

The earth moves for ALA's 111th annual conference

Patricia Layzell Ward went to San Francisco. This is what she found...

THE THEME FOR San Francisco in 1992 was 'Your right to know: librarians make it happen'—and they did. Earthquakes happened in Southern California while 18 200 librarians had a choice of 2 400 events to attend and 1 330 stands to visit along five kilometers of exhibit aisles. It was a test of stamina and the ability to manage time.

At the opening session the outgoing President, Patricia Glass Schuman showed a videotape of initiatives taken to draw attention to cutbacks in library funding. Her forthright and persuasive campaign had resulted in prime time TV and radio interviews. The call for support for the America's Libraries Campaign resulted in over 250 000 signatures, and 76 000 calls from the public. The results are in the hands of key Congressional leaders. The conference heard the first ever 'Best and Worst List'. Heading the 'Bests' was Beatrice, Nebraska—population 12 354—where more than \$1m was raised in less than 3 years to match \$1m in public funding for a new building. Top of the list of the 'Worst' were the budget cuts in California resulting in the closure of half of all school libraries in the past decade.

Brighter spots at the opening included the honouring of Director-choreographer Debbie Allen for personally donating \$10 000 and raising funds to rebuild two branches of Los Angeles Public Library after the recent riots. Also Gwen Davis,



Patricia Layzell Ward

founder of 'Writers Who Love Libraries', for pledging the royalties from her latest novel, and recruiting Woody Allen, Mel Brooks and Amy Tan amongst others to the cause. The two keynote speakers, Congresswoman Patricia Schroeder and Gloria Steinem, the feminist writer, both criticised the Bush Administration for proposing a 76% cut in Federal funding for libraries. Steinem spoke of the role of libraries during her childhood years. 'You've made me what I am today—I hope that you are satisfied'. Schroeder contrasted the vision of the Founding Fathers with the current state of the nation. She commented how silly it must look, that the richest country on the planet cannot fund its libraries adequately when information is a tool for social change.

A luncheon speaker for 'Your Right to Know' was Cesar Chevez President of the United Farm Workers. He spoke of the importance of free speech and stressed the need for improved pesticides information. But you can't exercise your right to vote—if you can't read, if your library is closed, if there is censorship or if the cost is too high. The last point reflects anger at the price tags placed

on government information. In a deep economic recession these questions affect all types of library and information service.

Examples of concern were the closures of library schools, the legal questions concerning entry to public libraries by the homeless, the pressures placed on academic libraries caused by the rising cost of serial subscriptions and the falling dollar (does this sound familiar?), and the need to increase academic library bookstocks whilst investing heavily in electronic delivery systems. Yet, being a group of Americans, no one was accepting the situation. They are fighting back and the incoming President, Marilyn Miller, is leading the battle with a campaign 'A billion bucks for a billion books'.

Multicultural issues were prominent and good discussion took place between librarians and publishers. The needs of the aged were highlighted.

The exhibition displayed some new automation packages for smaller libraries, notably Marquis from Dynix. Vendors focused on networking and systems to bring together information from a range of sources. User-friendly software for online ordering systems from library suppliers, and neater front ends were noted. A touch screen for guiding clients around the library attracted attention.

Throughout the conference ran the undercurrents of problems faced by the ALA—questions of finance, common to all associations—and the recent unexpected resignation of its Executive Director.

But there was one very special session, to review the Public Library Inquiry. Dr Alice Bryan, now in her 90's, gave an amusing and reflective account of the project 40 years on, revealing in the process that there is much more than can be learnt from the reports to help today's public library managers. She also demonstrated the art of writing and presenting an interesting paper.

Next year's conference will be held in New Orleans, and a friendly gesture by the ALA is that the conference fee is waived for foreign librarians and they provide a warm, welcoming reception for their guests. It is an excellent form of continuing professional education which is still tax deductible. ■

ACT Branch Council Prize Giving

EACH YEAR the ACT Branch Council presents a prize to each of the students who have excelled in their Library Study courses from both the Institute of TAFE—Reid Campus (Library Technician) and the University of Canberra (Undergraduate and Graduate Librarian).

The prize is always a set of minted coins of the year the students graduated and is presented during a social event

held in June or July. This year it formed part of our 'New Members Night' held on 4 June. Our guest speaker, Averill Edwards, spoke on the desirability of belonging to a professional organisation. ALIA President Bev Kirby spoke on the importance of 'Networking' and presented the prizes to Valerie Murphy (Library Technicians), Susan Feeney (Undergraduates) and Regina Kimmich and Caroline Falkland (Graduate Librarians—joint winners). ■