjoy and share this Gazette.

- Editor

## St. Louis AA responds to increase in non-English speaking population

An AA source in St. Louis took the time to catch us up on AA's response to the recent wave of immigration there. Outside sources put the influx at over 100,000 people in the last few years, claiming that 1 in 5 people now living within the city limits are not US citizens, and 1 in 10 do not speak English.

Efforts are underway to make AA available where needed by working with the International Institute (a not-for-profit agency working to help the recent immigrants), Catholic Charities, and personal contacts within those communities. According to our source, the influx includes large numbers from Mexico, Vietnam, and the Bosnia region. Central Services is looking for AA members who speak the relevant languages for possible Twelfth Step work.

## Local group goes dot-com

The Take It Easy group of Bracken Flats has incorporated to release a product that they believe will revolutionize sobriety – a selection of completed inventories, available via the Internet. "These are primo, grade-A inventories, all quality stuff", says Maude O., long-time group member and CEO of the new company, EasierSoftware.com. "We offer original 4<sup>th</sup> Steps written by newcomers who subsequently stayed sober an average of 8 years," she says, "a year more than the average AA." The inventories are available in a choice of formats, including 4-column, "seven deadly sins", and life-story. "This isn't a theory," she says. "These are proven inventories that worked for the people who wrote them." She also offers downloadable 10<sup>th</sup> Steps for men and women in all phases of spiritual growth. "We're working on a daily inventory tablet, with a few popular defects printed on each page. You tear out a page every day and pray for help with whatever's on it."

Take It Easy member Murph J. says, "Dr. Bob used to take people through an inventory in a week, or even sometimes just a few hours. But now you can download a completed 4<sup>th</sup> Step and be on your way in five minutes. That's spiritual progress."

Dissenting group member Stilts T. has not leaped on the bandwagon. "Call me old-fashioned, but I think once in a while you're supposed to ask yourself some hard questions and really think about them."

Brushing aside the objection, Maude says "I want to make the Steps so convenient that people can work them every day." Pre-formatted apologies in email format, suitable for amends, will be the group's next project. Meanwhile, she's encouraging people to do their inventories the EasierSoftware way.

## Eastern Area of Missouri Conference Area 38 Fall, 2002

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### A conversation with...

## Robin B., Senior Editor of the AA Grapevine

We're lucky to have Robin B. at the Fall Assembly this year, where she will conduct a workshop and will be the featured speaker at our Saturday night speaker meeting. Robin works at AA Grapevine, Inc., in New York, as Senior Editor of the AA Grapevine. We spoke with Robin on the phone. These are notes, not quotes, from our talk.

### We're looking at inclusion and participation in this Gazette. Any thoughts on the Grapevine's work in this area?

Diversity is an issue for us. Not all members are reached by all groups. Why that is, and how we can improve, is an important question for all members of the Fellowship. The Grapevine helps by reflecting the different segments of the population. It is a quicker response to the growing and changing population. The Grapevine represents the contemporary Fellowship and has the latitude to publish the full range of the Fellowship. It's about what people are thinking and writing. It doesn't require the ongoing approval of GSO. It's a bridge for different ways of practicing the principles. It's what the Traditions came out of; it's a mirror of the Fellowship.

### Sounds challenging.

Yes. It's helped my sense of tolerance. Having to publish things that sound strange to me, it opens my heart to more people. I can't just put down a manuscript because I disagree with it. The good news is that, sooner or later, everyone will hear their story in the Grapevine.

### Have you seen some pretty strange things?

Yes. I've had manuscripts sent in on legal paper, "Hello, Kitty" stationery, doctor's pads. I've read about all kinds of programs, from all different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. The diversity of approaches reflects the many cultures of our members.

## Roving Reporter goes to jail

I recently felt as though **the gates of hell** had closed on me with a clang. But it was actually just the gates of the **county hoosegow**, where yours truly had gone to track down reports of possible **Traditions violations behind the walls**.

Sure enough, as we entered the jail **the first thing we did was break our anonymity**. To my horror, I was required to **hand the deputy my photo ID**, which she used to run a computer check on me. "So much for anonymity," I muttered. But Raoul, my AA guide on this mission, explained that cooperating with a security check in order to carry the message is not the same as breaking my anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films. He reminded me that many forms of service involve **giving non-AA's your name & phone number**, so that they can contact you, and said that our slight discomfort at **letting these police know we're AA members** is more than made up for by the chance to carry the message to our fellows behind bars. He also warned me to take the security check seriously, since he knows two people who discovered in this way that they still had some outstanding warrants, and **had to stay in jail after the meeting**.

I had heard stories of **people from other fellowships** bringing their non-alcoholic problems to jailhouse AA meetings, and of **disruptive people** who come to the meeting just to get out of their cells. The potential was there for people to **do some serious Tradition-trampling**. (continued page 4)

***Our membership ought to include all who suffer from alcoholism. Hence we may refuse none who wish to recover. Nor ought AA membership ever depend upon money or conformity...***

## **Area members share their experience**

"I'm not sure if, a few years ago, I would have 'gotten it', and I'm not sure some members of my home group 'get it' now. There's a difference between someone offering you a cup of coffee and someone offering to make a pot if you want some; that's the difference between always having an interpreter at the meeting, and offering to hire one if someone requests it. But in the last few years, as Special Needs has been more active in our district, groups that have moved have chosen accessible locations. And there have been improvements in the Where & When. Now I can tell, without having to call someone (who may or may not know), whether a meeting is fully or partially accessible to me in my wheelchair."

"I sponsored an atheist for a while. It was an issue for him. He finally moved to a town he heard about in Idaho where there are apparently a lot of atheists, and he's attending meetings up there."

"I heard there were Spanish-speaking clients at the local treatment center, and started looking for local AA's who spoke Spanish. I found someone who had Mexican AA materials and was interested in starting a Spanish-speaking meeting. We put up flyers, put out the word, and began meeting every week. At its peak, we had about 8 attendees every week. Someone's work schedule changed, someone moved away, and eventually the meeting was shut down. We have hopes of starting it again someday."

"I'm looking for the black newcomer at the all-white meeting. The black newcomer may have to learn a different way of talking, and I'm not just talking about AA culture. And they may have to do it in a setting that's uncomfortable for them. In my case, my bottom was low enough that I decided to stay even though I was uncomfortable."

"When I was drinking, my biggest fear was non-acceptance, being singled out. And it was still a big fear for me when I got sober. In some groups, or when traveling, I sometimes hide my sexual orientation. I've gradually grown more comfortable at heterosexual meetings. Other gays and lesbians have been examples to me, encouraging me to be open when sharing about relationships, teaching me to set an example for others. My home group is the one place I feel completely at ease, where no part of my life has to be censored."

"At my first assembly, there were no other blacks. It didn't look like my home group at all. I was uncomfortable, self-conscious. I decided that day to get involved and make things different for the next person. I do that in my home group. To me, AA is about personal responsibility, sponsoring people in, being part of the solution."

"I did a year and a half in AA before coming out, and then six months later moved to a big city where I attended mostly lesbian meetings. When I returned to Missouri, it was a shock, and I didn't feel comfortable in the gay meeting here. I've been active in service at the district level, and I think people have seen me as a district officer, and not as a lesbian district officer. If I was going on to Area, I would hope not to feel any differently. I do sometimes censor my story in groups I don't know well, saying 'I fell in love and moved away' instead of 'I fell in love with a woman and moved away'. I'd like it if people looked blindly at the newcomers. People tend to gravitate toward some newcomers and not to others. We should remember this program is a matter of life and death."

"My beliefs don't fit in the majority belief system, if there is such a thing in AA. But the less I sit and think about myself, and the more I listen to everyone else's experience, the less the differences matter. It's everyone's job to keep in mind, 'attraction and not promotion', making sure that we're not just preaching from the pulpit but trying to let the newcomer hook onto that little inward smile and see that there's hope for a fulfilling life in sobriety."

***...Any two or three alcoholics gathered together for sobriety may call themselves an AA group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation. – Tradition 3, Long Form***

## **Specializing AA**

### **Specialized Pamphlets**

AA publishes a variety of pamphlets affirming that AA is inclusive and reaching out to potential members who may feel different. We took a quick look at those pamphlets. [Do you think you're different?](#) includes stories of alcoholics who are black, gay, lesbian, atheist, Native American, clergy, Jewish, agnostic, low-bottom, high-bottom, elderly, or teen-aged. Other pamphlets are more focused: [Memo to an Inmate who may be an Alcoholic](#), [Young People and AA](#), [AA and the Armed Services](#), [Letter to a Woman Alcoholic](#) (a 1954 article from [Good Housekeeping](#)), [AA For The Woman](#), [Too Young](#) (comicbook), [A Message To Teenagers](#), [AA and the Gay/Lesbian Alcoholic](#), [AA for the Native North American](#), [Time to Start Living](#) (for older prospective members), [What Happened to Joe & It Happened to Alice](#) (comicbooks), [It Sure Beats Sitting In A Cell](#), [Is AA For Me?](#) (for people who find reading difficult), and our newest pamphlet, [Can AA Help Me Too? –Black/African Americans Share Their Stories](#).

These pamphlets generally feature an introduction, the stories of some AA members who fit into these categories, and a positive conclusion. Most try to help the newcomer identify despite differences, and also to answer basic questions newcomers are likely to have. [AA and the Gay/Lesbian Alcoholic](#) is unique in that it does not rely heavily on stories, but is written more in an informative, topical style. Another interesting feature of this pamphlet is the self-diagnosis checklist. [AA and the Armed Services](#) is also unique in that it tries to answer questions specific to military AA's, such as "How do we stay in touch with AA when there are no meetings nearby?" and "Is difference in rank a problem?" (They say it isn't.)

The pamphlets are interesting, and sometimes inspiring, and may help you help someone. And like the many non-English pamphlets now available from GSO, the fact of their presence on the rack transmits a message about Tradition Three.

### **Specialized Groups & Meetings**

On page 15 of the pamphlet [The AA Group](#), groups are defined using the long form of Tradition Three and some points from Warranty Six of Concept 12:

- No penalties to be inflicted for nonconformity to AA principles
  - No fees or dues to be levied – voluntary contributions only
  - No member to be expelled from AA – membership always to be the choice of the individual
  - Each AA group to conduct its internal affairs as it wishes – it being merely requested to abstain from acts that might injure AA as a whole
- (For oldtimers, this replaced the old six-point definition of a group in 1992.)

Then it says: "Some AA's come together as specialized AA groups – for men, women, young people, doctors, gays and others. If the members are all alcoholics, and if they open the door to all alcoholics who seek help, regardless of profession, gender or other distinction, and meet all the other aspects defining an AA group, they may call themselves an AA group." When asked what is meant by "open the door", one GSO staffer offered a personal interpretation: "I think it means that if you're in a strange town one night and you need a meeting, they should let you attend. But they don't necessarily want you to join their group."

We spoke with a few local members of "specialized" groups...

"We believe in having a men's group. It works for us, and we think it fills a need. We don't talk about men's issues, we talk about AA, but the identification is strong and we don't have to deal with the distractions you find at some other groups. Women have sometimes attended our meeting, but none have ever asked to join the group, and we're okay with that."

"We read a statement at the start of the meeting: 'This is primarily a gay & lesbian meeting of AA. Anyone with a desire to stop drinking is welcome to attend.' We had a female group member for a while who was not a lesbian. She just liked the group."

## ***Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or AA as a whole – Tradition 4.***

“We aren’t just about ‘young people’. We have members of all ages, and we encourage that. But calling this a ‘young peoples group’ attracts young people, gives them a place to go in AA. It helps us carry the message.”

“We’re not necessarily a group that’s going to register with GSO. We started as a once-a-month meeting of physicians. We had similar problems with licensing, similar experiences with things like having to attend Caduceus meetings, a lot in common. We’ve expanded to two and sometimes three meetings a month, and we always read a Step or Tradition for the topic. We get dentists, nurses, counselors, sometimes people who just become part of the group with no other connection to medicine – they just like the meeting. Most of our people attend a lot of other meetings, but we’ve had newcomers who come here to explore, who only feel comfortable here. We encourage them to attend regular meetings, find a homegroup.”

A 1946 letter from a woman to the Grapevine revealed the same concern about “distractions” mentioned above, but she wasn’t sure that specialized groups were the answer. “Women’s groups are working out successfully in many cities, though fundamentally segregation is somewhat contrary to AA principles. Alcoholics are banded together in the fellowship of a basic malady and as a part of our healing we must help each other and like our fellow human being regardless of who or what he or she may be. For women to set themselves up as a special case is questionable to say the least – particularly when one of our chief weaknesses as alcoholics has been to stress the I’m-different-and-nobody-understands-me solitude of thought that leads to desolation. On these arguments, many AA’s are against women’s groups. But there are no rules and regulations in AA, and a number of women’s groups are doing remarkably well. Some women prefer them.”

In the conclusion of Do you think you’re different?, we found some surprisingly strong text encouraging people to focus on similarities, not differences: “In some large cities, you’ll find some special AA meetings – for police officers, gay men and lesbians, members of the clergy, young people, doctors, Spanish-speaking people, AA beginners, or women only. Going to some of these when we are new in AA may ease the recovery path at first, but the happiest, healthiest recoveries seem to come to people who go to *all kinds* of AA meetings, not only the special ones. We have found it unwise to limit our AA circle to folks exactly like ourselves. Segregation gives our ‘uniqueness’ an unhealthy emphasis. We find it more enjoyable, and more healing, to get into the mainstream of AA life and mingle with everybody else, not just ‘different’ people.”

In October 1977, the Grapevine published a letter on this issue from Dr. Jack Norris, an important Class-A friend of AA (died in 1989). One problem with the letter is his use of the word “we”; it’s not clear who he means when he says, for instance, “In general, we have inclined to this view: When other requirements are added that might seem to exclude some alcoholics, these should be considered AA meetings and *not* AA groups. We have never discouraged AA’s from forming special -purpose meetings of any or all kinds to meet the needs of interested individuals, but we have been hesitant to consider as *groups* those that might seem to exclude any alcoholic, for whatever reason.... Will we soon be having Catholic groups, Protestant groups, Jewish groups, atheist groups, agnostic groups, groups made up of members of one political party or another? Certainly, we hope not, and we don’t anticipate any such thing. However, we do feel that we should be aware of a possible trend and perhaps bend every effort to encourage our similarities and not our particularities.”

He includes in his letter the six-point definition of an AA group, removed from our literature ten years ago: “In the beginning of our Fellowship in countries outside the United States and Canada, we agreed on six points that describe what an AA group is. They are: (1) All members of a group are alcoholics, and all alcoholics are eligible for membership. (2) As a group, they are fully self-supporting. (3) A group’s primary purpose is to help alcoholics recover through the Twelve Steps. (4) As a group, they have no outside affiliation. (5) As a group, they have no opinion on outside issues. (6) As a group, their public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion, and they maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio-TV, and film.”

Dr. Norris concludes his piece by pointing out the difficulty of the question, and so do we: “At the 1973 General Service Conference, workshops on ‘The AA Group’ were held and went into overtime because of lengthy discussion on the subject of special -purpose groups. By request of this Conference, the subject was scheduled for full-scale discussion at the 1974 Conference. The time allotted for it again proved to be insufficient and a special session – lasting four hours – was called. The final action was that the AA General Service Office should list *all* groups in accordance with the definition of an AA group listed in the front of all our directories.

“In the final analysis, perhaps, what we are really dealing with in special-purpose groups is communication among AA members and how to improve it so that we can do a better job of carrying the AA message to alcoholics of all kinds.”

### **The Traditional Rights of Appeal and Petition**

In writing on AA’s Concept 5, Bill W. assures us of two special rights referred to collectively as the “Right of Appeal”. The first has to do with **minority opinion**. In our group processes, members voting in the minority “should be *encouraged* to file minority reports whenever they feel a majority to be in considerable error”. And in grave matters, the minority should “charge itself with the actual *duty* of presenting a minority report to the Conference.” The flip side, he says, is that “a well-heard minority... is our chief protection against an uninformed, misinformed, hasty or angry majority.” The second right, he says, should “permit any person in our service structure, whether paid or unpaid, to **petition** for the redress of a personal grievance, carrying his complaint, if he so desires, directly to the General Service Board... without prejudice or fear of reprisal.”

Bill writes, “The *Rights of ‘Appeal’ and ‘Petition’* of course aim at the total problem of protecting and making the best possible use of minority feeling and opinion. This has always been, and still is, a central problem of all free governments and democratic societies. In Alcoholics Anonymous individual freedom is of enormous importance. For instance, any alcoholic is a member of AA the moment he says so; we cannot take away his right to belong.... In drafting the Charter for our Conference, therefore, we naturally infused that document with provisions which would insure protection and respect for minorities. This is exemplified, for instance, in our ‘Third Legacy’ method of selecting Delegates. Unless the majority candidate can poll a two-thirds vote of his State or Provincial Assembly, he must place his name in a hat with one or more of the choices of the Assembly minority. By thus drawing lots, the minority candidates have an equal chance with the majority’s choice.”

#### **The Right of Petition in action**

Interestingly enough, a “traditional right of appeal” issue is now in process at GSO in New York. An AA member and former GSO employee, now retired, has taken issue with GSO’s handling of his retirement benefits. Having exhausted his ordinary legal options as an employee, he has taken the issue up as an AA member, requesting his traditional Right of Petition. According to Beth R., our Regional Trustee, his request for a fair hearing will be honored. How did he do it? He wrote a letter to the chairman of the General Service Board, and copied it to the chairman of AAWS.

*Throughout our structure, a traditional “Right of Appeal” ought to prevail, so that minority opinion will be heard and personal grievances receive careful consideration.* – Concept 5, Short Form

***Each Alcoholics Anonymous group ought to be a spiritual entity having but one primary purpose – that of carrying its message to the alcoholic who still suffers. – Tradition 5, Long Form***

## BULLETIN BOARD

### OCTOBER

#### Pacific Group Hayride

Oct 6, 7pm

Nike Grade School (Hwy AP & NN) Pacific Facility, open mtg

#### District 8 Annual Picnic & Fish Fry

Oct 13, noon  
Redman Creek Pavilion at Wappapello Lake State Park  
covered-dish lunch, families – Dennis H. 573-785-7363

#### 3rd Annual Olive Branch Reunion

Oct 19, 6pm-midnight, \$17  
Community Center, St. Ann

#### District 7 Quarterly Potluck Dinner

Oct 26, 1:30-? at Cape County Park Shelter #20, Cape G.  
AA speaker at 3pm – Kenny B. 573-334-7660

**Halloween Party** Oct 26, 8pm (meeting), 9pm (dance)  
Pacific Facility, 321 Orleans, Pacific, MO

### NOVEMBER

#### 2nd Annual "Four Absolutes" Seminar

Nov 2, 10am-3pm  
St. Alban-Roe Church, Chesterfield, MO

#### District 53 Seminar "Our Primary Purpose"

Nov 9, 2-5pm  
St. Luke's Church, Telegraph Road (1 mile N of 270)  
Chili pot luck included – Dave B 314-487-8325

#### District 12 "Service Work Workshop"

Nov 9, 1-5pm  
Russell Chapel, 108 E. Ash, Columbia  
James T. 573-474-9226 or Ben M. 573-874-9610

#### 5th Annual Illinois-Missouri Men's AA Breakfast

Nov 17, 9am, \$15  
W.C. 618-659-9202 or Jim E. 314-962-6664

**ALANO Banquet** Nov 23, St. Louis Airport Marriott  
6pm (social) 7pm (banquet) 9pm (dance), \$29

## Roving Reporter, *cont'd from page 1*

Surely Raoul, who had been so smooth at cooperating with the guards and getting us in, would fail to keep the meeting on track. **Argh! He ruined my story!** Instead of waiting for people to **break Traditions**, Raoul read a statement explaining our purpose before starting the meeting, and asked if anyone would like to leave. To my surprise, **several men got up and left.** The remaining inmates appeared to be genuinely interested in having an AA meeting.

My final concern was **a private fear** that, because I had never been to jail, **I would not be welcome at the meeting.** It seemed to me that Tradition 3 might not work in jail. That is, these guys had two things in common – alcoholism and jail – and I just had the alcoholism. Maybe they wouldn't want me to be there, or wouldn't be interested in what I had to say. But Raoul told me to focus on powerlessness over alcohol, which any alcoholic can relate to, and on how I recovered, which is what these guys came to hear. I did, and at the end of the meeting they invited me to return. And you know, I think I will. Ever vigilant, R.R.

## Hello from Beth R.

*We recently discussed some of these ideas with our Regional Trustee, Beth R. These are notes, not quotes, from that talk...*

In researching the 4<sup>th</sup> Edition Big Book, we saw that there were black groups way back, almost from the very beginning, and they were probably very important at the time. But as for nowadays, I have no real opinion; if it works for you, that's fine with me. I remember that the medical professionals meetings, when they first started, were greeted with some alarm, but they don't seem to have caused any harm.

One problem I do see is that of connecting people to the service structure. Hispanic groups in the Pacific region for many years had their own service structure. It's just in the last 8-10 years in Texas that we've seen the Spanish-speaking groups at the assemblies. *[Editor's note: some assemblies in Texas now feature translators and special headphones for this purpose.]*

We just saw in Box 4-5-9 about the first Japanese-speaking group in the Pacific region. Now in Houston, there are Asian groups that do not participate in districts or assemblies. Is this by choice or unawareness? They buy books at the Intergroup, but they don't register with Intergroup or GSO. Their meetings don't appear in the schedule; people hear of them by word of mouth.

The problems we're seeing now, which came up at the Inner City Special Forum, are that people are attending meetings where they work in the city but going back to their home groups to do actual service work. So these large meetings in the urban center have no real service structure. And you have meetings that have such a constant flood of 12<sup>th</sup> Step work that everyone's focused on getting people sober, sometimes getting them to hospitals or treatment centers, and nobody in the group participates in or knows anything about the service structure. So they're cut off from AA, from world services.

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## How to start an Advisory Action

If you have an idea you want discussed at the annual Conference, it's time to get moving. We asked around and learned of two routes:

1. Write a letter to the Conference Coordinator at GSO, who may forward it to an appropriate Trustees' committee. Or,
2. Write a letter to the Chairman of AAWS, Inc. (or Grapevine, Inc., if appropriate), who may forward it to an appropriate corporate committee, who may forward it to the board of directors of the corporation, who may forward it to an appropriate Trustees' committee.

It's probably a good idea to first discuss the issue at your group, district, or area, to check your thinking, and maybe give the idea a little more credibility. Your idea may be rejected at any time, of course. And if it's an administrative idea, rather than a policy idea, it may be put into action without further ado. But a policy idea that gets forwarded to a Conference committee may become a recommendation on the floor of the Conference. Just try to get it in soon. The agenda for the Conference, held in April every year, is finalized in January.

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## The Gazette Interview

The Gazette recently caught up with busy 19<sup>th</sup>-century French aristocrat and political theorist Alexis de Toqueville for a chat about AA.

*Gazette: As you probably know, Alexis, Warranty Six of our 12<sup>th</sup> Concept assures us that AA will always remain democratic in thought and action. Your admiration of democracy is legendary, and your writings on the subject are considered classic. In your opinion, what is the greatest danger to democracy?*

*de Toqueville: The tyranny of apathetic, self-seeking, uninformed, or angry majorities. Only a truly dedicated citizenry, quite willing to protect and conserve minority rights and opinions, [can] guarantee the existence of a free and democratic society.\**

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## SWRAASA – Southwest Regional AA Service Assembly – October 11-13, Ft. Worth, TX

Published by the Gratitude Gazette committee, Eastern Area of Missouri Alcoholics Anonymous. Opinions expressed are not the opinion of the Area or AA as a whole, which have not endorsed this material except where noted. We love suggestions and need writers, especially in the St. Louis area. To correspond with the editor or submit bulletin board items, write Gazette Editor, c/o Area Office, 2683 Big Bend Blvd., Rm. 18, St. Louis, MO 63143, or