

Promote ... and flourish!



4

There was never a dull moment when eighty librarians, library technicians, library suppliers and representatives of ASLA and ACLIS representing every State gathered for 'Promote ... and flourish' — the First National Library Promotion Forum.

Emphasis at the Forum, which was held in Adelaide on 4-5 August before the Third Asian-Pacific Special and Law Librarians' Conference, was on participation, with delegates broken into discussion workshops and then re-forming to discuss their outcomes. John Levett, Editor of the Australian library journal, was on hand as facilitator — his wry humour mixed with astute commentary kept the Forum on track, and resulted in a series of resolutions being framed on aspects of professional objectives and library promotion.

Workshops were held on three themes: Libraries' interaction with their environment, perceptions, and a program for library promotion.

In opening the Forum, ALIA President, Averill Edwards, said there was a growing awareness that libraries, as well as the profession itself, were under threat due to public perceptions of libraries as 'non-essential' services. The Forum was being held as the result of the demise of the Australian Library Promotion Council (ALPC). In emphasising the importance of library promotion for the profession, Averill said that it was time for a national program to promote libraries on all fronts, and that she hoped that discussions at the Forum would lead to the setting of an agenda of forward planning for promotion to employers, employees and clients.

John Levett reinforced Averill's opening remarks with some graphic examples of the state of librarianship today.

He said that, in view of the current political environment, it was time to change strategy: 'We have not been successful in telling people what we do, and how we do it. It is no longer sufficient to merely provide efficient library services. The folding of the ALPC has left a gap which must be filled, and we need to reach people in power. Funds are not going to come easily anymore'.

John said it was hoped the Forum could develop views on where the profession should be in 1990. It was time to lobby and promote, but at the same time 'lift our game'. 'If you promote, you will increase expectations, which will increase demand and the demand will precede financial support for the library,' he said. It was therefore critical to 'fire up' all members of staff who were at the critical transactional stage, i.e. those who were actually dealing with the clients. And there is no need to cringe about what we do, he added.

John's stirring comments provided a welcome introduction to Jenny Cram's paper, 'challenging our self-image'. Jenny, who is currently City Librarian of the City of Brisbane, said we were facing the danger that the effective librarian will be replaced by the efficient library. She went on to say that library promotion must concentrate on people who work in the library; they must believe in themselves and what they are doing or any other promotional initiative would be lost: 'We tend to blame others for our image problem, yet we feed and support negative images of librarians. There are a lot worse things than being considered to be helpful and intelligent!'

A media panel held later reinforced Jenny's comments. Adelaide media personalities Keith Conlon (ABC) Des

Ryan (Community Newspapers Editor) and Penny Radaj (ABC 7.30 Report) provided their impressions of what constituted 'news'.

In a lively, pull-no-punches session, the journalists were adamant that little children dressed in Halloween costumes for the annual Book Week at the local library were not 'news'. Libraries and librarians were competing, along with other professions, for news time dominated by disasters, hijacks, political uprisings, murders etc. It had to be accepted that in this context, and against this competition, libraries were 'boring' in regard to news value.

In gentle chiding, the Forum participants were told that they were a bit too introspective. If there was an image problem, it was with the librarians themselves. The panel was unanimous in its opinion that the public perception of

libraries and librarians was a good one. Constructive advice was offered on how to capitalise on news opportunities in the various media of newspapers, TV and radio.



5

The Forum concluded the following morning with all participants agreeing on draft resolutions that had resulted from the three workshop sessions. It was agreed the resolutions would be forwarded to ALIA for consideration at the November meeting of General Council.

The Forum was impressive in the personal interaction it inspired. No one could deny John Levett's closing comment, that there was a confidence-inspiring contagion in the air.

The proceedings, which include the resolutions of the Forum, will be available shortly from ALIA's Canberra office.

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4 Left to Right: Anne Hazell, Convener IFTN Campaign; Phil McQuade, Assistant Director, DITAC (SA); Jane McLeod, NIES (Canberra); Averill Edwards, ALIA President and Alan Bundy, ALIA Past President.

5 Forum participants at the information stall.