

# From the Chair

John A. Stevenson

*“This time, like all times, is a very good one, if we but know what to do with it.” – Ralph Waldo Emerson.<sup>1</sup>*

I am honored to be writing this column for our revitalized professional journal, *DttP: Documents to the People*. The transformation of *DttP* under the current editorial team demonstrates that our members are very capable. Running for this office, I wrote about things that GODORT should do to remain viable. We need to recognize that we live in a time of change and to act to make change work for us.

For those who don't know me, I have served as the coordinator of government documents and maps processing at the University of Delaware since 1990. Changes should not terrify us if we can work with them. Although I started my documents career in reference, library-wide reorganization offered me the opportunity to automate depository processing in my library as a technical services librarian. Throughout my career, GODORT members and programs have proven to be wonderful sources of specialized knowledge applicable to my work.

Just as our members' professional responsibilities are evolving, so is GODORT. Libraries have experienced tremendous changes over the past decade. New technology and people's responses to it have changed the way we access and collect information. Fiscal and organizational factors result in many librarians experiencing changes in the reporting structure of their work places and in the work that they are called upon to do. The proposed shift in duties of the GODORT Web administrator is an example of a small change intended to make things work better. As described elsewhere in this issue, the proposed bylaws change will appear on the GODORT Web site and be put to a vote at the Midwinter business meeting in Boston. Details change, but the mission needs to be fulfilled. Recent changes in the library world do not diminish the need for our round table.

The purposes of the Government Documents Round Table are: (a) to provide a forum for discussion of problems and concerns, and for the exchange of ideas by librarians working with government documents; (b) to provide a force for initiating and supporting programs to increase availability, use and bibliographic control of documents; (c) to increase communication between documents librarians and other librarians; (d) to contribute to the extension and improvement of education and training of documents librarians.<sup>2</sup>

Given our four-part purpose, GODORT members should be encouraged that our interests are increasingly part of mainstream librarianship. While many libraries are recombining units in new ways, government information remains an important part of libraries' collections and services. In the current climate, we should look at our colleagues as potential “documents librarians” since access to information via the Internet is making the distinctions between specializations less clear. While all librarians know some sources produced by governmental bodies, our colleagues look to us for help finding the government information that can easily elude them.

GODORT faces a number of challenges. In the year ahead we should build our membership, share expertise, demonstrate the continuing value of government information, and become more fiscally responsible.

## Building Membership

GODORT isn't just a “Federal Depository Library Program Round Table” and one need not work in a federal depository library to participate. Our purpose transcends international, federal, state, and local depository programs to include the full range of government information that should be available the public. While changes to the FDLP are of continuing interest and GODORT has a task force dedicated to federal documents, we care about permanent access to all public government information.

I want to thank the many GODORT members whose current duties distance them from the daily tasks of documents workers but who retain their membership to keep up with current issues. Many of them serve as mentors and role models. We also need to encourage membership among those whose professional lives

are not (yet) centered on documents, but for whom an increased knowledge of government information would be useful, and involve them in interesting projects.

### Sharing Expertise

We need to encourage the development of programs that serve not only GODORT members but appeal to everyone with a professional interest in government information. We should be encouraging librarians who work with any kind of government information to join us at our round table. The integration of public service desks offers some members the opportunity to demonstrate specialized reference skills. In library technical services, the shift to online resources gives a similar opportunity to those familiar with the new fields becoming common on our catalogs. Our annual programs and preconferences should broadcast the importance of documents to all librarians, not merely our members.

Members unable to attend this year's ALA Annual Conference in Orlando missed some great examples of expertise shared by GODORT members. The State and Local Documents Task Force presented a lively and informative program titled "Potholes on the Information Highway: Improving Access to Local Government Information." Selected materials from that program will appear in GODORT Web pages. In addition, some materials from our Cataloging Committee's preconference, "Make the Most of What You've Got: Improving Access to Government Information in Your Online Catalog," will also be posted online. More programming is in the pipeline for next year!

### Demonstrating the Continuing Value of Government Information

Members of the public are interested in government information but usually don't think of it as a category. Government information has been commonplace in recent news reports, and not just because it's an election year. When even non-librarians talk about whether *Patterns of Global Terrorism* reports statistics accurately and when parts of the *Taguba Report* are read on the evening news, we know that government documents are of vital interest. For more than thirty years, GODORT has served as a meeting ground for librarians interested in government information. Although details and formats change, there is no reason to think that government information is any less important in people's lives today.

### Becoming More Fiscally Responsible

In recent years, GODORT may have paid more attention to the content of its programs than to what they cost. Economic conditions and other factors, such as ALA conference equipment charges, have made our reserve fund dwindle. GODORT will use less equipment and examine our costs to improve GODORT's financial picture. We have established a Development Committee to address fiscal issues and develop long-term solutions. The committee's efforts and the contributions of GODORT members in supporting the W. David Rozkuszka Scholarship through silent auction and personal donations are commendable. We are also fortunate to have GODORT treasurer Ann Miller guiding our budget.

In the course of the coming year, we will address these goals and work to lay the groundwork for a successful future. Be sure to visit GODORT's Web pages at <http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/GODORT> throughout the year to stay abreast of current government information issues. Nominating Committee pages also include links to volunteer forms for those who want to participate or seek an elected office. Please use them and keep in touch. I look forward to working with all GODORT members during my year as your chair.

### References

1. Suzy Platt, *Respectfully Quoted: A Dictionary of Quotations Requested from the Congressional Research Service* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1989), 342.
2. ALA GODORT Bylaws, updated May 1, 2003. [http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/GODORT/GODORT\\_bylaws.html#2](http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/GODORT/GODORT_bylaws.html#2).