



Contributing — and Receiving — In Your State Library Association

*Connecting with
Librarians in Other
Specialties Promotes
Law Librarianship
While Building
Valuable Networks*

by Carol Billings

It was the end of May, and I had a million things to do back in my office. So why in the world had I agreed to spend a whole day undergoing leadership training in the library of the high school in rural Dutch Town, La.? How had I allowed my friend and fellow law librarian Charlene Cain, the new president of the Louisiana Library Association, to drag me into her administration as chair of the Intellectual Freedom Committee? Of course I was thrilled that such a dynamic colleague was going to take a crack at modernizing LLA, and, of course, she had helped me in the past ... and she's also good at buttering up her friends.

As I sat sipping my coffee, listening to presentations about parliamentary procedure and LLA's precarious financial status, I started taking stock of my fellow leadership trainees, many of whom I had known for years. Sitting at my table were the state recorder of documents and the head of the regional federal depository. Nearby were the dean of Louisiana State University's School of Library and Information Science, department heads from several university libraries and directors of parish public library systems. Small-town school librarians listened attentively along with administrators from the state library. Hmmm, I thought to myself, maybe this year will provide a good opportunity to reconnect or become acquainted with colleagues from other areas of the library profession.

So what do these musings have to do with public relations? As someone who did not know that law libraries existed until I had been an academic librarian for about five years, I realized that our fellow professionals who work in other settings often know little about what law librarians do and what resources and services law librarianship offers. And if other librarians don't know much about law librarianship, certainly other people in their communities are unlikely to appreciate why access to legal information is an essential right in our democratic society. Joining, supporting and actively participating in other associations — those concentrating on libraries and those involved in other educational, scholarly, cultural and community service endeavors — can be excellent ways to broadcast the word about the resources in law libraries and the important services that the profession provides.

Stating the Case for State Organizations

A small number of AALL members — mostly from public law libraries — have served in leadership positions in their state library associations. It's my unscientific assumption, however, that most law librarians do not even join their state organizations. Perhaps they consider the educational programming less relevant to their jobs, and very likely their employers neither pay their dues and meeting registrations nor give released time for committee or conference participation. Consequently, many law libraries are missing a significant opportunity to promote their services to other librarians and the potential patrons located all over their states.

Simply getting to know those librarians face to face is not only the collegial thing to do, but it also opens the way for both individuals to learn about each other's libraries' strengths and needs. A colleague working at a public or academic institution is much more likely to refer a patron needing legal information to your law library — or to call the law library herself — if she knows a law librarian there who has offered to help. And the reverse is true as well: When you have a question about the state documents depository program or a special collection at one of the universities, being able to call your friend in charge there tends to get you what you want a lot faster with less red tape involved.

Recently a local professor of legal history who was writing an article requested information about the cast of characters in a notorious Supreme Court election that had taken place in the 1930s in Southwestern

Louisiana. He thought the Lake Charles newspaper from that time might contain some juicy news accounts and political advertisements. Fortunately, I had met the public librarian from Lake Charles at a state association conference and knew that her library had an excellent genealogy division. When I called, she immediately offered to have a staff member search several months' worth of the microfilmed newspaper for information relating to the election. Within a few days, I received a hefty stack of reader-printer copies that delighted our legal historian. Knowing a real person to call for help had yielded great service and a satisfied patron.

Continuing Ed with an Edge

Having good relationships with fellow state library association members carries a wide array of mutual benefits. Continuing education programs and workshops presented by state associations often have the special advantage of being specific to your locality. Whether you participate as a presenter or receiver of knowledge, you will be sharing the experience with colleagues who face many of the same problems because you operate in the same political, social and economic environment.

For instance, I particularly remember how valuable it was to be able to ask the state auditor, who had just spoken at an LLA program session, questions about determining the value of a library collection, something that public and academic librarians also wanted to know.

State association educational programs also provide an excellent outreach opportunity for law library staff to contribute their expertise in legal information management and research to the wider library profession. Our public service librarians have presented several workshops on legal research both at our annual LLA conference and at meetings of public librarians. Enthusiastic, overflowing audiences were evidence of the public demand for more instruction in legal bibliography and research. Of course, our staff took advantage of those occasions to distribute our brochure, research guides and newsletter issues — all examples of what we have to offer.

Simply being “in the loop” is a very important benefit of state association membership. The latest news of initiatives in your state related to information technology, telecommunications, cooperative

networks and educational offerings is likely to reach you much faster if you're a subscriber to your state association's listserv and other media. Here, too, is where volunteering to serve on association committees and in interest groups not only puts you in touch with what's happening in the library community but also gives you a voice to influence its future direction. Law librarians are eagerly welcomed into the committee and leadership ranks because of their specialized knowledge of subjects such as copyright, licensing agreements, intellectual freedom, government documents and legislative history. Because AALL is an extraordinarily productive and effective organization, members who have gained leadership and programming skills from actively serving in AALL can make major contributions to state associations by lending their experience in areas such as strategic planning, budgeting, professional development and government relations.

Relationships Become Partnerships

Cordial relationships developed through participation in state associations lead naturally to partnerships and joint sponsorship of activities. Several years ago, when a member of our library staff was chair of the Subject Specialists' Section of LLA, she coordinated an all-day copyright workshop co-sponsored by that section and the New Orleans Association of Law Libraries. More than 120 academic, public and school librarians joined NOALL members in the auditorium of the state museum to hear a terrific presentation by Jim Heller, director of the law library and professor of law at the College of William and Mary Marshall-Wythe Law Library, and the head of the Copyright Clearance Center explaining how all types of libraries need to operate in compliance with copyright law. The two sponsoring organizations split the several thousand dollars in profits earned from the workshop.

When a group of local scholars published a collection of essays on Louisiana legal history, it provided an ideal occasion for our library to join forces with the Friends of the University of New Orleans Library and hold a reception and program in honor of authors. Our library staff and the university librarians enjoyed hobnobbing with the reception guests, including judges, lawyers, faculty from local universities, and friends and families of the authors.

Another example of collegial cooperation occurred a few years ago when several professional library organizations shared the cost of a teleconference site to enable local academic, special and public librarians to learn about the *Uniform Computer Information Transactions Act*. Recognizing how detrimental this proposed law could be to providing patron access to information, the director of Tulane University's main library called upon NOALL, LLA and several friends of the library groups to attend the teleconference, knowing that it was important for all librarians to understand *UCITA*. Following the teleconference, the audience engaged in a lively discussion about how to lobby against adoption of the law in Louisiana.

We law librarians should break out our checkbooks and join our state library associations. They need our financial support and the special knowledge that we have to share. In return, we and our law libraries will benefit from knowing and learning from our colleagues in public, school and academic libraries. Our entire profession will be better for it.

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announcements

Fund Your Continuing Education

AALL's best-kept secret is the Type V scholarship, available to law librarians attending a continuing education course related to law librarianship. It is awarded three times per year and is available **only** to AALL members. Application deadlines are Feb. 1, April 1 and Oct. 1.

Check out the AALL Web site, AALLNET, for complete information, instructions and applications at http://www.aallnet.org/services/sch_edu.asp. Spread the word to anyone who might be eligible!

For further information, contact AALL Scholarships Committee Chair Leonette Williams at 213/740-2635 or lwilliam@law.usc.edu or AALL Headquarters at 312/939-4764, extension 10, or membership@aall.org.