

Report from ALA Annual Conference 2004

*Lincoln Trail Libraries System
July 19, 2004*

Heat, humidity, and a convention hall that's a mile long! What more could you ask for in a library conference? I'm very excited about the new upcoming features that the Dynix company presented about Horizon, including an electronic resource management module and a web catalog that can be personalized by each patron to display the information they would like to see.

Sessions on the US Patriot Act and other legislative issues remind us that these volatile topics require continuous monitoring and advocacy. A wonderful session on the International Children's Digital Library project (<http://www.icdllbooks.org>) demonstrated online access to children's e-books in many languages – truly a global children's library!

In the technology trends sessions, we continue to hear about open source software, e-commerce solutions for libraries, and online learning. In the vendor hall, we saw a 'robot' that can digitize 1200 pages an hour as well as software that manages summer reading program logs in an online environment (so kids can use computers to earn their reading rewards).

All of that, plus thousands of librarians enjoying Universal Studios. It was a great conference.

--Pat Boze

The ALA Conference in Orlando was filled with a lot of opportunities for great presentations; unfortunately, they were in a variety of locations with transportation between locations slower than normal.

There were many wonderful speakers. I had the opportunity to hear Richard A. Clarke, former senior White House advisory and counterterrorism czar and author of Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror; Mitch Albom, author of Tuesdays with Morrie; Bill Rauch, author of POLITICKING: How to Get Elected, Take Action, and Make an Impact in Your Community; and a program on Customer Service, Disney Style. Another great program was the President's Program entitled "Equity: Are We There Yet?" featuring information about the 50th Anniversary of Brown vs. the Board of Education. I was involved in the Budget Analysis and Review Committee of ALA, which reviews and makes recommendations regarding the ALA Budget.

Staff also met with personnel from Dynix to discuss ongoing issues, specifically with the network. The meeting focused on issues related to ongoing problems that LTLIS is experiencing with Horizon. Our meeting was based on issues that were raised by a survey that we sent to libraries asking them to identify issues. The main issues were statistics and the lack of ILL and Reciprocal Borrowing stats, Networking in a Client Server Environment, fixes to problems that are not reported to the customer, and a general discussion. We met with Pam Ortega, Steve Nielsen, Bill Routt, and Eric Keith. Marsha Grove, Director of the Champaign Public Library, also attended the session along with Pat, Joe and I. Dynix has been following up with staff as a result of this discussion and LTLIS staff also followed up with responses to some of the issues raised by libraries that were already resolved and added those to the FAQ about LINC.

The customer service program from Disney had some great ideas for implementation. They work hard on knowing who is visiting Disney through lots of surveys (face to face, telephone, focus groups, shoppers

programs, email etc). They have a compass that they use for answering questions--finding out what people really want to know when they ask "What time is the 3 o'clock parade?", understanding what is being asked: Needs; Emotions; Wants; Stereotypes (this is an issue for reference service--what is really being asked?). Disney also uses a service theme that is not a mission or vision, but a theme that connects to the individual emotionally--"We create happiness" by providing the finest in entertainment for people of all ages, everywhere." With that in mind, they create service standards in four areas--Courtesy, Efficiency, Safety, Show. They go further and prioritize those standards, and these are used as decision-making tools for the staff.

Overall, there were a lot of good programs and great ideas that will be incorporated into the LTLS service program.

--Jan Ison

As with all ALA conferences there were many interesting and diverse programs to attend. "Marketing on a Shoestring" contained cheap, relatively simple ideas for improving your library's image and marketing. One suggestion for image development: the next time someone tells you that they "love the library," instead of just saying "thank you" say "thank you--tell a friend". Getting your faithful patrons to spread the word can be worth its weight in gold. For marketing - partner with someone new - call up the local art teacher and ask if her students could provide artwork promoting the next library's workshop or event or ask 10 teens who come to the library to evaluate your website. You will be surprised what they tell you!

Another interesting program was the LITA Presidential Program that featured a new venture from the University of Maryland. By using technical expertise, child psychology and librarianship, they are developing a new website with access to children's book from over 100 countries and 10,000 items. The books are scanned in the website and presented in their original language. Categories for searching have been developed by a child psychologist who recognizes that children do not think in the Dewey decimal system. Books are organized by original ideas such as color. Check it out at: <http://www.icdlbooks.org>.

--Donna Schaal

The 2004 ALA Conference was an exciting combination of meetings and vendor exhibits, all against the backdrop of warm and humid Orlando, Florida. Programs of interest included discussions of current legislation in areas such as copyright, e-rate, RFID technology, technology trends and e-commerce solutions. The vendor exhibits provide an opportunity to view new products and discuss future trends with vendor representatives. Among the highlights were advance previews of Dynix products due to be released next year, a high speed scanning machine for digitizing book materials that is capable of automatically scanning 1,200 pages per hour (and turning the pages automatically!), vendors of RFID technologies and self-checkout stations, and various electronic resource publishers.

LTLS consultants investigated the vendors of plastic patron card and key card products that may be of interest to libraries. These products offer the ability to issue durable hard plastic patron cards with applied or imprinted library bar codes. The cards are available in wallet size, similar to a credit card and also as key cards in a smaller size to be carried on a key ring. The cards are designed with a writable surface on one side to allow for patron signature or other hand written information.

At the OCLC Environmental Scan session we heard about the new information consumer who is "indifferent, insatiable, and in control." Asking the question, "What haven't we noticed lately?" this program challenged the library world to look at whether we can remain relevant to this new type of information consumer in today's

"Amazoogle World." These people are highly connected to electronic information sources. They can't get enough information. They don't care where it comes from. And they want it their way. They do their information gathering online on Amazon, Google, and other major Internet portals, not through traditional library catalogs. Can libraries compete against the power of the dominant search engines? Should we be competing, or should we be working to integrate library information into those environments? The OCLC Environmental Scan research points out that we have migrated from the Computing Era, where the emphasis was on the mainframe and personal computers, to the Connectivity Era, where the emphasis is on the creation of logical networks of embedded content. In the current era connectivity is a given as we become surrounded by a pervasive network of interconnected information sources. Is there a place for libraries in this era? The OCLC research indicates there is an emerging notion of a "Third Place" where libraries have an advantageous position. The "third place" is not the workplace and not the home, but another place, which is a place to think and to learn, a community place that brings us together. The OCLC Environmental Scan research report can be found at <http://www.oclc.org/membership/escan/default.htm>.

--Joe Sciacca