



Tales from a New Trustee

BY DAVE HARGETT

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Attending the ALA Annual Conference

My library funds American Library Association (ALA) membership for Trustees, as well as membership in ALTAFF. It also supports Trustee participation in ALA conferences, with board approval. After I was appointed a Trustee in late February 2008, the ink was still wet on my ALA membership card when I was told that I should pull together my plan to attend the 2008 ALA Annual Conference, in Anaheim, Calif., in late June. Two years later, I'm preparing to attend Annual 2010 in Washington, D.C.

I'm now more experienced and more involved, but my planning process is still pretty much the same. If you're a new Trustee, or a more experienced Trustee who has never attended Annual Conference, I hope you'll have the opportunity to attend the Annual Conference sometime soon, maybe even this year. It's a great way to learn more about libraries and your role as a Trustee, while also allowing you to network with other Trustees from around the country.

I had help from my board president when I tried to plan for my first Annual Conference. Over time I've refined my technique a bit, but it's still an involved process that takes several months.

Breaking the process down, I came up with steps to follow, which I'll review below:

Make the decision. Annual Conference happens every year, usually in late June. The meetings take place in different cities around the country and the schedule of dates and locations is posted on the ALA Web site several years in advance. The 2011 conference, for example, will take place in New Or-

leans. Deciding to go and setting aside the date on your calendar is probably the easiest thing to do. Then you have to figure out all the details!

Review the program. Annual Conference is a huge meeting, with about 25,000 attendees each year. With the various divisions, sections, roundtables, and other parts of ALA offering programs and committee meetings, there are thousands of events. How do you find out what you want to attend? Review the preliminary program as soon as it's up on the ALA Web site. As members or affiliates of ALTAFF, most of us will focus on the programs that are specific to us as Trustees or Friends. That helps narrow the selection quite a bit. The ALTAFF Web site is a good spot to watch for announcements on programming. Don't forget to look at the preconference programs as well, usually held on the first day of conference, where you may be able to attend a half or full day program devoted to a single topic in considerable depth. Extra fees are charged, but the knowledge you gain to help you with your local library's plans can be substantial.

If you have a specific interest, you may want to look at programs outside the ALTAFF grouping. At my first conference, I attended several sessions the Library Leadership & Management Association (LLAMA) presented about library buildings, and did a preconference tour of two major libraries, looking for ideas to use in our new building. I chair our building committee, so it made sense to attend this type of program.

Review travel options. Once you have an idea of the programs you want to attend, you begin to have a feel for the dates/times and you can determine when to travel. The Annual Conference Web site will have plenty of information to help you make hotel reservations and secure flights and pay for conference registration and additional event fees. You can then begin to plan for a budget to cover your costs of attending. As a Trustee, your library director or a member of the staff may be able to assist you with your planning.

Get approval. If your library covers your costs, or part of them, you probably have some sort of approval process that you need to follow so that your fellow board members agree that the library will cover those costs. This probably requires a vote at a board meeting, so plan ahead.

Register and make reservations. Once you have your travel plans made, your program schedule laid out and your plans approved, it's time to actually make the reservations for the plane and hotel, and register for the meeting and other extra fee events. Often someone in the library director's office will help you with this process, but it's perfectly doable by you and the ALA travel service for the conference. As you do your planning, work out some sort of calendar or schedule for yourself that lists each day, the time of day, the time frame of the program session and the name of the program. Leave room for a notation of the place where the program will be held, but that information is usually not in the preliminary program. Because Annual Conference is so large, programs are held in the convention center as well as in the neighboring hotels. You'll need to know where you need to be!

Attend the conference. You've made your flight, checked into your hotel and now it's conference time. You should have received some preliminary correspondence from ALA before you left home that included your event tickets, your name badge and other information. You'll still need to check in at conference registration to pick up the full conference program booklet (about the size of a small phone book!), a badge holder, and a bag for handouts. Once you have that program book, it's time to sit down and review the schedule you made earlier. You need to find the listing for the programs on your schedule and make note of the location of the program (hotel or convention center and the room name/number). On occasion you'll find that your earlier choices just don't work out as well as you had hoped — you may not be able to get from one location to



another in the time between meetings. That's when you take a look at alternative program sessions. I had to make several changes in Anaheim in 2008 because I didn't have a clue about the complications of getting from one location to another.

Hopefully you left some time to try to visit the exhibit hall. I've been to some large meetings in my career, but my first experience with an ALA exhibit hall was overwhelming. You'll see book publishers, large and small; you'll find all sorts of supplies and equipment for libraries from A to Z. You can get exhausted just walking up and down the aisles even if you don't stop to visit at a single booth.

For most of us Trustees, though, keep in mind that the library staff makes the decisions on all that "stuff" — we don't have to spend hours talking to vendors. At my conference, we had just started planning a building project, so I focused on looking at the possibilities of furniture, shelving and other "building" related items to help educate myself.

A lot of the fun to be had in attending Annual Conference is networking with fellow Trustees and/or Friends and library staff that you meet. You share ideas about your own libraries and about the activities of ALTAFF. Don't neglect this! It's important.

Report back. Our board requires that Trustees who travel to library conferences write a full report on what sessions they attended and what they learned at the conference. We also require a full expense accounting per library policy. Sharing what you have learned in writing is important, but we also try to review these reports orally during a board meeting, so that we can communicate to our fellow Trustees the key points or grand ideas that we picked up while at the conference. The intent is to share what we have learned, in writing, which becomes part of the board packet available to the public. As Trustees, we have an obligation to our citizens to show that the library is spending its funding wisely when it sends Trustees to conferences. These

Spotlight on: Birmingham (Ala.) Public Library Board of Trustees

BY GWENDOLYN B. GUSTER WELCH

President, Birmingham Public Library Board of Trustees

The Birmingham Public Library (BPL) Board of Trustees had a busy and productive 2009. We have resolved outstanding issues, brought in new initiatives, and made significant strides. We are always looking for new ways to make the city's library system better for its citizens.

Some of our major initiatives approved by the board were the *Birmingham Public Library Purchasing and Procedures Manual*, a conflict of interest policy, an internal controls policy, fiscal management policy, an outside employment policy, and a staff relations policy. We revised the by-laws and collection management policies. We coordinated a national search for a library director and associate director, developed a library director performance evaluation document, and established advertising standards for posting library positions.

The board approved a major community awareness campaign, hosted a public reception for the newly hired director and interim director, held a Patron Appreciation Day in all 20 libraries, and hosted a membership drive during National Friends of Library Week. In addition, we expanded the partnership with the Birmingham City Schools District, developed an H1N1 action plan, received a National Friends of Library Week Proclamation

reports are also our reminders to use this information to help improve policy or programs, or to improve our own personal knowledge of our duties as Trustees.

My advice to Trustees at the Annual Conference is to attend as many ALTAFF events as possible, from the opening night reception to the educational programs and the ALTAFF Gala Author Tea and other fundraisers that help support the activities of ALTAFF. If you're a committee member

from the Office of the Mayor, secured 100 percent Trustee membership for the Freedom to Read Foundation and the Black Caucus of the American Library Association, and held our first offsite board meeting at Glen Iris Elementary School media center. Photos of Trustees were posted in all libraries and boardrooms, and the Trustee page on the library's Web site was updated.

We look forward to continuing the outstanding working relationship with the Office of the Mayor, William A. Bell, Sr., the Birmingham City Council and the Birmingham City Council Education Committee, chaired by Council President Roderick V. Royal.

As Trustees, we must strive to make the board more visible, open, and effective. Our attention must always be on the employees and patrons that we serve. We are committed to providing stellar services as we ensure that BPL remains relevant to the community. Our employees are the core of continuity for our system. Their job performance was outstanding despite distractions this year, including the recession and the uncertainty of the future of public libraries at the national level.

In light of it all, staff members never took their eyes off the mission: providing the highest quality library service to citizens for lifelong learning, cultural enrichment and enjoyment.

of ALTAFF or ALA, make sure you attend and participate in your committee meeting. Visit the exhibit hall to see what's new. If you have a specific interest, like building projects, look for programs that can give you additional knowledge. Come to the conference to work hard for your library, but enjoy yourself as well, and get to know others who are dedicated to their libraries.

E-mail comments to altaff@ala.org to be forwarded to Dave Hargett.