

Executive Director's Column: Notes from a Binge Thinker

By Adam Wright, Executive Director, North Texas Library Partners
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“Even as the future viability of daily newspapers is called into question, they continue to serve as indispensable sources of local, national, and international information. As such, newspapers provide high-quality public service journalism that is critical to the functioning of a vibrant democracy. The newsgathering resources and investigative reporting arsenals commanded by daily newspapers typically dwarf those of any other local media. In many markets, the local newspaper has more reporters on the street than all other local media combined. As a result, newspapers are often the most effective—and in some cases may be the only credible-watchdogs of business and local government.”

-Statement of Brian P. Tierney Chief Executive Officer Philadelphia Newspapers, LLC Committee on House Judiciary Subcommittee on Courts and Competition Policy April 21, 2009

The quote above was taken from a congressional hearing transcript on the future of the newspaper industry. I believe it illustrates nicely the role newspapers have played in our society. With so many of these newspapers facing bleak futures, I believe there are some opportunities for libraries in the next decade, which is the reason I selected this as my theme for this month's identity crisis series: Where have all the newspapers gone?

Here are two roles that I discovered in my research this month.

1. Public Libraries as Civic Agents. Like the quote above highlights, newspapers have always been critical to the functioning of our great democracy because they provide an invaluable source of information on the local, national and international levels. Without this news, citizens would be less informed about matters of civic discourse. Taylor Winningham wrote in her article, Libraries as Civic Agents, about the future of libraries when it comes to civic matters. "...at a time when people are turning away from the public square—the public is frustrated with politics, problems seem insurmountable, and there is little trust in many of our public institutions—libraries can also be the leaders in revitalizing our democratic practices. Libraries can become indispensable by actively seeking opportunities to use their unique positions of trust and credibility to solve community problems. Not just passive sources of information or partners on short-term projects, libraries can be the lead agency in tackling pervasive social problems." (Libraries as Civic Agents, Taylor Winningham, Public Library Quarterly, Vol. 27(2) 2008, p. 97-110)

Willingham goes on to write that "They (libraries) are helping constituents learn about complex public issues and practice deliberative democracy, and are listening deeply to the concerns of members of their community and developing strategies to help them work together on divisive issues. They are civic agents creating civic agency." (Willingham. P. 99)

Civic literacy, as I have labeled it, is something that newspapers have always done for its communities in the past. If an individual wanted to learn about issues relevant to their lives, the newspaper was the place often visited by the individual. Without a community newspaper, where does one go to learn about the “complex public issues.” Why not the library? Libraries need to be leaders in promoting civic literacy in their communities. I feel very strongly that as we become even more polarized in our ideals as a nation, that it is even more important that citizens receive strong, objective guidance on the pertinent issues. The library can play this role in the next decade and add even more value in the eyes of its stakeholders.

Willingham goes on to write that libraries need to be the leaders in civic matters and step up to spark civic discussion. “What if libraries stepped up and called upon the public to engage with each other to solve problems? What if the libraries were to fill the leadership role that so many people feel is missing in our public life. Libraries are well suited for this leadership role as one of the most trusted public institutions. At a time when people are longing for leaders that tap into their hopes and dreams, perhaps libraries can take on that role.” (Willingham, p 104)

How does a library do this? National Issues forum is a great place to start to learn about the process of promoting civic discourse. You can check out their website at <http://www.nifi.org/>.

2. Public Libraries as Local History Agents. Newspapers have also always played the role of recording the local community history. What happens to this local history when the newspapers disappear? Once again, there is an opportunity here for libraries to fulfill a valuable role. Scott Nicholson, Associate Professor at Syracuse University's School of Information Studies, wrote a nice piece on the PLA blog entitled, Threats to Newspapers are Opportunities for Libraries (<http://plablog.org/2009/03/threats-to-newspapers-are-opportunities-for-libraries.html>). In it, he outlines three possible roles libraries could play in keeping local history.

- The local television stations continue to create local news items. While video clips are not as easy to scan as newspaper articles, the library could partner with local television stations to create a single community archive of items significant to the history of an area. Many stations will also have transcripts of their stories, and these could be embedded in the search functions.
- As libraries become more participatory places where library patrons create items as well as consume items, the members of the community could become the journalists for that community. The library can lead an effort to empower members of the community to create news items, training them on what is important to collect and how to present the news in a standardized form so that it can be easily archived.

- Libraries can reach out right now to their struggling newspapers and discuss a partnership. While libraries know about the development, organization, and access of collections, they typically have little experience in collecting interviews and oral histories and knowing how to create these news stories. There are journalists at closing newspapers who might be thrilled with the idea of working for a library as a news director, organizing the collection of stories, training librarians and community members in how to collect the local news, and continuing their work in a different setting. The newspapers have a network of advertisers who might be able to help fund a projects.

For me, the second one really hits home. Libraries are becoming community gathering places. It might serve for a library to have a place set up for people to record their impressions on community events and happenings and make this available via the web to the community at large. With technology at the point it is today, it would not be a large investment for a library to purchase a flip camera and set up a computer workstation for this purpose. Neat!!!

What role will your library step up to play in the vacuum left by failing local newspapers? I encourage you to explore the two possibilities outlined above and consider including them in your long range planning for the future.

Next month, I will explore the library as a community gathering place.

We have an exciting website theme this month on Accessibility Fairs. Please take a moment to check out our various features. Now here are some things happening around the System.

April Workshops

Register for these workshops at <http://www.ntrls.org/ce/>. If the course is full, let us know if you want to be put on a waiting list.

- **Support Staff in the Library - Let's Chat**, 4/7/2010, Online Chat
- **Librarian's Budgeting Workshop**, 4/21/2010, Denton Public Library - South Branch
- **Funny, I Don't See It That Way: The ADA vs Living with a Disability**, 4/30/2010, Grapevine Public Library

Consulting

Here are some consulting activities that took place in November.

Region 2

Alvord – consulting about local library issues

Saint Jo – worked with library on annual report

Region 3

True Colors – Arlington YMCA (contact through library)

Arlington – collection management

Region7

Texshare Databases and Reference – Staff Development

Other

- NTRLS @ Your Library – Forest Hill
- Regional meetings – Wichita Falls, White Settlement, Alvarado, Crowley, Justin, Colleyville and Bridgeport.
- TWDL – taught workshops in Bridgeport, Little Elm, Bedford and Denton
- Discussed with various libraries on improving access to websites for people with various disabilities
- Discussed with various libraries ways libraries can market programs and services to homebound persons via home care services
- Discussed with a library about membership regulations regarding charging for library programs
- Discussed with various libraries the pros and cons of online book sales as a complement to in-person book sales

Website and Internet Support for NTRLS Programs and Services

- Regular updates to NTRLS.org website.
- Website and other support for the Library Supporters Conference and TechNet Conference.
- Administration for NTRLS-supported listservs.

Plinkit

- Assistance to projects and training for librarians at 7 libraries.

- Assisted with setup for new project for Stephenville.

North Texas Library Consortium (Evergreen)

- Technical and administrative support for North Texas Library Consortium project.
- Served as NTLC's contact point with TSLAC, OCLC and Equinox for ILL Pilot
- Trained 3 librarians at 2 libraries on Evergreen Reporting.
- Provided custom Evergreen reports and report templates for 4 libraries.
- Handled and/or tracked 44 support issues.
- Provided administrative and technical assistance for adding Justin Library to consortium

General

- Support for Librarian Live project.
- Regular updates to Overdrive barcodes for participating libraries in Overdrive Consortium.
- General technology assistance to NTRLS office, including preparations for technology changes connected with office reconfiguration
- Attended regional meetings in Wichita Falls, Colleyville, Alvarado, Crowley, Bridgeport and Justin
- Attended NTRLS @ Your Library in Forest Hill

Libraries Served by the Technology Consultant

<i>City</i>	<i>Region</i>	<i>Project</i>
Alvarado	7	NTLC
Aubrey	3	NTLC
Bowie	2	Plinkit
Bridgeport	2	NTLC
Burleson	7	Overdrive
Crowley	5	NTLC
Decatur	2	NTLC
Electra	1	Plinkit
Forest Hill	6	Misc.
Grapevine	4	Misc.
Justin	3	NTLC, Plinkit
Henrietta	1	Plinkit
Kennedale	5	NTLC, Plinkit

<i>City</i>	<i>Region</i>	<i>Project</i>
Keller	4	Overdrive
Krum	3	NTLC
Lake Cities	3	NTLC
Mineral Wells	6	NTLC
Ponder	3	NTLC
Roanoke	3	NTLC
Saginaw	4	Overdrive, NTLC
Sanger	3	NTLC
Seymour	1	Plinkit
Springtown	6	Plinkit
Stephenville	7	Plinkit
Venus	7	Plinkit
Weatherford	6	Misc.
Wichita Falls	1	Overdrive

Special Interest Groups & Conferences

- LibraryTechNetwork SIG <http://www.librarytechnetwork.com>

TechNet 2010, the 3rd annual North Texas Conference for Library Technology, is scheduled for Friday May 14 at the Decatur Civic Center. Its theme will be *Ahead of the Curve: Learn, Explore, Engage*; the keynote speaker will be Amigos Consultant Christine Peterson.

- LibraryYouthServicesNetwork SIG
<http://www.libraryyouthservicesnetwork.com>
CYC 2010, the 4th annual conference focusing on Children and Youth Conference at North Texas Libraries is scheduled for Thursday August 5, at the Lockheed Martin Recreation Area.
- LibraryPresentationsNetwork SIG <http://librarypresentationsnetwork.com>
The conference planning committee for LP3 2010, the 3rd annual Conference for Library Program Planners and Presenters, met March 3 to begin planning that event, which is scheduled for Thursday Nov. 18 at the Lockheed Martin Recreation Area.

Accessibility

- The NTLP consultant attended *Everybody Plays!*, a workshop about Assistive Technology toys and ways to efficiently, effectively and inexpensively adapt toys to make them AT appropriate. The event was sponsored by Easter Seals – Fort Worth and several related local agencies.
- Registration is underway for an all-day workshop entitled *Funny, I Don't See It That Way: The ADA vs Living with a Disability*. At each of the two advertised workshop sites, a guest presenter will provide information about specific services for people with low or no vision. Stephen Tompkins, *Newsline* Coordinator for National Federation of the Blind-Texas, will speak at the Resource Center. In Grapevine, Stephen Biles will represent the Texas Talking Book Program.
<http://www.ntrls.org/Workshops/FY2009/ADAflyer2010.pdf>
- NTLP participated in the Colleyville PL/Colleyville Lions Club's Low Vision Fair March 6. Approximately 72 families received participated in the free eye exams and about 25 people received initial macular degeneration screening as part of that fair. One of the families receiving eye exams included five children.
- Amigos Consultant Christine Peterson is finalizing the schedule for meeting with staff at each of the eight pilot project libraries to discuss ways to assure that their websites are universally accessible.

Outreach to the Underserved

NTRLS developed the O2U Program to help member libraries and their branches promote library programs and services. The purpose of O2U is to develop original materials to be used to reach underserved urban and rural communities and make them aware of the wonderful services available at the public library.

For more information, please visit our website at

<http://www.ntrls2.org/default.asp?action=article&ID=245>.

Monthly Report of Activities		Number of Requests	Requested Material
Region 2	Jacksboro	3 requests	Bookmarks, brochure, cards
Region 3	Aubrey Area Library	1 request	Bookmarks
	Carrollton Pub. Library	1 request	Bookmarks
	William T. Cozby Public Library, Coppell	1 request	Bookmarks
	Denton Public Library	1 request	Bookmarks
	Flower Mound Public Library	7 requests	Bookmarks, Posters
	Frisco Public Library	1 request	Bookmarks
	Justin Community Library	1 request	Bookmarks
	Krum Public Library	1 requests	Bookmarks, brochures
	Lake Cities Library	1 request	Bookmarks
	Lewisville Public Library	1 request	Bookmarks
	Little Elm Public Library	1 request	Bookmarks
	Pilot Point Community Library	1 request	Bookmarks

	Plano Public Library System	1 request	Bookmarks
	Betty Foster Public Library, Ponder	1 request	Bookmarks
	Roanoke Public Library	1 request	Bookmarks
	Sanger Public Library	1 request	Bookmarks
	The Colony Public Library	1 request	Bookmarks
Region 4	Colleyville	3 requests	Flyers
	Saginaw	1 request	Brochure
Region 5	Haltom City	6 requests	Flyers, posters, bookmarks
	Richland Hills	1 request	Calendar
Region 6	Fort Worth	17 requests	Flyers, posters
	53 Requests completed. 3,997 Materials Distributed.		