

# A Non-Librarian's Impressions of the AALL Annual Meeting

by Jim Brewer

I was honored by the opportunity to attend this year's AALL Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C., and to take part in a conference program. I came away deeply impressed by the professionalism and the obvious dedication and intelligence of the assembled law librarians. Collectively, you clearly are able to rise to the serious challenges posed by the mammoth changes in the legal publishing industry and the methods of delivery of legal information to the bench, bar, and public.

The specific topic for the program I participated in was relations between librarians and their governing bodies. I hope that the attendees at our session had the chance to gain some insights from the contrasting perspectives on a number of library governance issues that were expressed by Charles Dyer (Director of the San Diego County Law Library) and me. The breakout session that followed with informal questions and answers and general discussion was a very productive method of bringing up a wide range of viewpoints on the common and unique challenges facing individual law libraries throughout the nation.

## Abecedary of the Law

I took great personal pleasure also in showing during our presentation a brief selection of images from a public art installation in our branch library, the *Abecedary of the Law* by Dennis Evans. The purpose for including this in a discussion of library decision-making process and procedure was twofold. I hoped that viewing these colorful pieces might be an enjoyable visual stimulation to help refresh the aesthetic part of the brain for attendees in the midst of a conference intensely focused on the organization of the written word of the law. I also wanted to give a direct example of how our library's board and our director, Jean Holcomb, have tried to make shared decisions. In the case of the *Abecedary* project, the remarkably open and gracious creative artist, Dennis Evans, agreed to share our collaborative and consensus-driven approach. He encouraged the participation of our five library trustees as well as the law librarians in some of the tasks of research and textual editing for his creation.

The *Abecedary* project consists of 26 pieces, each hung at the ends of a stack of shelving. Each piece includes an original painting, quotation, and descriptive text related to the history of the law for each letter of the alphabet. It provides a beautiful and moving visual and educational counterpoint to the legal texts in the Kent Regional Justice Center Law Library. I encourage visitors to the Seattle area to take the time to visit the branch and view the artwork. When I first saw the art hung in the library, I was moved by its powerful message about the role of law and legal information in defining and protecting the rights of citizens.

Pilar Vergara



Plenary session speakers (from left) Rick Boucher (U.S. Representative) and Allan Adler (Association of American Publishers).

## Consciousness Raising

I came away from the AALL conference with similar strong feelings about continuing vital importance of the task of law libraries. The breadth of the topics presented at sessions, workshops, and plenary sessions gave me a vivid sense of the depth of my own ignorance of the state of your profession. I have served as a law library trustee for some seven years and have been a library user for decades. Despite these experiences, however, like most lawyers, I have long tended to take for granted the professional expertise, human effort, and material information infrastructure that makes it possible for the mechanisms of the law to run correctly and smoothly.

## Other Programs

The complexity of these issues and the keen interest shown in them by the AALL was further demonstrated by the topics covered in other sessions. The speech by Chief Justice Thomas Zlaket of the Arizona Supreme Court regarding the National Action Plan to improve public trust and confidence in the justice system was an inspirational call for action. It gave particular focus to the role that law libraries can play as a point of entry for members of the public into the justice system. Follow-up small group brainstorming sessions generated a number of new ideas for improving public service and coordination of efforts between courts, law libraries, and public and private organizations.

Another fascinating presentation was the discussion of copyright law in the new realm of electronic media. This provocative program provided a window on competing viewpoints held by U.S. Representative Rick Boucher, Allan Adler (the Association of American Publishers), and law professor Peter Jaszi (Washington

College of Law at American University). I was struck by their willingness to share their sophisticated knowledge of the topic and the candor with which they described the federal legislative process. It was an exceptional opportunity for attendees at the AALL to hear from key participants in the process of defining the protection of intellectual property rights in a world of rapidly changing means of communication.

In closing, please let me offer my thanks to the Association for having been invited to participate in its conference and my sincere congratulations on the success of your ambitious and stimulating programs this year.

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