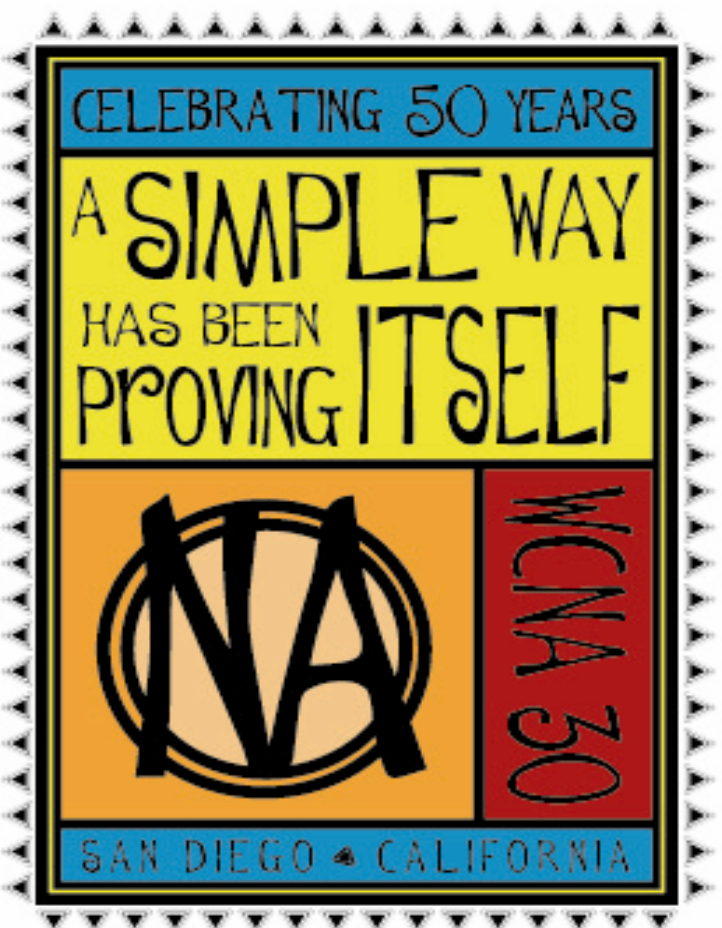


# Conventions and Events



## WCNA-30

### NA Marks Fiftieth Anniversary—Record Numbers Attend

Twenty-two thousand members from twenty-seven countries gathered in San Diego, California, USA, to share a piece of NA history as we celebrated the miracle of one addict helping another for fifty years. A simple way was indeed proving itself throughout the entire weekend as members participated in ninety-eight meetings and workshops and some seventeen special events. Attendees heard 145 speakers with a total of 2,698 years of clean time from twenty-five countries, including Australia, Bahrain, Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, England, France, Germany, Greece, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, Peru, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Sweden, Turkey, and the United States.

Eight years in the making, WCNA-30 was by far our most successful event, both in terms of the experience it gave our members in terms of planning and executing the event. This was our most complex convention in every area of planning. We were able to draw from our last ten years of an ever-growing and changing event by learning from our mistakes and enhancing our success into what seemed flawless to many who were present.

Our partnership with the city of San Diego was a significant factor in our success as every member of the hospitality community—from the janitor to the CEO of the facilities and convention bureau—worked tirelessly on our behalf.

We had a dedicated support committee in San Diego, without whose efforts this event would not have been possible. They implemented their responsibilities with grace, dignity, and unity of purpose. Filling over 2,000 volunteer slots and supervising those people was a monumental task, and our support committee did a magnificent job.

Convention attendees were able to see and hear the experience, strength, and hope that has become Narcotics Anonymous. Great care was given to developing a convention in which we could thread the historic nature of our fiftieth anniversary in a variety of ways. The program had a distinct flavor of the history and diversity that over the years has come to symbolize NA. Some of our oldest members shared throughout the event. We made a specific effort to include more old-timers from NA communities worldwide than ever before. Pieces of NA history and archives graced the pages of the convention program guide. Included in their registration package, attendees received a permanent memento of our fiftieth anniversary in the form of a commemorative CD-ROM retrospective outlining the fellowship's growth in words and over one hundred images and audio clips from our archives. An entire area at the convention center was dedicated to an exhibit of NA's archives and two huge room-length timelines charting the fellowship's growth and our literature development.

Then there were the little touches that provoked a moment of joy or a feeling of NA pride—the videos produced for several main meetings that provided a historical perspective of the event and enhanced the celebratory nature of the convention, a huge "NA50" flag that flew high over the San Diego harbor, the thirty-foot steel NA logo that hung in the convention center, and the satellite mapping technology that identified the Unity Day connections and scanned over the rooftops of the prisons on the phone. But the biggest thrill was the feeling each of us experienced, in our own way, while just walking through the convention site—there seemed to be an obvious presence of a spirit that permeated the entire event.

The convention program featured main meetings that were different than a typical convention. The opening meeting was a re-creation of the Moorpark meeting, which began in Studio City, California, USA, in 1959, reviving the NA Fellowship after it had ceased meeting for a few months. A dozen members who attended that meeting in its formative years graced the stage, led by a video tour of the earliest meeting sites narrated by the late Jimmy K. This meeting set the tone for the entire event as convention attendees were invited to share in a piece of NA history as seen through the eyes of some of our early members.

The Friday main meeting focused on how we have grown, presenting speakers who were early members from their respective NA communities and who represented a cross-section of our fellowship worldwide as it moved outside California to the 108 countries of today's fellowship.

Saturday night's meeting featured one of our members who was a part of NA's earliest days. He shared both about living through more than forty years of NA history and about his personal recovery journey.

Sunday's closing speaker shared his gratitude for recovery, from the perspective of belonging to a worldwide fellowship. That inspirational talk was a perfect ending to the four-day recovery "love fest" that was WCNA-30.

### ***Did you know: facts and stats***

Here are some facts for your consideration:

- ◆ 7 feet 4 inches tall by 4 feet diameter was the size of the "official" NA-50 birthday cake.
- ◆ 12 members of the San Diego-Imperial Region served on the Support Committee.
- ◆ 131 telephone link-ups from 28 countries participated in Unity Day.
- ◆ WCNA-30 used 247 shuttle buses totaling 4,199 operating hours to move attendees.
- ◆ 1,250 newcomers were given convention registrations.
- ◆ 2,352 volunteer shifts were filled by members being of service during the convention.
- ◆ 4,553 members laughed loudly at 2 comedy shows.
- ◆ 5,727 members sang the blues with BB King and Kenny Wayne Shepherd.
- ◆ More than 8,000 people attended the Kickoff Food and Music Festival.
- ◆ 11,986 speaker tapes were purchased.
- ◆ 12,394 room nights were filled in 22 hotels.
- ◆ 13,212 members paid for convention registration kits.
- ◆ 13,420 soft pretzels were devoured.
- ◆ 18,400 members attended the Saturday Unity Day meeting and anniversary celebration.
- ◆ 19,214 special-event tickets were sold.
- ◆ 22,000 members attended the convention.
- ◆ 24,105 Mrs. Fields cookies were munched.
- ◆ 38,000 bath towels were soiled.
- ◆ 44,200 chairs were set up, including 20,400 seats for the main meetings.
- ◆ 52,565 cups of coffee were savored.
- ◆ 56,840 pieces of merchandise were sold.
- ◆ 88,000 pounds of convention materials and equipment were handled by convention center laborers.
- ◆ The convention had a financial impact of \$31 million on the city of San Diego.

And, finally, we broke a WCNA record for most horns played (twenty-seven) at a world convention as every musical event, with the exception of the unplugged luncheon, had multiple horn players!



So how long did it take for all this convention activity to come together? Well, you would have to go back to 1995 to find a starting point in the planning of this convention. That is when the old World Convention Corporation proposed a special world convention to celebrate our fiftieth anniversary in the convention rotation plan that was adopted by the World Service Conference. Almost immediately, site selection and negotiations began, resulting in the signing of a contract with the city of San Diego in 1996. The next several years were spent negotiating additional hotel contracts and the more than one hundred other vendor agreements required to support convention operations.

We spent significant time brainstorming what it would take to create a unique celebration suitable to the historic nature of the convention. Everything would have to be special and inspirational, from the program to

the events; every part of the convention should seek to somehow reflect the anniversary and its place in NA history. Every convention registrant would leave the convention with some permanent memento of the anniversary that summarized the story of our first fifty years and how we have grown since 1953. Specific decisions were made for this convention that were unique to this event. Expenses would be higher, but so would the results, all focused on our intent to provide this unique celebration with extraordinary artwork, program, events, use of technology, visuals and historical displays. No detail was to receive anything less than our full attention.

Coming off the World Service Conference in April 2002 followed immediately by WCNA-29 in Atlanta, Georgia, USA, in July 2002 meant that most of the brainstorming for WCNA-30 had to be accomplished in just four weeks in order to go into production of the registration materials in September and be ready to go live on 1 December 2002. From there the planning just got more and more intense as the complexity of this event pushed us all. Planning back-to-back conventions in two consecutive years *and* maintaining the full level of services required to support the needs of the fellowship taxed world service staff and trusted servants to their capacity.

We asked the WCNA-29 attendees to provide input on the theme. Speaker-tape evaluation panels were created to provide input and recommendations on speakers. The fellowship was asked to submit historical materials to assist in the development of timelines and the CD-ROM.

Hundreds and hundreds of hours are normally spent answering members' questions, processing registrations, creating newsletters, programs, and merchandise, and the countless other tasks that go into convention planning. Add to that the thousands of pieces of archives read, the cataloging of historical items received, scanning these pieces into computers and meticulously considering them for inclusion in the historical displays and the commemorative CD-ROM, and you have a process that could easily take months to complete. However, with great effort and unparalleled teamwork, we accomplished these tasks in weeks.

We sold out three hotels in the first two weeks of December 2002. We closely watched the trends in room reservations and convention registrations and added hotel rooms accordingly. For a while, it looked like we were headed for a larger event than we actually ended up experiencing. Our projections changed as we saw a leveling off in sales around the time the war in Iraq began. While security concerns did not produce widespread cancellations, many members wishing to attend from outside the US experienced difficulty in getting visas to come to San Diego. Many were turned down and unable to attend.

With WCNA's size and the complexity growing with each successive convention, our ability to accurately project attendance is crucial to successful logistical planning, which directly impacts the expenses of the convention. It is becoming increasingly problematic to deal with on-site registration. There is also the reality of members who attend the convention, spending money in the merchandise store but choosing to not register for the convention.

Interestingly enough, we are seeing differing trends in the percentage of members who register depending on the location of the event, specifically when held in the USA. A surprising statistic we found based on registration data from the last ten years is that a smaller percentage of convention attendees pay registration when the event is held on the West Coast than any other region of the country. The percentage of paid registration to total attendance was seventy-five percent in both Chicago (WCNA-23) and Baltimore (WCNA-24), seventy-seven percent in both St. Louis (WCNA-26) and Atlanta (WCNA-29), as compared to sixty-eight percent in San Jose (WCNA-27) and sixty-four percent in San Diego (WCNA-30). This average decrease in paid registrations of nine percent of total attendance is the equivalent of 1,500 registrations, resulting in a reduction in total revenue of approximately \$100,000.

This discrepancy in realized revenue will provide a greater challenge for us the bigger the convention gets. With the convention not being planned to generate income for world services, the reality of this trend becomes even more problematic. If members continue to not register, then the expense of providing them with a seat at the convention will end up being paid by those who do register, as has become the case for many of our largest regional conventions.

While the reality of the shortfall in convention registration impacted our bottom line against the WSC-approved budget, the event nevertheless realized net proceeds of just over \$30,000. Of course the overall success of the convention experience and the buzz throughout the fellowship that followed the event will be remembered for a long time to come. They are priceless.

