

# History of Gamblers Anonymous (GA) and Gam-Anon in the Great Northwest

(Compiled by Alex H in June 2026)

## Gamblers Anonymous

Jim W and Ray M created Gamblers Anonymous in 1957. Chapter Twelve pages 117 to 128 of the new GA Blue Book, Sharing Recovery Through Gamblers Anonymous, has a summary of how the fellowship started. The "First Forty Years" and the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference Book "Preserving the Past for our Future" document a more comprehensive history.

## Gam-Anon

Gam-Anon had its first meeting in 1958. The 140 page Gam-Anon Book "Living with the Compulsive Gambler" contains the history of Gam-Anon, member's experiences, poetry, and explanations of Gam-Anon's 12 steps of Recovery and 12 steps of Unity.

## Great Pacific Northwest Group Summary

The Great Northwest was originally defined to encompass groups from Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Wyoming and British Columbia. Eventually Areas were established for each State, Canadian Provinces and countries throughout the world.

**Washington** was the 10<sup>th</sup> State to have a GA meeting. The first meeting was held December 10, 1961, in Seattle.

**Oregon** had its first meeting start in 1967 in Portland.

**Idaho's** first meeting started February 1974 in Boise.

**Montana** had its first meeting start in January 1986 in Missoula.

**Wyoming** had a meeting in the 1995/1996 timeframe.

**British Columbia's** first meeting was held in 1969 in Vancouver.

## Washington Groups

The first meeting was founded by Erv S and Dave S who met December 10, 1961 in the basement of the Greenwood Presbyterian Church. That Tuesday night meeting continued at the same location until it was shut down due to COVID in 2020. This was the longest running GA meeting at the same location. Members always noted that there were 12 steps to the basement of the Church where the meeting was held.

John C, who was at the first meeting became the meeting's "Rock" and influenced members Rick I, Jack B, Burt H, Ed B, Ed S and Jeff E to start other meetings in the area. John C's wife Maria was the founder of the Gam-Anon meeting at the same location in 1964. Ed S and his wife Tina would drive from Olympia to attend the Seattle GA and Gam-Anon meetings. They in turn started meetings in the Tacoma and Olympia areas.

Rick I is still an active member (over 45 years) of the new Marysville Saturday night meeting. Jack B, Ed S and Burt H are deceased. Ed B (over 45 years) now attends Oregon meetings. Jeff E (Over 30 years) helped start the new Seattle Tuesday Denny Park meeting in March 2023 to replace the old Seattle Greenwood meeting.

## **Oregon Groups**

Meetings started in Portland in 1967 and 1973 but did not continue.

Vic S wanted to start a Portland meeting in 1978. He found an old newspaper article about the 1973 meeting that Tom H had started. Vic was able to locate Tom through family members and Tom helped Vic start a new meeting. Since then, there has always been at least one meeting in Portland.

Salem has had a meeting since 1980. Claire V, who regularly drove from Salem to Portland to attend meetings, started this meeting which is still on going.

Bob F was a longtime member of the Woodburn group and helped many other Oregon groups by his commitment to service. He served as a Trustee and was the Chairperson for the 2008 Spring International Conference held April 2008 in Portland. Bob died in 2018.

In the mid 1990's Bill C started the Medford meeting with meetings in Grants Pass and White City evolving. Aaron from Medford along with Sisco and Larry from Grants Pass opened the Gold Hill meeting. The Roseberg meeting was started in the mid 1990's by Crystal. Kathy B became a member in 1998 and was involved in meetings ever since.

Sharon W and Bill C served many Oregon groups and were Trustees when Oregon and Washington were a combined Area in the early 2000 period. Both are now deceased.

A Grants Pass Gam-Anon meeting that existed for over 20 years no longer meets.

Currently there aren't any in-person Gam-Anon meetings in Oregon, however there are many virtual meetings listed on the Gam-Anon website.

## **Idaho Groups**

Active meetings in Idaho are at Pocatello, Twin Falls and Rathdrum. Currently there are no active Gam-Anon meetings.

## **Montana Groups**

Currently there are 15 active GA meetings (prior to COVID there were 19 meetings). Currently there aren't any Gam-Anon meetings.

## **Wyoming Groups**

There is one active GA meeting currently in Cheyene but no Gam-Anon meetings. There weren't any GA or Gam-Anon meetings prior to COVID.

## **British Columbia Groups**

The first meeting in British Columbia was started in Vancouver by Don P sometime in 1969.

The number of meetings started to increase in 1977. Van T became a stalwart member and was instrumental in starting many of the meetings. Van's wife Rachel was the leading advocate for starting Gam-Anon meetings. Currently there are 18 active GA meetings and 1 active Gam-Anon meeting in BC. In addition, there is now a Canada wide GA phone meeting 3 times a week. Prior to COVID there were 26 active GA meetings.

## **Cooperation within the Great Pacific Northwest**

Cooperation between the GA and Gam-Anon groups started in October 1979 when the first Conclave (a meeting of members with a shared interest in recovery) was hosted in Vancouver, BC. Seattle hosted the 2<sup>nd</sup> Conclave in 1980. Rick I from the Seattle group was present and is still an active member of the Marysville group.

A tradition was established to have these Conclaves alternate between cities in Western Canada and the USA Pacific Northwest each year with a preference for the October Canadian Thanksgiving weekend. Van T and his wife Rachael were Vancouver's leading advocates for these Conclaves. Conclaves were held in Seattle (1998), Federal Way (2004), Edmonton, Alberta (2005), Spokane

1(2007), and then Seattle Mini Conferences in 2010 and 2014. Portland had a Mini Conference in the early 2010 timeframe.

GA and Gam-Anon International Conferences hosted by Intergroups in this Area were: October 1996 Magic Mountain at Whistler, BC; May 2002 Magic Mountain 2 at Harrison Hot Springs, BC; April 2008 Conference at Portland, OR; and the 2013 Conference in Vancouver, BC.

Many members from this Area were planning to attend the April 2020 Conference which was to be held in Seattle. This was to be the first International Conference to be held in the State of Washington. However, COVID resulted in cancelation.

There are many other activities and events in our area to enhance recovery and unity.

Examples are the annual Spring retreat in Oregon, annual Fall retreat in Washington, Summer retreat in Oregon, annual October marathon in British Columbia, numerous picnics, workshops, holiday parties and member anniversary potlucks throughout each year.

### **Carrying the Gamblers Anonymous and Gam-Anon Message**

Initially word of mouth informed people having a gambling problem about the Seattle GA meeting. Eventually the Seattle Greenwood group established and financially funded a local Seattle GA Hotline 206-361-8413 which was listed in the telephone directory.

In the early 2000's Richard L led a group of members to establish a Washington Statewide toll-free phone number 1-877-727-5050 with a 24-hour answering service.

The Intergroup developed a master meeting list for all the meetings in Washington State which included the meeting name, location, day/time of the meeting and a person to contact. This list was provided to the answering service so they could refer callers to a GA member. The list was also provided to the Washington State Council for Problem Gambling, which they used until they set up their own Hotline.

This effort was funded voluntarily by GA groups throughout the State.

Eventually the Board of Trustees approved the GA National Hotline 1-888-GAHELPS (1-888-424-3577). Area 2H implemented this service in August 2007. Areas 2A and 2G also use this service.

The system evolved to be 1-888-2CALLGA (1-888-222-5542) and there is an approved poster (**TAKE BACK YOUR LIFE**) for groups to post in their localities for carrying the GA message to the public. Each Area Intergroup has an elected Hotline Administrator who works with member volunteers to ensure that coverage is always available to take calls 24/7. A volunteer who takes the call guides the caller to the soonest and nearest GA meeting to where they live. The caller is guided to a virtual meeting if they live in a locality that doesn't have meetings.

### **Area Intergroups**

#### **Area 2H**

Serving Western Washington north of Longview, to the Canadian border, and west of the Cascade Mountains. Website [www.gawashington.org](http://www.gawashington.org) carries the message and the active Intergroup that meets monthly.

#### **Area 2G**

All the Oregon and Vancouver/Kelso/Longview Washington meetings are in this Area. Website [www.gaoregon.gov](http://www.gaoregon.gov) carries the GA message. An active Intergroup meets monthly.

#### **Area 2A**

All of British Columbia and Alaska is in this Area. Website [www.gabc.ca](http://www.gabc.ca) carries the message. Their Intergroup meets monthly and a monthly Newsletter is published in the member section of their website.

#### **Area 2F**

All of Washington east of the Cascades and all of Idaho are in this Area. Groups have not established a working Intergroup and have not been represented by an elected Trustee.

**Note:**

This history of Gamblers Anonymous in the "Great Northwest" was being prepared for inclusion in the 2020 International Conference Book. This Conference was scheduled for April 2020 in Seattle, however COVID resulted in cancellation, so this history was not published. Alex H, a longtime member, has now updated it for retention in Area 2H Intergroup records and shared with neighboring Intergroups and the BOT History Committee.

**Past Meeting History- Area 2H**

Over the past 27 plus years in GA, I have seen many meetings start but not continue.

Closed due to COVID:

Bellingham, Smokey Point (2), Marysville, Redmond (2). Seattle (2), Auburn (Step),  
Renton, Burien, Sumner

Closed prior to COVID for low attendance:

Anacortes, Blaine (2), Stanwood, Port Angeles, Bellevue, Sequim, Port Townsend,  
Oak Harbor, Coupeville, Tulalip, Grays Harbor, Ocean Shores, Aberdeen,  
Montesano, Shelton, Everett, Seattle, Kent, Burien, Edmonds, Fort Lewis,  
Federal Way, Lakewood, Maple Valley, Kent (Korean), Auburn (Spanish),  
Mount Vernon (Spanish), Poulsbo, Renton (2), Bainbridge Island, Mission Creek  
Woman's Correctional Facility.