

AND WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

by

Robert N. Case

There is an old and familiar saying in Vaudeville - "The Show's not over 'til the Fat Lady sings." Would you welcome, please, the Fat Lady!

The title of the Fat Lady's final number has been changed four times in the course of planning this conference.

First it was: "Humanizing Networking"

2nd it was: "The Need for Cooperation is not only a Concern in the Country"

3rd it was: "Where Do We Go From Here" and

finally 4th: "And Now What Do We Do?"

My first reaction was to chuck the whole program and sing in my highest falsetto, "I'm only a bird in a gilded cage." And in as much as I'm only 4 weeks from retirement of 40 years of public service in education and school and public library service at all government levels, it seemed fitting that I am waiting to have the cage door open and to fly freely away. I would have no more responsibility for the concerns, issues and the commitment of librarians to their dedication and roles to make an impact upon the people and the communities they serve.

Let me assure you that even as I reach the end of the trail, this conference has totally *energized me completely!* It is this future of library service and the spirit of this conference that I shall miss in the years to come.

The goals or objectives of this assembly were to:

- 1) determine the nature of the community library now and in the decades to come, and

- 2) develop an agenda to provide the future framework for rural and small public libraries in the future.

The first verse of the Fat Lady's song is to congratulate the planning staff of Arizona State Library and the Center for Rural Librarianship at Clarion State University for meeting these goals. Beyond that, the program content, group discussions and the break times, provided many opportunities to discover and share ideas on rural and small public library services.

The conference did not solve any one problem or issue, but it did, through its presentations and especially group discussion, help to increase an awareness of the diversity of rural and small public libraries and the local concerns each addresses.

Two key elements that came across in the conference were the sense of commitment and the feeling of isolation in the work world of our daily tasks. I doubt that the commitment or feeling of isolation will ever end. But the conference planned in Gettysburg in 1993, Bismarck in 1994 and Greenbay, Wisconsin in 1995 will continue to reinforce our commitment to library service and to lessen the sense of isolation.

Dr. Michael Marien, the futurist, set the tone for a conference on the future of rural and small public libraries. His observation on the future — infloglut, access to information in a democratic society and the major world agenda concerning the environment — took us away from our daily routines, problems and concerns. His remarks were intellectually stimulating and challenging to all of us. They were also frustrating, too, because to many the world and the global agendas he identified were far beyond what we felt we could handle with shortages of staff, use of volunteers, limited budgets, and our small collections.

I thank Dr. Marien for poking us out of a slumber. For me, at least, it brought on a whole new perspective of library service and an opportunity to develop coalitions in my local community. As public dollars get tighter to support public library service, it becomes increasingly difficult for me to justify great public expenditure for best sellers, mysteries, sci-fi and the bodice gripping romances. I know that's what makes us popular, but perhaps new

library programs that give support to local, national and world agendas will bring more sense of purpose and justification to funding bodies in achieving some common goals. I don't believe Michael Marien nor I are suggesting no more popular books or best sellers. But he does offer ideas for us to capture an opportunity to help bring global, life and environmental problems to our local communities. In each of our library service areas there are already others organized to address these concerns. I'm suggesting we start communicating with them, see what their goals are, how they fit in with national and world agendas. Build a coalition, ask for their support for resources, take a first step, a small step, and build upon that stairway to increase our response and service role in a global society. For a library not to be a part of this leadership suggests that the library is isolated to the concerns of its community and does not see a broader field of global climate, ozone holes, deforestation, decreased wet lands, noise/air/water/toxic waste pollution, population growth, food supply distribution and habitats for humanity. Understanding all this and providing library resources is clearly a part of our mission.

Let's look at our role and mission of the library in a more focused way. I believe it will prove to be a right step. In the follow-up panel to Dr. Marien's keynote address, Jane Williams, from the National Commission on Libraries and Information Services, gave us a quotation that was relevant to today's information problem: "You didn't cause it, you can't control it, and you're not the cure." That's right on target, but she also stated we "cannot be relieved of the responsibility" to help change it.

I don't know how many of you have gone through the Role Assessment of Public Libraries. It is an interesting exercise. All the libraries in my system completed the exercise. There were no surprises. The main library chose as its roles to be a Public Access Reference Center, Children's Doorway to Learning, and Popular Materials Library. That's what we do best. These outcomes were the result of staff/board assessments. But *we failed to involve the community*. So as we fulfill these roles, plan our budgets around these identified roles and services, we lost sight that 30,000 students saw us as the Formal Education Support System, or others saw us as the center for community activities and as a public forum. Clearly my library will have to broaden the base of this exercise. I can

only hope that those who participate will see the world or global agendas as a part of our mission.

In the follow-up panel to Dr. Marien's keynote address, Jane Williams mentioned an article she had done on "Minimal Management." If I were to be asked to do an article similar to this, and I believe I could, I would call it "Management Interruptis."

I'm sure your daily agenda is shattered almost hourly on issues and concerns both internally and externally that direct you away from key planning agendas. I'll give you a perfect example of this interruptis.

In my library system we have a library in the town of Intercourse. They wanted to organize a Friends group. They called me — they needed a press release. So in response to the interruption, I wrote a hasty press release. My secretary typed it and sent it to three local papers, plus weekly county newspapers. I did not proofread it.

The press release said:

The Friends of Intercourse are calling an organization meeting on Thursday, October 15 at the Intercourse Library at 7:00. Anyone interested in furthering the cause of Intercourse is invited to attend. The purpose of the meeting is to select a steering committee, elect officers and plan the programs related to Intercourse for the coming year!

When I got there, I didn't see one Amish buggy. But I soon found out the press release had been picked up by Associated Press and was carried in local media throughout the Atlantic Seaboard. We had people attending from six states! That's how management interruptis gets us into trouble.

I believe this conference has made it very clear that we are constantly in response to new agendas. How we react and cope and keep an even keel, and gather among us the key leaders and advisors to help us plan, is essentially a major concern to all of us.

I greatly appreciated Helen Maule's description of her service area in Nogales, Arizona. This has to be a classic example of a library service area that

includes apathy, many government layers and levels of barriers, an ethnic mix of population always in transition beyond what any library can expect to cope with. Beyond that, her library is impacted upon by international treaties beyond which her library board, city or county has little control.

And I venture to add that each one attending this conference has similar barriers and constraints to cope with at a different or lesser level. But nevertheless these concerns are very real to your ability to produce, plan and be accountable to your funding bodies and constituents. A self assessment of your library and the community it serves should be done annually, included in this the identification of barriers as well as identifying those who can help you move forward.

John Christensen was refreshing in his history and review of rural libraries. "Voices from the Cracker Barrel" in the old general store brought nostalgia to our minds. He also sensitized us to the demographics of a rural town or place. And yet as his cracker barrel library moved into the present times we saw how it played a role on local economic development. His introduction was excellent background to Nancy Walsh, Senior Research Analyst for the Morrison Institute for Public Policy and Economic Development programs. She clarified the term, Economic Development, and addressed the needs to be met for economic development programs. Results of surveys placed the library low as a contributing source of information. But through statewide efforts in Arizona, this changed the role 23 libraries are now playing in local/regional support for economic development efforts. We look forward to seeing copies of her core collection of library resources to support efforts in our local communities. We have been challenged from reports of library efforts in support of economic development in other states.

The term "partnership" was expressed by almost all presenters. A good relationship to pursue and nurture. It may, however, relate also to developing coalitions — which is different, but equally important. I wish more examples of coalition building at the local level had been stressed, it would help to lessen our sense of isolation.

The first day of the conference stressed programs and activities at the local and state level. It opened our eyes and minds to the level of action programs ongoing throughout our country. The second day of the conference gave focus to the national agenda and included reports of two major programs related to the Rural Information Center and the progress that has been made in establishing public libraries for tribal nations in Indian territories.

Jane Williams, Research Associate for the National Commission on Libraries and Information Services, spoke on the national agenda for developing plans and policies, studies, surveys and research to advise the national administration on avenues it must travel and support for a strong national information access program. She reported on a number of recommendations and information agendas identified at the 1991 White House Conference on Libraries and Information Services. Among these were the National Rural Information Services in 1980, the National Advisory Board for Rural Library Needs in 1984, and its final report in 1985. Two current programs: 1) the Public Library Cooperative Statistics Project is now capable of providing current library statistics to provide analysts with current data to analyze the geographic and demographic trends in public library services. 2) Further study of this data by the Library Research Seminar will call for other data needed to give important management data to national library planners and program development.

Perhaps one of the most exciting presentations of the conference was that from Patricia John, Coordinator of the Rural Information Center from the National Agricultural Library in Beltsville, Maryland. With the touch tone press of an 800 number, libraries and citizens have access to hundreds of data bases to answer questions of a total universe of knowledge related to rural life, health, economic development, agriculture, marketing, sociological and psychological issues. The Rural Information Center provides responses to customized inquiries. Originally established as a clearinghouse by the US Department of Agriculture, it has now been expanded to a full fledged information center. Each year its data is expanded to now include all areas of life. Among one of its more important publications is *Federal Funding Sources for Rural Areas*. This has to be a gold mine for libraries and a wonderful source to open doors to build

coalitions in local areas for community development to enhance the quality of life. The Rural Information Center has access to nine major national data banks. Librarians who express a feeling of isolation should be quick to realize how quickly this will open the door to a new and active role in support of community planning.

This conference told us many things. Among the most important was that though we are working often in isolation, events, activities and plans are going on at all levels on our behalf — state libraries, the National Commission, the Rural Information Center and most certainly in the publishing and information access initiatives across the nation. Deborah Loeding, Director of Library Relations for H.W. Wilson, presented an important overview to the corporate publishing world. Its decisions and plans often guided by focus groups are leading to the development of new information sources, both for the library and home consumer. This publishing and information industry has turned full circle, developing and marketing new products, merging and joining ranks with other vendors to package information in affordable formats. These new initiatives will have great impact upon national and worldwide consumers and libraries as well.

Just when we think technology is wagging the library's tail we hear a report from Lotsee Patterson on the information needs and library services of Native Americans. Her report on the development of public libraries on tribal lands of Indian nations was a report that was most welcomed in our pluralist society. We are encouraged by their advocacy role and the progress and impact and advisory role the Native Americans are having at the national levels to house their information, archives and public document needs met through access to their public library.

But there were other concerns addressed at the conference. One highlight was the value of library extension services. John Phillip, Director of Field Operations, State Library of Ohio, spoke of the alternative outreach programs provided by public libraries across the nation, through branch libraries, bookmobiles, Book By Mail, Homebound delivery, deposit collections, institutions, childcare units and services to prisons and jails. He concluded his presentation by saying, "We can build new buildings and they may come to us,

on the other hand through library extension services we can initiate new opportunities to 'reach out and touch someone.'

Preparing a national cadre of library professionals, technicians and paraprofessionals was addressed in the report by Rita Flannigan, Dean, College of Communication, Computer Information Services and Library Services, at Clarion University, Clarion, Pennsylvania. It is encouraging to learn that academic institutions are developing a variety of programs and moving off companies to the grasslands to meet library personnel training needs. Offsite learning centers and long distance learning programs are beginning to answer the education needs of library personnel in remote places. Success of these early ventures suggests increased expansion of new levels of training components. Especially important was the effort of library educators to better understand what skills are basic and desirable for libraries in rural and small public libraries.

And now, "What Do We Do?" We have several choices. I recognize that all of us have been away from our work place for perhaps four days. On Monday morning when we return to our desk I know there will be a work backup of papers to shuffle. I urge you not to put your conference folder of notes aside, the desk work can wait until another day.

Most of us will have a 2-3 hour plane ride on our return home. Take this time to review the conference and write down your highlights, bits of new information, information that will be useful to share with your staff, board, supervisors or with key community leaders. If nothing else, tell them you are not as isolated as you once thought, report on the State Library activities, the National Commission on Libraries and Information Services, the Rural Information Center, publishing initiatives. Suggest a plan to your local funding sources on how you can help them through the Rural Information Center. Give it a try. See results, See the funding bodies response. Try another inquiry. Reach out to other agencies. Find out their questions. Dial the Center's 800 number.

A positive report of the conference will give you a work and planning agenda with policy makers. Share this with them. See how you can help fulfill their needs. Reach out and build coalitions. Plan a few projects together to meet

common needs. Be a part of the community policy process. See the results. Plan another one.

Don't assume these policy makers know your goals or agendas. Never assume your board or commissioners, supervisors or community know library needs. You are probably the only library administrative professional in your community. It is your responsibility and appropriate in your role as chief librarian to share what you have learned these past several days for the public good. You'll be amazed how our goals are similar.

And why do we do these things? I shall share with you a philosophy that I have shared with many for over 35 years. This is in recognition of an individual whose name is Elizabeth Knapp.

There probably isn't anyone in this room who has ever heard of Elizabeth Knapp. Who was she? In 1918 she was the Supervisor for Children's Services for the Detroit Public Library. I first met Elizabeth Knapp as a young student over a quarter of a century ago while doing a research project at Case Western Reserve University Library School. At that time I came across her annual report written in 1918. At the conclusion of her report she makes a statement that was very important to me. Then, as now, I was terribly idealistic about entering into a profession that I hoped would give me great fulfillment, and it has, far beyond my expectations. I copied Elizabeth Knapp's philosophy on a piece of paper and put it in my wallet.

Later, when I became a school librarian, I found how important this philosophy would be to me. I began to use it in conferences and workshops. As my library career changed, I was able to use it across the state of Ohio with thousands of teachers and hundreds of librarians and administrators and board members. When I left Ohio and had the privilege of working with the American Library Association for six years, I carried Elizabeth Knapp's statement with me and used it across the nation at many state and national conferences of library associations and to nearly 30 library schools. Just when it seemed as though I had used up my audience, I was invited on a special assignment to Australia. I shared her philosophy in the jungles of New Guinea, down the coast of Australia at many conferences. I carried it to Port Arthur, Tasmania, and up through the

vast great outback to aborigine settlements — even there, there were those responsible for library services — finally across the continents and back to Chicago. I often wonder what Elizabeth Knapp would say to think that something that was a second thought for her would be carried so far to so many people.

It occurred to me when I was awarded the Pennsylvania Distinguished Service Award, I had never shared this philosophy with my colleagues who were responsible for rural and smaller public library services in Pennsylvania. Most recently at a retirement dinner held in my honor I realized I had never shared Elizabeth Knapp's thoughts with my staff or board.

What was life like for Elizabeth Knapp at the Detroit Public Library in 1918? In many respects not so much different than in our libraries today. Then, of course, the nation was at war. But then, like today, the world was still seeking new avenues of peace and world understanding. Toward libraries there was, as now, an attitude of apathy and indifference. Elizabeth Knapp began her report with a review of what she had hoped to accomplish during the coming year. As her report progresses it is soon plain to see that forces were chipping away at her goals - bit by bit, piece by piece. Her small budget for books, she soon lost. The small staff she had counted on to help her implement her programs she lost to mobilization efforts. The facilities of the library then were not the fine example we know of in Detroit today. They could not begin to enfold and encompass the creative programs Elizabeth Knapp had planned for her young people. It was an inner city library then as it is today. As the year comes to a close, the decline in circulation statistics offered additional proof of the frustrations expressed during the year.

Most of us would have ended the report in defeat. But not Elizabeth Knapp. I can only imagine that at this point she put down her pen and thought for a moment about who she was, where she was going, how she was going to get there and what effect it would all have upon those she served. And then, again, I can only imagine, she picked up her pen and this is what she wrote:

But there really are no figures for the following:
An American idea instilled,
A sluggish brain quickened,

An imagination stirred,
An artistic sense developed,
Or civic pride taught, or
Lessons made more vivid and hours of real enjoyment
given free.

There is only one faith that we may have done some of
these things for many people.

This is my last official and public presentation before my retirement. I'm pleased that the last verse of the "show's" closing can be the verse of Elizabeth Knapp. Take her philosophy and pass it on. Practice it. Add to it your own special touches. It is the most difficult of all ideas to articulate as a measure to funding agencies and law makers at all levels. But it speaks well of why we do the things we do in our thousands of rural and small public libraries. It also speaks of how our users respond to what we do.

There is a faith, a purpose and the wonderful hope that in the end we have done these things for many people.

Robert N. Case was the director of the Lancaster County Library in Pennsylvania until his retirement shortly after this speech was given. The above conference summary is from the third conference in the series, The 21st Century: The Future of Rural and Small Public Libraries. The conference was held in Phoenix, Arizona November 19-21, 1992, jointly sponsored by the Arizona Department of Library, Archives and Public Records and Center for the Study of Rural Librarianship, in cooperation with the Graduate Library School, University of Arizona and the Department of Library Science, Clarion University of Pennsylvania. It is with regret that we note Mr. Case has since passed away.