

# The Gazette

## All-night Alcothons one way to resist lure of the last call

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It was 2:15 a.m. yesterday morning, a time better suited to sleeping than to taking part in a sobering educational experience.

The early-morning hour didn't prevent several hundred members of Alcoholics Anonymous from attending marathon round-the-clock meetings at Le Grand Hotel (formerly the Hyatt Regency). Hundreds more AA members filled the hotel's lobby and hospitality suites.

Sporting their name tags, the AA members were there to absorb knowledge and share experiences with the many speakers.

They also consumed coffee (a helpful way to stay awake), soft drinks, and plain tap water.

"Welcome to the Marathon, where love is available 24 hours a day!" read the program for the meetings, which continue non-stop in the Regence Ballroom until 8:45 a.m. tomorrow.

AA members listened to such topics as "Happy Joyous and Free is What I Want to Be" a quote from the multi-million selling Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous.

Members trooped up to the podium and introduced themselves.

"Hi everybody, I'm Tom W. and I'm an alcoholic," said a Laguna Beach, Calif., member. "Hi Tom!" several hundred people shouted back in unison.

The members told their tales of woe how they lost their families, their jobs, and their businesses when they were alcoholics and how they've turned their lives around since joining AA.

One member explained how he was drunk and landed in an \$11-a-night hotel room. "God, please help me," he said he prayed. "I believe my recovery began that night."

The round-the-clock marathon meetings are an AA convention tradition, said Craig W. from Atlanta, Ga.

"After all, we used to drink marathons. I used to drink non-stop," said Shadrack K. from Brooklyn, N.Y. "I didn't care about what time it was."

Before he came to the U.S., Shadrack was a journalist at the Johannesburg Sunday Times in South Africa, "until the booze kicked me out."

He now spends an hour a day every day at AA meetings, because, he said, "alcoholism is a disease that respects nothing. In order to have it arrested, I have to go to meetings."

All-night meetings called Alcothons are also held on such holidays as Christmas, New Year's, and Thanksgiving, said Kevin V., of Cambridge, Mass.

Those days can be extremely dangerous for alcoholics who are alone, he said. "At 1 or 2 in the morning if (an alcoholic) has a drink, the ballgame could be over."

The meetings served as a nightcap of sorts for members, as they began on the heels of Thursday night's ballroom dance at the Palais des Congres, and disco dance at the Palladium on Berri St.

"This crew will be up all night, " said Craig, who has gone "11 grateful years" without a drink. "When we have a chance to get together and share like this, it's a marvellous experience."

The all-nighters didn't faze Guy Lariviere, the hotel's night front-desk manager. "For us it's the same," he said.

About 50,000 AA members have flooded Montreal streets for the group's four-day golden anniversary convention, greatly adding to the city's coffers but providing small comfort to brewers and liquor companies.

Another of yesterday's early-morning topics was "Nobody Dies From Lack of Sleep."

And, at 6 a.m., shortly after sunrise, remaining sleepy-eyed members could attend a meeting dubbed "Oh, What a Beautiful Morning."