The Reference Desk

What an exciting time to be in the legal field! I was not alive in 1968 with all of its turmoil and conflict, but I think 2017 is shaping up to be one of the more consequential years in the two-hundred-and-thirty year history of the Republic.

This reinforces the importance of civil society organizations and non-profits are for the health of our society. The American Civil Liberties Union has found that the Trump Administration is now their best fundraising tool.

All MALL, we don’t exude the same fund-raising magnetism but the Executive Board has been discussing ways to raise revenue. What does MALL do with the funds it raises? We largely spend it on our members!

In her role as treasurer, Teresa Myers, presented a wealth of data about MALL’s finances at the Fall meeting, but one chart in particular (reproduced here) revealed MALL’s priorities and spending habits.

As you can see, the vast majority of MALL’s outlays are for scholarships. The next largest categories are meeting expenses and software.

For the last year, we have been assessing the membership’s reaction to raising MALL’s dues. So far, everyone has been supportive. Actually, we have received some (unexpected) feedback that we should raise the dues higher.

I have heard many times over the last year that MALL is an incredible bargain and would still be an incredible bargain at twice the price.

The executive board did some research and found that full membership dues were last raised in 1994 from $12 to the current $20. In terms of buying power, $20 in 1994 would be worth $32. That would be $45 today according to the inflation calculator found here.

Since it may be another twenty years before we raise membership dues again, we will propose raising dues to $40 per year at the Spring Meeting. We will ask the membership to vote to approve this resolution. Free or reduced rate memberships will still be available for retired librarians, students and librarians who have lost their jobs recently.

We will also propose the reduction of the forty day window for announcing candidates to join the executive board. Notifications are much quicker in the Internet age and less time is needed to communicate the desire to serve. Indeed, it has been challenging to find people who have the time to take on a leadership role in MALL. Talking to potential nominees takes time. The requirement that announcements occur more than forty days out from the Spring Meeting makes this a very challenging task for the existing executive board members.

If you are interested in gaining some leadership experience and working with a great group of people, I encourage you to nominate yourself (or your best friend) to join the executive board. We could use a few good librarians!

Neal Axton, President

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NEWS

• MALL Winter Meeting- March 14, 2017 at 5 PM. Register here.
• Spring meeting vote to raise membership dues from $20.00 to $40.00 annually
• Spring meeting vote Reduce window for executive board candidacy declaration
• Kathleen Kelly elected to Executive Board

Expense Breakdown per Year

<table>
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<th>Year</th>
<th>Supplies</th>
<th>Insurance</th>
<th>WebDev/Software</th>
<th>SVN/ML</th>
<th>Expenses</th>
<th>Other Events</th>
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The last time I attended the AALL Annual Meeting was in 2010, so it seemed time to go again. I missed the sessions, speakers, round tables, people and mostly the energy of the whole group. It is stimulating to sit in a room with hundreds of people and listen to the keynote speaker talk about “knowledge work” (I guess that is what I do), Lean Startup (not really lean) and LeanUX (user experience). Will Evans, design thinker, had a lot of forgettable quotes at hand, but my favorite was “a problem well stated is mostly solved” - So true.

The keynote is the kick-off to the conference, and a few of the sessions stand out. Some highlights:

Are people using this database?: E-Resources and statistics – The question is, how do we evaluate e-resources for renewal. Basically we use statistics. For example; COUNTER Compliant (www.projectcounter.org), or vendor defined/supplied statistics, self generated, or none at all. It is important to remember that statistics are just numbers. They need to be interpreted.

How Congress really works: rethinking legislative history – The intended audience for this session was librarians who teach or research legislative history which I don’t do, but I have always found the process interesting. Starting with www.congress.gov, one speaker walked us through the example of PL 107-204. Other recommended sources were www.govinfo.gov and www.cali.org/lesson/10765 “Reading Legislative History”. Speaker Victoria Nourse talked about her new book Misreading Law, Misreading Democracy published by Harvard University Press.

The once and future Presidential library: from Lincoln to Obama – I have a personal goal of visiting all 13 of the presidential libraries, so this session was of interest to me. The libraries are part of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), www.archives.gov. The Lincoln Library and Museum which opened in 2005 is not part of NARA. It is run by the state of Illinois. Last summer the plans for the Obama library included two possible sites in Chicago but now a location in Hoffman Estates has been chosen. If anyone wants a road trip, the closest library is the Hoover Library in West Branch, Iowa.

Contract review: considering the vendor relationship and key terms – This topic is near and dear to all of us and one that we all dread. To relieve a little of the stress, here are a few tips. To begin, look at the price first. Then who is the vendor – old or new? What is the product – is it new or unique? Who is the competition? Who uses the product or benefits from it – all attorneys or a practice group? What are the termination rights for the vendor and the customer? What are the use restrictions? What are the confidentiality/non-disclosure terms? The review should be a collaborative process to include the library staff, accounting group, procurement people and management.

Relevant scholarship: a conversation with Judge Richard Posner – This session was late afternoon on Tuesday and was the best way to end the conference. Sit back, relax, and listen to Bob Berring of the University of California School of Law Library talk to Judge Richard Posner of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit (appointed by President Reagan). A couple of the Judge’s comments: law clerks write most opinions, but he writes his own. He hates the Bluebook. It is too long and full of “really bad stuff”. He gives his clerks his own five page handout of citations.

We all know the object of going to the Annual Meeting is to bring back new methods and tips to do our jobs better but don’t discount the importance of the social side. As a solo librarian I don’t have any co-workers to discuss challenging issues with, and if I do talk shop with others in the firm their eyes glaze over. So socializing with colleagues is just as important to me as the educational side of the meeting.

Attached is a picture of Pauline Afuso, Hope Porter and me at the Palm Court at the Drake Hotel where we had High Tea, a most civilized way to spend an afternoon. Photo is courtesy of Hope Porter.

I am grateful to MALL for the grant enabling me to attend the 2016 Annual Meeting in Chicago.

Kathleen Kelly
REFLECTIONS OF A NEWISH ACADEMIC LAW LIBRARIAN
By John Scherrer

Once upon a time, I was an unhappy attorney. Familiar refrain, yes? A career change was mandatory not just for intellectual fulfillment, but my fragile sanity. I would have been a depressing chapter in Studs Terkel’s Working.

The short story: before committing to library school, I discovered MALL and met with Karen Westwood, then the MALL president. Her words convinced me I was heading in the right direction.

Fast forward several years and I’m in the latter half of a one-year fellowship at the University of Colorado Law School Library. I’m happy, and the non-linear career path is now more a badge of honor.

For those out there considering academic law librarianship or fairly new to the profession, here’s a random assemblage of what I’ve learned along the way.

LESSON #1: Mentors Are Vital

There’s a 2014 Law Library Journal article by Michael Chiorazzi with a thorough treatment on this topic, and I’ll echo his point. I’m lucky to hold a position that prioritizes my professional development, but there are few similar opportunities for entry-level law librarians to receive such a full experience.

Our profession is better than most for having people eager to help less experienced colleagues or aspiring librarians, but professional development is still tough. You should actively seek counsel. For me, doing so was instrumental in charting a path.

LESSON #2: Get in the Classroom

Here, I owe a great deal to Mitchell Hamline’s Sonya Huesman. She encouraged me to teach a session of her summer course (probably knowing it frightened me a bit), and it was an invaluable experience.

In library school, you’re likely to compose a short Jing video, but filling a complete class is a much different beast. It’s hard, but it gets easier with practice. Teaching is a great way to learn a new subject. For instance, entering the fall semester I didn’t know a thing about researching U.N. documents, but I ultimately managed to teach a 50-minute session on the topic.

LESSON #3: Don’t be Afraid of Questions at the Reference Desk

I’ll admit it. When I first sat at the reference desk, I was petrified a patron would pose a question that would expose me as a fraud. Imposter syndrome is quite common among new librarians.

I have no profound insight here, but I’ll just say this: you’ll be fine! And if you’re working at a law school library, get familiar with The Bluebook.

LESSON #4: Write Something for a Publication!

This lesson partly serves as a reminder to myself and an aspiration. Don’t know what to say? A librarian gave me this sage advice: choose a topic that relates to why you decided to become a librarian.

LESSON #5: Attend the AALL Conference*

After I accepted my current position, one of the first questions I posed to the director was, “Can I attend AALL?” My start date was less than two weeks before the conference so the timing wasn’t ideal. But she insisted I go and I’m glad I did. (And I’d like to once again thank MALL for its generosity in helping me to attend the 2016 AALL conference in Chicago.)

If you can make it, do go. And despite one or two AALL Spectrum articles to the contrary, CONELL may not be your be-all and end-all conference experience. It wasn’t for me and I thought I had a productive conference.

CODA

This is by no means a laundry list, nor is it static. It’s just been my adventure.

Please let me know if you have any questions!

* For those planning to attend this year’s conference, feel free to contact me for an Austin BBQ scouting report.
They say that there is a professional organization for everyone, and if you have ever spent time browsing through the Encyclopedia of Associations, I’m sure you will agree. We all know about MALL – our local association for law librarians. But did you know that there is an even more select group of law librarians in Minnesota? Yes, I’m talking about the Minnesota Coalition of County Law Libraries, or MCCLL.

Minnesota law allows counties, with the assistance of the State Law Librarian, to create a law library and fund it through filing fees. The purpose of the county law libraries is to provide assistance to the Bench, Bar, and the general public, but each county law library fulfills this mission in ways that are unique to the county.

For example, many county law libraries have legal advice clinics to help self-represented patrons successfully pursue their claims through the legal system. Other counties host CLEs for attorneys and judicial staff, or they sponsor workshops to educate the public on their rights and responsibilities. MCCLL is a conduit for the county law libraries to meet and share ideas on how to meet the legal information needs of their county’s residents. As Karen Westwood, Director of the Hennepin County Anne W. Grande Law Library said, “The Coalition helps us all do a better job of reaching out of our physical spaces to partner with public libraries, offer clinics and CLEs, and increase access to justice for all citizens.”

The members of MCCLL host two major educational programs during the year. In the fall, MCCLL holds a program for county law librarians. This program brings together all of the Minnesota County Law Librarians for one event. The sessions give the law librarians practical and substantive training for handling the questions asked at the public law library. This past fall, MCCLL decided to try something new, and invited other non-library self-help professionals to the program. Professionals from the Courts Self-Help Center and the 10th District Self-Help Center added to the mix of county law librarians for this program. Sara Galligan of the Ramsey County Law Library commented that, “it was fascinating to see how our services between libraries and self-help clinics align to support each other with the common goal of helping self-represented litigants.”

Currently, the group is planning its Spring Legal Workshop. Information about the upcoming program will be posted shortly on the MCCLL website (https://mccll.wordpress.com/) and on the MCCLL Facebook page. Unlike the fall program, the spring session has programming geared towards public librarians, not law librarians. The sessions focus on helping public librarians become more comfortable with handling legal questions and giving legal referrals. In addition to the educational component at the Spring Program, MCCLL also tries to incorporate introductions and networking so that the public librarians have a law librarian to contact within their county or with the State Law Library for additional help with legal questions.

In fact, collegiality is one of the core strengths of MCCLL. This group is particularly eager to help public librarians and other law librarians with the sometimes tricky task of giving legal information, not legal advice. Shannon Stoneking, Dakota County Law Librarian and current Chair of MCCLL said, “MCCLL has been a tremendous source of knowledge and ideas and an excellent resource to help me in tackling unique law library questions. The group brings a “help first” mentality and realizes that we all face similar issues but those issues may be presented in different contexts. It is nice to have some reference to gain insight and perspective to address the challenges that we all encounter as law librarians.” Mary Freyberg of Scott County agrees, and adds, “I cannot say enough about the advice, referrals, and wisdom I have gained at MCCLL meetings. The experience shared at MCCLL meetings has made me a better law librarian and enabled me to better serve my community.”

So if you have a reference question that has you stumped; if you want to brainstorm with some friendly law librarians; if you can’t make it to AALL but want to attend an educational workshop for law librarians, please contact your local county law librarian. We are here to help you.
Our mission is to facilitate the administration of and access to justice through the dissemination of legal information and through education of its members and the public.

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