

**2004 Idaho Library Association Annual Conference
Doubletree Hotel Riverside – Boise, Idaho**

Final numbers have been gathered on the 2004 Boise ILA Conference. There were 205 conference registrants, the highest number yet: 134 registered for both days, 40 registered for Thursday only, 7 for Friday only. This figure does not include vendors or speakers.

We had two pre-conferences this year; 13 registered for (A) which was Patents and Trademarks, held at BSU, and 20 for pre-conference (B) disaster planning, held at the Doubletree Hotel. Pre-conference A could have held 25 and pre-conference B could have held 40. So both took in approximately half the people they could have.

There were 25 registrations for the AASL Leadership, conference-within-a-conference, held on Friday. This workshop could have held up to 75 but optimally 50. This workshop succeeded only because it was underwritten. The cost of the workshop was \$4500 with about \$500 to \$800 additional cost for the workshop's 100 page-bound book. Fortunately, Stephanie Bailey-White on Local Arrangements was able to persuade the Department of Education to underwrite the costs for \$4000 and Follett completely underwrote the cost for the workshop books. Thus the cost to ILA was only \$500 for this very special program. It received very favorable evaluations (see workshop leader's evaluation sheet) but was not as well attended as had been hoped.

This is a direct result I believe of changes in the schools that are threatening the positions of library media specialists, are resulting in decreased travel and educational support (monies/time), and by administrations changing these days to required in-service training. On the registration form there was a question about attendance from each division. This was included to track where ILA's attendance was coming from in terms of conference decisions. The Local Arrangements committee and myself thought this was important to find out who was attending and keep track of this in the future.

I would also recommend that ILA select an ILA Board member as a underwriting and/or fundraising person for conference and have this person work in cooperation with the chair and local arrangements to secure additional funding. By having someone from the Board do this, ILA would be insuring that this person understands ILA policies and procedures, as not all members on conference committees are ILA member or are familiar enough with ILA policies to handle this important position. This also brings up the point of having people transition over to the next conference, so that the new group is not completely reinventing the wheel.

The conference evaluations have been tabulated and the results are reported separately (see evaluation form). Accolades and criticisms should both be noted. With regard to the long schedules, as conference chair I believed it was important to have a full complement of workshops to draw attendance. With so many required meetings, and the number of sessions that the Board would like all attendees present it was difficult to schedule. In order to have a substantial offering of classes the times had to run that long. Setting up the time schedule to include adequate class time, adequate meeting time, and adequate time for attendees to visit with vendors (who bring in a huge percentage of

conference dollars and keep ILA Conference affordable) was not easy; thus the long schedule. As it was, vendor time still had to be trimmed by 1 hour to meet requirements.

I think that some of the meeting needs and time lengths need to be re-evaluated and re-assessed. I think that quantity and quality of time with vendors is also critical. Every library association and every library conference is fighting the battle of decreasing vendors except the very biggest shows. Librarians must understand that it is a mutual support system if no one buys or supports the vendors, then they do not support us and the future costs for conferences could rise dramatically. As you will note, many of the attendee's comments indicated they wanted to see more vendors, but we had no more takers. I did speak with a few of the vendors, and one, who I know very well, said that this was the best ILA conference for him in many years. He was able to spend quality time with customers and he felt supported. Linnea and I have spoken of doing a post-conference survey of the vendors to get their impressions and critiques to see how they felt about the Boise conference.

There were comments about the food, especially Thursday's lunch, which was not as advertised and promoted. It seems there was a communication breakdown at the hotel. What Jonathan told us were our vegetarian options were not communicated to the kitchen as the same meal (on the order sheet). When I complained on the bill, the gentleman in charge of the kitchen services came out and took a Xerox copy of what Jonathan had given us as our menu to insure that the rest of the meals would be as ordered. I agreed with some of the attendees that the chefs in the kitchen did not seem to be reading their own menus. The food was not as described. I was disappointed with the flank steak (not) and the teriyaki beef salad left much to be desired and the vegetable wrap on Thursday was simply a salad in a burrito and not much to write home about. I would not have chosen that, if what was served was what had been described, and I sympathize with all the attendees.

It appears also that some of the Idaho Speaker's Bureau members have been around too much and even though they are good (and inexpensive), many librarians have already heard them. I have been having a bit of trouble getting information for my report to them on publicity expenditures, which is part of our grant requirement.

Working with the Advocacy and Marketing committee on conference publicity was wonderful. They are a very talented group and bent over backwards to get things done under some extremely tight deadline pressures. The conference packets and programs were extremely complicated due to the complexity of the conference itself. Karen Yother did an outstanding job in organizing, presenting and revising information. There were some transmission complications and communication snafus but overall it went down to the wire, but became extremely accurate. Sue Wagner did an excellent job of designing and changing the ILA Conference website.

I think it is really important to have people with skills in brochure design, webpage design, and journalistic ability on this committee. I also think it worked well to have this as a separate committee with its own budget and chair apart from Local Arrangements. I think trying to find talented people in these areas would have been more difficult to add to Local Arrangements already complex committee. Especially as I had to locate people in an area where I don't live and am not familiar with people through work—only meetings. As conference chair, I thought it made things easier, especially since this committee had experience already on one conference to transfer to conference

number two. It was not an entirely new committee as was Local Arrangements. It helped transition experience into the conference. The only major problem seemed to be one of communication where the conference website was posted before all the corrections were made and approved by the chair and therefore, people downloaded those registrations with the wrong prices and sent them to Pam Bradshaw who was forced to accept the monies they paid and not get the corrected amounts.

Our income for the conference was as of November 12, 2004 is \$51,303. Our expenses paid are \$12,260. The hotel bill came to \$21,848.19 but there are corrections and credits that will need to be applied to this, so it could end up a bit less. Some of these discrepancies were noted by the equipment committee, and by the vendor chair who also has some issues that need to be resolved with the hotel. There are still a few more expenses – phone, copies, and speaker's travel to be deducted to get the final costs. The hotel was late in delivering the bill and it had to be passed through and checked by a few people and Jonathan has not been available to discuss some of these concerns with.

Cathy Gray chaired the equipment subcommittee, under Local Arrangements, with Robin Ballentyne and Cheri Rendler, both from Ada Community Library. This committee was critical to the success of the conference. The team worked and planned well together. They checked and rechecked the needs with speakers. They made cost effective decisions. They took the conference schedule and organized the presenters into rooms so that the ILA was able to benefit from what was already there, and kept equipment moving to a minimum. They also borrowed equipment from other libraries and troubleshooted all the equipment problems for speakers. They were mobile continually making sure things were as expected. They verified every detail on pricing with Jonathan and what was expected where. Only one small problem occurred, the microphone for Keith Michael Fiels that was there in the afternoon when they checked it before someone from the hotel staff decided to move it elsewhere. Their efficiency saved the conference at least 2/3rds of what would have been the equipment costs, and made it easier to check the billing because of their documentation.

I would recommend that the workshops specifically geared to trustees be kept at ½ day as I think this works better for the trustees who often find it difficult to come and who make up such a small portion of the ILA conference audience. I think some general workshops for librarians would work for trustees who did wish to attend a whole day. I base this on the last ILA conference in Pocatello where 2 Buhl Library trustees attended and went to the same workshops the librarians did.

Other observations include that skimping on meals (and prices) does not necessarily make for better attendance at banquets. Good food is what people want. Food that is reasonable for the price, and even when you go with cheap food the cost is still high. I think ILA would do better to educate its membership on why conferences cost so much and why it is an investment in your local library association. I think that good programming and good food are essential to helping have a good conference experience. Too many meetings and too few classes or poor classes do not encourage attendance. Diversity, new speakers and topics, attractive environments, numerous vendors and activities these are the keys to success.

I would also like to commend our Local Arrangements committee who went through some rough times for awhile, but hung in to lend their advice, expertise, and

enthusiasm even when things were down to the wire, they all came through. Anne Jennings' leadership and emotional support helped everyone perform to their best.

Conference is a team project. It cannot be done without a good team and every member of that team is critical in many ways. It is hard work but it is rewarding. I hope the revised ILA Conference manual which should be ready in 2006 will make it easier for many future conference teams.