

COMMUNICATION & COUNSEL

Subject: Public Library Association Conference

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Right off the top I'll tell you I like Philadelphia. Flying over the City I was impressed by the high density of industrial properties and I noted a river running through this area and thought to myself I wonder how many factories are still operational so I watched for the number of cars far below in parking lots.

As well I thought which river is this? It is the Delaware. There are many bridges that traverse the waterway and there are more than a hundred barges and US Navy ships! I asked about those and apparently these ships are not state of the art but are solid back up for the Navy when needed. In this general industrial/commercial area sharing a parking lot was the arena for Flyers, ball stadium and football stadium. I thought that was a smart use of space given it is likely sports games do not cross over. The 76'ers basketball shares the Wells Fargo Arena.

I arrived in time for the opening ceremonies and joined Jane Venus and Elaine Condos on the floor of the Philadelphia convention centre which is likely 6 – 8 times the size of ours. Before I get into the accounting of sessions I will say that I found the City friendly, safe (not necessarily out towards the industrial areas and some neighbourhood libraries) but definitely in the downtown. The folks there including the police who are “on the beat” everywhere. I know we all agree the food was outstanding! The view from the top of the Philly Free Library was beautiful with an outlook on the Philly Museum (steps Rocky ran up!!) to the right both nestled around a giant roundabout with a fountain in the middle and use of sand for proper drainage. Families use the fountain in the summer for recreation/cool down and because the City Management doesn't support this, they are

building a splash park just to the side of the roundabout.

I accidentally came upon a giant underground mall with some stores opening on to Market street (that's how I came to accidentally find it) as I walked back from a quick breather/mind refresher. Anyway this complex connects to the large Marriott Hotel which connects to the Philadelphia Convention Centre and has a subway running through it. It is quite neat and clean! Certainly a vision of "what Ottawa could have with our LRT tunnel".

I can tell you when I was in Dallas earlier this year I did not have the same sense of safe. I am sure if I had travelled outside the core my opinion may have changed. I would go back to Philadelphia if I had the opportunity on holiday...it wouldn't be my first choice but I do know there is more to see there.

OPENING CEREMONIES

Wednesday March 14th

Debra Jacobs who leads global work for Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (you may recall I have reported on Debra's works before) spoke ahead of the headline speaker. She told us that the Gates Foundation is in the business of "listening". Previously Debra was Library Director SEATTLE and is very well known in the "library world". She stated that PLA is her favourite conference and that librarians are information brokers par excellence! In 2012 the Gates Foundation will celebrate its 15th anniversary. The goal is to enhance and deliver "access to information". The Gates Foundation in this goal has chosen ULC (we are member) to lead this multi-year work now called "EDGE".

Lead speaker Robert Kennedy Jr was absolutely NOT what I expected; in fact it was like he was speaking/arguing with himself sometimes. Quite frankly it was disappointing, couldn't find a connection to "the library".

SESSIONS

I attended a session called "WHAT'S THIS ALL ABOUT?" Sometimes we just need a quick answer for a patron who is either frustrated with having toured the stacks or is in a hurry and wants a "good" book.

Speaking on the topic of Classics, good must know books, first up was Barry Trott, adult services director, Williamsburg Regional Virginia library. He's into historical fiction and suggests you know "the Law of Dreams" by Peter Behrens or the "Book of Fires" by Jane Borodale. Then there is "Four Freedoms" by John Crowley, a sprawling (what a great

word this is) epic which is set in a time that is more historical.

Law of Dreams is an Irish epic; it tells a tale. The tale is of an Irish potato farmer who moves to Canada, tale is a real sense of loss. Behrens also has a book out the O'Briens.

A recommendation of Borodale's work sets place in 18c London. A young woman pregnant and from the countryside heads to London where she apprentices herself to a "firemaker" in the "Book of Fires". This is a thriller/suspense novel. As well "Crowley – World War 11". This one is written in a literary/lyrical style and is about a plane building plant...sounds interesting!

Then there are books that explore people's lives not about kings and queens.

"Black Ships" by Jo Graham is written about the earliest days of Greece through the eyes of a young Trojan girl – story of Aenid. "Coal Black Horse" is a book by Robert Olmstead. This one has great historical content and is about the effects of war and violence (Civil War) on people's lives

Trends in historical fiction are books on women but not famous women like Anne Boleyn (ruler of a country) but instead women scientists, painters, authors. Check out "Clara and Mr. Tiffany".

Naval fiction is another trend. "Midshipman Bolitho" by Alexander Kent is loaded with fine military detail. Then there is "Betrayal" by Julian Stockwin which you may want to read or "The Mountain of Gold" by JD Davies.

Other "trend" areas are fictional bios, immigrant stories and historical mysteries. Folks I have lists of suggestions if you are interested ask me or you could go on line check out www.placonference.org. It was session *Books and Authors: The Top 5 of Another 5* on Thursday March 15 from 8:30 – 9:30. I could write them all down but it would take a few pages. There are Sci Fi trends, Roberta's favourites and Barry's Faves and much more.

CREATIVE FUNDING: HOW TO AFFORD THE SERVICES YOUR COMMUNITY NEEDS: Thursday, March 15, 10:45 – noon

Library budgets and programs are really all about choices. Speakers for this one were Jinny Baeckler retired library director from Plainsboro N.J, Linda Raymond, materials management manager, Charlotte Mecklenburg (N.C) library and Cathy Deane from Mount Prospect PL.

Now I have to tell you that I should not have gone to this one. Nope but once you are in the room and I tend to sit up at the front because you have room because no one else does it's very tricky to "escape". The title sounds interesting and one that usually gets you lots of info. I would have realized had I reviewed where these presenters are from. I know way more about fundraising creatively than they did. So I didn't take a lot of notes as is the norm. I am however telling each of you to review the presenters as well when deciding which sessions to attend.

Thursday evening was fabulous, Danielle (she arrived late Thursday afternoon), Elaine and Jane and I attended the Urban Library Council (I am on the Board as you know) on the roof of the Free Library of Philadelphia. It was a great opportunity for Danielle to meet library directors, library leaders, foundation folks, in her new capacity. As we all know contacts in our library world are priceless.

READ/WATCH/DISCUSS: Book and Film Programs in the Library Thursday March 15, 2 – 3:15

This session was about combining book groups and film screenings. If done correctly this is fun and builds a whole new group of patrons.

How we read

- Character
- Story
- Pacing – there is more flexibility to skip over "in the book"
- Frame
- Writing style

Whereas

How we watch

- Time limit
- Character
- Story
- Pacing is pre-determined
- Frame
- Visual style

The question of course is how the “book” was better or how does the “film” move better? The visual flow needs to be there in the film but in the book if you need to step back you can shut the book, pause and think about it, then go back when you are ready...not so in the movies!

The best movies adapted are when the film captures the “books emotional spirit”. There are many suggestions as to books and movies that work really well together. Again for more you can ask me for my long notes or check out the site for this program.

I attended Sustainable Thinking: Passageway to Better Buildings, Budget and Beyond

High test presenters for this one. Panelists presented the inside scoop on how to design with nature, develop a platform for embedding an eco-ethic deep into operations, and explain the tools libraries need to pursue a sustainable future in uncertain times. This was a very good discussion and well worth the time and the read

Sustainable is the New Strategic

Elaine Condos and I attended this session. It was great; presenters were George Needham and Joan Frye Williams www.georgeandjoan.com. What will it take to continue to deliver good service into the future? Clearly there is a dearth of funding and sustainability is about every day, every week, all year and year after year.

CHANGES:

If your plan doesn't hold water sink that ship, rethink and reshape! Sustainability is our contract with the community. The point of sustainability is not to save library jobs and surely not to do jobs the same old/same old.

FOCUS ON OUTCOMES:

Take the Fire department for example. Lots of work back in the old days was fighting fires plain and simple. They didn't rethink their mission; they rethought how they accomplished their role without sacrificing their mission. Fire Departments don't say SOS our firetrucks, they retooled, re-specialized!

Libraries need to entertain ideas we may have to do whether we like those choices or not.

Redesign, don't just reduce and determine how to do more with less differently. If you find you need more money every year for programming well you need to know that is just not sustainable? Time to deconstruct and redeploy.

WE HAVE

- Reputations
- Facilities
- Staff
- Community based

Can we identify them and remarket them. Don't worry about what to do next, determine what we are doing well. Tune up what to keep and understand what's happening in between.

DEFINE CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE

- We need to be excellent somewhere
- Do a few things really well
- Pick what community values work best
- Don't consider what will keep jobs!

Excellence doesn't take new jobs, it does however take ingenuity! Combine unique with community ties and be ready to develop new capacity if necessary.

SUSTAINABLE IS NOT

- Cutting
- Retreating to the past
- It is doing new things

MAKE IT SHOW

- Not for staff but for patrons and non users
- What difference are we making?
- Telling alone doesn't cut it; you have to show it

LINK WHATEVER YOU DO TO A COMMUNITY VALUE

- Make it unique, find out what each community cares about then "do it"!
- Libraries are only sustainable when they are in a relationship with the community, other agencies and aware of and ready for the "changing times". In the case of OPL, we do this very well.
- Make sure your "links" are seamless so it isn't "easy" to "just drop off the library parts"
- Remember that sustainability is NOT about managing and controlling. It is important that we understand and demonstrate that we know this

GET OUT OF THE LIBRARY

- If the big topic of the day at City Council is Waste Water and the "whole town" is talking about it make sure your library is doing something to be part of the "chatter". I don't think we are particularly good at this in Ottawa.

MAKE IT SHOW/HELP IT GROW

- Stop worrying about abandoning the last 12 people who use beta/VHS...move with the times
- Example: 12 people renting/using VHS; it would be cheaper to buy them all DVD players than keep this part of the collection
- Deal with growing demand and growing clientele (watch for shifts in age and culture)
- If you have to make a difficult choice then do it, for example a 90 year old long time customer refuses to use self check-out and yet the branch she uses has gone to self check-out service only
- Do you design for the 1 old lady or do you design for the future trends? Answer: your staff assists the 90 year old every time she visits her branch

PREPARE FOR SUCCESS

- Actively plan for success and know what success will look like for your library
- How many meetings do you attend where the chatter is about what could go wrong versus what could be right?
- Quit screwing around with dooms day and focus on what is good, what is the future
- Meet increased demand in a new way
- You don't abandon principles of good food @ a buffet just as you don't abandon whole library programs even though the demand may be reduced. Think podcast/webinars. Denver Public Library reaches more by providing a podcast for storytime!
- A library will not be sustainable until it abandons the notion that the only way to get good service is to provide it by library staff

MAKE IT FLOW

- Can most members of the community use what you are offering without assistance?
- Use mainstream tools and terminology and get rid of jargon like acronyms and phrases so people understand
- Unlock your data – you can walk out with a \$25,000 car as opposed to walk in to the library credit card and license and take out a \$25 book.
- It doesn't happen in the rest of your life but in the library zone. We run things our way, our rules.
- Let's face it people think we should KNOW they were going to receive an iPad for Christmas

LET IT GO

- Are you doing the right work or the work right?

Anyway everyone, I have more to say but no time to say it. If you have any questions let me know. It was a very worthwhile conference!