

Executive Director's Column: Notes from a Binge Thinker

By Adam Wright, Executive Director, North Texas Library Partners

January 2010

Happy January!

I hope everyone had a wonderful holiday season. As we move forward with the new year, please take some time to look over our theme of the month, which is "Doing a Job Fair in Your Library". Our guest columnist this month is Jann Miles, the Strategic Directions Unit Director for Workforce Solutions for Tarrant County. In our podcast, we interview Chris Dobson, librarian at the Irving Public Library, on how to host a job fair in your library.

As I wrote in last month's column, this year I plan to focus on the role of the library in the next decade, what I am calling the public library's identity crisis. I will cover a different role each month.

Before we launch into this month's role, I would like to discuss my choice of names for this series of columns: Identity Crisis. It was pointed out to me in separate emails from three librarians that this label was too negative. I should have been more optimistic and used terms such as our evolution. Although I agree with the idea of public libraries evolving and changing based on the environment, I do not agree that I should change the name of this column series. To be honest, I selected Identity Crisis to ruffle some feathers and start the discussion on some difficult topics. I wanted to engage the leaders in our field to think about the hard questions facing us in the next ten years. Whether we like to admit it or not, libraries are going through some changes, and we need to take steps to adjust, or face the consequences of inaction and denial.

As I move forward with this series, I have decided that my research methodology is twofold. First, I will perform primary research by asking some of my favorite listservs a series of questions that I hope will generate discussions on the topic. I will also hit our Texshare databases along with the Internet to see what has already been written.

Let's get down to it then. Our question this month is: What is going to be role of the book in the library in the next decade?

When I asked this question on the listservs, the overwhelming sentiment was that books would still be an integral part of the library in the next decade.

"Books - I don't think they will go away anytime soon. I expect they will remain an essential part of our services for a long time. Like with any physical thing an emotional attachment forms to the item. I'd never get attached to an ebook reader. Every book I own has a different look and feel and that's an important part of my attachment to each of them." Steve Benson, library director of the Richardson Public Library, wrote in an email response.

Of course, there are those who feel differently. Many in the major media markets see books in libraries disappearing sooner versus later. John D. Sutton of CNN wrote in an October article that the stereotypical library is dying. "Books are being pushed aside for digital learning centers and gaming areas. 'Loud rooms' that promote public discourse and group projects are taking over the bookish quiet. Hipster staffers who blog, chat on Twitter and care little about the Dewey Decimal System are edging out old-school librarians."

<http://www.cnn.com/2009/TECH/10/24/future.library.technology/index.html>

If this is true, what does this mean for the brand of the "book" that we have had for so many years? To the majority, the library's perceived role for the last hundred years has been the place an individual goes to get a book. In many of the rural communities I serve, the library was started to provide community access to book collections. Are we a public institution that houses books?

In one interesting email discussion centered on this latter question, Paul Phelan, Director of the Greenville Public Library, wrote this in an email to me. "Once again, a library is an information center not a "book house." We will continue to provide information to the public and information consulting services. From a practical standpoint, this might mean we have a smaller traditional reference section and more computer terminals; however, we will still be in business. I think the greater shift has been in librarianship. In the "old days" librarians helped people locate small quantities of information hidden in texts. Now, librarians assist people in navigating through a virtual universe of data to find accurate information."

As you would expect, I read many email discussions that dealt directly with the central theme of my identity crisis series, what is the role of the library in the next decade. Books have played such a central role in our mission that it is only logical that the discussion would veer in to that direction.

I heard from one library director serving a rural community about its role in the community. Lanora Joslin, director in Jacksboro, Texas, emphasized her library is serving more individuals today when it comes to book circulation than ever before. She stressed, however, that a library should be serving the needs of its community despite its location or the role of the book in its mission. In her email, she wrote, "We must stay on top of what our particular communities want—we must listen to all facets of the community and provide what they need. What I need in my rural community may not be what is needed in the urban areas. If I try to impose what I think makes a good library on my patrons and it is not what my community wants or needs, then my idea of a library will not work. I must listen to the heartbeat of my community which means I must consult with patrons of all ages and try new things."

Many library directors are very aware of the changing role of the book in libraries and are changing their strategic missions to accommodate for this. Kerry McGeath is the library director in Southlake, Texas and he emphasizes the

service aspect of a library. "My approach is that the product we provide is service - what we actually sell (books, programming, information, whatever) are all secondary to our central product. What we sell can vary widely from location to location. (If we offer just the traditional services), the Southlake library would be closed."

What can librarians do to prepare for the book's changing role? Many of the directors wrote about training on the new way of conveying and communicating information. Ebooks were mentioned regularly. Many mentioned that librarians need to be cognizant of the readers that are making ebooks so popular and be ready to help patrons with them. We need to be aware of the issues involved with this new technology and make sure that information is not reserved for the ones who can afford the technology. Phelan wrote, "On a societal level, librarians need to be at the table as new information related technologies evolve. We have an obligation to society, to make sure that future publishing and network models do not limit access of information to the public (i.e. Kindle)."

You are probably wondering at this point, what I think? I envision that the book will continue to play a central role in our libraries for several years to come. However, as people discover new technology to access books more readily than a trip to the library, this role will diminish until we reach a point where books will be housed in our libraries for purely archival purposes. I think it is important for librarians to realize that many of our communities are viewing the library as a book warehouse and if books are playing a central role in the library's value in the community, they begin to rethink their long range mission and objectives.

Of course, this is what I hope to accomplish with this identity crisis series. I hope librarians will begin to evaluate what changes are inevitable and adjust accordingly. We are changing and we need to change with it. Rodney Bland, Director in Burleson, summed it up for the overall discussion. "If we can imagine the role of the Library -- all kinds of libraries -- changing -- then we can imagine the facilities that will contain them -- and that may be a most exciting challenge."

Now here are some things happening around the System this month.

January 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.

- **Book Protection and Repair**, 1/6/2010, Azle Public Library
- **Summer Reading Program and Showcase**, 1/8/2010, Wichita Falls Public Library
- **Certified Library Computer Technologist Program - Part 3 - FULL**, 1/15/2010, NTRLS Office

- **Program Pizzazz on a Budget: Low Cost Library Programs for Kids and Teens**, 1/21/2010, Decatur Public Library
- **Merchant Librarian**, 1/21/2010, Decatur Public Library
- **Merchant Librarian**, 1/26/2010, Kennedale Public Library
- **Program Pizzazz on a Budget: Low Cost Library Programs for Kids and Teens**, 1/26/2010, Kennedale Public Library

Consulting

Here are some consulting activities that took place in November.

Region 3

Lake Cities - Image Audit

Region 4

Watauga - Library visit

Region 5

Arlington - Image Audits of Branches

Region 6

Azle - New Director Orientation

Misc Activities:

- Consulted with Gordon on their new library
- Relocation visits for new location
- Awards Committee Meeting
- CE Committee Meeting
- Discussion and comparisons of specific Adaptive Technology tools to accommodate visual learners

Website and Internet Support for NTRLS Programs and Services

- Regular updates to NTRLS.org website.
- Website and other support for Library Supporters conferences.
- Administration for NTRLS-supported listservs.
- Began revision of web application for CE Registration to simplify handling of merit points.

Plinkit

- Updated 20 existing sites for changes connected with Plinkit 2.0 migration.
- Re-installed tracking code for 6 Plinkit sites using Google Analytics.
- Additional assistance to projects at 6 libraries plus the North Texas Library Consortium.
- Trained 1 librarian in Plinkit content management.

North Texas Library Consortium (Evergreen)

- Technical and administrative support for North Texas Library Consortium project.
- Handled and/or tracked 39 support issues, including 22 tickets with vendor's tech support.
- Prepared new cost estimate for adding Justin Library to consortium

General

- Support for Librarian Live project.
- Regular updates to Overdrive barcodes for participating libraries in Overdrive Consortium.

Libraries Served by the Technology Consultant

<i>City</i>	<i>Region</i>	<i>Project</i>	<i>City</i>	<i>Region</i>	<i>Project</i>
Aledo	6	Plinkit	Krum	3	NTLC, Plinkit
Alvarado	7	NTLC	Lake Cities	3	NTLC, Plinkit
Aubrey	3	NTLC	Mineral Wells	6	NTLC, Plinkit
Benbrook	6	Plinkit	Paducah	1	Plinkit
Bowie	2	Plinkit	Pilot Point	3	Plinkit
Bridgeport	2	NTLC	Ponder	3	NTLC
Burkburnett	1	Plinkit	Roanoke	3	NTLC
Burleson	7	Overdrive	Saginaw	4	Overdrive, NTLC
Chico	2	Plinkit	Sanger	3	NTLC, Plinkit
Crowley	5	NTLC	Seymour	1	Plinkit
Decatur	2	NTLC	Springtown	6	Plinkit
Dublin	7	Plinkit	The Colony	3	Overdrive, Plinkit
Electra	1	Plinkit	Venus	7	Plinkit
Forest Hill	5	Plinkit	Wichita Falls	1	Overdrive
Justin	3	NTLC, Plinkit			
Kennedale	5	NTLC, Plinkit			
Keller	4	Overdrive			

Special Interest Groups & Conferences

- LibraryPresentationsNetwork SIG <http://librarypresentationsnetwork.com>
What's Age Got to Do with It? *the 2nd annual Conference for Library Program Planners & Presenters, a.k.a. LP3 2009*, attracted 118 library personnel members and 48 exhibitors this year. When asked what she thought of the conference, a participant who had driven two hours to get to the event said, "I gained so much info from the sessions I attended....[It was] worth the long drive!"
- LibrarySupportersNetwork SIG <http://www.librarysupportersnetwork.com>
The Future of Libraries, *the 2nd Annual North Texas Conference for Library Supporters*, set for Sat. Feb. 13, 2010 at the Lockheed Martin Recreation Area, will be preceded by kick-off event Fri. Feb. 12 at the Courtyard by Marriott on Bryant Irvin Rd. That dinner/guest speaker event will feature Anita Duckor, President of Duckor & Associates, Inc., presenting *Your Library's Guide to Surviving and Thriving in the 21st Century*. Ms. Duckor will also present several sessions at the conference. Anyone wishing to register must do so separately for each event – and should do so soon since seating is very limited for both events.

Expanding Accessibility Program

- Our first volunteer, Trisha Clark, comes in weekly to maintain and expand our spreadsheet listing local Accessibility Service Providers and Product Vendors. The spreadsheet is intended for use by library personnel not only as a reference resource but also as a resource for finding potential exhibitors when planning an Accessibility Fair. It currently includes over 400 entries.
- Planning for this year's Universal Access workshops is underway, and arrangements for one-on-one consultations with a UA expert regarding web presence are being made.
- Upcoming Accessibility Fairs at other Pilot Project libraries include:
 - * Sat. Jan. 23; 2010; 11 a.m.-3 p.m. Fort Worth Library's *Accessibility Tech Fair*
 - * 2010 date TBD at the Colleyville Public Library's *Accessibility Fair*

Libraries for Literacy

For more information on these projects, please visit our website at <http://www.libraries4literacy.org>.

- The Libraries for Literacy Seed Grants went to Arlington, Denton, and Watauga (when the Board finishes voting on it).
- The 3rd Edition of the Literacy Program Toolkit is now available.

- We are now accepting applications for the LearningExpress Library Grant.

System Assembly Meeting

Please save the date of January 28, 2010 for our next System Assembly Meeting in Denton, Texas at the Center for Visual Arts. I want to thank the System Assembly Meeting Committee for all of their hard work on making this event a possibility. A special thank you goes out to Gleniece Robinson, Director of the Fort Worth Library and Eva Poole, Director of the Denton Public Library. Gleniece took it upon herself to be chair of the committee and is working hard to make this a very special event. Eva volunteered to host the meeting.

Please go to ntrls.org to register.

TSLAC News

The North Texas Library Consortium, the 13 libraries using the Evergreen software, has been selected to participate in the Interlibrary Loan Pilot Project. As a refresher, TSLAC selected OCLC as their vendor for the new ILL system. In order to test the new system, a pilot project will be run. The Evergreen libraries should be commended for taking a step forward to participate in this important endeavor.