

A Passion for ALA

Association involvement has personal, professional benefits

by Leslie Burger

By the time you read this, ALA's Midwinter Meeting in Seattle will be history. Once again we will have gathered in our small community to discuss issues of importance to the profession; deliberate about the work of the Association; advance our mission; network and socialize with colleagues and friends; and learn about the latest service innovations, technologies, and products for our marketplace. As an ALA member since 1976, I've come to realize that attending Association conferences and participating on ALA committees not only provides opportunities for professional growth, but a chance to shape the future of library service in the U.S.



What you learn at ALA conferences and the skills you obtain at Association meetings transfer back to your library.

To outsiders or casual observers, it may sometimes seem that our organizational structure is complicated and exclusive, with participation reserved for a chosen few. I see it differently. The approximately 5,000 people who have made a commitment to actively participate by serving on an ALA or division committee, round table, or interest group are passionate and committed supporters who care about the future of our profession and libraries. Many at-

tend conferences on their own time and at their own expense because they believe in the work of our Association. Contrary to speculation that participation in ALA is reserved for an elite group of administrators, Association committees include staff from all types of libraries and a wide variety of positions who serve in leadership positions.

In a few weeks you will receive your ALA ballot. Not only do I encourage you to vote, but I also urge you to think about standing for elected office in ALA. We need people who are eager to run for Council and the Executive Board as well as for president and treasurer—people who can make a difference.

Questions such as why would I want to do that, what's in it for me, does my participation really matter, and will I find it rewarding are no longer acceptable excuses when the ALA Nominating Committee calls.

Why ALA matters

Let me offer just a few reasons why your active participation in ALA matters:

■ **ALA is a membership-based organization in which each**

member makes a difference. Your participation ensures that the Association's decisions represent the consensus of all members. Make sure your voice is heard.

■ **ALA makes a difference.** The recent attempt to close the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency libraries was proceeding without notice until ALA stepped in to call public attention to the matter and helped to halt the closings (*AL*, Jan., p. 17). Together we can make a difference.

■ **ALA Council works and works well.** Council often gets a bum rap. I urge you to not sit on the sidelines and gripe that it won't make a difference. Your participation ensures that Council operates in a way that is responsive to member needs and our organization.

■ **Getting involved in ALA is good for your library.** What you learn at ALA conferences and the skills you obtain at Association meetings transfer back to your library. I can't tell you how proud my community is that I am serving as ALA president. It's brought renewed attention to my library.

So the next time someone asks you if you would like to stand for ALA election or accept a committee appointment, don't think twice. Say yes and reignite your passion for libraries and ALA. ■

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