

NCLA Biennials Bring Home the Bacon

by Plummer Alston Jones, Jr.

Reading maketh a full man, conference a ready man, and writing an exact man.
— Francis Bacon (1561-1626)

NCLA is the fifth largest state library association in the country. Since the NCLA biennial conference is one of the largest gatherings of library professionals, it attracts speakers and workshop leaders, who find a receptive audience for their ideas, and exhibitors, who find potential purchasers of their goods and services. The biennial conference is, in addition to membership dues, the principal source of revenue for NCLA. Revenue gained from the biennial provides seed money for the succeeding conference and funds continuing education programs of NCLA sections, round tables, and committees throughout the biennium.

The real responsibility for making the biennial a reality falls on the shoulders of the Conference Committee, appointed and chaired by the President-Elect, Gwen Jackson. Although Janet Freeman, NCLA President, shared a wealth of knowledge gained from planning the 1991 biennial for which she was Conference Committee Chair, Janet was quick to point out that each biennial conference is and should be unique. Philosophical and practical decisions affecting the success of the conference were made by the Conference Committee through monthly meetings beginning in September 1992, thirteen months before the 1993 biennial. From that first meeting onward, the ten individuals on the Conference Committee planned as a group.

As Program Chair of the Conference Committee, my primary responsibility was to appoint a Program Committee to select speakers and performers for the three General Sessions. Having compiled a list of possible speakers and formats for the general sessions, the Program Committee voted to continue the tradition established by the 1991 Program Committee of inviting the incumbent ALA president to address the NCLA membership during the first general session. The Program Committee also decided that the Ogilvie Lecture, the second general session, should consist of a panel of five ALA presidents, who would address the topic of diversity in librarianship during the last quarter of the century. Booking Clyde Edgerton, the Tarwater Band, and Lee Smith for the third general session was Janet's suggestion, which met with unanimous approval of the Program Committee. My task was to follow through with their suggestions, make contacts, and get commitments. Happily, everyone to whom we extended an invitation to speak or perform at the general sessions had accepted by December 1992, months away from the biennial.

My secondary responsibility was to work with the designated program planners for each of the approximately thirty NCLA sections, round tables, and committees, and to encourage joint sponsorship of programs. Keeping in mind the needs of their respective members who could afford to attend only one day of the conference, many program planners decided to schedule at least one session on each day of the three-day conference. Grants for conference sessions were available from the NCLA Finance Committee. As Program Chair for the conference, I served as an ex-officio member of the Finance Committee, giving input regarding programming and clarifying information on grant applications. No application for a conference grant was denied.

Over eighty sessions were eventually planned, with speakers flying and driving in from across the eastern seaboard, from New York to Florida. Library-related groups with no formal affiliation with NCLA were invited to sponsor conference sessions also. Care was taken to give each program planner the time requested, the day requested, and the type of room and room setup requested. Some changes were made throughout the planning process to accommodate speakers' schedules.

The preregistration material and the conference program booklet were designed to highlight not only the sponsorship, but also the content of conference sessions. The intent was to encourage participants to attend sessions of interest regardless of their sponsorship.

Even with the diversity, flexibility, and careful attention to detail which characterized the planning process, there occurred during the conference those inevitable snafus which prove ultimately that no human endeavor is entirely perfect. Nevertheless, attendance at the 1993 biennial broke all past records. It appears that once again the NCLA biennial conference brought home the bacon.

COUNTER POINT



What About A Program For Vegetarians?

by Harry Tuchmayer, Column Editor

I know planning a conference is not an easy task, and goodness only knows I have nothing but admiration for Al, Gwen, and Janet (not to mention the hundreds of other people who helped make NCLA happen), but can anyone out there tell me why I always feel like I missed the really good programs?! I don't mean to complain — but why do I always have to choose between the two very programs I would get the most out of? And it's not just me! Ask anyone who attended NCLA and the first thing they'll tell you is, "I don't know why they always have to schedule two good meetings at the same time."

I know the purpose of the conference is to attract as many good speakers and design as many good sessions as possible, but really, Al, couldn't you have thrown in a couple of duds to make my life easier? Here's a perfect example: on Thursday I had every intention of sitting through "How to Search OCLC Efficiently and Cheaply." In fact, I lasted through about half an hour of really good advice on how to navigate my way through all the commands when I heard "screaming" coming from the very next room. Now I don't know about the rest of my colleagues, but screaming and laughter usually get my attention. So I quietly snuck out the back and went next door to a jam-packed session entitled "Libraries and the Internet/NREN: Realizing the Potential." Yes, I know it sounds sort of dull, but far from it! Charles McClure was in full stride, and he had the audience hanging on his every word, especially when the discussion turned to all the "explicit" junk out there on the internet. And after he repeated two or three times the logon commands necessary to get into some really nasty files, I thought I was back in college with a room full of anxious undergrads taking as many notes as possible. And just when I was about to get the stuff after "sex dot(.)" I HEARD EVEN MORE SCREAMING AND LAUGHTER coming from the next adjacent room.

Well, you know me, I had to see what all the fuss was about. At least, that's what I wanted to do. But as I pulled into a space in the outside hallway to get a better look, I was immediately informed by a very serious sounding librarian that "this is for women only!!!" Now, if only the placards outside each room had been bigger, I might not have embarrassed myself by trying to go to "Superwoman: Balancing the Multiple Roles." But really, Al, how was I to know that some sessions you guys set up really weren't for me?

It's not just scheduling conflicting meetings, but the whole issue of who gets what time slots that really bothers me. I mean, I'm barely awake when I wander into a meeting that looked boring enough to allow me time to finish my coffee and danish. How was I supposed to know that "Working with Government — Working FOR Libraries" was really a how-to session on training politicians as you would your dog! Although I don't let my kids have any dogs in the house, if it really is as easy as Senator Varn says it is, I might just let them keep a state senator or two!

Finally, someone has to say it! "What is the deal with these general sessions anyway?" They get the best time slots, no conflicting programs, and top notch speakers! Can't you guys do anything to make them better?!

Perhaps it's not the committee's fault. Could it be that I expect too much from a bunch of volunteers? I don't know. Maybe my wife is right and I'm just getting too old for this kind of thing. But next time, could you at least pick some dates that don't conflict with the World Series!



What's he doing here? Could NCASL President Nona Pryor and NCLA Secretary Waltrene Canada be part of that "no men allowed" Superwoman network that Harry refers to?