

Public Libraries **Australia** Conference: **Building Balance**

The Public Libraries Australia 2007 Conference was presented by Public Libraries SA and supported by ALIA. It was held 5–7 August at the Adelaide Convention Centre.

Keynote speaker Rivkah Sass, Director of the Omaha Public Library, in the US, spoke about giving communities the libraries they deserve. The challenges she saw included funding, old and inadequate buildings, politics, community ennui and staff training and development. Her advice? Take risks: reorganise, rethink and retool! She outlined some of the successful partnerships Omaha has developed — with the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, where artists-in-residence create public art at the library, Activate Omaha and the 'have your feet become a mystery' bookmarks, and Leadership Omaha, designed to develop effective community leaders.



Jeannine Hooper, Kamara Schlegel and Rivkah Sass

Omaha is gearing its library towards the young and technologically savvy. It is dedicated to making it easier and better for the community by matching opening hours, collections and programs to their users' needs and desires. Rivkah recommended we all have a few dangerous ideas and act upon them. Weed heavily (this led to a 12% rise in circulation at Omaha), extend your staff, create service standards and promote and talk about excellence. See <<http://www.omahapubliclibrary.org>>.

Kate Meyrick from the Hornery Institute in Queensland spoke about public libraries as the 'third place' — an informal public space where the main activity is conversation. The Hornery Institute's charter is to make communities better places to live, work, learn and play, and public libraries are vital partners in this endeavour. A successful third place must feel socially inclusive, opening and inviting, accessible, organised, dynamic,

different every visit but reliably familiar, and with multiple layers, settings and activities.

Kate suggested that libraries create a brand for themselves and invite their communities to enjoy planned and chance encounters every time they visit. They must be places that encourage discovery and energetically support creativity. Third places have several features in common — activities are all under one roof, themed and often intermediated, perennial or ephemeral, commercial or civic, real or virtual but remember — 'no tea, no cake, no third place'! See <www.horneryinstitute.com>.

Other themes explored included workforce planning, from the right skill mix for the Library 2.0 environment to volunteering; customised service delivery such as the mobile library literacy programs in rural California and the targeted youth program at West Torrens; and measuring sustainability and community strength. Conference papers are now available at <http://www.pla.org.au/Conf2007/conferences_papers.html>.

The very successful NSW ® campaign has been 'adopted' by the other states and territories and there were opportunities to view the current campaigns, subscribe to future campaigns, and for one lucky library to win a free subscription. For more information, visit <<http://www.atyourlibrary.nsw.gov.au>>.



The @ your library® team

The conference also provided ALIA and PLA an excellent platform on which to build their partnership and collaboration. They shared a conference stand and spoke with suppliers, ALIA members and PLA members, promoting the partnership.

ALIA and PLA ran a competition where participants were asked what they thought was the best thing about a partnership

between ALIA and PLA. The first and second prize winning entries summed it up for everyone!

It just makes sense — effective use of resources making it easier to put our energies to use where they are most effective.
Susan Killham (PLA Member)

The energy, dynamism and innovation that occurs with positive outcomes for all.
Janet Salvatore (ALIA Member)

Victoria Anderson and Roger Henshaw
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Kamara and Robert Knight at the ALIA/PLA Conference stand

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