

ASI's Traveling Show

By Bonnie Dwyer

The fifty-fourth annual ASI convention rolled into Sacramento on a hot August Wednesday night this year. Don Schneider, president of the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists, was the keynote speaker for the meetings, which some refer to as a national camp meeting. Over the next three days attendees could choose to attend seminars or devotional meetings, hear inspiring project reports, testimonials, and favorite evangelistic speakers, or visit an exhibit hall lined with the booths of eighty-one Adventist entities.

In the aisles of this marketplace of Adventism conversations blossomed with old friends and new. It was "the" place to catch the movers and shakers of the Church, plus the people who operate self-supporting schools and health centers. Three Angels Broadcasting Network carried the proceedings live for those who could not make the trip. During the Sabbath church service, members proved their support of church evangelistic projects by donating more than \$3 million.

ASI—Adventist-Laymen's Services and Industries—is an organization of Seventh-day Adventist laypersons involved in professions, industry, education, and/or services. It is known for its great convention and the money collected there for needy projects. According to its current mission statement, "ASI exists to provide challenge, nurture, and experience in Sharing Christ in the Marketplace, as well as to support the Global Mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church."

In 1908, E. A. Sutherland and Percy Magan organized the forerunner of ASI as the Madison Association of Self-supporting Units and started the yearly meetings to provide inspiration and camaraderie for people who worked in isolated, lonely places. The organization also gave Sutherland and Magan an opportunity to address issues that surrounded the quality of the mission work. It was the first N. C. Wilson—Nathaniel Carter Wilson, vice president of the General Conference in the 1940's—who saw the potential in having the organization become a more direct partner with the Church. In 1947, he helped transform the Self-supporting Units into the Association of Seventh-day Adventist Self-supporting Institutions. That is the date that ASI celebrated in 1997 at its fiftieth anniversary.

The importance of the tie to the Church reverberates in the organization's vision statement: "ASI and its members will be known for their unswerving honesty in business principles and practices, unflagging participation in the various ministries of the Church, unwavering positiveness toward Church leadership, unhesitating provision for the needs of others, and untiring focus on the Christ they represent in the marketplace."

The organization is tied to the Church through its budget and election of its officers. Although ASI's president, currently Denzil McNeilus, is a lay person, the secretary-treasurer of the national organization and those of all regional chapters are church employees, and the church supplies office space, secretarial assistance, and any necessary support staff. Dwight Hildebrandt, the secretary-treasurer of the national organization, is an employee of the North American Division. His office at the General Conference building in Silver Spring,

Maryland, serves as the organization's national office. Because the North American Division provides the overhead for the organization, and thus approximately half of the annual budget, donations to ASI can be focused on specific projects.

Membership in the organization "is available to any Seventh-day Adventist Church member in good standing who operates a business, provides a professional service, has a product to sell, or operates a supporting ministry and whose business has been in operation for at least one year, or who, having been a member of ASI for five or more years, is retired from such activity and agrees to order his or her life and business according to the ASI objectives and principles." Membership applications require a pastor's confidential recommendation concerning the applicant's community outreach activities and support for the "standards and ideals of the Seventh-day Adventist Church."

In the early days, members came from the educational and health care professions—those areas being considered the primary work of the Church at that time. It took the membership application from a garage owner for the organization to consider the outreach potential of other business professionals. Today, ASI's twelve hundred members include wealthy entrepreneurs, snack food manufacturers, lawyers, travel agents, piano dealers, and media operators. Spokesperson Shirley Burton says the organization is growing rapidly as more and more lay people get excited about doing something for the Lord. She describes the membership as very conservative, historic Adventists—not legalists—who are not afraid to admit that God used Ellen White to formulate a plan for the Church and its outreach.

Calling for the Offering

Allan Buller, ASI president from 1967 to 1973, remembers the first mission offering taken at an ASI convention. It was after an ASI convention in San Diego that some of the participants decided to visit a mission school in Mexico. The members wanted to do something for the people they visited, so they took up an offering and collected about \$700. "That trip really turned our members on," Buller recalls, "It was so exciting to leave some money to help with the local work."

Currently, the Sabbath offering is the centerpiece of the convention. Groups that want to benefit from the generosity of the members apply in advance for

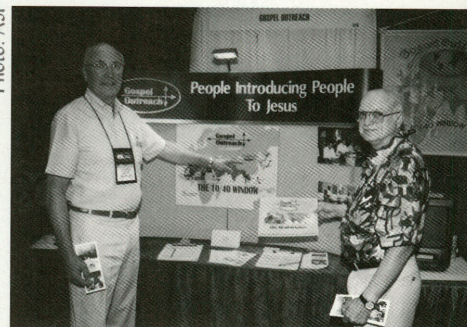
support. A missions committee headed by retired attorney Harold Lance, a former president of the organization, reviews the applications, chooses who will be funded, and sets the goal for the offering. One board member says they look for donor appeal—something with pizzazz that will grab people by the heartstrings. Building and evangelistic projects fill the list (see box, pages 66-68). Awardees are notified before the convention that they have been selected, but are not told at what level they will be funded. They are asked to prepare a report for the meeting, which is to be given during the convention. The Friday evening meeting is set aside for project reports.

Included in the Sacramento convention materials were descriptions of the thirty-four projects chosen in 2001. Hildebrandt opened Sabbath morning's forty-minute offering call with a statement of the dollar goal, inviting people to look at information in the program. Then a testimony was given by twins who went to Advent Home when their family home came apart because of divorce. They told how they had turned away from drugs to serve Christ. A video message from ASI president Denzil McNeilus followed.

McNeilus talked about the DVD project that had been the centerpiece of the offering last year and is slated to receive \$600,000 more this year—the largest amount for any project. Using the latest technology, "Christ-centered, spirit-powered, culturally sensitive" sermons and graphics have been prepared in

eighteen languages so anyone can give Bible sermons to a small group or to thousands. This year, the plan is to develop materials in eighteen more languages, as well as to create a program for use by laymen in North America to enhance the pilot program introduced in the Philippines last year. The video continued with testimonials about the DVD's effectiveness when used in evangelistic meetings in Africa and New Guinea. Representatives from the Oregon Men's Chorus told of delivering DVD's to thirty-seven pastors for their

Photo: ASI



Dick Madsen and Arnold Pflugrad at the Gospel Outreach Booth.

use. The audience applauded as the video closed.

Next, Bob Paulsen told about ASI work in India. "Satan wasn't happy," he said repeatedly as he added each new detail about the 50 teams of Global Mission pioneers sent to the country, the 50,000 people who attended the last meeting in the evangelistic series, and the 13,000 converts who were baptized. The story of how the chauffeur for the evangelist was baptized and won his entire family ended the story portion of the call. Hildebrandt then returned to the pulpit to make the final pitch. Acknowledging that the audience had undoubtedly been thinking and praying about how much to give, he suggested that they tear up any previously prepared checks and rewrite them. After prayer, a soaring violin solo filled the auditorium as the ushers moved down the aisles with white buckets.

A special ASI offering envelope was used during the convention. "Yes, I will help!!! Knowing that EVERY DOLLAR—EVERY CENT—of my gift will be used for evangelistic projects, mission outreach, and youth training and service projects. Here is my gift of: \$500, \$1,000, \$5,000, \$10,000, Other."

The ushers marched out to a side room to count the money while Calvin Rock preached. At the close of the service, a speaker announced that \$2.7 million had been collected, an outstanding figure, but short of the \$3 million goal.

In the lunch line after the service, attendees discussed whether this was the first time an ASI convention had ever fallen short of its objective. Obviously,

some members did not want that to happen and more money was contributed. By the time of the afternoon meeting, the officers could announce reaching the goal.

The total amount of the offering has declined over the past two years. The ASI convention collected its largest offering, \$4.6 million, in 1999. In 2000, the total was \$4.2 million. The convention collected its very first million-dollar offering in 1993.

Walking the Aisles of Adventism's Marketplace

Patterned after exhibit halls that have become such important parts of General Conference Sessions, the ASI convention drew more than 275 exhibitors: small independent schools and sanitariums plus much of official Adventism. All of the denomination's North American colleges and universities were represented, as were a dozen different General Conference Departments, such as its Stewardship and Trust Services and its Secretariat. Walking the aisles one could buy Advent Ware with church logos on hats or polo shirts, taste health food products, see demonstrations of how putting more oxygen in your water will improve your health, get a neck massage, or participate in a Jewish/Adventist sundown worship.

Although a wide variety of businesses and organizations were represented in the hall, ASI denied space this year to five potential exhibitors—including *Spectrum*. Secretary-Treasurer Hildebrandt declined to

ASI Projects 2001

\$600,000	DVD development		and twenty students from		Bible School	
\$390,000	100 Global Mission church schools—Myanmar (Burma)		Black Hills School of	\$75,000	Country Life, Prague, Czech Republic—purchase of two acres with older farm buildings to be remodeled for a medical missionary training school for up to twenty-four students	
\$250,000	Fifty house churches, EuroAsia Division—Russia, Ukraine, and Moldova	\$140,000	200 Roofs Over Africa—roofs for churches		\$75,000	Eden Valley Institute, Loveland, Colorado—expansion of retirement village to sixteen units
\$200,000	The Chinese Challenge—100,000 packets of Chinese language books—Bible, <i>Desire of Ages</i> , Mark Finley's <i>Search for Certainty</i> and <i>Studying Together</i>	\$140,000	Wildwood Lifestyle Center, Wildwood, Georgia—new girls' dorm, two new staff homes, and remodeling of hospital and Lifestyle Center		\$60,000	Haiti Water Project—a shared project with Versacare
\$150,000	Youth evangelism and training, Atlanta, Georgia—evangelistic meeting conducted by David Assherick, with forty-three ASI youth	\$100,000	3ABN, West Frankfort, Illinois—construction of a station in Papua, New Guinea		\$50,000	Friends-R-Fun, Summersville, West
		\$100,000	Heartgood Foundation, Skotselv, Norway—new building for the European			



Photo: ASI

ASI officers from left: Dwight Hilderbrandt, secretary-treasurer; vice presidents, Carolyn McHan, Stan Smith, Debbie Young, Vern Erickson, Doreen Schmidt, Chester Clark III; and Denzil McNeilus, president.

identify other organizations turned away, but he did say that other potential exhibitors have not been accepted in the past. *Spectrum* was told that it did not fit in with the theme of the exhibit hall—"Sharing Christ in the Marketplace."

The number of exhibits at the convention has grown rapidly in the last decade. In the 1980s, a few

persons set up small exhibits in the foyer where the meeting was held, according to Hildebrandt. "In the early 1990s more people began asking for space. In 1994 there were fewer than 100 booths taken at the convention. In 2001 the number was 281 exhibit spaces." In spite of the growth in participation, he says, "The convention is not considered a means of making money for ASI. The revenue and expenses for the booth area become a part of the overall budget. The entire expense for the operation of the convention is paid from the fees charged the participants and exhibitors at the convention. No subsidies are given to the convention from the ASI operating budget or from the Church for the operation of the convention. If there is a gain in the operation of the convention, as we have had for the past few years, that gain goes into a reserve for convention expenses."

Booth space costs vary according to whether or not a business or organization belongs to ASI, but rental charges for the typical 8-by-10 foot exhibit can run \$700 for the three-day convention. Hildebrandt says that in 2000 the booths generated \$77,000 in revenue, and that the direct expenses for the exhibit hall were \$71,000. The tally for 2001 had not been completed at press time.

Sharing Christ in the Marketplace

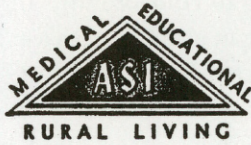
The ASI mission of sharing Christ in the marketplace has been interpreted differently over the years. George

ASI Projects 2001 Continued

Virginia health and education center
 \$50,000 Gospel Outreach, College Place, Washington—recruitment and training of lay evangelists to work with Muslims
 \$50,000 Miracle Meadows, Salem, West Virginia—boys' dorm to house twenty to twenty-two students
 \$50,000 Springs of Life, Poland—printing of *Happiness Digest* books for Poland, Romania, and other Eastern European countries
 \$50,000 Center for Professional

Evangelism, Union Springs, New York—offering an associate degree in personal evangelism and a BA in religious education
 \$50,000 Missionary Assistance Plan—support of Outpost Centers, Incorporated, missionaries
 \$40,000 KSBN, Springdale, Arkansas—assistance in upgrading to digital broadcast equipment
 \$40,000 Riverside Farm, Zambia, Africa—improvements for clinic, personnel housing, and a vehicle

\$40,000 School of Religion, Southern Adventist University—three field schools of evangelism with Jack Blanco to be held in conjunction with evangelistic campaigns in New Guinea, Ghana, and Romania
 \$38,000 Association Vida E. Saude, Portugal—consulting and outpatient treatment rooms for Lisbon health center
 \$33,000 Kibidula Farm Institute, Tanzania, Africa—school vehicle, loudspeaker system, and educational material for center to teach lay evangelists



ASI

Harding IV, whose father was instrumental in the beginning of the organization, sees several phases as he looks back over its history. Education and health care were the original focus. Reaching out to commercial entities marked phase two. When other business professionals were added to the mix, discussions began about how individuals represent Christ in their own businesses. Sharing Christ on a daily basis can be hard to do, he notes. Next came the evangelistic phase, with trips to the Philippines and India that resulted in large numbers of baptisms. "Going to the Philippines for a week-long evangelistic crusade seems like an easier way to witness," he says, but then he adds that he thinks the organization needs to return to emphasizing the personal witness members have in their everyday worlds.

Witnessing to corporate America, which one might guess to be a goal of the organization given the marketplace mission statement, is a concept that newly elected board member Clyde Morgan would like to see developed. Morgan is the president of ASI's Lake Union chapter and president of Adventist Frontier Missions.

Hildebrandt says that ASI's greatest contribution to the Church has been the empowerment of laypersons to become more active in personal witness, and he points to the very active participation of youth in summer evangelistic programs such as those ASI has sponsored the past three summers in Orlando, Florida; Grand Rapids, Michigan; and Atlanta, Georgia. "Setting a tone and environment in which laypersons can work in strengthening the Church is the greatest contribution ASI can make to the Church," he concludes.

Capturing the Spirit of Entrepreneurship

ASI has captured the spirit of entrepreneurship for the Church, Buller says. Business people are risk takers. Their contribution to the Church is an ability to take risks because they spend their own money to do so. Church employees spend other people's money. When ASI sees something that needs to be done, the organization does it. Francis D. Nichol, former editor of the *Review and Herald*, once made the statement that if lay people had not created ASI, the Church would have needed to develop it.

Columbus, Ohio, will be the location for the 2002 convention, August 7-10.

Bonnie Dwyer is editor of *Spectrum*.
Editor@spectrummagazine.org

ASI Projects 2001 Continued

\$30,000	Country Haven Academy, Pasco Washington—3,000 foot addition to administration building		support for pilot program training part-time literature evangelists in Magabook sales	\$16,000	Healthy Life Missionary Training, Supia, Columbia—lay church evangelism project for entering new areas
\$30,000	BCSS America, Provo, Utah—two greenhouses for Eastern Hilltracts School, Bangladesh	\$20,000	Adventist Brazilian Beneficent Association—lifestyle center to accommodate twelve guests	\$14,000	Home N' Heart Seminars, Clovis, California—two years of training and educational seminars in third world countries for women's ministry groups
\$25,000	Radio 74 and Radio 74 International, Archamps, France—studio office, antenna, and staff housing	\$20,000	Wordsight Association, Fall City, Washington—interactive Bible evangelism Web site	\$6,000	Chessie Harris Foundation, Huntsville, Alabama—rehabilitation of sixteen-bed emergency shelter for homeless children
\$20,000	Two hundred bicycles for African colporteurs and lay evangelists	\$20,000	Asian Aid Organization, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan—"Purpose-built" school on land donated by the Southern Asia Division		
\$20,000	Magabook Evangelism, Michigan—continuation of				