A BRIEF HISTORY OF TRSA

In 1978, several Texas scientists who were or had been NIAAA study-section members got together and decided to form a state chapter of the national Research Society on Alcoholism. This small group included, among others, Harold Altschuler, Virginia Davis, Linda Shanbour, Paul Srere and Carl Erickson. These scientists were particularly interested at that time in regular meetings of Texas alcohol researchers for the purpose of exchanging scientific information, and increasing state and federal funding for alcohol research. Because Carl was working in Austin, he was appointed to do the "leg work" required to set up a non-profit corporation. The paperwork was easy in those days, and corporate status was achieved through the Secretary of State in a matter of days, and a (privileged) 501 (c) (3) non-profit status was granted by the Internal Revenue Service in 1979 - all without a complete Constitution and By-Laws. (This would not be possible in such a short time today.)

A newsletter was begun in September, 1979, which was most often a single-page collection of TRSA news and scientific abstracts. The early publication was simply called the "TRSA Newsletter". In 1985, we changed its name to "Solving the Puzzle of Alcoholism"; in 1988, its name was expanded to include "and Other Chemical Dependencies"; and in 1991 (when John Roache became editor) the newsletter became "News & Views". This continues to be the most stable source of funds for TRSA and the prime means of communication among members.

Although the records are old and incomplete, it appears that the early membership (all scientists) was around 30 people. These charter members held a membership drive for the next several years and the membership grew to around 100 in 1985, where it stayed until non-scientists with an interest in alcohol research were allowed to join, in 1986. At that time, a Board of Directors was formed, with Shaun O’Brien (the initial development consultant for TRSA who helped Carl set up the organization) and Hank McNamara - two individuals that continue to play a significant role in TRSA’s present Board leadership.

The early years of TRSA were filled with multiple attempts at fund-raising (a few successful, most not) and annual meetings. The first annual meeting, in Austin in 1981 had 45 registrants and was highlighted by 3 national alcohol researchers presenting their most recent findings. The second annual meeting, in Houston in
1982, was less successful. After those meetings, the TRSA annual meetings were held in Austin in conjunction with the Annual Institute on Alcohol Studies. This association ended in 1986. Annual meetings began again in 1989, under the direction of Zehava Gottesfeld and Marty Javors.

Carl Erickson was President of TRSA from 1980 until 1985, when he became Executive Director. The first elected officers of TRSA (1985-1987) were President, Bob Guynn; Vice-President, Linda (Shanbour) Livingston; and Secretary-Treasurer, Gerald Frye. In 1987, new Officers were elected: President, Marty Javors; Vice President, Steve Leslie; and Secretary-Treasurer, Zehava Gottesfeld. In 1989, the new officers were President, Marty Javors; Vice-President, Alan Swann; and Secretary-Treasurer, Peter Silverman. Finally, in 1991 the officers Became President, Marty Javors; Vice-President, Bill Klemm; and Secretary-Treasurer, Peter Silverman.

During the 1980’s, raising funds for TRSA programs was extremely difficult. The organization was kept afloat by newsletter subscriptions, small donations from foundations, Board member contributions and loans, fund-raising events and a lot of volunteerism. The original TRSA office was run out of Carl’s office at the University of Texas in Austin, and later out of Shaun O’Brien’s office in Austin. In 1985, TRSA opened an office off of South IH-35 in Austin. In 1987, the office was moved to its present location on Medical Parkway. Today, there is a positive balance on TRSA’s books, thanks to several contracts for services from the Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse, and two important fund-raisers (a physicians continuing education conference, and the San Antonio Open golf tournament).

As we wind up this brief history, it is fun to look back on some activities which buoyed our spirits, provided hope, and served to publicize TRSA, its members, and its programs:

* A 1983 banquet which drew 450 guests to Austin to hear Betty Ford and to see Joseph Pursch, M.D. receive the First Roger Williams Award for Contributions to the Field of Alcoholism. This banquet was acclaimed at the time as the "first time prominent recovering and non-recovering Austinites attended a fund-raiser for alcoholism research".

* The first coin collection campaign for alcohol research in the United States. The "Hanging Bottle", an idea developed
by Carl Edwards of North Carolina, consisted of collection bottles placed in pharmacies and liquor stores in Austin, San Antonio, Houston, and several small Texas Towns. The Knights of Columbus, a catholic men’s organization, was recruited to place the containers and collect the proceeds. Then-Governor Mark White kicked off the campaign in Austin, and Henry Cisneros did the same in San Antonio. The campaign eventually died due to the lack of volunteer coordination, but over $6,000 profit was realized after a lot of very hard work in making the bottles and transporting them to the sites.

* A fund-raiser with Johnny Cash in 1984 which eventually was cancelled because of lack of ticket sales.

* A number of public service announcements for radio and television which described TRSA and alcohol research, through the distinctive voices of Cactus Pryor and Barbara Jordan. Additionally, Carl did a weekly 2 1/2 minute Research Update on KLBQ AM in the mid 1980’s.


* Creation of a liaison between TRSA and the Texas Commission on Alcoholism (now Alcohol and Drug Abuse) via representation of TRSA (its President) on TCA’s Statewide Advisory Council.

In its quest for success, TRSA has had many office managers, officers, Board members, newsletter subscribers, and donors through its 12-year history. It is said that an organization is successful if it lasts over 5 years. TRSA has lasted 2.5 times that long, probably because of all the faithful workers who simply wouldn’t let it die. Given such a history, background, and foundation, the future looks bright for TRSA. The start-up is the hardest, and now is the time to take advantage of our successes and our knowledge of the failures. The Society is in good hands, and it is time to move ahead.

Contributed by:

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(with the aid of Shaun O’Brien)