

## CEC becomes a MSCA Standing Committee

*Written in January, 2006*

We were asked to write an article about our experience in becoming a standing committee in mid-southern California Area 09. In some of this author's travels, new information was shared about the path of carrying the message to the elder alcoholic. We thought we would include a small time line in this article to show you, the reader, the progression that led us, in May 2005, to a Cooperation with the Elder Community standing committee.

In 1990, in southeastern New York, a group of AA's, including a woman named Cookie, (who was later to become a delegate on Panel 49) with the help of a Class A trustee named Joan Jackson, formulated a questionnaire, which was sent out to all the delegate areas to find out what they were doing to help the still suffering older alcoholic.

From that time until 2000, in New York, a subdivision of Sober Over Sixty was established under the Special Needs Committee. This group targeted assisted living nursing homes. The group also taped "old timers" for the archives and did "Roots" meetings. The group also succeeded in redoing the Time to Start Living pamphlet.

In July 2000, Minneapolis at the 65<sup>th</sup> International A.A. Convention a workshop was held entitled, "Carrying the Message to the Older Alcoholic."

In November 2001 a workshop was held at the 40<sup>th</sup> annual Hawaii Convention, "Serenity not Senility."

In August/September, 2002, Box 459 published an article, "Honolulu AA's Help Older Alcoholics say Aloha to Serenity".

In August 2003 at the Hawaii Area 17 assembly, an ad hoc Committee called Cooperation with the Elder Community was established. The co-chairs were Marion B., Sandra S., and Stan B.

In September 2003, in an Area 17, District 8, West Hawaii meeting the first district level, "Cooperation with the Elder Community" ad hoc committee was established.

In May 2004, West Hawaii Area 17, District 8 voted unanimously to allow "Cooperation with the Elder Community Committee" to become a standing committee.

In March 2004, at the PRAASA held in Irvine, California, two roundtables were given on “Cooperation with the Elder Community”. The author attended one of the roundtables and left the roundtable committed to giving service in this area. The author spoke with the Area 09 Chairperson, Panel 54, Bruce H., who had also attended the Roundtable. He agreed that there was a need and suggested we meet at the next Pacific Regional Forum 2004 in Portland, Oregon, to discuss the possibility of the establishment of an ad hoc committee, “Cooperation with the Elder Community”.

In July 2004, an ad hoc “Cooperation with the Elder Community Committee” was formed in Area 09, mid-southern California.

We were off and running. Over the course of the next few months we

- developed a list of senior meetings in Area 09,
- worked on and designed a brochure called “Cooperation with the Elder Community”,
- gave presentations at many district meetings,
- participated with Cooperation with the Professional Community in a panel presentation to the public and spoke about the increasing number of still suffering elder adults,
- developed letters to all the Central Service Offices in Area 09, asking them to use the designation ‘Sr.’ next to all meetings that were formatted for the elder adult in the meeting directories,
- helped form four “Cooperation with the Elder Community Committees” at the district level,
- spoke with several nursing home facilities and senior centers,
- gave a presentation to 1300+- people at the Carrying the Message to the Older Adult panel at the 2005 International Convention in Toronto

This was no small feat, as some of us lived 120+ miles away from each other. What was incredibly heartening was at every Area Service Committee meeting or Area Assembly, new people signed up from districts all over southern California. As of the writing of this article, we now have nine districts represented on the Committee and over fourteen committee members at the Area level.

We encountered a number of challenges, not the least of which, were AA members at the Area level who were adamantly against the need for a Cooperation with the Elder Community standing committee. They strongly believed this type of work could be handled by the Cooperation with the Professional Community and the Special Needs Committees. We stressed that the process of aging was not a special need but a “universal phase of life with

its own blessings and challenges”. We did it ... ‘one day at a time’ and sometimes ‘one meeting at a time’. But we continued to discuss and develop new ways to reach the still suffering elder alcoholic.

In May 2005, the mid-southern California Area 09 Assembly approved the establishment of “Cooperation with the Elder Community” Committee as a standing committee. During the preceding two Area Service Committee meetings we stood before our AA peers and answered every question that was asked, with as much grace and serenity as we could muster. We prayed often, answered softly, and placed principles before personalities. We were absolutely grateful and delighted when the majority of our AA peers showed us their support and belief in the need by voting for the standing committee.

We are currently in the process of having the mid-southern California Area 09 Assembly approve a new brochure entitled, Cooperation with the Elder Community, and a set of guidelines and we have asked the Literature Committee to review a list of Do’s and Don’ts for presentations to the districts. We are also working on establishing an AA meeting in a nursing home facility in Long Beach, California. And, we are developing a ‘How to begin a Cooperation with the Elder Community Committee at the District level’ guideline to encourage more Districts to form a CEC Committee.

One of our hardworking committee members, Doug W. wrote this regarding his experience:

In Preparatory efforts toward realizing the acceptance of CEC as a standing area committee, I spoke before two district meetings. I also spoke on behalf of the CEC at the Area Assembly session at which the committee was being presented for a vote.

I used the source material that was available to present statistics and anecdotes pertaining to alcohol abuse among the elder population. Statistics from Orange County were most effective.

My main point at the Area Assembly was that the committee would help carry the load rather than invade other committee’s turf.

I also used the source material to propose that my District include CEC as a standing District committee and made myself available to answer questions. I found unexpected support and opposition at all sessions.

Our terrific committee secretary, Bob Mc, wrote this:

During the CEC Committee ad hoc period, we shared published studies and did our own research into the magnitude of the problem of elder alcoholics. I was surprised to find that alcoholism among the elder population is statistically at epidemic proportions, yet it is mostly unreported, misdiagnosed or ignored. There is a mountain of material out there that validates the seriousness of problem drinking among elders; this same material concludes that little is being done about it. For example, one survey shows that the prevalence of problem drinking in nursing homes is as high as 49%, yet less than 17% of treatment facilities have programs tailored for elders. Another statistic that caught my attention was that ELDERS HAVE RECOVERY RATES AS HIGH AS 85%, IF THEY ARE INTRODUCED TO TREATMENT PROGRAMS! That did it for me. If I can carry the message to just one elder alcoholic, then both of us can be happy, joyous and free.

We currently have people from all over the United States and from Ireland, England and Scotland on our bulk email list. The interest in this committee has been overwhelming. In our mid-southern California Area 09, we now have approximately 8-10 Cooperation with the Elder Community committees at the District level. It's happening so quickly we are being challenged to keep track of all the newly formed committees.

As for this humble chairperson, three years ago, I was a GSR stumbling around without a clue about how to participate in service at the District and Area level. Today I have learned so much. I've just completed a two and one half year term as a DCM and formed some wonderful relationships with the GSR's in Districts 6C & D. During these last few years, I've developed a far deeper understanding and respect for the Area-level process that Bill W. established for us so many years ago. The process is fair and democratic beyond question. It has taught me more humility and gratitude and how exciting it is to be able to be a part of something that is so much bigger than myself. I am grateful every day for the opportunity to have participated in this experience, to have the privilege of working with such wonderful people, and to have a new avenue with which to carry the message to this very large group of elder alcoholics. Thank you all for allowing me to be of service.

For further information, please contact us at [www.msca09aa.org](http://www.msca09aa.org) and click on the Cooperation with the Elder Community Committee link.