

North County Alcoholics Anonymous History

When Alcoholics Anonymous was founded in San Diego in 1940 the next closest groups to the northern part of the County were in Los Angeles.

The earliest Alcoholics Anonymous group in Northern San Diego County was in San Marcos and dates from late 1945 or early 1946. It met at 8:00 p.m. on Thursdays in the San Marcos Methodist Church Social Hall. The San Marcos group was one of seven groups participating in the first meeting of the Central Committee of the "San Diego Alcoholics Anonymous Group," which later became the San Diego Coordinating Council. This was on April 13, 1946. A Vista group had started by October 1946. A 1947 San Diego A.A. meeting directory included groups in Encinitas, Escondido, Oceanside, Ramona and Vista. A Carlsbad group followed in 1948, and Del Mar and Fallbrook were soon added.

North County A.A. groups were active in the San Diego Central Committee, with representatives from groups in Encinitas, Escondido, Ramona and Vista making the monthly trek to San Diego starting in the 1940s. They also made regular financial contributions to the San Diego Central Office and The Alcoholic Foundation, now the General Service Board of Alcoholics Anonymous in New York City.

A January 23, 1948 San Diego Central Office list of "Members With One Year Or More Of Sobriety" showed San Diego with 126, Vista with 11, Encinitas with none and Ramona with 2. Just 5 months earlier, on August 29, 1947, the San Diego list showed 67 people with over one year of sobriety. A.A. was beginning to take hold all over the County.

The first North County women's group met in Encinitas in the early 1950s, but this group disappeared. By February 1959 a women's group met twice a month on Wednesdays at the Carlsbad Episcopal Church. By 1965 a second women's meeting had been added on Fridays in Escondido, and by 1967 there were women's meetings in Poway and Oceanside.

By the late 1950s North County A.A. members were carrying the message of recovery to inmates at Camp San Jose at Palomar, along with bringing meetings into Chino State Prison, and within a few years Puerta La Cruz was added to the mix.

In 1962 North County boasted 16 A.A. meetings: 3 in Oceanside, 2 each in Carlsbad, Escondido and Poway, and 1 each in Camp Pendleton, Del Mar, Encinitas, Fallbrook, Rancho Santa Fe, Ramona and Vista.

Two organizations that greatly affected the growth of Alcoholics Anonymous in North County were founded in 1963. Late that year, in the alley behind a liquor store on South Hill Street in Oceanside, the Oceanside Alano Club was born. In 1967 it moved to the second floor of a building on Oceanside Boulevard, and in April 1975 it opened in its current location, the former Knights of Columbus Hall at 4198 Mission Avenue, just east of the Mission San Luis Rey. The second organization that started that year was The Fellowship Center in Escondido, a recovery home for alcoholic men. Although it has expanded greatly in the past 50 years, it still occupies the same buildings it did when it started.

By August 1974 there were 54 A.A. meetings in North County: 15 in Oceanside, 12 in Escondido, 5 in Carlsbad, 4 each in Encinitas and Vista, 3 in San Marcos, 2 each in Fallbrook and Poway, and single meetings in Del Mar, Solana Beach, Pala, Rancho Santa Fe, Rainbow, Ramona and Rancho Bernardo.

In 1975 an enterprising group of North County A.A.s opened a Central Office at 323 E. Broadway in Vista because they felt there was a critical mass of A.A. groups in North County to support the effort. In September 1975 a North County A.A. Meeting Directory was printed that listed 68 meetings: 19 in Escondido, 15 in Oceanside, 6 each in Carlsbad and Encinitas, 5 in Vista, 4 in Poway, 3 each in Fallbrook and San Marcos, 2 in Ramona and 1 each in Del Mar, Rancho Santa Fe, Solana Beach, Rainbow and Camp Pendleton.

The Central Office accepted contributions from groups and individuals, ordered and sold literature and distributed Twelfth Step calls to A.A. members throughout North County, but no attempt was made to form an intergroup. Some

A.A. members in North County objected to the idea of an independent Central Office with no ties to an A.A. service body to oversee the operation. Hard feelings ensued, as often happens in A.A. when new ventures are launched, but were eventually smoothed over.

In February 1976 a North County delegation requested that the San Diego Coordinating Council establish a branch office under the auspices of the San Diego Central Office. Within a month an office had been secured at 666 E. Vista Way in Vista, since Vista was the mid-location for toll-free telephone calls. The original North County enthusiasts cooperated with this transition and bowed out.

Rosemary A. was the first paid North County Branch Office Secretary, but quickly resigned due to poor health. She was followed briefly by Ruth R., who was succeeded by Sam M., who remained in the position for over 15 years, when he turned it over to Jenny M., our current secretary.

By the spring of 1979 it became apparent that North County had ample resources to support its own Central Office independent of San Diego. Cliff R. spearheaded an effort to form a North County Intergroup, and on June 16, 1979 representatives of North County groups voted unanimously to establish and support an independent office. Beginning July 1, 1979 A.A. services in the Northern and Southern sections of San Diego County were provided by separate offices in Vista and in San Diego. The July 1979 "North San Diego County AA Meeting Directory" showed the number of A.A. meetings had grown to 97 per week in Borrego Springs, Carlsbad, Del Mar, Encinitas, Escondido, Fallbrook, La Costa, Oceanside, Poway, Ramona, Rancho Bernardo, Rancho Santa Fe, San Marcos, Santa Ysabel, Solana Beach and Vista.

What happened to the early North County A.A. groups? The Vista Group continued to meet in the Women's Club House until the early 1960s. In December 1962 the group was meeting in the Vista Recreation Center on West Vista Way. By November of 1964 it had moved to the All Saints Episcopal Church at the corner of Escondido and Eucalyptus Avenues, where it has continued to meet weekly every since.

In 1947 the Friday Encinitas Group met in the Community Hall of the Catholic Church. By the early 1950s the group moved to St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, which at that time was in ramshackle buildings at 294 La Veta since their church had burned to the ground in 1950. By the mid-1960s the Encinitas Group had moved with St. Andrew's to its new location on Balour in Encinitas, where several groups continue to meet to this day.

By 1953 the Del Mar Group was meeting in the Parish Hall of St. Peter's Episcopal Church off 14th Street, and it has met there continuously and weekly for the past 60 years.

As of 2013 the Ramona Group has met weekly and continuously at the Congregational Church at 8th and D Streets since 1947 – 66 years and counting.

Today there are almost 600 English and almost 100 Spanish A.A. meetings each week – almost a seven-fold increase in the number of meetings held when the North County Intergroup started in July 1979.

Thanks Paul C. for putting this together and the many hours of research.