From the Chair

“Once and Forever” Documents Librarians

Cass Hartnett

The past few months have seen major news developments: a new presidential administration, an economy in crisis, library budgets slashed, and change in the air. In our professional world, a new sense of openness, transparency, and progress balances out some of the challenges. GPO’s FDsys debuted to positive reviews. GODORT’s meetings at ALA Midwinter 2009 ventured into new territory with a program on nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Excellent talks by three different speakers convinced us that libraries, and specifically governmental organizations (NGOs). Excellent talks by three different speakers convinced us that libraries, and specifically NGO literature.1 GODORT helped promote the Federal Armed...
visually, we would form some kind of star cluster. Before we get enamored with ourselves, let’s remember the dozens of ALA units with whom we will collaborate via the ALA Forum on the Future of Government Information. They are part of the cluster, too. Let’s remember the libraries represented by those units, and all of those libraries’ users. Add to that the millions of individual government information users worldwide, with or without online connections; they are our real universe. We’ve got to form a mental picture of this mega-set of all government information seekers, and keep it in our minds, especially if we want to stay relevant and work side by side with activists and pioneers reshaping access to government information all around us.

As the editorial team of this journal changes with the next issue (we owe a debt of gratitude to the outgoing team), I began looking back on the past six years of *DttP* and easily chose my favorite issue: Fall 2006 (vol. 34, no. 3). Five GODORT award winners (Reynolds, Linden, Sanders, York, and Mosley) smile out at us from the cover photo. Inside is a fantastic range of essays, including one of *DttP*s catchiest projects so far: “Things I Wish I Knew about Documents, and Things I’m Glad I Know.” Seven brief articles cover disciplines ranging from medicine, agriculture, data services, humanities, law, business, economics, and public safety. Librarians specializing in these areas tell how government resources impact their content areas, and what they still want to know.

The larger world has changed, in many ways and across many sectors. We are far from alone in feeling both invigorated and overwhelmed by the rapid changes confronting our profession. People who visit antique stores are now a fraction of those buying and selling antiques; professional critics see their book and movies reviews placed side by side with thousands of amateur reviews online; and my goodness, the millions of people who routinely seek government information are rarely consulting librarians or libraries! And yet we still have a role. All those people are charged up by the same thing that we are: government information. Whenever they need serious and comprehensive searching, when they require general assistance, when they want to find collections of actual artifacts, or when they want to put data in a context, GODORT librarians need to be there online, via phone, and of course in person. I looked around on the bus this morning to see a lady poring over statistical printouts from King County Public Health, while the man sitting next to me read a book about the 1964 *Civil Rights Act* with the page open to a table tallying the number of yea and nay votes in Congress (we know how to find those). The next seat over? A student reading a *Time* magazine article on taxes and a woman asleep with her State of Washington identification tag hanging outside of her bag. Government content is everywhere. So . . . how can we position GODORT’s expertise, and GODORT members’ willingness to learn and share, in as many places as possible?

**References**

2. Free Government Information (FGI), Shuler’s blog, free.govinfo.info/blog/160.

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**GODORT Membership**

Membership in ALA is a requisite for joining GODORT.

Basic personal membership in ALA begins at $50 for first-year members, $25 for student members, and $35 for library support staff (for other categories see www.ala.org/Template.cfm?Section=Membership).

Personal and institutional members are invited to select membership in GODORT for additional fees of $20 for regular members, $10 for student members, and $35 for corporate members.

For information about ALA membership contact ALA Membership Services, 50 E. Huron St., Chicago, IL 60611; 1-800-545-2433, ext. 5; e-mail: membership@ala.org.