Give The People What They Want

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Libraries exist in Washington because people want them. Plaudits flow endlessly, and it seems libraries can do no wrong. At every library event we hear “those wonderful ladies at the library ... when I was a child” and “when the library turned out to have ... wouldn't have finished successfully without it.” Realtors insist libraries increase property values in their neighborhood, and libraries are frequently the busiest public facility in their community.

If we are so popular, why is it then that we constantly battle for funding? Why is librarianship one of the lowest paid professions that require a graduate degree? Where are the hordes of supporters who have had their lives enriched by the library? With all the love lavished on us by our communities, where is our voice?

Your library association speaks for libraries. While hundreds of libraries serve multiple thousands of patrons, a small percentage of library employees belong to the Washington Library Association and take our voice to Olympia, and through the American Library Association (of which WLA is a constituent organization) we speak in the other Washington.

We speak to give the people what they want. Seldom is our message contradicted: that the public want free and open access to information and help getting it right. Virtually everyone sees that libraries have an important role to develop, assist, and encourage the literacy of our children, to promote wide knowledge among our teens and young adults, and to help adults with life-long literacy. All speak well of libraries. Why is our voice so weak?

Some speak in heartfelt tones of their school library, others exclaim over their public library visits, and some credit their academic library with success in their career. Life-changing knowledge has come from medical libraries and law libraries, and businesses have built their success on knowledge gained through corporate libraries. These are all signs of libraries giving the people what they want, in the context of their lives. In these contexts, libraries speak with divergent voices, with each variety of library speaking in its own tone, about its own constituency. Lost in the variety of voices is the message these are all libraries, and this great variety of people is served by librarians.

As library workers, we speak in many dialects. The Washington Library Media Association speaks for school libraries, the Washington Medical Library Association for medical libraries, the Association of College and Research Libraries for academic libraries, the Special Library Association for corporate libraries, the American Association of Law Libraries for—well, you see the picture. When someone is speaking for libraries, all too often the voice is heard for the hospital library, the campus library, the law library, or only the public library. This message is easily seen as giving only a few of the people what they want—just those who patronize that particular institution.

We have a fractured profession. While the Washington Library Association claims to speak for all libraries in the state, we strongly represent public libraries and have little or no representation from each of the other library types. The entire profession needs strong advocacy. The stories of success and wonder from all types of libraries should be brought together and spoken of in terms of library service—not school library service or public library service, campus or corporate library, but service from all libraries. We benefit everyone. We may have specialized services but the overarching philosophy of access to knowledge in information infuses all libraries, and we need to work together.

The Washington Library Association currently has a reciprocal relationship with the Washington Library Media Association, which can serve as a model for joining our voice with other library associations in the state. We will be seeking an appropriate arrangement with each association so that we can speak with one voice for the support of all librarianship. Some may affiliate with reciprocal memberships; others may find a better fit as a specialized interest group. We will offer to all libraries and library workers the support of our non-specialized association, speaking with a strong voice of all the success stories and achievements of every type of library in the state.

We have our legislative arm with a successful record in Olympia. Our most recent success, seeing that taxes were not added to libraries’ database access fees, has benefited libraries of all types. By bringing together our disparate voices, we will promote further giving the people what they want—all the people, no matter what type of library is the home of their favorite story.
“Alki,” a Native American word meaning “bye and bye,” was suggested by Nancy Pryor, Special Collections at Washington State Library, as the title for the Washington Library Association’s journal. “Alki” is also the state motto, signifying a focus on the future.

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Alki’s purpose is to communicate philosophical and substantive analyses of current and enduring issues for and about Washington libraries, personnel, and advocates, and to facilitate the exchange of research, opinion, and information.

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You Might Find You Get What You Need
by Julie Miller

You’ve got to give the people, now
Give the people what they want
--The O-Jays

When the O-Jays sang their hit song “Give the People What They Want” in 1975, they could have had no idea that thirty-three years later it would become one of the theme songs for Barack Obama’s presidential campaign. The sentiment resonates as strongly now as it did then. As any political leader knows, the challenge is to determine just what the people want, and then to have the resources, means, and will to deliver it.

We who work in the library community face this challenge all of the time: it is in the unspoken request at the heart of the reference interview, in the choices we make between “popular” and “literary” novels with a shrinking collections budget, in the decision to limit one program (ready to read?) in order to expand another (computer literacy for adult learners?). The articles in this issue of Alki explore the challenges of finding out what our communities want and then delivering it to them.

Some of the articles focus on techniques for eliciting input from library constituents. In “A Process for Giving People What They Want,” Mary Getchell describes Pierce County Library System’s reiterative process for listening and responding to community needs. E. H. Baxter and Alec McKay explain how the Friends of the Waterville Library used the “snowball” method of surveying their community at little cost, but with big results. In “Giving the Community What It Wants,” librarians from Timberland Regional Library share with Bo Kinney tips for hosting community chats to glean insight into the community.

Other articles focus on delivering the goods. In “Quiet Please,” Theresa Kappus describes the Foley Center Library’s response to Gonzaga college students who wanted more quiet in the library. Ahniwa Ferrari tells the story of the Washington State Library’s Hard Times Resource Guide, a Web site created to help Washington libraries meet the needs of the unemployed. Lynne King and the newly formed ILL team at Highline Community College Library find support among peers at the Northwest Interlibrary Loan and Resource Sharing Conference. When voters overwhelming exclaimed, “We want a new library!” by passing the largest bond in Richland’s history, the Richland Public Library accepted the challenge; Julie McMakin shares the gratifying results. (We should all be so lucky!)

After a hiatus (the reason of which will become clear when you read her article), Angelina Benedetti is back with a new Solinus column that will make you smile. David Wright offers gift book suggestions for the readers (and non-readers) on your list. This issue of Alki has lots of WLA news. Meet Kate Laughlin, a long-time WLA member who has been hired as the new WLA Continuing Education program coordinator. Catch up on people and places and find out the theme for the 2010 WLA/PNLA joint conference in Victoria.

It’s a unanimous decision
I said they’re ready for a change, yeah, yeah, yeah

We want freedom, justice, and equality
I want it for you and I want it for me.

Alki’s purpose is to “communicate philosophical and substantive analyses of current and enduring issues for and about Washington libraries, personnel, and advocates, and to facilitate the exchange of research, opinion, and information.” Alki is your journal. Are we delivering what you want? Please send your comments, questions, and concerns to me at alkieditor@wla.com.
“We Want a New Library!”: The New and Improved Richland Public Library

by Judy McMakin

The Richland Public Library reopened on Friday, July 17, 2009, to an enthusiastic crowd of over two hundred library supporters. They were celebrating the renovation and expansion of their community library. In May 2006 the residents of Richland said, “We want a new library” by approving a $17.25 million bond by a 63% majority, the largest bond passed in the City of Richland’s history. This bond would provide the funds to increase the size of the library from 33,000 square feet to 58,000 square feet. This celebration was the culmination of about seven years of planning, designing, and construction of this new facility.

Planning the Expansion

Library consultant Dallas Young Shaffer and ARC Architects had recommended in a 2003 Programming, Planning, and Design Study that the existing Richland library should be expanded by 25,500 square feet. Shaffer stated that the current facility was already overcrowded and lacked adequate room for its collections, programs, and technology. She developed a demographic profile of the community noting that Richland is highly educated with a large percentage of people employed in management and professional occupations. She used the City Planner’s population projection of 63,030 for 2025 to help develop the space needs and service levels for the new library. The heavy use of the current library by children and their families also had an impact on the planning process.

In 2004 the staff did an informal survey asking library users what they would like in a “new” library. Library users took a personal interest in the planning for the library and were very passionate about what they wanted. Some of their responses were:

“More books, more movies, more books on CD, and more magazines for kids”
“More space; you are so crowded!”
“More computers”
“A drive-up book drop”
“A coffee shop”
“A larger area for the teens and more study rooms”

As part of the design process for the new library, the architects Fletcher, Farr, Ayotte Inc. held town hall meetings and conducted a formal survey to gather input from the community. The public and the staff expressed that they wanted the library to be inviting and welcoming, to be open with lots of natural light, and to be a comfortable “destination point” where people wanted to spend their time.

In 2008 the staff conducted an online technology survey asking the community what new products and services they would like in their new library. They overwhelmingly voted for downloadable books, music, and videos and an online book club. They also asked for computer games that they could check out of the library.

The RPL, Only Better

Now we had our “marching orders”! The library was built so that the collection had room to grow for the next 25 to thirty years and would accommodate the future needs of the growing community. The Teen Area has doubled its size from the original space. The teens now enjoy three Alienware computers that are dedicated to role playing games, such as Runescape. They have two study rooms and comfortable seating for just “hanging out” and the collection has doubled in size. The Children’s Area increased in size by over 75 percent. It has two study rooms and much room for the collection to grow. The Adult Area has almost doubled in size. The library has a new second floor which houses the adult biographies, general and genre fiction, magazines and newspapers. Patrons can enjoy the beautiful view sitting in comfortable chairs in front of a fireplace or use their laptop at the numerous study tables throughout the second floor. Each study table is equipped with an outlet for electricity and data. A panorama of windows lets in the natural light on three sides of the library. The wireless network was strengthened so that patrons can use their laptops throughout the building. Patrons have seventy Internet computers available in several parts of the library for research and recreational purposes.

The collection of materials has also grown. The library spent almost $100,000 of the library bond money on an “Opening Day Collect-
The renovated and expanded Richland Public Library. The crowd of people waiting to come in on Opening Day.

“...consisting of over 2,500 new books, books on CD, music CDs, DVDs, graphic novels, foreign language material, and reference books, for the adult, teen, and children’s collections. In a 2008 Library Technology Survey the community said that they wanted an online book club, downloadable media, and computers to check out. The library responded with a subscription to DearReader.com, where library users can choose from a variety of book clubs and receive a chapter or two of a book in their email each week. Patrons can enjoy a downloadable collection of audiobooks, eBooks, music, and videos from OverDrive that can be downloaded and transferred to a computer or a handheld device, or burned to a CD. The library added children’s and teen computer games to the collection in three formats, Nintendo Wii, PlayStation 3, and Xbox 360, for checkout.

Now patrons have two places to return their library material: a pedestrian and a drive-up book drop. The items are immediately checked in and sorted due to the application of radio frequency identification (RFID) tags in each item. Library material is also checked out using RFID. The library purchased additional self-check-out stations for patrons who are “on the go” and would like to get in and out of the library as quickly as possible.

Library users experience the “Wow!” factor as they enter the majestic, open lobby with floor-to-ceiling windows. The long-awaited coffee shop in the lobby should be completed by the end of the year. A local coffee vendor is leasing this space which is located next to the Friends of the Library bookstore. In the lobby there are also tables and chairs and comfortable seating for patrons who want to relax, enjoy their coffee with friends, or surf the Internet on their laptops.

The community also told us to keep certain features of the “old” library. They wanted to preserve the “art wall” along the eastern side of the outer wall. It was engraved by sculptor Harold Balasz and is a unique part of the building. This “art wall” was carefully preserved during construction and is now an inner wall in the Friends of the Library retail space. We also have a bronze statue of a reclining girl reading a book and a stained glass window displayed in the Children’s Area which were kept from the “old” library.

Opening Day

We opened the doors to the renovated and expanded library, and the community came in droves. The circulation statistics, new patron registrations and patron requests for assistance have skyrocketed since the July 17 reopening. In August patrons checked out 53,683 items, an eleven percent increase from August 2007 when the library was in the same building, pre-renovation. Staff handled a 65 percent increase in the number of patrons applying for new library cards, from 193 in August 2007 to 547 in August 2009. The number of questions from patrons who needed library assistance jumped from 2,582 in August 2007 to 3,951 in August 2009, a 35 percent increase. Patrons can receive assistance at five service desks in the new facility, compared to three in the old building.

The community spoke; we listened! The City of Richland has a “first class” library of which every resident can be rightfully proud.
Helping Libraries Help Patrons in Hard Times
by Ahniwa Ferrari

The Washington State Library launched its Hard Times Resource Guide on August 28, 2009. As of October 15, the Guide, which can be viewed at http://www.secstate.wa.gov/library/hardtimes/, has received over 4,000 unique visitors and 10,000 page views. The success of the Resource Guide can be measured not just in the use it has received or its value to libraries throughout Washington—of course, both of these measures are great—but also by the collaborative, multifaceted, and speedy response mustered by the Library Development team at the State Library.

Life Cycle of a Statewide Project

Most statewide projects exist on a very specific timeline and within a set structure. Many of them are suggested by librarians in Washington State through an open process, voted on by the Library Council of Washington, and then implemented over the course of one or several years. The goal of the State Library in responding to the economic crisis was to implement a faster and more flexible solution that would benefit libraries throughout the state.

We need to be plugged into resources for our customers who are searching for jobs, training for them on computers and e-mail, and able to find time to help this labor-intense group. Job search is not self-service at all.

Identifying Library Needs

In early February 2009, the State Library released a survey asking public library directors across Washington to describe the new sorts of challenges they were facing in light of the troubled economy. Of the thirty-three responses we received, many noted an increase in users coming in to look for employment help, résumé services, job skills testing, and basic technology assistance. Many of these libraries were dealing with these increased demands at the same time that they were suffering from major budget shortfalls, leaving them with too few staff and too few computers to address these new challenges effectively.

Comments in this survey highlighted these new challenges:

“Online job applications, test-taking, benefits applications, tax filing, etc. are all increasingly in demand and often difficult to do for many people.”

“Our greatest challenge is the vast increase in customers who now need to use the computers to get a job but do not have the necessary or appropriate computers skills.”

“People are looking for résumé help and resources, and it is hard to find the time to put things together in an organized way.”

“We need to be plugged into resources for our customers who are searching for jobs, training for them on computers and e-mail, and able to find time to help this labor-intense group. Job search is not self-service at all.”

To meet these challenges, many of the survey responses stated that the State Library could be of assistance by compiling a list of online resources for libraries to access in one place.

Taking Action

By the end of February the Library Development team had created a Hard Times Core Committee to work on the issues highlighted in the survey responses. The committee investigated numerous avenues of assistance, including offering thumb drives pre-loaded with resources to libraries, checking into database vendors that may have helpful solutions, exploring partnerships with groups like WorkSource, and others. One of the action items from the first meeting was to develop a list of job-help and employment-related sites to put onto the State Library Website for use by other libraries.

This initial Web site, filled with job-searching, résumé-building,
The Hard Times Resource Guide’s home page uses images to help users navigate its twelve subject areas.

Anatomy of a Resource Guide

Twelve subjects were chosen for the Resource Guide, eight actually dealing with broad subject groups, and four targeting specific populations. The four subjects that were anticipated to be the most used and popular were highlighted at the top of the guide. These subjects have garnered the most use since the guide launched, perhaps because they are highlighted on top.

Some of the broader subjects are broken down into subsets once the user has made their initial selection. For instance, users browsing in the Health and Sustenance section will find resources separated into Health Resources, Flu Resources, and Food Resources.

Selection of Resources

To say you’re going to build a resource guide around a particular subject or set of subjects is easy, but actually doing it is something else entirely. Avoiding commercial sites was fairly important to the portal development team. Most of these sites want something from the user, and that seemed counter-productive given the job-seeking audience for the portal. Non-commercial job-seeking sites are particularly difficult to find, and in the end quite a few commercial sites were included.

For most of the other subjects, the selected sites were mostly organizational, educational, or government in nature. Since the resource guide is meant to serve a statewide library patronage, resources that were too local were turned down, as were some resources that were too broad in geographic scope. Resources meant to serve Washington citizens in particular were highlighted. Another consideration was the number of resources to use in a given subject area. In creating a selective, rather than comprehensive guide, the portal development team a great deal of care not to overwhelm the user by including too many resources for a given subject.

Pretty but Navigable

The committee wanted to create a site that looked good and was also very user-friendly—always a challenge. Breaking the site into sections based on presumptions of usage seemed reasonable. Using pictures to make the site more interesting and to emphasize the subjects helps the users stick around long enough to find the resources that will be of use to them. A text-rich resource guide is easy to make and can be useful, too. Breaking up that text, while more difficult, can help users navigate, make the site more memorable, and encourage repeat visitors.

Keeping It Growing

Resources come and go, needs change, and eventually even the economy will improve. The Hard Times Resource Guide will persevere, though, and continue to add new resources and remove old ones as needs change. The Employment and Job-Seeking section could still use some revision, possibly by removing some of the commercial sites and finding better local alternatives. Creating a state map that people could click on to find local resources is a possible future project, as is expanding and changing the name of the En Español section to include help for speakers of other languages.

As the Guide continues to grow, libraries are encouraged to link to it from their Web sites and to supplement with more local resources as needed. Suggestions for the site are always welcome, and contact information is included on every page on the site. Future guides may be in the works as well for more general subjects, depending on demand. Perhaps a general guide for reference resources, or a K-12 Resource Guide? Please feel free to send suggestions.

For more information about the Hard Times Resource Guide, contact:
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In order to find out what students find useful or lacking in our facilities and services, Gonzaga University’s Foley Center Library conducts a survey every two to three years. Based on the results, the library has added more group study rooms, study tables in the atrium, more computers, building-use laptops, and video cameras to check out. In a 2006 survey, many students commented that the library was also lacking QUIET!!

“Often times groups of people are disrespectful and loud. Cell phones are a big pain because someone is always on one.”

“I am dissatisfied with finding a quiet place to study because people are always talking or on their cell phones, it’s annoying.”

“... many students use their cell phones, keep their voices up, etc., and are not asked to be quiet.”

Student ambassadors giving campus tours to prospective students created a legend that the library “gets quieter as you go up.” Noise should be expected around the circulation and references desks, but survey comments showed that this was not a universal understanding: “People that work here talk too loud when helping students, and it is very distracting.” A quiet study zone on the third floor was the only area with a noise limitation. The study spaces there were prime real estate for serious scholars. Icy stares ensured the zone’s enforcement.

To clarify the noise level expected throughout the library, public services staff designated red, yellow, and green study zones. The main floor is a green “Talking Zone”; the third floor is a red “Quiet Zone”; other areas are assigned a level based on their typical use. Detailed descriptions of these study zones are provided in our Wiki: https://wiki.gonzaga.edu/foley/index.php/Study_Zones

Though the library was reluctant to impose a cell phone policy, the survey revealed that students were more annoyed by cell phone conversations than the library staff. This was the opportunity we needed to address the issue without the library coming off as the bad guy. The cell phone policy went into effect in September 2008:

**Foley Cell Phone Policy**

In response to student concerns about noise in the library, we require all patrons to place their cell phones on silent or vibrate mode, and to conduct their conversations outside the library. Please take your belongings with you if you leave your study space. You may also leave belongings at a staffed service point while you are gone.

Cell phone use in Foley Center is limited to the Atrium outside the main doors of the library, the 24 Hour Study Lounge, and the Group Study Rooms (when no one in the group objects). Text messaging is acceptable in the library, as long as it does not cause a disturbance.

Library staff does not routinely police either the study zones or the cell phone policy. Students are generally respectful of the Study Zone system, though the “legend” of progressive silence may have an influence. Occasionally, staff will inform or remind students of the cell phone policy, but that too, seems to be taking hold. For those who like it even quieter, disposable ear plugs are available free at the reference desk.

Foley Center Library has two enduring sources of noise, one structural and one procedural. The spiral staircase connecting all four floors acts as a megaphone amplifying any noise in or around the stairwell. Whether it’s the banter of trustees descending from the 4th floor boardroom or a story being read aloud to a youngster on the lower level, library patrons get an earful. Tales of faltering relationships, financial difficulties, and past-due assignments are also inadvertently broadcast when the stairwell is the location chosen for such conversations. Once the speaker is informed that they can be heard throughout the building, conversations are usually replaced by an embarrassed silence (trustees excluded). Of course, the other noise source is the library staff at work. Sure, we might be a little loud answering reference questions, checking out books or wrangling with the copier, but the service desks are in a Green Zone, so it’s legit, right?  

Theresa Kappus is Distance Services Librarian at Gonzaga University.
Designing a Web Page to Give Students What They Need at the Lower Columbia College Library

by Andrea Gillaspy Steinhilper

At Lower Columbia College Library (LCCL) Services, we give our students not just what they want, but also what they need to be successful. We think not only of student success in classes at LCC, but also of success in their lives as they leave the college and pursue their careers and personal goals. Therefore, we provide students with access to resources they can use now, but also to teach them skills that they will find useful both in their college career and their future lives.

This approach is fairly standard for a community college—all of us want our students to succeed. As with many community colleges in Washington, our students come from a lower socio-economic base than one sees at a typical undergraduate college. Unemployment is high in Cowlitz County.1 Many of our students have been laid off or are on public assistance. A few come to us as Running Start students, even fewer directly out of high school, but many are adult learners—sixty percent are over age 25.2 As adult learners, a high percentage of our students are digital immigrants, or not even immigrants yet. We find that many of them do not know how to save documents onto a USB drive, use a search engine, or tell the difference between a document from a database and a blog posting. Still, all our students are taking classes and trying to access information that is increasingly to be found only in digital form.

What do our students want? They want the information they need, right now. They want to get this information without having to learn how. They want to get this information without having to come to the library.

What do they need? They need to be able to find the information. They need to learn how to look for and evaluate that information. They need to know when to come to the library and when they can locate the information online.

This is the story of how LCCL is using its Web page to give students what they want—and what they need.

Background

At LCCL, we try to make the information students need readily accessible, as painlessly as possible. We also make ourselves as available as we can, so that students will come to us and get help immediately. And we teach them the skills they need along the way to finding their information—so that when they leave, they have not only the information they wanted, but the skills to continue to access and assess information.

These are great goals—but it has been a hard road to get here. Two years ago, our library was little used. We had computers that could be used to do research, but had no word processing applications. Students could not write their papers, take notes, or do much else on the computer besides research. Our collection was, like many academic libraries, good for historical research (in other words, old). The library was very quiet—good for studying. Our Web page had a lot of text, with a description of the library’s services and access to the catalog and to the two databases to which the library subscribed.

A new vice president and a new dean began the process of hauling our library into the present. Updating computers, weeding collections, and rearranging the furniture provided a fairly low-budget quick fix to the physical atmosphere. The campus Tutoring Services were integrated into the library space, which became the Learning Commons. Students began to come in. The physical changes were tremendous, and the Learning Commons is now a welcoming place. But it was up to the library staff to change the Web page and instruction we offered and to provide online learning and assistance to our students who still are not digital natives. Our approach needed to change to give our students what they wanted—and needed.

A Web Page for Digital Immigrants

The old Web page was text heavy and included access to the catalog, Proquest, and First Search. We wanted to move to a user-friendly Web page that would be as much a teaching page as Library Services tried to be a teaching library. We worked with the LCC Public Relations Department to get help on how people use Web sites and how people read on the Internet (according to Marie Wise of the PR Department, “Read on a Web page? They don’t.”) Then we reviewed library instruction, and came up with the following objectives:

- remove much of the text,
- arrange links in user-centered categories,
- demonstrate the same research process on the Web site that we teach in the classroom,
- offer how-to and tutorial pages,
- provide easy ways to get help or contact staff.

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We are gradually moving away from text. The first page revision just involved rewriting the paragraphs to be more student centered. With the second revision, each link in “Information Resources” had a sentence identifying its usefulness. The current version relies on “tooltips”–pop-up text that briefly describes what the link does.

Web designers tell us people stay with the view that pops up on their computer; they don’t scroll. So we have redesigned the Web page to place front and center the items students need most: access to databases and a way to ask a question. Instead of providing text telling students what we offer, the page now lists the most requested services in the top central bubble. The top right bubble is for asking a question—it links directly to AskWA, but also provides a link to LCCL’s reference e-mail and phone.

LCCL is required to use the college’s bubble templates for the Web site. This restriction does present some problems, but also has the advantage of providing a tool that an inexperienced Web-designer librarian (me) can use. Another advantage of the format is that it is based on categories. People think in boxes, and if we can put our resources and instruction into boxes, it can make it easier for students to follow. In this development process, the library staff have been concerned with how to make the Web site teach students, just as we teach students in the library or when we offer orientations. We always go over the research process—start with an overview, get some key words, move into books, then into periodicals or specific articles, evaluating all along the way. We have therefore structured the information on the Web page to align with the research process. For example, on the “Databases” page, we have arranged the database links in order of the research process—book/overview, periodical, other. The same is true for our “How Do I?” page. The “Subject Guides” also follow the same process. They may list pertinent databases and links, but the access is organized according to the research process, rather than alphabetically. In addition, the one teaching video we have made to accompany the Business Administration subject guide (on a special LSTA grant for embedding librarians into disciplines) walks the students through the research process to find their material. This video is available only through ANGEL (the LCC distance education course management system) at this time, but we are working on linking videos to the Web page.

Providing Tutorials as Instruction

Library Services is, according to Dean Jon Kerr, “the biggest classroom on campus.” If we only provide access to information, students may not know how to locate, use, or evaluate that information. Even when we offer face-to-face library instruction in classrooms, students sometimes say, “I know you showed us that database, but I can’t remember
Getting Out the Good Stuff for Teens

by Kirsten Edwards

Every year WLA puts on a smorgasbord of great learning opportunities, and the 2009 conference was no exception. Even if you plan to stick to a particular track—youth or reference services, for example—you end up wanting to be in two places at once. This year, I made a valiant attempt at to be in two places at once. One of my co-presenters, Rosalie Olds of King County Library System, and I participated in both the Non-fiction Book-Talking Extravaganza and the Teen Program Showcase. Both programs were designed to get loads of good, workable stuff (be it fun reads or fun events) into the hands of our teen-serving peers. I brought stuff to share on the following topics: taking teen services out of the library and into the community and book-talking fun nonfiction.

Taking Teen Services on the Road

For me, taking library services “on the road” began with a request: Can you do this thing you’ve never done before? No one else wants to. The first request was about the Foolscap Literary Convention, and one of my boss’s boss’s bosses asked if I could represent our library system as librarian guest of honor (!) at a science fiction and fantasy convention. I’d just discovered the magic of the VPN (virtual private network) key and decided it would be a terrific opportunity to beta-test the nano-micro-branch: one librarian + a laptop.

To make a long story short, it worked. I got to dress up like Mme Pince (the librarian at Hogwarts) and sit behind a poster in the hotel hallway making library cards, checking out books (I brought titles from the conference’s artist and author Guest of Honor backlist), and answering reference questions. By December, I’ll have repeated the experiment where it really counts: riding my local high school’s Wi-Fi, using the VPN to access our system’s circulation database, and signing up our high school students for library cards in their own lunchroom. (I will not, however, be wearing my Hogwarts costume.) The devil is in the details, of course: all of which can be found in the handout posted in the Resources section of NWCentral.org.1

Fun Nonfiction for Teens

When it comes to sharing fun nonfiction for teens, my beau ideal was Gregory & James’ Toilets of the World: astonishingly informative, eye-opening, and irresistible.3 From the solid gold toilet to the world’s smelliest (visitors have been known to pass out from the stench), the book is a whirl-wind tour of our common humanity—and unique cultural quirks. Silly? Absolutely. Well-produced and appealing? Also a big “yes.” All year long I keep an eagle eye out for books like these: that compilation diary and blog entry book from the Mennonite teenager whose life was derailed by a chronic illness (Emily)4; the detailed makeup and costume book: How to Cosplay, vol. 1.5 For some teenagers, the standard novel just won’t cut it. But a really funny biography like Knucklehead6 or an exciting “how to make ice-cream with dry ice” read (Theo Gray’s Mad Science7) can convince a skeptical teen that, yes, the printed page does have something for him. That realization is a door that, once opened, can set you free. For true believers in the power of books and libraries to change lives—as I am—there’s nothing more rewarding than when a young person walks through it.

At the WLA conference we only had time to book-talk a bare

Continued on next page

Kirsten Edwards provides teen services to three small rural branches in the King County Library System. She would like to point out that her presentations were far from being the only “good stuff” on hand, but are (she’s afraid) the only ones she’s prepared to write articles about.

A second request to do this thing you’ve never done before came when the local library was approached by the Duvall Days planners. Every year at Duvall Days, the smaller north end of the park “got out of hand” because the teenagers would hang out there in the dark making trouble—could we suggest anything? The library brought our full Game On! video game complement: Dance Dance Revolution, Guitar Hero, Game Cubes. The city brought power and temporary fencing. Together we turned a “problem” into an exciting program. If you’re already doing some sort of video game program and your city has access to a portable generator they can share, give it a try. 2010 will be our fourth year to bring the library to Duvall Days. The handout posted at NWCentral.org includes the layout and requirements for taking a teen video-gaming program out to your town’s local fair.2
handful of titles—presenters had fifteen minutes each—then run back to the Teen Program Showcase. The full list of “fun nonfiction” titles, however, runs to 47-odd titles (emphasis on “odd”). The list includes a thumbnail of the cover, an idiosyncratic synopsis (you won’t be getting library school extra-credit either, not for writing annotations like these, but they’re decent book talk “hooks”) and the likely general appeal/age appropriateness: younger teens, older teens, etc. Included are thrilling life experiences (The Daily Coyote), freakishly true stuff (Take Me to Your Leader), “lars” a minute (The Big Bento Book of Chindogo), and how to do stuff they don’t (won’t) teach you at school (Punk Rock Etiquette). Most of the books on the list are recent publications with 2007-2009 copyrights, with a few golden oldies.

Where to find more such titles? Two perhaps less well-known resources are the Bloggers Choice (http://bloggerschoiceawards.com) and Weblog (http://weblogawards.org) awards. The best blogs generate some great books (Cake Wrecks, for example)—but my absolute favorite go-to list is created by the teens and librarians in New York: Books for the Teenage, now available exclusively online at http://teenlink.nypl.org/bta1.cfm. Teen services librarians (and the teens they serve, who love to share the books they love) honestly are the greatest resource. Heading online and finding out what they recommend—whether you hit YALSA’s Quick Picks for Reluctant Readers or your own local network—just can’t be beat. Which is, fundamentally, what our WLA conferences are all about: tapping into our varied skill sets, sharing with our peers, getting out the good stuff.

References & Resources

WLA presenters were encouraged to use NWCentral to post all their handouts and additional resources; the posted presentations are all still there. Most presenters tagged their uploads, too, so Alki readers can browse by topic. Browse the resource list for WLA conference and other postings at http://www.nwcentral.org/?q=node/1567.

1 Edwards, Kirsten. Taking It to Town: Bringing Your Program into the Community. Detailed downloadable PDF file: http://www.nwcentral.org/?q=node/1567
2 Ibid.
8 Edwards, Kirsten. Fun Nonfiction for Teens: No one’s Going to Give You Extra Credit for Reading These (Probably). PDF file: http://www.nwcentral.org/?q=node/1566
A Process for Giving the People What They Want @ Pierce County Library System
by Mary Getchell

Pierce County Library System (PCLS) strategically discerns the needs of individuals and communities to determine how the library can provide value, meet their needs, and give people what they want.

We ask customers and potential customers about their needs. We listen. We collaborate with customers, potential customers, and community leaders. We act on what we discern people want. We inform people and connect them to how PCLS has provided value and met needs. We reiterate this strategy.

“We hear all of the time from people,” says Neel Parikh, executive director for Pierce County Library. “To give people what they want, we strategically ask them; not so much what they want, rather we ask about their lives, their communities, and how the library can help meet their needs and bring value to their lives and their communities.”

Ask and Listen

PCLS is in constant engagement with people in its communities. In 2006 the community voted on a reauthorized levy to maintain PCLS’s services and add additional services. The path to the ballot was an orchestrated strategy in community collaborations to discern what people wanted and how PCLS could help meet community needs. PCLS worked with a citizens’ advisory committee to listen to people’s top priorities. Public involvement included reaching thousands of people via print and online surveys, community meetings, and many other collaborative steps. Voters gave a 56 percent approval to pass the re-authorized levy.

In the past year, PCLS has asked, listened, to, and collaborated with more than 5,000 people to build a facilities master plan: Pierce County Library 2030. The plan focuses on community needs for the next twenty plus years and on how PCLS can deliver quality services in contemporary, convenient locations to help meet those needs.

Collaborate

“Collaboration is essential because it goes beyond asking and listening—it engages people and brings their interests into the process,” says Parikh. “By learning and understanding communities’ needs, the library can more successfully give people what they want.”

To develop the facilities master plan, PCLS conducted numerous collaborative communication activities throughout 2009 to create an achievable, future-looking plan that represents the needs of local residents. These activities included: print, online, and direct mail surveys; a workshop with community leaders to envision future needs and services; regional advisory group meetings, community meetings, and more.

PCLS is committed to working in partnership with community organizations. Library staff members are encouraged to participate in local organizations and help with community issues. The library’s Pierce County READS one-book program involves twenty community partners, including book stores, colleges, and other organizations, to reach a constituency beyond the library.

Act

Once the library has listened to and collaborate with its constituents, it takes action to meet community needs. Since 2007 PCLS has delivered promises delivered during the re-authorized levy campaign. The library has:

- Added twenty percent more open hours.
- Offered new materials and faster service, cutting the time people waited for popular books by an average of 60 percent from 19 weeks to 8 weeks.

Continued on page 30
Giving the Community What it Wants: Timberland Regional Library’s Community Chats
by Bo Kinney

Timberland Regional Library (TRL) is a five-county library system serving a diverse, largely rural region in southwest Washington. Communities served by TRL range from the metropolitan area surrounding the state capitol of Olympia, to the beach towns of Westport and Ilwaco, to the tiny Olympic Peninsula community of Amanda Park.

Despite the challenges faced by such a diverse, geographically expansive library system, TRL maintains a concentrated focus on listening and responding to the needs of its communities. I recently spoke with Jodi Reng, TRL’s outgoing director, and two TRL branch managers, to find out how the library accomplishes this responsiveness.

Reng, who retired in October, says that “giving the people what they want” has been something of a theme for her during her entire time at TRL. “The library has to be part of the community,” she says. “If we narrow our mission to books and information, then we’re not that relevant to the community. But if we find out what people want, then we become the heart of the community.”

One of the most important tools she has used to discover community needs is what she calls the community chat. In a community chat, community librarians invite representatives from different groups and organizations to meet at the library and share their perspectives on the needs of the community.

The Community Chat

Each library in the system invites community members to community chats on a regular basis. Mary Thornton, the manager of the Hoquiam Library, says she starts with people she knows who are “volunteer types” and invites them to participate and to spread the word to other community members. She also sends invitations to the head of the chamber of commerce, school principals, local churches, and historical groups.

Thornton has found that most people who come to community chats are doing multiple jobs. For example, someone might work for the hospital, be an active church member, and volunteer in a teacher/parent group, as well as a historical society. “I don’t just get one person, I get four,” she says. “Even if only five people come to a chat, they often represent many groups.”

Some groups, however, are hard to attract. Thornton says that representatives from the school district and small businesses almost never come because they simply can’t spare the time.

The library always provides one facilitator and one note taker, but “instead of talking, they listen,” says Reng. “The real key is the gathering together of people,” says Christine Peck, manager of the Aberdeen Library. “We’re not presenting. We tell participants, ‘We’re interested in what’s happening for you so we can match programs for your needs.’”

All participants are given a chance to introduce themselves, talk about what their organization does, and what they perceive community needs to be. “Very often, they’ll take over and talk amongst themselves,” says Thornton. She feels this is the best part about the chats because community members don’t often have other opportunities to meet and talk to each other. Sometimes organizations find that they are unknowingly competing, as in the recent case of a food bank and local churches. “Often they find they have similar goals, and can collaborate instead of competing.”

After the chat, Thornton sends a synopsis to everyone who attended—and everyone who couldn’t come. Peck also follows up with participants, sometimes to get more information about issues they brought up during the chats.

“Community chats have been a productive way for TRL to connect with and to respond to its many diverse communities ranging from the metropolitan area surrounding the Olympia, to the beach towns of Westport and Ilwaco, to the tiny Olympic Peninsula community of Amanda Park.”
Community Needs

Every librarian feels like they know what community needs are, says Reng, but they see the community from their point of view. Thornton agrees. “The community chats let me know what’s going on outside the library. I don’t hear a lot of what’s going on in the community. By having these people sit down, I can see what they’re seeing and what they’re experiencing, and I can tailor programs and services to their needs.” In addition, a community chat can bring in community members who are not regular library users. “If people don’t come in the library, it’s hard to know what their needs are,” says Thornton. “This is how I find out.”

The key with community chats is to get other people talking about their needs, then write it down and bring it back to the library, says Reng. Thornton asks participants to begin by telling the group what their goals are for the next year. “It’s not ‘I need this from you,’ but ‘This is what’s happening in my world,’” Peck says. “Then we try to say, ‘What can we do to provide that for you?’”

Thornton says it’s very hard not to overcommit. “It’s easy to say, ‘I can do this and this and this’ and then go back to your desk and say, ‘How am I going to do these twelve things I just promised I would do?’ I try not to promise I’ll do everything.” Peck says she lets participants know that while the library is always looking for suggestions, she may not be able to provide what they are asking for. “Some things I can do,” she says. “Some things I don’t have control over.”

But even if the library is not able to respond to a need immediately, it is still helpful to identify something as a need. For example, some technology services are difficult for TRL to implement systemwide because of substantial differences in bandwidth among branches. “Certain kinds of technology would work in Olympia or Aberdeen,” says Peck, “but would close down the entire library in Amanda Park.” But through community chats with college students, Peck has identified the importance of having a library presence on social networks and has recognized the need to look for other sources of funding, such as federal stimulus grant money, to expand TRL’s network.

Responding to Needs

The real success of community chats, according to Reng, comes from “hitching them up with outcome-based evaluation.” TRL uses community chats to determine desired outcomes, and then uses these outcomes to plan programs and set library goals. Reng says that using community chats as a starting point allows the library to ask, “Did we reach the outcome the community was looking for?”

Community chats can reveal problems and needs that are not necessarily apparent on the surface. For example, when the Hoquiam library was having problems with vandalism, community chats with youth and youth-service providers uncovered that the underlying need was for after-school activities. To respond, the library began offering gaming programs in Hoquiam and other locations.

The programs have been very successful. “Some of our smaller libraries, where getting ten kids to a program is a big deal, were having forty turn up,” says Reng. And while not everyone comes back to the library later, some do, says Reng, because “they begin to think of the library as a fun, welcoming place.” Thornton says gaming programs “make kids happy because we got them involved. We asked them, ‘What do you want?’” Youth have got-
ten something valuable from the library, and vandalism has decreased. Reng was originally against the idea of offering gaming in the library. “I said, ‘What’s that got to do with us?’” she says. And even now, “a lot of people don’t think of Dance Dance Revolution as a library program.” But gaming programs in the library gave kids the opportunity to interact with caring adults as a positive role model. It gave them a view of how their lives could be different.

Although the explicit goal of community chats is to give the library information about what’s happening in the community, they are also a way for community members to find out about library activities and services that are already available to them. For example, Thornton has found that local businesses have a need for computer skills and training, and she has used the chats to advertise the library’s computer classes. “It’s a way for me to get the word out without a lot of money,” she says.

Likewise, other groups have been excited to find out about the library’s free meeting rooms. A representative from the City of Hoquiam who participated in a community chat was looking for activities for the city’s summer day camp for kids. “They’ve started bringing kids to summer reading program events,” says Thornton. This partnership benefits the library and the summer camp participants. “It gives us an audience, and it gives them free programming.”

Financial Challenges

Timberland, like most public libraries, has been hit by the economic downturn. The library has cut hours, decreased its collection budget, and reduced the maximum number of checked out items from 200 to fifty.

Reng says that budget woes make serving community needs challenging. “With sufficient funding you do whatever it takes,” she says. “Now we sometimes have to do what we can afford.” But knowing the community’s needs helps the library make the difficult decisions about what to cut. By listening to the community, and by focusing on the needs of the community as a whole, as opposed to the needs of each individual member, the library can “make that stretch,” as Reng puts it, and provide the “greatest good for the greatest number.”

Reng says that focusing on community needs doesn’t mean that the library doesn’t value individuals. “The person across the desk from you is the most important person in the world, and you treat them that way,” she says. “We don’t say no. We don’t say, ‘We can’t do that.’” But budget limitations do sometimes require certain services to be tabled or scaled down.

TRL’s librarians, like public librarians everywhere, are hoping for better economic times so they can go back to doing “whatever it takes.” But in good times or bad, community chats have been a productive way for TRL to connect with its many diverse communities and to respond to what the community wants and needs.

Tips for Organizing Community Chats

- Keep track of community leaders you know. Talk to library volunteers, friends, and trustees, and get names from them.
- Identify what you don’t know about the community, and who you need to hear from. “A community chat is a perfect opportunity for the library to find out about parts of the community that it wouldn’t otherwise,” says Peck. “Look around your community and go, ‘Who haven’t I talked to?’—and then invite them.”
- Decide how open you want your invitation to be. Some TRL libraries send word to community leaders and rely on a ripple effect to broaden the range of participants. Others identify specific people or groups they want represented, and ask for RSVPs so they know exactly who will be coming.
- Make sure all participants know who everyone is and what organization they’re representing.
- Make a clear schedule and stick to it. Try to keep the entire chat to under an hour, and keep the discussion moving so everyone gets a chance to talk.
- Don’t be discouraged if attendance is low at first. Some people whom you want to come just won’t have the time. Over time, participation will grow.
The Friends of the Waterville Library (FOWL) had been active in an annual and an on-going book sale, programs for school children on early-release Mondays, and some repair work for the library. But we felt we should be doing things that would enhance the role of the library in the community. We decided to ask the local people—but who, and how? We adapted a traditional sociological method, called a “snowball” or a “sociogram,” that involves developing a sample by asking each person interviewed for the names of locals who would have an interest in the subject.

The Friends of the Waterville Library adapted a traditional sociological method, called a ‘snowball’ or a ‘sociogram,’ to develop a survey sample of community members who have an interest in the library.

To get the “snowball” rolling, we interviewed people in person or by phone. After a short summary of what FOWL had been doing, people were asked what activities or events or changes they would like to see at the Library, and then for the names of people they thought would have suggestions. We began by talking to active and former members of FOWL, then to the people they suggested, and so on (hence the term “snowball”).

Interviews were conducted as time allowed, each generally taking about fifteen to twenty minutes, over a couple months in late 2008 and early 2009. A difficulty is deciding how many people to interview—we decided we would interview until we were getting the same names over and over, and when we were not getting any new suggestions. Thus, we stopped interviewing after we had talked to 31 people.

Results

We organized the results into three groups: most frequent suggestions (things mentioned by half or more of those interviewed), less frequent suggestions (things mentioned by fewer people, but always by more than one person), and singular comments that rather surprised us.

The most frequent suggestions were programs for adults, which surprised us because of the current emphasis on children’s programs. (We speculate that this emphasis on adults may be because people feel there are an adequate number of children’s activities already.) The most frequent suggestions were, in order: (1) computer training, especially Internet skills (such as on-line banking and filling out forms) and more advanced word-processing skills; (2) attention to local history (a collection, tours of local sites, speakers, and so on); and (3) a wide variety of art, craft, skill, and entertainment activities (knitting, adult reading skills, movies, money management, and so on).

Less frequently mentioned were (1) programs for children and families, much along these lines of what is already being done at the library, and (2) changes to library operations, such as some evening hours for those that work during the day, a bike rack, and better signs for the on-going book sale. The physical attributes of the library seemed to be of little interest; people were more interested in services, the collection, and programs.

Other comments were that teens were not much involved, and that parents (not unrelated adults) should be reading to children. One person remarked that there were very few activities for men at the library. We then noticed that most of the interview respondents were women; only twenty percent were men. We speculate that this group could be cultivated by the library, which could considerably increase its use.

One happy result was that several people volunteered to provide training in some of the activities or named people who had relevant skills. We speculate that there are probably quite a few talented people in the community whose skills the library could use.

Implementing Our Findings

Copies of the survey results were provided to the Executive Director and Director of Public Services of the North Central Regional Library (NCRL). The response was quite gratifying—they acted promptly on the results. The library hours were adjusted, so that the library was open one evening a week. Space for local history materials was allocated in the shelves, and a number of items have been supplied by NCRL to help start the collection.

Local people have taken an interest, too. Local volunteers have now started a computer club, and NCRL has provided an instructional projector for meetings. And FOWL had a local company design and make a bicycle rack, which has been given to the town and installed in front of the Library.

Conclusion

We are quite pleased with the results of our survey and the changes that have resulted. More generally, though, we are happy to think we found a way to find out what the community wants. Of course, we may very well have failed to discover other things that people in the community are interested in, but we know much more than we did, and the results have given FOWL some goals to work toward.

Of course, these only apply to our community, but it seems likely that a similar consensus exists in other places. Such a survey can be a useful guide to groups like ours, at a fairly low cost in time. In all—the planning, the interviews, the preparation of the report—required about sixty hours and almost no cost, in our opinion well worth the time.

E. H. Baxter, Ph.D., is retired from teaching and research in sociology and marketing and is former Secretary of F.O.W.L. Alec McKay is a trustee for North Central Regional Library.

How Do We Know What They Want?
by E.H. Baxter and Alec McKay

The Friends of the Waterville Library (FOWL) had been active in an annual and an on-going book sale, programs for school children on early-release Mondays, and some repair work for the library. But we felt we should be doing things that would enhance the role of the library in the community. We decided to ask the local people—but who, and how? We adapted a traditional sociological method, called a “snowball” or a “sociogram,” that involves developing a sample by asking each person interviewed for the names of locals who would have an interest in the subject.
Giving the Community What It (Doesn’t Know It) Wants: the Early Learning Program at Pierce County Library System

by Susan Anderson-Newham

Before a staff meeting last month, the deputy director of the Pierce County Library System (PCLS) circulated a very interesting copy of a blog pointing out, while that companies often ask customers what they want, in reality customers don’t generally know what they want. They only know what they want once they see it! So how do we give the people what they want if they don’t really know what they want?

From a grand perspective, certain "wants" seem to make everyone’s list–healthy and thriving children, good schools, ample employment, safe neighborhoods, and strong communities. Most people agree we all want these things. But how on earth can libraries deliver on even a few of these universal yearnings? At PCLS, we believe we begin with early learning.

The Development of the Early Learning Program at PCLS

PCLS had an outreach book delivery program for child care centers that had been up and going since 1984. But in 2000, this program became the Early Learning Program, and a part-time librarian was added to create literacy trainings and support based on the PLA/ALSC “Every Child Ready to Read” model. The idea was to form a sort of “train the trainer” program. Children’s librarians trained child care providers in best practices of early literacy by encouraging the effective sharing of books, rhymes, songs, and stories with the children in their care. If the teachers themselves discovered the joys of reading and sharing books with young children, the children would in turn be on their way toward greater school success and lifelong learning. In other words, they would thrive.

For children and families to read more, they have to want to check out books. So the Early Learning program and the PCLS Communications unit created a special library card for our youngest customers. This card featured an adorable dragonfly reading a book with the caption, “I’m a born reader.” Customers didn’t realize they wanted a card, but once we created one, everyone wanted one!

In an attempt to strengthen in-branch learning, we added AWE literacy machines to all our branches. Wildly popular with families and constantly in use, these computers have helped young children develop early literacy skills. Coupled with our books, materials, wonderful storytimes for all ages, and early literacy manipulatives, our branches were truly becoming early learning hubs for the community.

Extending Our Reach

As the Early Learning Program grew, we realized that working exclusively within the library branches was not enough; we had to move into the community to be truly effective. We focused on forming partnerships with early learning community leaders: the Educational Service Districts, Child Care Resource and Referral, the Department of Early Learning, the Head Start and Early Childhood Education and Assistance Programs, child care associations, parenting groups, the Washington State Department of Health, the Children’s Museum of Tacoma, and state associations that focus on early learning. These community partnerships have evolved into a coalition, “First 5 FUNdamentals,” and have helped move all of Pierce County closer to serving children and their families more effectively.

Coalition members share information about our community--its mental and physical health, demographic and cultural changes, available resources, and areas of most need. We also share important new research on early learning and on the programs that best reflect that research. These partnerships have led directly to changes in library programming. For instance, several library branches host weekly “Play to Learn” sessions conducted by the Children’s Museum of Tacoma. In observing the incredible popularity of these sessions, and reading the research behind them, PCLS initiated a pilot program aimed at incorporating more elements of imaginative play into our storytimes to strengthen and enrich early learning.

Giving the Community What It Wants

By improving early learning in Pierce County, we have made a positive impact on the children living here. Does this move us closer to the shared goals of strong communities, ample employment, and safe neighborhoods? We believe it will! Recent research on the return-on-investment for early childhood development finds that for every dollar appropriately spent on early learning, the community saves nearly $17 over a child’s life. Thus, an effective early learning system could provide Pierce County with an additional $16 dollars for every child. This largess could be spent on enhanced schools, increased higher education, more job creation, superior libraries and stronger communities! We believe that would truly be giving the people what they want.

References


The Northwest Interlibrary Loan and Resource Sharing Conference: Sharing Ways to Give People What They Want

by Lynne King

In 2009 the interlibrary loan (ILL) service at Highline Community College Library was moved from one department to another after budget cuts necessitated some personnel changes. Only one of our team of four people currently doing ILL has significant experience in interlibrary loans at our library. As stated in the library’s mission, we “...make our materials available to the broader community. We assist our users in accessing remote resources; we share our distinct resources...” These statements make interlibrary loan an integral part of good service—part of giving people what they want.

Our director wants our history of good interlibrary loan service to continue and to grow. With this in mind, she has encouraged our team to get as much training as possible. As is true with many smaller library staffs, we all have other jobs along with ILL, so time for training has been precious. Two of us went to the most recent Northwest Interlibrary Loan and Resource Conference in Portland. (Check it out at: http://nwill.org/index.shtml)

We were excited about this opportunity to learn new/better ways to do our job.

“ILL really is a remarkable way to give people what they want from libraries. In times of limited funds and increased expectations, we provide real service in good time.”

The keynote speech, “Future of Resource Sharing and Library Service,” presented by Cyril Oberlander, associate director of Milne Library at SUNY College at Genesco, was “awe”-some in the literal sense. His team is part of a resource-sharing cooperative that is developing new systems and tweaking existing ones to help libraries provide state-of-the-art (and to us, futuristic) interlibrary loan service. Check our Project GIST (the Getting It System Toolkit) at http://toolkit.idsproject.org/doku.php?id=wiki:gist to see how they are integrating and optimizing acquisition and interlibrary loan services.

Another presenter who inspired me was Shirien Chappel, head of Access Services in the Knight Library at the University of Oregon. She spoke about change and how we can help ourselves and our staff deal with it. I like this quote from her presentation: “We no longer dictate what our patrons get: we respond to requests and needs from our students and faculty. And those needs frequently change, and that’s not going to change.”

We attended sessions on competencies, strategies, workflows and planning. We listened to speakers who had staff larger than ours (35 student workers—wow!) and others who were a one-man show. My head was full of possibilities, but not a lot of practicalities. So I started to talk to the other attendees at break times.

As is often the case in a conference, the networking was as valuable as the program. Many interlibrary loan colleagues went out of their way to talk to me about how they did the job to provide service to their communities. They offered practical “free” alternatives to upgrading our service. They offered to send documents and lists and tips and resources to help us do a better job. They gave me contact information and said, “Call for help!”

I am especially grateful to Erik Jensen from Blue Mountain Community College Library in Pendleton who recently set up an ILL department and generously shared his tip sheets and instructions he had “hammered out for staff to follow in processing ILL requests” (his words). My colleagues and I are eager to review and possibly incorporate streamlined work flows.

We also want to thank Sara Hatch and Hilary Barnes from City University of Seattle who have contacted us with an open invitation to visit their ILL department and observe their set-up and workflow. Sara says they “continue to evaluate and adjust their procedures and protocols to streamline service,” and this process mirrors our own expectations.

We can’t possibly own or house all of the items that our library users want and need. Interlibrary loan opens the world of resource sharing to our patrons. I think ILL really is a remarkable way to give people what they want from libraries. In times of limited funds and increased expectations, we provide real service in good time. Our library borrows (and sends) materials all over the world to fill patron requests. And with current technologies, some requests are filled within hours!

This conference showed me how interlibrary loan and resource sharing continue to adapt, expand, and deliver a world of information to our patrons at a local level. I came back with ideas we can use today and with a better understanding of the possibilities for the future.
Angelina Benedetti is a new Library Cluster Manager in the King County Library System.

Recently, I made two changes in my life that I was utterly unprepared for: I became a mom and I went back to Public Services. In just a few months, I went from being sure of myself in my job to feeling thirteen again—just like it was the first day of junior high and my clothes didn’t fit.

For the past eight years, I worked in collection development for our library system, first as a selector and later as the department manager. In my job, I knew exactly what our patrons wanted, and I worked to give it to them--more DVDs, blockbusters on street date, and an improved holds-to-copies ratio. Even as our system’s collection grew more complex in size and scale, I felt confident that we were building a place where everybody could find something, even if they had to wait a little while to get it. At parties, when people asked what I did, I could honestly say that someone paid me to buy books all day. Who wouldn’t love that job?

Then I became a mom. Overnight, I went from being a competent service professional to knowing absolutely nothing about how to make this one, special, and oh-so-tiny patron happy. One month I was sending in orders for thousands of dollars of forthcoming bestsellers, and the next I was sending orders to Diapers.com for Size 1 Pampers (overnight delivery please).

Three months of maternity leave flew past, and it was time to return to work. My psyche had become accustomed to chaos, and instead of going back to that job I loved, I decided to turn my life upside-down once again. Instead of going back to collection development, I applied for a Public Services position.

After all, eight years in collection development had taught me what our patrons wanted, right? The latest authors? I knew ’em before they were famous. Database searching? Bring it on. I had memorized every collection location in the system and a few that hadn’t been invented yet. I was a Readers’ Advisory Goddess with a heart that beat to an Intellectual Freedom drum. I was ready to go back out on the floor.

Those of you who have actually been working on the front lines know how well that turned out. I had my shiny collection development self handed back to me. Every skill I had honed in the past eight years meant nothing. What did the patrons want? Not the latest bestseller (well, maybe Dan Brown). Instead, they wanted computer time—the more, the better. And printers that never ran out of paper, please. Our patrons wanted meeting rooms for their homeowner’s associations and waivers for their fines. They wanted math tutors and driving directions to the immigration office. Overnight, I needed to learn scheduling software, online meeting room sign-ups, and the reference desk wiki. If I was lucky, maybe once a day a patron would ask what they should read next. Pity them, because I was all too eager to share.

What I have learned in the past few months is that the library collection is only part of what we do. Sure, we have the books (and some folks have even figured out a way to make us their own personal Netflix), but really we are much more than that. We are the place you can come when you have to look for a job online and have no idea where to start. We will even let you print your résumé. Storytime is on Tuesday and Wednesday mornings at ten and eleven am and if you want it in Spanish, come on Mondays at six pm. Need the study room? I will see if it is available.

In short, what I forgot while working behind the scenes is that the front-and-center of library service is more than just our materials. We are the only free game in town—the place where our patrons can find their next good read, and a lot of other things besides. As unequipped as I am to give them what they want, I have never been happier.

And now, I know when my daughter is hungry, when she is poopy, and when she is tired. It will take me a little longer to master that scheduling software, but I’ll learn. If you are willing to be patient with me, eventually I will figure out what you need.
For many of us, the library is a place to find a favorite book, use a computer, find resources, participate in classes or community activities, or have a place to read and work. For someone with autism, the library offers all these opportunities, but it also is a place without that special book available or without a computer available. The library has strange lights and noises, offers classes and activities that are difficult to follow, and has unfamiliar and unpredictable people coming and going. The library can be both a favorite place and a very stressful place for someone with autism.

In an effort to help library staff provide better service to individuals with autism, the Washington State Library offered a program at the WLA Annual Conference in Spokane followed by two half-day workshops titled “Autism Awareness in the Library.” The presenter, Julie Ashmun from Project D.A.T.A. at the Haring Center at the University of Washington, shared information on how libraries can create a more welcoming environment for those with autism.

What Is Autism?

Autism is a neurological disorder that causes complex developmental delays, including marked impairments in social interactions, communication, and behaviors that restrict leisure and daily activities (Hall, 2009). Although there is no medical test for autism, the symptoms are apparent during the first three years of life and affect one in 91 children (Kogan, et al., 2009), one girl for every four boys.

With increased awareness of autism, parents, pediatricians, and other caregivers are usually the first to detect red flags or cause for concern. The first signs are noticeable in the first twelve months of life, and they include no smiles or joyful expression by six months and no reciprocation of facial expressions, sounds, and smiles by nine months (Autism Speaks, 2009). Some absolute indicators include:

- no babbling by twelve months
- no gesturing (pointing, waving bye-bye) by twelve months
- no single words by sixteen months
- no two-word spontaneous (not just echolalia) phrases by 24 months
- any loss of any language or social skills at any age under three

Autism is a severe, life-long disability that affects an individual across a range of abilities and challenges and is therefore classified as a spectrum disorder.

How Do I Know If Someone Has Autism?

Because autism does not affect any physical features, a person with autism may look like anyone in your community. Atypical behaviors or inability to talk and socially interact often distinguish someone with autism from someone without. Every individual with autism is different from every other, with varying degrees of communication, social skills, and restrictive or repetitive behaviors. A person with autism may show a complete lack of interest in others or may display an abnormal attachment or interest in certain adults. People with autism generally display a lack of understanding of facial expressions and body language (e.g., turning away to indicate an end to interaction), and making friends is challenging for people with autism due to social deficits. Individuals with autism may use augmentative communication systems or have no communication system at all, and individuals with expressive speech may have odd uses of language with varied tones and rhythms when talking. The odd uses may include scripting (reciting words from a book, movie, etc.), pronoun reversals, and repetitive speech such as echolalia (repeating what another person says). Many people with autism have obsessions and demonstrate obsessive behaviors. Hand flapping, spinning, and self-injurious behaviors are just some of the self-stimulatory behaviors people with autism may exhibit.

How Do We Support Individuals with Autism in the Library?

Learning to communicate and socially interact with someone with autism is the key to forming a relationship and welcoming that individual into the library and, thus, the community. Someone with autism may demonstrate several ways to communicate, whether it is verbal, with pictures, sign language, a voice output communication aid (VOCA), gestures, or picture boards. The key is to find out about the individual and how he or she communicates with others. If it is a small child or an individual with limited language, talking with a parent or guardian will be helpful. If the person is older, address him or her directly. Here are some key tips to follow when communicating with someone who has autism:

- Get the individual’s attention; use his or her name.
- Use simple, clear language and directions.
- Have a picture board/book available with common pictures of items in the library.
- Ask close-ended questions (e.g., “What’s your favorite book?” or “Do you like trains?”).

Julie Ashmun is Continuing Education Coordinator at the Haring Center for Applied Research and Training in Education at the University of Washington. Jennifer Fenton is the Continuing Education/Training Coordinator at the Washington State Library.
• Use exaggerated facial expressions and gestures.
• Use language to define steps in a sequence (e.g., first, then, last; one, two, and three).
• Have a dry erase board ready to use for writing words or drawing simple pictures.
• Avoid distractions, such as assisting another patron, when interacting with someone with autism.

In a stimulating environment such as a library, a person with autism may need pictures to express needs and desires or to process what another person is saying. Pictures of items and picture cue examples may enhance the communication process and reduce stress or anxiety for someone with autism. For example, putting a picture cue that reads “ask for help” next to the library catalog computer or the check-out computer may alleviate disruptive behavior. Additionally, for library classes or activities, try having a sequence of picture cues that explain how to complete an activity or what to do during the activity (see Figure 1). Pictures may be found from a variety of resources on the internet; you can also take pictures of the items and activities in your library to use as picture cues. The Library of Fanwood and Scotch Plains Web site provides resources and materials that are available for librarians to use, including a sample picture book entitled This is My Library and a sample communication guide that provides a variety of pictures to have available in your library (The Library of Fanwood, 2009).

Other simple environmental changes or adaptations that may be helpful for someone with autism include:

• color code the library catalog or use pictures to represent each subject area in the library;
• define or list any rules or expectations when applicable (with concise words or phrases);
• consider timers, such as a Time Timer at computers and during classes to make it clear to an individual when an activity ends or begins;
• offer a comfy spot, away from others, noise, and activity;
• provide choices and redirect attention (e.g., if an individual looks upset, instead of asking if you can help, show two pictures – one of a book and one of a computer).

Supporting an individual with autism in the library also means ignoring behaviors that may seem odd, but are not harmful to others. Someone with autism may pace, rock, flap hands, talk to himself or hum, demonstrate tics, or wiggle. These behaviors are generally not intended to disrupt others or gain attention; therefore, they are best left alone. If a librarian ignores these behaviors and appears comfortable and not alarmed by them, then the patrons in the library may follow this lead.

Librarians are a means for awareness in the community regarding disabilities, including autism. Showing respect and empathy is the key to customer service for all library patrons. Talking with people with autism and their families will help build a thriving community.

References


Recent events at the Camas Public Library include a gift of three works of art created by local artist Marion Beals and her late husband Chet. As a teen Marion worked at the library and Chet was a library trustee for 10 years. The library also hosted a “not-a-lot-of-sleep”-over featuring games, movies, and pizza on September 25, and Andrew Carnegie visited the library on October 9 for an entertaining and informative story of his life. The Friends and Foundation of the Camas Library (FFCL) has been very active, holding a spaghetti feed and silent auction on Oct.3. The FFCL also was also the beneficiary of the local Whole Foods community giving day, receiving 5% of the day’s receipts.

Linda Lambert, Library Director at Whatcom Community College, will assume the position of Interim Director of Communications, working with the college Advancement office through June 30th, 2010. Both positions will be half time.

The Washington State Library offers free obituary lookups from its large collection of Washington state newspapers. This service was recently highlighted as the “Tip of the Week” in the digital Family Tree Magazine e-newsletter. The person who gave them the tip about the service won a free book, and the State Library gained many new genealogy patrons. Visit the site at www.secstate.wa.gov/library/Obituaries.aspx

The Colfax Branch of Whitman County Library began a major ADA and safety renovation project in November. Project cost is $1 million with key elements being an elevator, accessible restrooms, a safer stairway and modifications to the children’s area. The Colfax Library is the only building owned by Whitman County Library District and serves as a clearinghouse for books and services countywide. Funding for the renovation comes from a number of sources including local and corporate donations, a Community Facilities grant from the State of Washington and a USDA Rural Development loan funded by American Reinvestment and Recovery Act funds.

As part of The Secretary of State’s Washington Rural Heritage Project, Whitman County Library received a $5000 Library Services and Technology Act equipment grant in 2008 to begin digitizing Whitman County’s rural heritage. Since then, local interest and funding have blossomed. The Library recently received a $9,000 Whitman County Historical Preservation grant to expand the program and produce public exhibits. Volunteers keep the project running while partners like Washington State University’s Manuscripts and Archives, The Whitman County Historical Society, The McGregor Company, Creative Image Portrait Studios and local museums have joined in. Contact Patti Cammack or visit www.whitco.lib.wa.us for information.
WLA Communiqué

Picture This at Your Library

The North Central Regional Library (NCRL) has its own children’s book, *The Adventures of Super Princess Madame Zorony*. It was created by Winthrop author/illustrator Erik Brooks through interaction with kids at NCRL libraries. As part of the NCRL 2009 summer reading program, Brooks visited all 28 community libraries within the library district. Working with children who attended library programs, Mr. Brooks made 28 drawings to form a book. A paperback edition of this book, *The Adventures of Super Princess Madame Zorony*, has been created and will be available in NCRL libraries soon.

“How many masterpieces can we create this summer?” asked Youth Services Librarian Martha Ashenfelter of the children at Jefferson County Library in Port Hadlock. For each book read during the 2009 Summer Reading Program, kids glued pieces to “masterpiece” puzzles. Ashenfelter bought posters of well-known paintings, created a numbered grid on the back of each one that matched a cardboard grid the size of the poster, and cut the “masterpieces” along the grid. A local artist created “gilded” frames from foam board, plaster strips and gold spray paint. Twelve paintings were completed, over 2,600 books read, and the Children’s Room became a museum!

Author/illustrator Erik Brooks collaborated with children throughout North Central Regional Library’s district to create *The Adventures of Super Princess Madame Zorony*.

The puzzle of the Mona Lisa is almost solved at Jefferson County Library’s Summer Reading Program.

In Memorium

Long-term library trustee Art Kirschenbaum passed away on Monday, July 13, 2009. He was a Trustee on the Library Board for the Sno-Isle Library System at the time of his death, having served on the Board since 1999. Prior to that, he was a member of the Edmonds Library Board and the Washington Library Association Library Friends & Trustees Association. An active member of the Friends of the Edmonds Library for many years, he was Past President and was currently serving as Parliamentarian. Kirschenbaum was a member of WLA and a continuing member of ALA and was active in several capacities in both organizations. He retired from the US Department of Education, Washington, DC, in 1990, when he moved to Edmonds, WA, with his wife Athalie.

The following is an excerpt from the eulogy made by Joel Selling, fellow Trustee on the Sno-Isle Library Board, at the July 27, 2009, Board meeting. (Read the full eulogy at http://www.sno-isle.org/assets/4165/4165_20090930105732.pdf.)

“No remembrance of Art’s life and his library work would be remotely close to accurate without noting his singular passion for intellectual freedom. The American Library Association’s Library Bill of Rights notes seven areas that, in essence, prescribe that libraries give as many people as possible straightforward access to the materials the libraries offer. Art was the most vocal, and occasionally contentious, of Trustees when there were any hints of a breach of this Bill of Rights. In all the years I had the opportunity to serve with, and learn from, Art, intellectual freedom was the most powerful and consistent article of faith in his decisions. The Trustees are grateful for this passion of his—and our patrons are better off for his efforts.”

Carma Russell (Zimmerman) Leigh, former state librarian of Washington (1945-1951), died September 25 in San Diego, CA. She was 104 years old. A graduate of the University of California Berkeley School of Librarianship (1930), she was director of the Watsonville Public Library (1931-1935), Orange County Free Library (1938-1942), and San Bernardino County Free Library (1942-1945) before moving north to become Washington state librarian. She returned to California in 1951 to become California state librarian. She retired from the California State Library in 1972. Carma Leigh was a long-time member of WLA and an innovative, dynamic and extremely influential state librarian. For more information about her life and work, see “Revisiting the Career of Carma Russell (Zimmerman) Leigh” by Cindy Mediavilla in the December 1997 issue of *Alki*. 
WLA Board Self-evaluation

by Julie Graham

Washington Library Association is streamlining—all part of a process stemming from a self-evaluation the board took part in last winter.

The evaluation asked board members to look at their own organization and at their relationship with Melby Cameron & Anderson (MC&A), the company with which WLA contracts for management services. According to WLA President Tim Mallory, “Dana (Murphy-Love), our executive Director, is steering WLA toward association best practices,” Mallory said. MC&A is familiar with many organizations, so they can look at WLA’s existing practices and sometimes say, “I’m sure you had a reason for doing this at one time, but is it really serving your purposes now?”

Murphy-Love said MC&A has used this evaluation tool for about seven years. The firm developed it, though some content comes from the American Society of AssociationExecutives, of which MC&A is a member, she said. “We like it because a board member or committee chair can evaluate how they feel the board as a whole operates and themselves individually. The tool identifies areas which can be improved upon as well as validates areas that are operating well.”

All board members took the evaluation separately, and their answers were anonymous. The self-examination portion asked them to examine the board’s effectiveness and performance in areas such as goals, decision-making, communication, and accomplishments, and to rate the board on a scale ranging from exceeding expectations to satisfactory to below expectations. In almost all areas, the majority of board members felt the board efforts were satisfactory or above.

The results themselves, Mallory said, weren’t really surprising. “It turns out that we think we’re doing a very good job, but it did come out that we felt we could be doing better on all sides in communication.” Better communication “on all sides” includes between the WLA board and members, between members and the board, and between the board and officers and committees. However, Mallory also noted he’s rarely seen a survey where people didn’t feel communication could be better, and that communication is something the board is always working on. One result is the creation of a marketing and communication committee this summer. (See Jennifer Wiseman’s call for volunteers for the Marketing and Communication Committee in this issue.)

The survey has led the board to really start looking at itself as a board and to be more self-aware of being a board, Mallory said. “Are we doing things a board should do?” Gail Willis served as WLA’s executive director and association coordinator for many years–Mallory called her “essentially the fairy godmother of WLA.” Now that WLA is transitioning from that structure to contracting with a firm to provide management, the board’s role is refocusing on strategic planning.

The board is also clarifying the roles of board members and the various WLA committees, simplifying the organization. Sometimes that means combining roles and duties, and sometimes it means ending a particular piece. Mallory gave the examples of WLA’s budget committee, which met once a year to draw up the budget and present it to the board, and its financial oversight committee, which met three times each year to review how WLA spent its money and whether expenditures aligned with goals of the organization. Now both roles are combined as the finance committee. The process of clarifying and streamlining roles began at the board’s annual retreat in June and has continued through subsequent meetings.

“As terms expire we are going to reduce the number of officers and members of the board,” Mallory said. The process will continue into 2010, as some positions the board is examining have two-year terms. Also, some positions could change to one-year terms, such as the president and vice president. Currently, the president essentially has a four-year term — two as vice president and then two as president—and when a person weighs whether to commit to that service, it can be a challenge to predict what his or her life will be like in four years, Mallory said. He added many associations have those positions be one year each. He said he anticipates that the board will eventually have three at-large elected members, which have been associated with specific elected positions.

The board has also simplified WLA’s banking. Instead of having about a dozen different accounts (and paying fees on all of those), the organization now has two: one that incorporates different revenue streams and one for legislative funding, which must remain separate by law.

The evaluation is one WLA could use regularly, Mallory said. The part that focuses on the management-organization relationship is a useful tool to help guide the executive director and help that person learn more about the organization and, in this case, about libraries.

Julie Graham works at Yakima Valley Libraries and co-chairs the WLA Collection Development and Technical Services (CATS) Interest Group.
To increase the quantity and quality of continuing education (CE) opportunities for its members and potential members, WLA recently hired a Program Coordinator. This position is responsible for working directly with Interest Groups (IGs) and others in planning and implementing a wide variety of CE efforts, as well as for assisting in the development of regional CE programs for small- and medium-sized libraries that are institutional members of WLA.

Program Coordinator Kate Laughlin began work on October 1 by visiting the WALE conference in Wenatchee, attending every program and interviewing participants. She is already deep into the program planning process for the August 2010 WLA/PNLA joint conference in Victoria, BC. Between conferences, Kate will work with the WLA Interest Groups (IGs) to further develop their own communities of practice, including regular meetings and programs.

Before moving into contract projects for libraries, Kate was the Training Coordinator for The Seattle Public Library (SPL). She is a longtime, active WLA member. Formerly Program Chairperson of WLA’s Washington Library Trainers IG, Kate still serves on their board as Vice Chairperson. Since leaving SPL two years ago, Kate has provided training and consultation to libraries throughout the Pacific Northwest. Current projects include work with Kitsap Regional Library and with the Inland Northwest Council of Libraries. Kate also serves on an advisory group for the Washington State Library.

What Kate especially brings to this new WLA resource is her wide-ranging experience in libraries. In addition to her many years as a trainer, she has worked in front-line circulation, as a reference provider, in management, and in human resources. She has done large event planning, curriculum development, and strategic planning.

Prior to her work in libraries, Kate was an antiquarian bookseller for many years, and founded one of the first online, out-of-print search services, predating Amazon. She also worked as a graphic designer for a publishing company and then independently for a handful of Seattle-area organizations.

Kate is a longtime, avid volunteer. She facilitates a monthly book group for her local library, serves as newsletter editor for her son’s school, captains a team for the annual MS Walk, and is a past recipient of the PTA Golden Acorn Award. Kate makes her home in Seattle with her husband and children, dogs and cat. In addition to being a lifelong learner, Kate is a daily walker, reader, and FaceBooker.

Take a moment to share your thoughts with Kate on continuing education, or just drop her an email to say hello at kate@wla.org. 📚
Dear Potential 2010 WLA Scholarship Recipient:

WLA believes in you. Graduate Study Scholarships are awarded annually to help defray costs related to your library education. WLA has a great tradition in nurturing talent—we want to welcome you into the library field by helping to pave the way. Applying for a scholarship grant or a conference grant puts you squarely on the right path. As a WLA member—a requirement of the scholarship—you have an array of Interest Groups to join, the chance to work side by side with professionals advocating for libraries in Washington, and the opportunity to attend the WLA annual conference, which offers the best training and networking around. In order to fully benefit from your talents and education, we also require that you establish residency or be employed in a Washington library upon graduation. Applicants can attend any accredited library/information school to be eligible. Awards are based on potential leadership in the profession, experience in community activities, volunteering, professional associations or work involving libraries, and academic achievement. More information and criteria can be found on the Scholarships and Awards link at www.wla.org. The application period is from November 1, 2009, to January 2, 2010.

Another form of assistance offered is the WLA Conference Grant. Scholarship applicants and other WLA members in need of financial help to attend the annual WLA conference may apply separately for these grants.

The Scholarship Fund reflects the generosity and hope of WLA members for you. They contribute directly to the fund through the WLA website or buy lots of accessories and jewelry from Susan Madden's booth at Conference, the proceeds from which go directly into the fund. This fund relies on solely on WLA members' contributions and is always in need of more donations. Linda Johns, 2004 Scholarship Winner, would agree, “I need to give to the scholarship! You know, we need to keep this scholarship opportunity open to those who are coming into the profession. This scholarship truly encourages new librarians who come from diverse professional backgrounds. There are so many graduate students who are juggling full-time jobs, families, and the demands of switching to a new profession. All of their rich experiences make them wonderful additions to the field of librarianship, and if we can recognize these up-and-coming librarians—and make their lives a little easier—it only serves to strengthen our profession.”

We really hope to hear from you! Our hands are waiting to help you cross the finish line.

Sincerely,
The WLA Scholarship Committee
Have you thought about further developing your career and, at the same time, sharing your expertise and interest with other professionals? You can, by volunteering for one of two new WLA committees. Participation is easy and very rewarding! You can meet new people, contribute to your profession, help advise WLA’s Executive Board and staff, and expand your leadership skills.

Marketing & Communications Committee

This new WLA committee has met three times since August 2009 and is working diligently to develop a Strategic Communication Plan for the Association.

The purpose of the plan is to integrate the marketing and promotional activities for all of the Association’s programs, education and advocacy efforts. By developing short and long-term strategies for our efforts, WLA will be positioned to be more proactive and strategic. This plan will help the Association leverage and deploy resources more effectively and improve the way we work together as a team to achieve our mission and vision.

It is important to recognize that all of the Association’s efforts have a communication element. The new Strategic Communication Plan will include action items for achieving the charge of the Marketing & Communications Committee in three areas: 1) creating communication standards; 2) helping the Association communicate internally; 3) improving communication outward from the Association.

Member Services Committee

The Member Services Committee plays a key role in ensuring that WLA evolves to meet the changing needs of its members. This committee is responsible for:

- Targeting potential WLA members to increase membership.
- Identifying, improving and raising awareness of the benefits of membership in WLA.
- Reviewing and making recommendations about WLA’s membership criteria, categories & dues.

In September 2009, this committee recommended a number of changes to WLA’s dues structure to simplify and streamline it. These changes include lowering the minimum and raising the maximum dues, eliminating the mathematical formula for dues calculation and replacing it with salary ranges, and reducing the number of dues categories. The committee is now working hard to find ways to enhance WLA membership and identify new member benefits.

Get Connected

Getting involved in a WLA committee is a natural way to be at the table when decisions affecting the future of the Association are made. If you’re interested in volunteering or want to recommend a colleague contact Jennifer Wiseman, Coordinator of Communications at communications@wla.org or 425.369.3221.

A full list of committees and their description are available at http://wla.org/about/job-descriptions/
 increasedservicesforkidseteenagersbyaddingthe
OnlineHomeworkHelpserviceandearyearningresources.
• Upgradedservicesandtechnologieforyourcustomers,adding
hundreds of computers for public use.

These actions demonstrate the library’s commitment to listening to and meeting community needs.

Inform/Connect

PCLS is in constant communications—in its libraries, on its Web site, via its electronic list, with the media, and through other communications channels—to keep people informed about and connected to actions taken by the library. PCLS staff and managers often run across people who are surprised to learn about the library’s services. Marketing and communicating services constantly cannot be overdone.

Reiterate

As PCLS continues to provide new services from the re-authorized levy, it asks-listens-collaborates to involve customers and potential customers in shaping the new services. For example, in response to the public’s desire for more convenient, accessible services, PCLS developed an online reservation system for meeting rooms. The library involved residents to test the service as PCLS developed it, as well as when the public provided ideas and comments to improve the service following its initial run. The library responded to those ideas, further improved the service, and thanked and informed customers.

The Process Continues

According to PCLS Executive Director Neel Parikh, “To meet the needs of customers—internally and externally—libraries must engage in strategic collaborative and iterative processes to deliver services to meet today’s and tomorrow’s needs.”

PCLS seeks to engage all of its constituents, not just library users, in this process. It employs the same strategy—ask, listen, collaborate, inform, reiterate—to meet the needs of its internal customers such as employees and trustees. Pierce County Library is earnestly interested in giving people that don’t currently use the library—potential customers—what they want. In recent years the Library conducted a focus group with non-library customers, and it learned a lot. The Library also wants to learn more from people who are or could be library supporters to give them what they want, regardless if they use the library’s services.

The PNLA/WLA 2010 Conference, in Victoria, B.C., is taking shape for August 11 to 14. The keynote speaker, sci-fi Robert J. Sawyer, is going to make a great impression. Besides his awards as a writer, he is a gifted speaker, able to engage audiences with a range of topics such as future technology, bioethics, climate change, and human rights. His novel Flashforward is the basis of the popular new TV series by the same name. For more information about Sawyer, visit www.speakers.ca/sawyer_robert.aspx or www.sfwriter.com/.

The joint Program Committee has begun looking at a strong pool of program proposals. With the PNLA/WLA partnership, the variety and depth will be excellent. And, of course, to see issues from the Canadian and PNLA perspectives will enrich the conference experience.

The Conference Committee is sorting through all the options for social and recreational time in Victoria. Possibilities include visits to High Tea at the Fairmont Empress Hotel in Victoria, Butchart Gardens, the Royal British Columbia Museum, unique historic sites, and (for Corks and Cans) the nationally renowned Swan’s Pub.

The Fairmont Empress has begun taking reservations! We have secured excellent rates, especially considering that August is peak season in Victoria. We are developing online registration on the WLA and PNLA websites. Follow our progress at http://2010conference.wla.org/.

In case you’re wondering about the palm tree design, one tidbit you may not know: Victoria has the highest year-round average temperature of any location in Canada!

Phil Heikkinen is the 2010 Conference Co-Coordinator.
Gift Books
by David Wright

We librarians and librarianistas spend the whole year pushing books, so why should the holidays be any different? Yet we often know more about our patrons’ reading taste than that of our in-laws. How about accompanying your gift with a personalized book list for each of the readers on your list, assembled after getting them to tell you a few titles they’ve enjoyed, and some they haven’t? A wonderful idea, if you’ve got the time as the holidays draw near, but if you’re like me you’ll opt for Plan B: buy books that aren’t so much read as perused and passed around the party. At every holiday gathering there is at least one person who is grateful to have a high-interest book they can dive into or hide behind, or a voluble crank that you wish would get quietly absorbed in something.

Trivia, for example, is highly absorbent, and two new compendiums fit the bill very well: *Ultimate Top Ten Lists* and Nick Belarides’ *Random Obsessions: Trivia You Can’t Live Without*. Or skip words altogether and tap right into our spatial mainframe with such irresistible graphics-laden treats as *Show Me How: 500 Things You Should Know*, or Mark Ovenden’s *Transit Maps of the World*. In *Little People in the City: The Street Art of Slinkachu*, tiny railroad model people enact life’s dramas amidst a world they never made, and they were made far too small for. By turns charming, whimsical, sad and hilarious, this one will definitely make the rounds of any party. (My personal favorite is the kids curiously venturing into a cigarette pack). *Terry Borders’ Bent Objects: The Secret Lives of Everyday Things* plays a similar game, crafting absorbing, revealing little dioramas out of whatever’s at hand, from cheese doodles to deodorant to peanuts—he’s very good with peanuts.

Bloomsbury’s *100 Must-Read* series are great stocking-sized reading guides for a wide range of tastes, and they are far less intimidating than those 1,001 books you see everywhere these days. They have titles on Crime Novels, Science Fiction, Fantasy and Classics, but the two I like best are *100 Must-Read Life-Changing Books* and *100 Must-Read Books for Men*. The last of these includes a wide range of things from classic action and adventure to visionary cult fiction and a healthy selection of outstanding biographies—a fine gift for male readers (and the males you wish would read).

The best thing about Edward Gorey’s (aka Hyacynthe Phyppe’s) stocking-worthy *The Recently Deflowered Girl: The Right Thing to Say on Every Dubious Occasion* is the first blush of recognition, no doubt much the same as it was when this was first given as a gift back in 1965. The contents, however, are fairly tame, even for Gorey, making this a charming, nostalgically naughty notion.

Family coming from far and wide? Everyone will want to check their home state’s entry in *State by State: A Panoramic Portrait of America*, edited by Sean Wilsey and Matt Wieland. Inspired by the WPA guides of the 30’s and early 40’s, this collection compiles essays by a wide range of authors. Many of the original WPA guides have been re-printed over the years, so if you have loved ones far away, check and see if you can get their state’s guide. (Sad to say, WPA’s 1941 entry on Washington, the Evergreen State has not been revived—maybe someone out there within the sound of my voice can make that happen?)

The bookstores are crammed with amusing-blogs-as-books that I’d personally rather look at online (FU Penguin, Cake Wrecks, *Fail Nation*, etc.), though I suppose they’re good gifts for non-surfers. One that is worth getting/giving is Isabella Roselli’s *Green Porno*, which includes a DVD with eighteen episodes of this viral combination of informative nature documentary, surreal costume drama, and titillating bestial bodice-ripper.

Internet widows (and widowers) take note: if you’re giving anyone a gadget this year, consider adding on Soren Gordhamer’s *Wisdom 2.0*, a helpful guide to the one thing that all the other instruction manuals and sites don’t include: how to turn the damn thing off, put it away, and get on with your life. Given the number of iPhone zombies I see looming and lurching around the library lately, this book should be a popular gift this year.

Happy giving, and getting!
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