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### ALA, What Have You Done for Me Lately?

by *Gina Persichini*

This column is intended as the first in an ongoing series to share what is happening on the national level with members of the Idaho Library Association (ILA). The plan was to use the space this month to update the library community about all that took place this summer with the **American Library Association** (ALA). That plan changed, however, during a meeting at the recent Idaho Library Association Annual Conference. There, while discussing ILA's budget and priorities, I heard members asking questions about the benefits of membership. In regard to ALA, I thought of Janet Jackson (yes, I lived my teens in the 1980s) and I wondered about ALA: "**What have you done for me lately?**"

Musical references aside, this is a valid question for our state association to ask each year when we consider our budget. We pay the American Library Association annual dues in the amount of \$150. It's not much in the grand scheme of association budgets, but we need to pinch our pennies and justify the expense. As Idaho's representative to ALA for the past three years, I should be able to answer that question when it arises. So, ALA, what has membership done for Idaho?

#### *Mailing list*

It doesn't have a lot of bells and whistles, but the LIBIDAHO mailing list is perhaps one of the most frequent reminders we have of what ALA can do for Idaho. For years the list was generously hosted on a server at Boise State University, but we were limited in its use when legislative issues arose. There are times when it is crucial for our state and federal leaders to hear what the library community has to say. Those messages could not be as freely shared using equipment provided with taxpayer dollars. Using our status as a dues-paying chapter of ALA, the Idaho Library Association was able to move our mailing list to [lists.ala.org](http://lists.ala.org). Now, the ILA Legislative co-chairs can more freely send those requests for assistance when crucial matters arise requiring community input.

#### *Advocacy*

Advocacy extends beyond state issues, and it requires more than a mailing list. Idaho is fortunate to have the ALA Washington Office advocating on our behalf on national issues. This means that when issues like the Consumer Products Safety Improvement Act of 2008 arise, ALA Washington Office staff are on top of it, educating lawmakers about the impact on local libraries. Which leads to the Capwiz benefit. **Capwiz** is an online tool "designed to cultivate grassroots mobilization by helping constituents identify and communicate with their legislators or committee members on important issues when it counts most." The ALA Washington Office uses the tool to mobilize the ALA membership, and ILA has access to mobilize the Idaho library community on important issues. ALA pays the fee so we, as a state chapter, can utilize it for our local needs.

#### *Office of Intellectual Freedom*

**This office** is charged with the responsibility to help libraries uphold the basic right to read. When a local library has a challenge to materials, the Office of Intellectual Freedom will provide information and assistance to help library staff manage the process. Not very long ago I had a question from a library director needing information to support their local policy to protect patron records. The Office of Intellectual Freedom came through providing supporting documentation from

their website and individual assistance to the library with questions.

### ***A Voice on the National Scene***

As a chapter, Idaho has a vote on the ALA Council. This vote is cast by an elected member (currently me) tasked with representing ILA at each of the Council meetings. It's not just a vote; it's a voice on matters big and small in the national library scene. This voice comes through on Council floor when we are considering issues like pay equity, core competencies for librarianship, and political issues. Council is made up of 153 individuals from around the nation representing state chapters, ALA divisions, and the membership at large. When we are considering an issue like minimum salary standards, I can share with all of ALA the challenges facing small, rural Idaho libraries. When we talk about broadband connectivity, I can share the impact to libraries in our state.

It's not just at Council meetings. Throughout the year policies are proposed and, through chapter input, Idaho gets a voice in crafting those policies. Currently, ALA is working on strategic planning. As a chapter, ALA sent a representative to attend the ILA Annual Conference who hosted a session to get feedback from Idaho about our priorities, our needs, and our desired future. This is a voice we are given as a chapter. But, more importantly, this is a responsibility. We as a chapter have a professional obligation to raise our voice with the national library community.

### ***And More...***

Discounts, leadership development, and education are additional benefits interwoven throughout those listed above. The possibilities go on as the ALA Chapter Relations Office and the network of other state association chapters create endless opportunities for learning and growth for Idaho libraries. These opportunities are unlimited as long as we continue to take advantage of them.

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