

**American Library Association
2009 Annual Conference, Chicago, Illinois
Report of James Rettig, President**

Let me begin this final report as president by once again thanking ALA's members for entrusting this office to me and its responsibility to represent ALA throughout this year. It has been a singular honor and privilege. I cannot think of a way to succinctly describe the experience other than to say it has been extraordinary, more than I could have imagined, and very rewarding. The learning curve at the end isn't as steep as at the beginning, but it never plateaus.

Representing and Speaking for ALA

Each month I have sent an informal report to the Council and Member Forum lists. These reports provided details about the events at which I have represented ALA and the interviews I have given on behalf of ALA.

The most noteworthy happening in recent months took place in New Jersey in June. As a part of the launch of President Obama's "United We Serve" initiative (<http://www.serve.gov/>) for volunteerism, I participated in an event at the Fanwood Memorial Library in Fanwood, NJ. U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and New Jersey Governor Jon Corzine participated in the event to promote volunteerism through libraries' summer reading programs. During the first thirty minutes I moderated a town hall discussion with about 30 representatives from the New Jersey library community. Our colleagues informed Sec. Duncan and Gov. Corzine about the many ways in which our libraries, especially our school and public libraries, contribute to American society. Both listened attentively and asked good questions. I am confident both came away from the session with a better understanding of the myriad ways libraries contribute to the vitality, education, civic life, and economies of their communities. During the rest of the secretary's and the governor's visit they read two books to Fanwood children who came to registered for the library's summer reading program.

Some of my most memorable learning experiences as ALA president have come while participating in conferences in Ukraine, China, Mexico, and Greece and the 2008 IFLA conference in Quebec City. Hearing about and seeing the state of libraries and librarianship in other parts of the world consistently reminded me that, even though we could use greater funding for our libraries and use that funding well, libraries in the United States have more than most libraries in other countries—sometimes much more. ALA's name commands great respect around the world and many of our international colleagues look to us for leadership.

President's Program at the 2009 Annual Conference

Thomas S. Blanton, director of the National Security Archive at George Washington University (<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/>), will speak at the President's program at the Annual Conference, Sunday, July 12, 3:30-5:00, McCormick Place West, room 184. He will speak on access to government information—how much access have we lost in recent years and what needs to be done to restore that access to its proper level.

Presidential Initiatives

Most of my presidential initiatives have been experiments designed to increase opportunities for members to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from their association. These initiatives have been designed to create connections among members and between ALA and its members.

- On Friday, July 10, 75 members participated in a day-long unconference. The unconference's Twitter hashtag is #unala2009.
- Ten of 118 proposals submitted were selected for the "Grassroots Programs" track at the Annual Conference. The programs, all of which have been scheduled in the Hilton, are:
 - Libraries and Obama's Information Policy, ShinJoung Yeo--Saturday, July 11, 3:30 - 5:00
 - From Legacy Data to Linked Data: Preparing Libraries for Web 3.0, Jennifer Bowen--Monday, July 13, 8:00 - 10:00
 - Access to Information as a Human Right: changing Practice and Policy in Central Africa, Natalia Taylor Poppeliers --Monday, July 13, 3:30 - 5:00
 - Free2Succeed: Creating a Library Job Center, Susan Gallinger--Monday, July 13, 3:30 - 5:00
 - Hiring the Best: Looking for Experiential Learning in MLS Students and Asking the Right Questions, Stacy Creel--Monday, July 13, 3:30 - 5:00
 - Learning to Lead, Melissa Henderson--Monday, July 13, 3:30 - 5:00
 - Naked Ladies in the Library! or Public Art in Public Libraries: Building Lasting Alliances and Creating Social Capital, Ruth Ketchum--Monday, July 13, 3:30 - 5:00
 - Discovering and Preserving Local History, Emily Erwin--Tuesday, July 14, 8:00 - 10:00
 - Many stories, Many options: Pushing out your digital content in new ways, Juliana Nykolaiszyn--Tuesday, July 14, 8:00 - 10:00
 - A More Narrow Discussion: The African American Male Librarian and Career Choice, Kaetrena D. Davis-Kendrick—Saturday, July 11, 3:30 – 5:00

- The Career Connections online community in ALA Connect is a place where members can submit their resumes for review and comment and share career advice at any stage in their careers.
- Members submitted virtual posters in a juried process. Those selected are available at http://presentations.ala.org/index.php?title=2009_Virtual_Posters.
- Monthly online salons presented in OPAL gave members opportunities to speak with some of the most creative individuals currently working in our field and in key leadership positions in ALA. Streaming audio of these is available at http://jimrettig.org/content/initiatives/member_participation/online_salons.htm
- A “Craig’s list” of opportunities for ALA members and libraries is in development. Unfortunately circumstances have delayed its debut until sometime after the Annual Conference.

On Saturday of the Annual Conference we are hosting students from underrepresented groups who attend Chicago area colleges. They will take in a few programs, visit the exhibits, attend the Opening General Session, go to the Scholarship Bash, and have ample opportunities to talk with Spectrum Scholars and others. We hope that after they see firsthand the range of opportunities librarianship offers they will give it serious consideration as a career.

As the year progressed and the recession deepened, the need for effective advocacy became ever more evident. For the past several years I have spoken of our libraries as parts of an integrated ecosystem. If one part of an ecosystem is weak or threatened, the whole system is weak or threatened. This calls for an advocacy approach that transcends type of library labels. A task force of proven library advocates has put together a panel discussion “Building Statewide Coalition for All Libraries in a Tough Economy” Saturday, July 11, 4:00-5:30, McCormick Place West, room 196-b. Marci Merola, director of the Office for Library Advocacy has guided development of the new “Coalition Building” Web site, scheduled to go live in early July at the Office for Library Advocacy’s site at <http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/ola/index.cfm>.

Members who Made a Difference

I am grateful to the members of my advisory committee: John Budd, Maria Carpenter, Trevor Dawes, Joe Janes, Laura Kortz, Genevieve Owens, Tom Peters, Cyndi Phillip, Karen Schneider Ma’lis Wendt, and J. Linda Williams.

I am equally grateful to the members of my advocacy task force: Mario Ascencio, Ann Ewbank, Judy Field, Judith Gibbons, Sara Kelly Johns, Peter Pearson, Jan Sanders, Sandy Schuckett, Pat Smith, Jan Walsh, and Ma’lis Wendt.

It has been a pleasure to work with my fellow Executive Board members. Each is deeply committed to ALA, takes his/her role seriously, brings varied experiences to the table, contributes to lively and insightful discussions, and works towards collective decisions founded

on a thorough examination of the evidence and sound reasoning. It is also a group that, once the day's work is finished, really knows how to have a good time!

I also want to thank my fellow ALA members for electing me as their 2008-2009 president. It has been an honor and a privilege to represent and serve you.

The Role of ALA Staff

Every ALA president depends on member volunteers to develop initiatives. And every president relies on ALA's staff for help, support, and guidance. I cannot possibly list every staff member who has worked on my behalf this year without inadvertently overlooking others. They serve ALA's members with dedication, commitment, talent, and energy. Thank you to all ALA staff who supported my work as president!