

The Minnesota Library Association Annual Conference
Bloomington, Minnesota
November 19 - 21, 2008

One of my first attendances at an MLA Annual Conference was in Duluth during the fall of 1979, and Governor Al Quie was the featured speaker. The day was foggy and so was I - about what I was supposed to be doing and what I was supposed to be learning. Now, after my umpteenth yearly convention, I am at peace with knowing there are four approaches to making the sessions productive. I can learn from the scheduled **program** sessions, I can learn from the **vendors** who play such a vital role in making the event possible, I can learn from my **peers**, I can allow **serendipity** to lead me. Or it can be some strange brew of approaches as it was again this year.

As a public library director and a NLLN Board member, some of the most important information was contained in the MLA/MEMO Legislative platform. The **program** exploring it alerted us to the increases to be requested when the Legislature convenes early next year, including an increase of \$325,000.00 each year of the biennium for the Multi-type Library Systems and \$4.8 million each year for Regional Library System Support. There was also, alas, discussion of probably serious budget issues to be addressed. Another platform plank, \$200,000.00, for a "structure study" of how library services are delivered, drew some fire from attendees who had some strong reservations about the credibility of the State Library Services agency.

Although I have always been a bit leery of the **vendors**, especially of late when budgets have been so tight, I enjoyed conversations with a half dozen or so this year. Since their booth rentals subsidize the conference, letting them give me a sales talk seems "the right thing to do." The book sellers I talked with included the University of Minnesota Press, Historical Society Press, Nodin, and Books on Tape. I also talked with a woman who represents a company producing informational DVD's for young adults, a rep for downloadable books, a business that salvages library materials after fires or floods, and a Bloomington company that can digitize large-format maps and atlases as well as a wide variety of documents. The

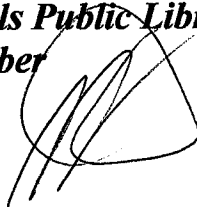
City of Fergus Falls is working on the latter project but with a different vendor.

Sometime I want to attend an annual conference and attend no programs, but rather just hang out in the halls and chat with my **peers**. The conversations I had this year again proved helpful, in learning something about library politics (yes, North Mankato is mending its fences), funding (no, Duluth has no prospects for reopening its closed branches) and programming (yes, Friends groups are providing some of the bright spots around the state). Formal communicators are ample for most library duties, but informal, face-to-face conversations give information one never thinks to ask via e-mail or would dare to ask in a structured setting. I learned that a ventriloquist I worked with 20 years ago is still performing effectively, for instance, and that some library directors have major reservations about "open source" catalogs replacing their current vendor-driven "integrated library systems."

Dave Barton, once Director of the Viking Library System, loved the word "**serendipity**" and I have come to like the word too. In a profession placing its top priority on books and connecting them with people, it's a wonderful thing to mingle with people, librarians and library advocates, who know people and literature. Through a colleague to colleague introduction, I met a U of M librarian whose sister is a customer of ours at FFPL and whose nephews were "trick or treaters" at our house last month. A long-time acquaintance at Hennepin County Library staffer told me, after I had first mentioned my using the Obama/Change web site to suggest shutting down the Guantanamo Bay prison and lifting the Cuban blockade, that she has been traveling to Cuba via Toronto to advise librarians there! I love those quirky, chance discoveries!

I appreciate very much the opportunity to attend this year's MLA conference and the financial support provided by NLLN that made it possible. There is no better way of getting the "big picture" of public library service in Minnesota than through attendance at these conferences. I hope in years to come more NLLN Board members may have the same opportunity. I thank you.

***Walt Dunlap, Fergus Falls Public Library Director, and
NLLN Board Member***

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Walt Dunlap', written over the typed name.